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ABSTRACT

The German sociologist and communication theorist Jurgen Habermas' theory of communication as it applies to the problems of developing nations takes into account both the structural factors that hinder indigenous development as well as the individual psychology of the citizens of the less-developed countries (LDC). This paper details the application of that theory. Following the introduction which discusses various models that have attempted to both explain and predict the process of "progress" in the less-developed countries since the late 1950s, the paper presents the first component of Habermas' model, critical theory, which attempts to combine the transcendental spiritualism of Kant and Hegel and the materialism of Marxism. Next the paper examines Habermas' position that psychoanalysis is the avenue by which individual persons and the society methodologically achieve "self-reflection," a prerequisite for the emancipation of individuals from unnecessary domination. The paper then discusses Habermas' theory of communicative competence which has two parts: (1) universal pragmatics, and (2) ideal speech situation. The paper closes with a discussion of the specific area of communication rights where Habermas' thought has been paralleled most closely, and a critique which suggests a major weakness of Habermas' theory of communication and governance; that is, his assumption that all people at all times are able to offer and accept only rationally argued, bias-free claims. (Twenty-four references are attached.) (NH)

TOWARDS A CRITICAL PARADIGM FOR CHANGE: HABERMAS' "IDEAL SPEECH SITUATION" AS A META-MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

This study intends to demonstrate the importance of the work of rhetorical theorist Jurgen Habermas to development scholars. His conceptualization of society and subsequent outlining of the "ideal speech situation" provide a meta-theoretical basis for many of the "change-oriented" theories of development. The paper attempts to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of applying Habermas' theory to such an epistemic role in development communication.

TOWARDS A CRITICAL PARADIGM FOR CHANGE: HABERMAS' "IDEAL SPEECH SITUATION" AS A META-MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

In the literature of development communication, there have been offered various models that attempt to both explain and predict the process of "progress" in the less-developed countries or LDCs. In the immediate post-colonial period (the late 1950s to early 1960s) much stock was placed in the "economic" theories of development enunciated by Rostow, Lerner, and Schramm among others (Hedebro 17-22, Elgabri 4-8). In these paradigms, it was assumed that the former colonies of Africa and Latin America could become self-sufficient and prosperous nation-members of the world community if they simply followed the road of development that western Europe and North America had done in the 19th century: free-market capitalism. As Frey (367) argues, the major independent variable in these economic theories of development is capital. (Land and labor are considered relatively "fixed" commodities in these models.) Capital formation and its manipulation through socio-political means are, it is claimed, the engine of progress. Hence, to aid development, it is necessary to infuse capital-intensive technology into the LDCs to increase the production of goods, which would then be sold on the world market and thereby generate prosperity for the host countries and their people, in a "trickle-down" fashion from the urban, westernized elites to the rural, traditional poor (Ibid.) As Sauvant

(9-10) has so aptly observed, the hoped-for results of such Rostowian models as applied by UN developmental programs and the US sponsored Alliance for Progress did not come to pass:

> By the end of the 1960s, these hopes had been shattered. The international development did not deliver what they had seemed to promise. If anything, the gap between the North and the South had increased. At the same time, it became obvious that political independence is a mere chimera unless based on economic independence. Economic decolonization and development thus came to be viewed with a new urgency (10).

Rogers, in his 1976 work Communication and Development: Critical Perspectives, responded to the vacuity of the old economic development model by suggesting a new paradigm of development that relies upon the integration of useful cultural and social mores of the old host society with mores that will aid growth and prosperity (121-46; Nordenstreng & Schiller 5; Elgabri). In this paradigm, it is recognized that the people in the LDCs have to be participants in the process of development and not just the users of a universal model of development conceived of beforehand by outside theorists. But, according to Nordenstreng and Schiller, this paradigm of Rogers' does not address the notion that there are structural factors in the world economic system that determine the prospects of development for a struggling nation. His theory, they assert, regards "development as something that takes place within the (more or less) 'black box' of the nation state" (Ibid.).

Schiller (21) argues that it is the role of the multi-national corporations (MNCs) that should be the central focus of study for development scholars. The fate of the LDCs, he claims, are tied to the decisions made by MNCs as per the international division of labor and the allocation of resources, of which they exert a great amount of control. The structural imparatives of the MNCs are to acquire raw materials, manufacture products cheaply, and to sell these products on a world scale. According to Schiller, the communication media play a central role in assisting the MNCs (some of which own communicative enterprises) achieve these aims. Normally, these activities of the multi-national corporations, he states, "occur without central direction or political intentionality once the underlying model of capitalistic enterprise has been established and set on its course" (27). In short, the ideology of the corporation is to be kept subsumed (except in times of crisis) and accepted as the natural way of doing things.

Schiller argues that in many developed and underdeveloped nations alike, this goal is achieved by the co-option of the governing elites of the subject nation. This process of buying the goodwill of governing sectors occurs by the skillful employment of cultural and educational links (e.g., having the ruling cadres of the host country educated in the sponsor nation), the formation of export programs that favor the wants of such westernized elites over the needs of the masses, the promotion of tourism, and

finally, the ownership and control of the media system of the LDC by MNCs (38-9). By controlling the media output of a nation, multi-national corporations can promote the acceptance of a ideology that is congenial to their interests. The scope of the problem, Schiller asserts, is systematic (26,30). Thus, it is obvious that any useful counter-theory of development must be sociologically comprehensive, taking into account both the structural factors that hinder indigenous development of a LDC (Nordenstreng and Schiller) as well as the individual psychology of the citizens of the LDC (Lerner, Hagen, McClelland) (cf. Frey 370). One theorist that incorporates both of these levels into a structured meta-theory of society is Jurgen Habermas, a German sociologist and communication theorist. In this paper, I will detail the application of his theory of communication as it applies to the problems of developing nations on the world stage.

Critical Theory--A Socio-Cultural Model of Change

The first component of Habermas' model is critical theory. A development of the "Frankfurt School" of theorists at the Institute for Social Research, (founded in 1923 by Felix Weil in Germany) this philosophy is a creation of a group of scholars (George Lukacs, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno) whose basic goal has been to analyze the role that ideology plays in the governance of society (Foss et al 218).

Critical theorists believe that "society [should] be experienced as an arrangement of ideas that invite rational critique," in order to ". . . discern and reveal the [sublimated] contradictions in society" (Foss et al 218; Marcus & Tar 10). With the contradictions thus exposed, critical theorists, to quote Habermas, hope to encourage a process whereby people (and societies) can "free themselves from unecessary domination" (Foss et al 216). To Habermas, an "ideology" is any unconscious or unexamined assumptions that a individual or a culture holds as a "given" that is not available for rational critique. (Societal or tribal "norms" are often within this category of unexamined assumptions.) Because these assumptions are not open to rational criticism, unsolvable problems and contradictions are created. Critical theorists wish to expose the ideologies and the contradictions they cause in order to build a more rational and just society (Foss et al 218).

Critical theory attempts to combine the transcendental spiritualism of Kant and Hegel (the idea of the freeing power of an "Absolute Spirit," i.e., that a individual can liberate apart from his physical conditions) and the materialism of Marxism (Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society 21-5; McIntosh 564). Foss, Foss and Trapp outline the basic postulates of Marxism as follows:

1. Humans' self-realization or growth depends on production or work and on the relationships

established around the processes of production.

2. Under capitalism, products are manufactured primarily for value and profit and not to fulfill human needs.

3. In such a society, the products of human labor are objectified; they are seen as having lives of their own apart from those who make them. As a result, the commodities begin to control the nature of human labor rather than the reverse.

4. The control of society by the process of production is not immediately comprehensive to the members of that society because of ideologies or illusionary belief systems which, though false, are taken as adequate by society. Social change occurs when the dogmatic and false character of ideologies is dispelled (217-8).

Scott has referred to the attempt of the critical theory school to bridge the gap between "historical" and "scientific" Marxism, i.e., to "broaden" Marx beyond the strict confines of 19th century economics, and to apply its analyses to the problems of the present age (1). Central tenets held by the new theorists are, according to Guess:

1. Critical theory is aimed at producing "enlightenment in the agents that hold them, i.e., at enabling those agents know what their true interests are." [Developing countries can recognize their own potentialities.]

2. This perspective is "inherently emancipatory," depending upon people to free themselves from the bonds of self-imposed ideology through psychoanalytic self-critique. [LDCs can gain freedom from domination by either external or internal forces.]

3. The epistemological basis of critical theory is different than that of the empirical sciences: the first being based upon a reflective (hermeneutic) basis, the second

upon an "objective" (positivist) one. [Development decisions by LDCs need to be made on a social and not merely technical basis (1-2).

Habermas has developed these tenets of his theory of society and knowledge in Knowledge and Human Interests (1971) and subsequent works. The major theorectical conception Habermas deliniates herein is the separation of all of life activity into three "quasi-transcendental" cognitive domains, each possessing its own interest, rationality and scientific embodiment. These domains and their interrelationships are outlined below (Foss et al 227):

Domain	Interest	Rationality	Scientific Embodiment
work	technical	instrumental	empirical science
language	practical	practical	hermeneutic sciences
power	emancipatory	self-reflection	critical theory

To Habermas, the domain of "work" is that domain which is concerned with the control of physical nature. Therefore, its interest is defined as "technical." Its cognitive embodiment is best seen in the empirical or analytical sciences. In this sphere of thought, instrumental rationality (means/end thinking) is deemed appropriate. Logical positivists, however, have inappropriately employed instrumental logic as the standard of judgment to all spheres of life, with the result being that "science" excludes both

questions of human communication and power relations from the Edenic garden of "rationality," Habermas believes. Thus, the main philosophical problem of logical positivism is that its practitioners cannot see or rationally assess the implications or hidden interest that their epistemology entails. Because of this, Habermas asserts that technology has become the unexamined assumption or ideology of modern life. Researchers in developing countries are not immune to the power of this limiting world-view. As Rogers, in reviewing the state of development studies in the mid-'70s observed:

> A social scientist's perception of problems . . . is structured by the concepts and theories that he has been taught. He sees status, alienation, fatalism and achievement motivation because he has been taught these concepts. And, of course, he does not perceive phenomena for which he lacks concepts. So his scientific language structures or limits, his perceptions of the world, and it affects his choice of concepts, theories and methods for investigation (qtd. in Hedebro 122).

Hence, in order to be able to rationally assess these value assumptions in science, a broader concept of knowledge is required. By developing the domains of language and power, Habermas attempts to achieve this broader rational base from which to examine the ideologies within society (Theory of Communicative Action 91; Burleson 112-27). In this language domain, the interest is "practical," that is,

concerned with the question of how people communicate and persuade through symbols. A key concept here is that knowing is done through the interpretation of language symbols and thus the scientific embodiment in this domain is properly hermeneutical and historical (Ibid.). As discribed by Hedebro, successful development efforts result from the generation of indigeous schemas for progress in the LDCs themselves, as has been done in China, Cuba and Tanzania (73-88).

This development of thought is not new to Habermas. What is new is his creation of the third domain of knowledge, that of power. Power is a "derived" domain, that is, built upon the foundations of the work and language domains. By means of critical theory, Habermas asserts, we can scientifically understand and apply theories of power to improve the society by praxis. (Praxis is defined as the unification of theory and practice (Sullivan 71).) Following the idea of praxis, critical theorists hold that they should become directly involved with the subjects of their studies (much like cultural anthropologists) to better understand the needs and desires of the members of the culture of study, so has to effect positive change upon the social structure. This "subjective" activism is a key tenet of critical theory, in that no aspect of social science is interest-free, and thus any theory that does not work towards change ipso facto supports the status quo and political interests tied to it. For example, Rostow's theory of

development in based upon an epistemology that assumes that the values of western, capitalist society provide the foundation for any sense of "progress." This bias, however, is often not made explicit to developing countries that attempt to use it. (Hedebro 21) Habermas argues that the quest for "objectivity" merely allows for issues to be removed from open public discussion and debate (Theory & Practice 1-40). By defining certain issues as "technical" a government can argue that they should be left to "experts" to manage. As a result of this process, an "ideology of technology" results, denying the reality that real political issues are at stake in these very issues. Schiller has persuasively endorsed Habermas' view in his book Communication and Cultural Domination. To Schiller, the importation of communication apparatus from the developed countries to the LDCs has many sociological repercussions:

> Technology and the way it is used affect the basic structure of social communication.. . . The way human beings are related to each other in work and in their community and family life is largely, if not overwhelmingly, determined by the nature of the technology employed. . . . This [western] technology is in itself an expression of the capitalistic structures and strivings from which it emerged (48,50).

Habermas argues that power for the emancipation of such oppressed people and nations is to be achieved through praxis, but a question arises: How are people to see the discursive-formation power of ideologies and cope with them?

Freudian psychoanalysis is posited by Habermas to be the avenue by which individual persons and the society methodologically achieve "self-reflection," a prerequisite for the "self-emancipation" of individuals from unnecessary domination that is the ultimate goal of Habermas.

Psycho-analysis: A Scientific Avenue to Self-Reflection

"Psychoanalysis . . . is a tangible example of a science employing methodical self-reflection. The birth of psychoanalysis opens up the possibility of arriving at the dimension that positivism closed off, and of doing so in a methodological manner that arises out of the logic of inquiry" (Habermas Knowledge and Human Interests 214). In saying this, Habermas is claiming that Freudian psychology is a hermeneutical "critical" science that allows for the revealing of the "deep structures" of an individual's (or society's) thought processes, therefore allowing for useful self-reflection.

Habermas states that the main goal of psychoanalysis is not to provide nomological laws of human behavior (pace the behaviorists) but to provide a convincing interpretation of human activity that can allow for the person or society to understand improve its own behavior, free from external domination (229).

The main concern of such a psychoanalytic process

according to Habermas is the centrality of symbols and their meaning. Neurosis occurs when a subject's ability to mediate his private world of symbolic meaning with the public sphere is disrupted due to unrealized systematic distortions, or ideologies. The seed of this distortion, according to Habermas, lies in the unexamined unconsciousness. As Habermas states, "what is unconscious is removed from public communication. Insofar as it expresses itself in symbols or actions anyway it manifests itself as . . . a distortion of the text of everyday language games" (KHI 238). The result is "systematically distorted communication," which can occur on a social as well as personal level (Ibid.).

By dialogical therapy with an analyst, the disturbed individual (or culture) can achieve unity of his private and public symbolic meaning spheres. The powerful controlling influence of ideology and other "false consciousness" is thereby revealed and mitigated. This theory suggests that all overt behavior in an healthy individual or society should be conscious and open to critique or argumentation (Habermas KHI 228; Gottlieb 286-95). Hedebro parallels Habermas here, first citing the power of the Western-controlled world media system, by which it monologically imposes its own political ideology upon the developing world (93). Hedebro thereby calls for the creation of such dialogical theories of development that take the views of LDCs into account, and reduce the unconscious acceptance of ideologically-binding development plans (119-20). Any claim of benefit to LDCs by

a researcher will thus require, according to Habermas, an ability to be supported by "good reasons" acceptable to those people subjected to a thorist's social designs. A set of problems arise, however: By what means can a intersubjective standard for judgment be arrived at that can be used to assess the validity of such claims? How can Habermas' belief that the human interest in emancipation is innate be warranted? To answer these queries, Habermas claims that his emancipatory meta-theory of society possesses an a priori status embedded in language itself:

> The human interest in autonomy and responsibility is not mere fancy, for it can be apprehended a priori. What raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: language. Through its structure, autonomy and responsibility are posited for us. Our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus (KHI 314).

Habermas thus creates a theory of communicative competence by which one can compare actual human dialogue with this ideal goal of self-reflection. This theory has two parts: "universal pragmatics" and the "ideal speech situation." To a discussion of these components we can now turn.

Communicative Action: a Theory of Social Critique

"Universal pragmatics" is a theory of language that seeks to discover basic, cross-cultural rules that govern the use of language by persons, and thereby develop standards for judging the "communicative competence" of language users. Chomsky led the way here, creating a theory that allowed for the discovery of syntatic "deep structures" within language. Habermas builds upon this foundation, but he is more interested in the universal rules that govern the use of sentences in communication. His goal is to "identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible understanding" (CES 26-64; Foss et al 229-37).

The basic logical assumptions of "universal pragmatics" are: (1.) Speakers know how to communicate their intentions; (2.) the universal rules of language are constant among all cultures and situations and are known intuitively by speakers; and (3.) these universal rules are knowable (Ibid.).

Within this frame of universal pragmatics, Habermas partakes of Austin and Searle's concept of "speech acts." Simplified, this concept claims that statements consist of a performance or "illocutionary force" aspect in addition to any propositional or factual content they possess. Habermas delineates three speech acts: constatives, regulatives and avowals (Ibid.). Constatives assert a truth claim, regulatives govern or regulate the relationship between the rhetor and auditor, and avowals correspond to an expression

of feelings or wishes on the part of the rhetor. Each of these communicative acts have differing validity claims, in that they speak to differing dimensions of human interaction. In most everyday situations, we accept the validity of these sorts of statements without much question. If questions do arise, we can pursue dialogue with others to come to terms. If, however, the question deals with either the truth or appropriateness of a statement, we must leave the common level of communicative action and agree to enter into rhetorical "discourse", a sphere of communication in which, according to Habermas, "nothing is taken for granted" (Ibid.). The participants of discourse can argue on four levels depending upon the nature of the question. Truth claims are dealt with by "theoretical" discourse; the nature of appropriateness in "practical" discourse; the conceptual framework or knowledge "field" in which the question is grounded (al la Toulmin) in "meta-theorectical" discourse; or finally the nature of knowledge itself in "meta-ethical" discourse (Ibid.). The "truth" of a proposition in critical theory is held to be "consensual." Habermas, however, insists that this is not an adequate criterion for "truth" for his societal model in which truth, freedom and justice are the accepted cornerstones of the "good life." According to Habermas, the consensus gained through discourse has to be a "warranted consensus." This requires that a structural, procedural method must be created in which the "warranted assertability" of discourse can be recognized, achieved and

judged (Burleson 120)

The Ideal Speech Situation--A Proposed Model for Decision-Making in International Development Discourse

The structure created by Habermas to provide such a standard of judgment for rhetoric is the "ideal speech situation." Within this structure, Habermas provides an environment for his third (and most basic) domain of human knowledge, that of power (Foss et al 227; Wenzel 89). Since Habermas believes that the goal of society should be the freeing of people from domination, the ideal speech situation must possess a "general symmetry requirement." That is, in any discussion aimed at achieving a warrantable consensus, the following conditions must be met: (1.) No constraint must weigh upon the discussion; (2.) All participants in the discussion must have "unimpaired self-representation"; and (3.) All participants in the discussion must possess an equal right to issue commands to others. These conditions parallel Habermas' concepts of truth, freedom and justice, respectively (Foss et al 235).

The roots of these a priori concepts are, according to Habermas, based in the universal pragmatics of language, which provides a non-arbitrary standard by which to judge arguments, regardless of their subject (Aune 105). With this construct people can critically analyze the "irrational" individual or social beliefs or ideologies that, according to Habermas, limit peoples' freedom (Wenzel 87). As a result,

the separation between knowledge and interests in human organization that has hindered development towards the "good life" can be bridged, claims Habermas, resulting in an advanced, rational and just society. Can this emancipatory rhetorical model, however, become a reasonable pattern for decision-making both in developing countries and within the international forums in which their ulitimate fates depend? In the following section, this core concern will be addressed.

Discussion and Critique

Many of the ideas expressed in Habermas' sociological theory of communication and society have been echoed in development literature, at least in part. The fact that he is not cited as a source in most of that same literature seems indeed a mystery. For example, Hedebro states that the core idea behind "development" is liberation, which is can be defined to include the "emancipatory interest" of Habermas (5). Hedebro also bemoans the lack of a true dialogical model of development that would assist in the self-directed progress of the LDCs, a concept of communication central to Habermas (Ibid.). In addition, development scholar Inayatullah advanced the following definition of development in 1967, which mimics Habermas almost precisely:

> [Development] is a process through which a society achieves increased control over the environment, increased control over its own political destiny, and enables its component individuals to gain increased control over themselves (qtd. in Hedebro 34).

It is however, in the specific area of communication rights that Habermas' thought has been paralleled most closely. Harms, Richstad and Kie have enumerated certain "essential elements" of a "right to communicate" (a concept which has been embraced by UNESCO as a foundation upon which to build future world communication policies) These elements are:

> 1. Everyone should have the right to get the information they need.
> 2. There should be an appropriate, balanced information exchange between persons, regions, and countries.
> 3. Information from the "outside" for culture building should be balanced by information from the "inside" of a nation.
> 4. Communication in the world should promote globalism and cultural plurality.
> 5. The communication structure in a country should promote two-way communication at all levels.
> 6. People should have basic communication skills, and they should be taught them.
> 7. There should be room for active participation in society as well as individual privacy.
> 8. Everyone should possess a right to communication resources to meet basic needs (qtd. in Hedebro 67-8).

In short, these aspects of the "right to communicate" are elements of the "ideal speech situation" of Habermas.

The work of this great German sociocultural theorist is something to be admired, because he has developed a theory of society that encompasses both micro and macro levels of analysis, and also provides an avenue for the impartial judging of argument quality. Sociologist William Outhwaite has credited Habermas with achieving a "fundamental breakthrough" in his analysis and critique of positivist market and administrative rationality (356-9). This praise is warranted, but the grand scope of Habermas' theory creates some problems in its actual application to development problems.

To begin with, the Freudian psycho-analysis is a source of trouble: Freud's theory suggests strongly that we are creatures driven by biological drives, which, however, Habermas believes we can transcend through self-reflection. If Freud was right, this seems doubtful. Freud strongly believed in the controlling role of the therapist to guide the patient to recovery. How then can one individual or society objectively be its own therapist? How can we become aware of our own ideologies, which, by their very nature hidden from us? How can a undeveloped nation teach itself out of its predicament without outside advice or material aid?

Habermas' domains of knowledge are also problematic. They cannot be kept strictly separate in real life. Often, a situation or event may encompass all three domains: A

development decision to build a dam will, for example often include "technical" interests (to stop flooding), "practical" interests (to be a symbol of "progress") and "emancipatory" interests (to increase a leader's political power). Habermas has admitted the looseness of these constructs, by labeling them in his later works as "quasi-transcendental." One cannot really have it both ways here. These domains are useful analytical tools of societal behavior, but they are not, and should not be, straitjackets restraining real-life phenomenon (KHI 314).

The writer argues, however, that the major weakness of Habermas' theory of communication and governance lies in his assumption of the abilities of all people, at all times, to both offer and accept only rationally argued claims free from ideological bias. This is unrealistic due to several reasons: First, it assumes that everyone is educated and free to partake in governance. This assumption is unwarranted in the developed countries and quite farcial in the less-developed world, where most people are illiterate and hungry. Secondly, it assumes that those persons or groups that now hold power will give it up readily. (Schiller's account of the overthrow of Allende's democratically-elected government in Chile should give anyone pause on this claim (98-109).) and thirdly, it assumes that there is one (and only one) rational decision that can be made and agreed upon in all circumstances. These assumptions, I believe, place an unbearable burden on the concept of rationality in society,

and just as seriously, disregards any role for emotive feelings and impulses in social intercourse.

To be fair, Habermas has admitted that his ideal speech situation is probably an unobtainable ideal, but he argues that our rhetoric and our decision-making (on both the interpersonal and societal levels) will be the better for it. To conclude, if his theory can allow development theorists, through better models, to truly help LDCs grow into self-determination and self-sufficiency, then it is a most worthwhile systematic advance over earlier, more narrowly-drawn development theories.

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