

## **People in the driver's seat of development? On the role of language in the tension between local and global discourses of development**

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### **Abstract**

Seven conferences on "Language and Development" (sponsored by the British Council) have been held between 1993 and 2005. This paper provides a brief report on these conferences as a background for asking to what extent attention to language can address both the desire for material development expressed by a considerable number of people at the grassroots, and the World Bank's proclaimed goal of putting people in the "driver's seat" of development. It is suggested that the World Bank's image itself contains the basic tension between the aim of allowing people define their own goals and the continued international belief in the ability of "technology" to provide the means for achieving these goals: putting people in a "driver's seat" presupposes that there is a vehicle with a steering mechanism.

Discussions at the conferences on "Language and Development", as well as opinions of local people interviewed in the context of the research project LAGSUS raise the question to what extent the steering mechanism can be handled through the medium of local languages. Both in the international context and in the empirical material a striking feature is the prevalence of technical images of development on one side, and the insistence of (some) international experts, as well as of some local people, that the appropriate medium for handling "modern" technologies are "modern" languages, particularly English. The paper reports images of development and on differences in local perceptions of the role of the local language for development between the Baluli in Uganda, the Herero in Namibia, and a group of minority languages in Celebes, Indonesia. While the images of "development" look similar, the perception of the local language as an appropriate vehicle seems to depend on the size of the language community: the strength of the Indonesian as a national language promoted through the education system, combined with the small size of the language communities, seems to diminish the role local people themselves accord to their own language for anything beyond everyday activities. What role is there, then, for "alternative visions" of development, based on grassroots conceptions developed in local languages?

## Introduction

The African has become deaf and blind to his own basic needs to a degree which leads me to believe that the notion of underdevelopment should be resuscitated, so that he may finally comprehend what is going on.

Axelle Kabou (1993: 38)

Africa is underdeveloped and stagnates, because it decidedly refuses development. All the steps leading to development have caused resentment and cultural resistance, with the effect that at the beginning of the nineties the idea of progress is not rooted anywhere on the continent to a degree that people would be irrevocably convinced of it.

Axelle Kabou (1993: 39)

The Africans are the only people on the earth who still believe that other people than themselves have to take care of their development. They should wake up at last.

Axelle Kabou (1993: Blurb)

Therefore, refusing development is not just a secondary phenomenon, as some experts mistakenly believe, but the most prevalent and most fervently cherished idea in Black Africa. The refusal of progress is a home-grown and therefore unsuspecting idea; it is omnipresent but invisible ...

Africa is not breathing its last, but instead is committing suicide in a kind of cultural inebriation which only leads to moral satisfaction. The substantial injections of capital will not be capable to change this. First of all, one would need to detoxify the African mentality, set the clocks right and confront the Africans with their responsibility. Development aid would mean to encourage Africans to create the psychological preconditions first for the idea of change to fall onto fertile ground.

Axelle Kabou (1993: 40)

These quotes are taken from Axelle Kabou's *Et si L'Afrique refusait le développement ?* – published in 1991 in Paris where Axelle Kabou, born 1955 in Douala, had studied. The book was intended as the provocation it became. In the fifteen years since its publication, most African commentators disagreed, while the majority of the readers from the industrialized white and "Western" world seems to have quoted Kabou approvingly: voicing criticisms they felt to be true but not in a position to voice because they would immediately be seen as representatives of neo-colonialism. One can, however, find approving voices in blogs from Africa, as well as disapproving ones from Western journalists. Thus, Lutz Herden (2003), sees in the refusal criticized by Kabou a rather logical and realistic retreat from development resulting from the condition of the continent, considering that "the 48 states between Casablanca and Kapstadt would, at a growth rate of 2 per cent, need 40 years on average to *return* to the standard of living existing during the first decade of independence."

Precisely because they are contested, these statements can serve as an illustration of the central tension underlying all discourses about development - and, as a consequence, the question of the relationship between language and development: If, as critics from all over the world have noted, "development" is a typically Western idea, which began to dominate the global discourse following the famous 1949 speech of then US President Harry S. Truman, why should Non-Western peoples and cultures, particularly if they value their cultural identity, follow a path which immediately places them in the inferior position of being "under-developed" or "less developed" or "developing"<sup>1</sup>?

What I would like to show in this paper, is that these questions have a place in some academic discussions while they are almost absent both the the level of the global discourse as exemplified by the World Bank, and at the level of local discourses as encountered during field research in Uganda, Namibia, and Indonesia in the context of the Volkswagen-funded project "Language, Gender and Sustainability." This fact puts me and my own scientific work into a curious contradiction: the questions which I find most relevant and also most intellectually stimulating - questions how "development" came to mean what it means to different people, why the results of actions towards achieving development goals so often differ from the proclaimed ideals of development, and whether and how this discrepancy might be narrowed - are the questions which appear to be rather irrelevant both for "ordinary people's" business to get on with life, and for the planners whose business it is to manage funds and experts to somehow improve ordinary people's lives, using well thought-out strategies on the basis of sometimes massive data collections such as those gathered for the World Development Reports of the World Bank and the Human Development Reports of UNDP.

For most of them questions about identity and "alternative" or "local" or "indigenous" visions of development seem to be rather alien. For them "development" means roads, schools, hospitals, electricity, water supply, transport, employment or marketing opportunities. It means these services and a modicum of comfort. It also means the absence of poverty which the World Bank has proclaimed its mission to achieve.

At the same time some of those who claim to stand for alternative visions of indigenous development, of empowerment based on tradition, seem to pursue well-know strategies of self-enrichment and self-aggrandization which were thought to be the mark of corrupt elites - whether in the North, the South, or within the development industry itself.

Where does this leave academics and scientific research? When it seems that scientific results are on the whole not used to re-think approaches, as suggested by some writers (Kapoor 2004), but, rather, to justify existing approaches? This paper aims to pose these questions for discussion precisely because I find them pressing in view of the global situation while at the same time I do *not* have convincing answer myself.

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<sup>1</sup> as the politically correct terms changed over the years precisely to avoid the impression of domination.

## **The British Council: Conferences on Language and Development**

Starting in 1993, the British Council in collaboration with Ministries of Education and other institutions involved in language teaching, began organizing biennial conferences which attempted to explore the relationship between language and development. The first five conferences were all held in SouthEast Asia, the sixth one moved to Uzbekistan, and only the last one was held in Africa - in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2005. As the initiative for these conferences came from the British Council, it is little surprising that the initial focus was on methods and effectiveness of teaching English as a second or special purposes language (Kaplan 1997) and its role for the development of the participating countries.

### **The Series of *Language and Development* conferences**

**Bangkok, Thailand 1993: *Language Programs in Development Projects***

Proceedings published (see Kenny & Savage, 1997) and reviewed (Kaplan 1997)

**Bali, Indonesia 1995: *Language and Communication in Development: Stakeholders' Perspectives***

No further information available

**Langkawi, Malaysia 1997: *Language in Development: Access, Empowerment, Opportunity***

No info about either authors or topics - only general review and recommendation to write to INTAN (co-organizer) for proceedings

**Hanoi, Vietnam 1999: *Partnership and Interaction in Development***

Topics, description and papers available online

**Phnom Penh 2001: *Defining the Role of Language in Development***

Proceedings published by *Language Australia Ltd.* (Lo Bianco 2002) and available online from ERIC at

[http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content\\_storage\\_01/0000000b/80/23/b4/65.pdf](http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/23/b4/65.pdf)

**Tashkent, Uzbekistan 2003: *Linguistic Challenges to National Development and International Cooperation***

Some Information on the Web: Focus areas and brief newspaper reports

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2005: *7th International Language & Development Conference***

Website (<http://www.langdev.org/>) gives main speakers and abstracts; additional article by Don Osborn in the *East African Standard*

In the words of the British Council itself: "The Bangkok conference showed that there is a common field with which professionals working in language and development can identify." The following conferences broadened the topic, until in 1999 in Hanoi and in 2001 in Phnom Penh general considerations about the relationship between language and development were included, which in Uzbekistan also included the role of language for national identity and in Addis Ababa took note of the African peculiarity of a highly fragmented situation.

Reviewing widely believed arguments that "*English is key to a better life for the poor*" Alistair Pennycook in a keynote lecture to the 1999 conference in Hanoi replies that "it might well be argued that escape from poverty through English (which still in any case needs to be demonstrated) perpetuates inequality and holds back development since it only provides access (for some) to inequitably distributed resources rather than change the distribution of those resources." Pennycook 1999).

He then proceeds to review four separate aspects of the relationship between language and development:

- 1) Language *as* development
- 2) Language *for* development
- 3) Language *in* development; and
- 4) the Language *of* development.

He does not waste much time on the first of these positions, which equates language development - and hence language teaching - itself as development. Learning English as a way out of poverty falls in the second category, as it includes the ability to participate in development projects where the dominant language is English. This position still considers language only in its instrumental value - as a tool to achieve other ends. What these ends might be, and how language itself might frame possible meanings of "development" is then discussed under the last two of the four possible prepositional relations: language *in* and the language *of* development. The last of these presents an opportunity to present the participants of the 1999 conference with an analysis of development discourse, including the growing dissatisfaction with and criticism of the whole notion of development. Various authors are cited as examples of a stream of thought which sees development as

"profoundly eurocentric, conflating development, modernization and westernization, and promoting particular worldviews, cultures and technicist rationalism. Thus, the whole notion of development was based on the notion that in order to become more developed, societies needed to follow a 'western' pattern of modernization, politics, economy, education, language policy, and so on." (Pennycook, 1999)

Development projects based on such a eurocentric notion of progress are inherently patronizing and assist "Europeans with their guilt over the past" while failing "to incorporate local needs and ideas. ... Thus, as Escobar reminds us >in many places there are worlds that development, even today and at this moment, is bent on destroying< (p.226)" (Pennycook, 1999).

Based on a eurocentric model of progress, which implies "an upward, linear path of development", even the positive notion of "sustainable development" does not escape the logic of rational planning and management, but only adds a notion of "preservationism" (Pennycook,

citing Adams, Escobar, and Manzo). The notion of preservationism, however, opens a door for a more sensitive approach to culture, identity, and languages.

Pennycook reviews seven "models" of "language in the world": *colonial celebratory, laissez-faire liberalism, modernization, imperialism, linguistic hybridity, and postcolonial performativity*.

**Models of "Language in the World" as used by different actors**  
(Pennycook, 1999)

<b>View of the global spread of English</b>	<b>Implications for culture and development</b>	<b>Pedagogical implications</b>
Colonial celebratory	English an inherently useful language	Teach English to those who can appreciate it
Modernization	English a crucial tool for modernization	Teach English to modernize the world
Laissez-faire liberalism	English a functional tool for pragmatic purposes	Business as usual: give people what they want
Imperialism	Homogenization, destruction of other cultures and languages	Language rights, instruction in mother tongues; protectionism
Linguistic hybridity	Languages and cultures change and adapt	World Englishes, multiple standards; assume change
Postcolonial performativity	Cultural politics of change, language, knowledge and difference	Critical language education for struggle; appropriability

Pennycook describes these models as a kind of historical sequence beginning with an almost unquestioned belief in the inherent superiority of English, proceeding to the view that language has a role in enhancing development and modernization as a tool, a view which does not see other languages as inherently inferior, but accords them a quasi-natural place as "a home tongue for love-making, religion, verse-craft, back chat and inexact topics in general" (Pennycook 1999, quoting Hogben). In this role as the "natural" language for the modern world, English retains the most important place. Not surprisingly, this is the position held by many modernizing elites and power holders in the "South", as exemplified by the role English plays as the language of development in Pakistan (Shamin, 2005), and echoed in parents' demands for improved teaching of English in school education reported by Pennycook. English - together with French or Spanish in other parts of the world - continues to be a privileged language, the language of "the ruling system, government, education, business and trade, and diplomacy" and is therefore necessary for "global competitiveness" (Pennycook 1999, citing Ortez).

Acknowledging this, the professional language teaching community developed what Pennycook calls the attitude of "laissez-faire liberalism, which he sees exemplified in the mission statement of the TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages - the global professional organization for the teaching of English): "to strengthen the effective teaching and learning of English around the world while respecting individuals' language rights" (Pennycook, 1999). In his view, laissez-faire liberalism is deficient because it ignores the power relationships between

English and other local languages, which is inextricably linked to power relationships between different groups of people.

Other contributors to the same conference (see Tollefson, 1999) are cited by Pennycook as attempting to integrate such insights into language teaching itself: language teaching as a means for (stealthily) transforming the power relationships, which would lead to a more equitable world by explicitly including language rights. This is the model termed *Language ecology, language rights, linguistic imperialism* by Pennycook. It is also the model which seems to underlie the speech of the Namibian Minister of Basic Education, Sports, and Culture, John Mutorwa on occasion of launching the video and proceedings of the 2000 National Conference on Language and Development. In his speech, entitled "Empowerment Needs Language Fluency", he stressed the Namibian Government's concern with

"the empowerment of the entire population to participate fully in the democratic process and in the government of the country. This means fluency in a single national (official) language while at the same time restoring mother tongues to their proper position of respect and continuing the development of local languages and cultures." (Mutorwa 2001).

This objective is to be achieved through a consistent language policy for schools, which aims to both "[establish] English as the official medium of education and [promote] the equal development of the main Namibian languages." This, however, presents the problem of striking an "appropriate balance between the consolidation of the learners' own culture and background on the one hand; and the acquisition of a language offering wider communication and opportunity." The Minister knows that it is not easy "to harmonize UNITY versus DIVERSITY," because either way, one or more language groups might be "offended" (Mutorwa 2001).

Long before Yasir Suleiman gave his keynote speech to the first of the Language and Development Conferences which took place in Africa - i.e. in Addis Ababa in 2005 - the Namibian Minister seemed to be aware that language policy is rather complicated because debates about language always take place against a background of "issues of power, inclusion and exclusion, ethnic purity and contamination, globalization and localization, tradition and modernity, the allocation of resources in society, religiosity" - and "many other factors" (Suleiman, 2005). At the same conference, which was reviewed rather positively as an opportunity to become aware of the unique language diversity in Africa as a resource (Mbatiah, 2005), Robert Chambers, the most prominent figure in the global movement towards participatory approaches to development, emphasized the necessity to always ask "Whose language? Whose words? Whose concepts? Whose values? Whose ideals? Whose realities? and Whose power?" (Chambers 2005).

Language is both caught up in relationships of power, and is used as an instrument of power. Because - as Chambers says - this is not always seen clearly, there are gaps between "what words imply and the realities of policies, practices, attitudes and relationships", and there are also attitudes which make it difficult for those who possess "language power" to listen and learn. He therefore recommends the adoption of learning behaviours such as shutting up and listening, "to enrich discourse and understanding in dominant languages by seeking, hearing and adopting words, phrases and concepts from subaltern languages, for example those which express wellbeing and the good life, and values and ideals like *ubuntu* and *ujamaa*."

His keynote is summed up in the following words:

"For better or for worse, language frames development thinking. The uses and abuses of its power deserve more attention to exploit the potential of language to influence power relations and induce good change."

One of the previous conferences in the series - held in Phnom Penh in 2001 -, had taken care of some of these issues under the heading of "institution building," and the relationships between local and foreign experts, noting that there is a lot more going on in development assistance than assumed by those who see it mainly as a "transfer" of knowledge and/or technologies. As Lo Bianco in his introductory chapter to the Proceedings states:

"What is really going on quite often are localised relations among people who have institutional roles that precede them and that reflect relations between the donor and the recipient. These prior relations influence how the locals and the "foreigners" relate. Development agencies often represent "language development" as an analogue of what Truman saw in economic or industrial terms, an uncomplicated process of the transfer of skills and techniques from an "advanced" to a "developing" context. Several of the chapters of this book problematise this analogy, offering both very positive evidence of collaborative, mutually beneficial relations, and of some characterized by tension and misunderstanding. As far as language is concerned, it seems very unlikely that uncomplicated transfer can ever occur." (Lo Bianco, 2002: 18)

In addition to setting this framework for understanding the "micro-politics" of projects as instances of - or at least as linked to - the "macro-politics" of international institutions and development assistance, Lo Bianco's introduction to the Proceedings of the Phnom Penh Conference displays his main thrust in the title: "Destitution, wealth, and cultural context: language and development connections" (Lo Bianco 2002).

Even more succinctly than Pennycook, Lo Bianco traces the whole modern development industry back to the thought first clearly and publicly expressed in President Truman's Inaugural Address of January 20, 1949: "Development" means "making the benefits of our own scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of the underdeveloped areas." This, Lo Bianco says, first spelt out the logic on which all development assistance in subsequent decades was based. In spite of the orientation to help others to "catch up", however, in reality inequalities between the poor and the rich were growing during those decades of development assistance, as he shows with citations from UNDP's 1999 *Human Development Report*<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The situation has not improved in the meantime, as the *Human Development Report* of 2005 shows, which is summed up by Mertens (2005) in a briefing paper for the Friedrich Ebert Foundation:

"The HDR does not simply deliver absolute figures and indicators of human development, but also places these figures into comparative context. Thus the overall picture constructed is one of growing inequality and the global gap between rich and poor. The richest 50 individuals in the world have a combined income greater than that of the poorest 416 million (p. 4). The 2.5 million people living on less than \$2 a day – 40% of the world's population – receive only 5% of global income, while 54% of global income goes to the richest 10% of the world's population. But the problem is not just one of inequality between countries. The HDR points out that in the last 20 years the unequal distribution of income (measured in Gini-coefficients) within many countries has grown worse. Of the 73 countries for which figures are available, 53 (comprising over 80% of the world's population) have recorded an increase in inequality of distribution. Only in 9 countries (comprising about 4% of the world's population) has the wealth gap between rich and poor been at all reduced."



In 1997, the focus on poverty eradication - or at least poverty alleviation - had been declared a core concern by the British Department for International Development (DFID). The institutions also included poverty alleviation among the main *educational* aims under the heading "Education for All." This happened before the World Bank under its president James Wolfensohn officially declared the "attack on poverty" to be its main reason for existing - its "mission." The growing concern about fighting poverty as the core of international development assistance affected the field of language and development: well-established programmes for teaching English to particularly for Non-Western elites were immediately cut away, because they could not be justified in terms of poverty alleviation (Kennett, 2002). Because of the general donor requirement of cost-efficiency, *all* language teaching programmes were affected, however: they had to show a positive "return on investment" with respect to the "yield" in terms of poverty reduction which every dollar invested in such a programme would bring. This was explained in some detail in the contribution of a World Bank staff member to the Phnom Penh Conference (Mbida-Essama, 2005).

Within this rationality which in fact underpins virtually all development assistance, poverty reduction depends on continued growth, as the World Bank's then new "Comprehensive Development Framework" demonstrated. The CDF was intended to become the global strategic framework for the fight against poverty, as laid out in some detail in the World Development Report 2000/1

### ***The World Bank's Attack on Poverty within the Comprehensive Development Framework***

At the turn of the millenium, the World Bank organized a global consultation on its newly proposed "Comprehensive Development Framework" (CDF) and for the second World Development report focusing on Poverty (World Bank 2001). The Draft of the CDF emphasized a "holistic approach" to development and the central role for "attacking poverty" and coined the phrase "Putting Countries in the Driver's Seat of Development" - which I used for the title of this paper.

This sentence became sort of a trade mark for the then President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, who used it in various public statments, in which he also explained the CDF as "a structure for holistic sustainable development" (Wolfensohn, undated a):

"The CDF reflects an approach to putting together those elements which are central to the development process, and without which no amount of money and no macro policy could render efforts effective. ... It started with governance. If you have a weak government and it can't do what it says it's going to do, the chances are you're not going to succeed. Likewise, if you don't have a legal system that gives you bankruptcy laws, property rights, contract laws, it's difficult to run a country. And if you have a legal system but corrupt judges, you might as well not have a legal system because you will not have justice. The third element was supervision and regulation of the financial system because if you don't have bank supervision and control, you can have chaos notwithstanding your stated policy. And that applies not only at the Bank level but at the level of public markets, and

at the level of the corporation. It is in the interest of both growth and of poverty, because the people who get hit most in those sorts of crises are, in fact, the poor. The fourth was the need for a social safety net, because if you don't have that you may have good policies, you may decide to have privatization and cut down your public corporations, and then what happens is you get people out of work, and trapped into poverty."

While this sounds like a translation of structural adjustment goals into everyday language, Wolfensohn also makes it clear that there are some very "down-to-earth" physical requirements for any development:

" If you're going to deal with development in any real sense, if you're going to deal with poverty, you must start with education and knowledge transfer, and parallel with that, health. If you don't deal with the health issue and you get kids to school that are badly nourished, you have kids getting to school already mentally damaged. There's not much sense in that, quite apart from the ethics and the morality of proper social and health care, which affects population, which affects women's rights....

And then I went on and ticked off water, a central security issue in terms of health, the environment and a major source of potential conflict. You need to have power and transport infrastructure to have an education system that works. And you cannot have an urban program and a rural program that works unless you have communication, unless you have all these factors coming together. And that led me to think that really it's not a question of one element or the other. It's about building the different factors in a complementary manner, and from the bottom up, with the country in the driver's seat and ownership in the local community." (Wolfensohn, undated a)

In the discussion version of both the Comprehensive Development Framework and the 2000/1 World Development Report *Attacking Poverty*, this boils down to three main elements:

- **Empowerment:** Making state institutions pro-poor and removing social barriers to poverty reduction.
- **Security:** Helping the poor to manage the risks they face in their everyday lives, and managing national downturns to minimize their impact on the poor.
- **Opportunity:** Expanding economic opportunity for the poor by building up their assets and increasing the returns on these assets, through a combination of market-oriented and nonmarket actions. (World Bank 2000: Chapter Overview p.5)

While *Security* refers to the various forms of social safety nets, *Opportunity* is a clear commitment to a global system of free markets based on private ownership. The implication - which in other places is spelt out more clearly - is that the building of assets requires growth: "Pro-Poor Growth" as the World Bank terms it. And through *Empowerment* the local people should be put in a position to hold their governments accountable for implementing this pro-poor growth:

**"Empowerment.** Global action can empower poor people and poor countries in national and global forums. Aid should be delivered in ways that ensure greater ownership by recipient countries, and it should be directed to increasingly country-driven, results-

oriented poverty reduction programs, developed with the effective engagement of civil society and private sector agents. Poor people and poor countries should have greater voice in international forums, to ensure the international priorities, agreements, and standards - such as in trade and intellectual property rights - reflect their needs and interests.

The strategy in this report recognizes that poverty is more than inadequate income or human development - it is also vulnerability and a lack of voice, power and representation. With this multidimensional view of poverty comes greater complexity in poverty reduction strategies, because more factors - such as social and cultural factors - need to be taken into account.

The way to deal with this complexity is through empowerment and participation - local, national, and international. National governments should be fully accountable to their citizenry for the development path they pursue. Participatory mechanisms can provide voice to women and men, especially those from poor and excluded segments of society. The design of decentralized agencies and services needs to reflect local conditions, social structures, and cultural norms and heritage. And international institutions should listen to - and promote - the interests of poor people.<sup>3</sup> The poor are the main actors in the fight against poverty. And they must be brought center stage in designing, implementing, and monitoring antipoverty strategies." (World Bank 2000:12)

Wolfensohn did not tire to explain the drama of poverty in places of power - both in terms of the size of the gap between the rich and the poor, and what he saw as the basic unity of purpose of his institution's mission and strategy with the intentions of the poor themselves. The first of the following quotes is about inequality and comes from a speech in Frankfurt:

The main point that I want to say is that although there has been progress, few of us have come to recognize that the world has changed from that luxurious world of talking to each other about Europe and talking to the other side of the Atlantic and talking about Japan, because the world is getting and has become different.

It is now a world of 6 billion people. Only 1 billion live in the world that we historically talked about. That world of 1 billion has 80 percent of the income, our global income of \$35 trillion. And we, who are lucky to be in the billion, have \$28 trillion of that income. The other 5 billion has \$7 trillion dollars of that income. So you have 80 percent of the world with one fifth of the income. And you have 20 percent of the world, that's us, with 80 percent of the income. That is the first primary imbalance as my topic suggests.

The second imbalance is that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer; there is a large divide between the rich and poor. Not just between the countries but within the countries. And we also should know and notice that as we in Europe look at the future, and the rest

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<sup>3</sup> Steen Jorgenson, Director for Social Development at the World Bank, also emphasized this in an online discussion on the social dimensions of development effectiveness: " Our job as outside agencies is to make sure that other voices are heard in that debate, that also the voices of the poor are heard, that the voices of the marginalized are heard so we create a more level playing field. So this is a distortion of free market economics that some economists may not appreciate but it is very clear that the basic principle applies of equal access to opportunities for all." (from: <http://discuss.worldbank.org/chat/view/8385>)

of the world looks at the future, it is not static, because in 25 years the world moves from 6 billion to 8 billion. And all but 50 million of that growth goes to developing countries. So that, by the year 2030, we'll have a world in which 7 billion out of 8 billion live in developing countries. And by 2050 or so, it'll be 8 billion out of 9 billion. And Europe, and indeed your country, will not have grown and be quite conceivably smaller."  
(Wolfensohn, 2005)

The second quote is about his personal familiarity with the conditions of the poor, and comes from a speech about *Financing the Monterrey Consensus* (Wolfensohn, 2004):

"And the third issue is the issue of aid. How are we increasing aid? I pay tribute to the European Union for agreeing to increase the funding during the next three years and to the President of the United States for adding another five billion in terms of adding fifty percent to the moneys that are given by the United States. But the simple fact of the matter is that it's not there in scale. We need much more. And it's a gift, and it's not charity. It's an investment in the future of our children to have a planet that has stability, opportunity and peace.

This is what we're here to discuss today, to discuss it not just financially, but to discuss it also because it's right. It's right from the human point of view, from whatever religion one follows. It's right for the individuals that we're working with. My travels take me to slums and villages all over the world and the people in the slums and villages that I meet are frankly the best people you could meet. They're like all of us. They don't want anything different. They don't want charity. They want an opportunity. They want a chance for their children. They want to live in peace. The women don't want to be beaten up. They want a chance to move forward and to build better lives for themselves. And they want a life of hope. They cannot do it alone. It's for us to work with them; to give them their hope, and in so doing enrich them, and enrich ourselves as well"

But Mr. Wolfensohn also is sure that the problems - which he admits had already been discovered by the Brandt Commission 25 years earlier (Wolfensohn, 2005) - can be solved. And he uses the word "fixed" for this:

"We will face issues of migration, we will face issues of work, we will face issues of how we meet our pensions, we will face issues about growing social benefits, and all this is known already; all this is known, and all this was discussed at the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations in the year 2000. When every leader of the world made an almost identical speech, in which they said, "It's not the conflicts that we are worried about, it is poverty that we are worried about - it is imbalance, it is inequity". And everyone said, "We can fix this ", and they had a couple of more meetings as everyone knows in Monterrey and in Johannesburg, and I am happy to say that the Bundespräsident and I participated in a number of these discussions. Everybody agreed that we could fix it. That we could fix it much in the way that Willy Brandt said we can fix it."

## **Local Discourses**

Let me therefore now turn to the "poor" themselves - as they presented themselves to one foreign researcher visiting them with local research assistants in the framework of the project "Language, Gender, and Sustainability" (LAGSUS).

The situations observed in the course of this research project were rather diverse: in Uganda, I participated in group meetings organized by another researcher whose main task in the Nakasongola District is to promote advanced agricultural practices. In the Lore Lindu area of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, I organized focus group and individual interviews, some of which were "kick-started" by showing a video of an improvised drama of school children concerning transgressions of conservation rules in the villages. In Namibia, I attended meetings and a workshop of the Tjohorongo Kondjee Farmer's association. In all areas I also organised individual and group interviews around the relationship between resource use and development, including the role of local leadership in resource management. In all these conversations<sup>4</sup> and wherever appropriate the role of language was explored from the respondent's own point of view. In Namibia, the use of English for the documents of the Farmers' Association or in meetings for a goat improvement project was seen as a practice by people holding power, leading to the exclusion of those who could not speak - and much less write - that language.

What I will present here are a few snapshots, which came sometimes from observation, sometimes from responses to questions, sometimes from unsolicited conversations and requests

The most striking similarity across diverse places and situations was the sometimes embarrassing frankness with which "respondents" insisted that they *are* poor and that they *want* to be helped - whether from their own government or from a foreign agency. And they want to be helped to get precisely some of the amenities which Truman already promised, and which Wolfensohn again mentioned as the basic ingredients of all development efforts: water, schools, hospitals, transport, markets, jobs.

During the first field research period in Namibia, in August 2004, a group of school children had been asked to come up with a story about development. On the basis of that story they produced an improvised theatre play about how a community got rid of an oppressive local leader. In the discussion with adults following the showing of the video recording of that play, the participants expressed their actual dissatisfaction with a leader who, not residing in the area, would always divert resources to the people in his own community. In that discussion, the adults made it very clear that "development" for them means precisely this: schools, water, hospitals, electricity. Particularly water and electricity was seen as a precondition for many other possibly profitable activities. Responding to a question by the researcher, they emphasized the importance of electricity: without it, resident students in school hostels would use candles at night - resulting in burnt down schools, as had happened recently. And jobs were - and are - of the utmost importance in this Herero "communal area" where young people themselves see unemployment and alcoholism as the biggest problem. To the extent that the most important wish of a mixed group of youth and adults in the home community of the research assistant was to get a "food for work" project.

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<sup>4</sup> I call them "conversations" rather than interviews, because every opportunity was used to leave the question and answer format behind and begin to talk - as frankly as possible - about the issues the "respondents" saw as the most relevant with respect to development and conservation or sustainability.

Electricity and employment opportunities also played the leading role in villages around the newly created Lore Lindu National Park in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. In conversations with several village mayors they stressed the need to have skills training and tools in order to be able to produce marketable items to improve their lives. For them, this was important because the new National Park meant restricted access to the forest which had provided easy access to land for gardens, for hunting, and for various other products which could be marketed, such as *damar* (a kind of natural rubber) and rattan<sup>5</sup>.

At the same time, the need for education, marketing opportunities, jobs, skills, electricity etc. is seen at least by some as a more or less quiet attack on a way of life - and with it on local languages. While it is a great achievement that every second Sunday service in church is conducted in the local language, the older people note that their mother tongue does not play a role in school, and that the young people now often prefer to speak the national language - *Bahasa Indonesia* - even at home. In some places the parents themselves support this trend, believing that opportunities to advance in life will depend on the ability to be fluent in the national language, going to the extent of asking school teachers to teach English during the few hours per week reserved to *muatan lokal* - the term for a "free" topic reflecting local needs.

The coincidence between New Year Celebrations 2005 and the field research in the village of Betue provided opportunities for extended conversations, in which the *kepala desa* (the mayor) together with the Indonesian research assistant reflected on the changes brought to this remote area in recent years with the arrival of residents from other parts of Sulawesi, who, they agreed, displayed a more diligent attitude towards work. They would get up early in the morning and go to the fields, they would save money to buy land, they would become active to start trading activities to earn a living - even if they possessed high education certificates. The traditional "easy way of life" simply could not be maintained any more. Not that local people had not also worked hard in the times when the mayor had been a boy. They had also risen early and gone to the fields or the forest. But work did not take up the whole day, and there had definitely been more leisure time then. This was not possible any more - at least not if you had any ambition to get on in life. As he termed it: "The economy works us."

This kind of observation throws a small local light on the big topic of the need for growth proclaimed to be absolutely essential in the fight against poverty by the World Bank, while seen as failing to achieve a real reduction by others, such as the "New Economic Foundation" (see Woodward and Simms, 2006a): in the eyes of critics, the present fixation on growth produces some of the effects it is supposed to solve, as described by no lesser a figure than a British Secretary of State for International Development: "Our whole global economic system is geared to generating growth, often sacrificing in the process the equitable distribution of income, the provision of essential social services and environmental sustainability" (Woodward and Simms, 2006a).

The Baluli in Uganda, however, experience their own poverty and ambition to improve their situation as not allowing too much consideration for clearly visible environmental degradations: forests give way to cotton fields, and trees are burnt for charcoal, which particularly the local poor sell to the poor of the city as the cheapest available fuel. Seeing such connections

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<sup>5</sup> Which is still widely collected particularly by poor people - as it is unpleasant and hard work - and marketed regionally through rather organized channels, despite the official restrictions.

themselves, but no alternatives, one can hardly be surprised when, during a focus group discussion after the Sunday mass in Kisenyi, the question: "And what can you do to improve in the future?" is answered by: "We need help from someone like you - from someone coming from a rich country."

Not only is poverty tangible, but so is the inequality between rich and poor: in the wars leading to the establishment of Uganda as a British Crown Colony, the Baluli had been on the wrong side, and their land had been given to the victorious British allies: the Baganda. The overwhelming majority of the Baluli are still rent-paying tenants, threatened by eviction if the owner finds more profitable use for the land. This is the background to the Baluli's insistence on their own culture and language as different from the Baganda, who, in their turn (as exemplified even in casual discussions between the young female fisheries officer and local residents on the shore of Lake Kyoga) think that the Baluli are just a part of Baganda culture - and language. Hence, it is routine that the Bishop in Luweero sends a Baganda preacher to the congregation in Kisenyi. With the effect that local people cannot understand his sermons fully, because their language is in fact different.

The recent official recognition of a separate "traditional" head for the Baluli - the *Ssabaruli* - and the creation of a separate district (Nakasongola) was therefore much welcomed by the Baluli residents. Some also expressed clearly that with this recognition of their separate cultural and linguistic identity, they will be better able to develop. The legal situation of absentee land ownership, however, is not likely to change in the foreseeable future. Which means that land ownership is not a way out of poverty for the Baluli.

The situation does indeed put the Baluli in a situation where everyone more or less fights for himself or herself. This is reflected in the insistence on "jealousy" (*bwiya*) as a prominent character trait. It also crops up in statements about leaders who use their position to get out of poverty for themselves - particularly if they are poor. On this occasion, however, the seemingly logical conclusion - to the researcher - that rich people therefore do not need to have as much *bwiya* as poor people, was vehemently refuted: "rich people are even more jealous. They know that they need the poor people to work for them cheaply. They do not want them to get rich also. They want to remain the only ones to be rich."

## Conclusion

What I hope to have shown is that there can be little doubt that whatever you want to understand by "development", "ownership" or responsibility for this development can only be taken by people who have integrated this idea - the idea of a positive change achieved collaboratively - into their daily lives. It is obvious that this can only happen in their own language. It is also clear that each and every language in itself is a unique repository of both knowledge about people and their relationships to each other and to a specific environment. Hence the loss of any language is as irreplaceable a loss as the loss of a biological species - which makes it a pressing task to preserve as much of this diversity as possible (for examples under the umbrella of *Linguapax* see Andrade 2005).

I also hope to have shown that the logic which is behind the present globalized "development" - if we understand this broadly enough to include all events leading towards integration into a globalized market system - follows considerations of technical and cost-effectiveness. As the value embodied in the knowledge lost with a particular language does not enter calculations of cost-effectiveness, while the costs involved in programmes to preserve that language do enter, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the death of languages - which has alarmed some observers - will continue. The pride taken by some peoples in their culture and language, supported by efforts such as *Linguapax* will slow the general trend in some pockets. At the same time the "felt need" to advance at least a little bit in material terms seems to often outweigh the pride in and need for a culturally distinct identity, accelerating the switch to languages which further this material advancement - which is also an advancement in the image of "modernity." Pride in "being modern" coexists with pride in "being steeped in tradition" with the latter needing at least some physical security for maintenance. In this respect the most effective way to preserve languages and accord them a role in development would seem success in the World Bank's avowed mission of fighting poverty. As the World Bank has recognized and the recent UN-report has reiterated: poverty is humiliating not least because the concentration on mere survival leaves no room for cultural pride.

Which leaves us with a difficult contradiction: to put people - whether as "communities" or as "nations" - effectively in the "driver's seat" of development - and I hasten to add that by this I do not mean the expansion of the global market system but the fight against poverty and for a better life *together with others* - requires them to understand development and requires "development" to understand them. This requires what Thomas Bearth called "Local Language Hermeneutics".

But implementing Local Language Hermeneutics seems to be too costly for an efficient fight against or "attack on" poverty, as the World Bank's stance on "return on investment" even with respect to language assistance programmes shows (see Mbida-Essama 2002). Ultimately, it appears that "we" do not seem to have enough time, nor enough money, to really put "people" in the driver's seat of development. Much less do we have enough time and money to involve them in the design of the "vehicle development": participation, taken seriously, would entail that all of the 6703 language communities in the world (Grimes, cited by Watson, 1998) would be involved in a global dialogue about the meaning of development. As it is, the World Bank will continue to offer assistance in helping people into this driver's seat, and there will continue to be local people who want to take up that offer - and get additional offers, so that they may not lack too far behind those who have already been helped. Neither of them seems very much willing to take into account that there is in fact an inescapable logic concerning development and the use of both human and natural resources: we live in a world of finite resources, while growth consumes resources. Understanding this logic is behind the more recent switch to "sustainable" development. The word is used - but the actions referring to it do not seem to this logic into account. Both that the logic is real *and* that it is not followed shows up in the results of scientific investigations.

Which brings me back to the question of the beginning: What can we as scientists do when we have to realize that our best offer is not among the goods demanded by the consumers both at the helm of institutions and at the grassroots?



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