

**Language, Gender and Sustainability  
(LAGSUS)**

*A pluridisciplinary and comparative study of development communication in traditional societies*

**First annual report**

*Addendum*

**April 2003 – August 2004**

**Scientific report:**

**Preliminary findings, hypotheses, methodological reflections and conclusions**

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## 1. **The practical relevance of language to development**

The relevance of language as an essential ingredient to the development process and its outcome – the starting assumption of the project put in most general terms - has been confirmed by the results from the initial phase of fieldwork. One of the key observations is that in areally unconnected and socio-politically as well as economically very diverse geographical settings, the issue of language tends to be perceived as a key factor by the "target groups" themselves, and one on whose successful negotiation the outcome of development interventions depends in a significant way.<sup>1</sup> The degree to which local languages are recognized as a key resource in negotiating fundamental and practical issues pertaining to development crucially influences the way in which local actors perceive their roles relative to these issues and their readiness to identify with them.

This last point suggests that language choice and language use may be decisive factors not just for enhancing comprehension of innovative ideas and for their contextualization – which they certainly are -, but even more so for ensuring *social sustainability* as a prerequisite to sustainable development. Evidence in support of this hypothesis comes from apparently contradictory observations on the extremely heterogeneous case studies on Herero (1.1) and Tura (1.2.).

- 1.1. *The Herero case study.* Currently, the most impressive and also the most unambiguously expressed confirmation of the relevance of language to development comes from prominent stakeholders of development in the Herero community. The introduction of the language issue on the public agenda, a direct result of the three-way interaction between the LAGSUS project, state- and foreign aid-supported development agencies (SARDEP, etc.), and local communities, has triggered an ongoing process of conscientiation in matters of language use in development proceedings, and has led to the adoption of a set of new strategies and rules whose common objective may best be described as *empowerment through language* of the socially weaker participants. On a practical level, this is reflected in the decision to make the proceedings of community meetings, which so far had only been recorded in English, available in Otjiherero.
- 1.2. *The Tura case study.* The Tura case differs from the Herero situation in a number of respects. First, in respect to its sociolinguistic profile: in terms of language attitudes, the Tura home area is an exceptionally clear-cut case of what we shall call *language endocentricity*. The paramount rule of local language endocentricity entails that deliberations on issues relevant to the local community will always be conducted in the local language. Tura is the dominant language in the Tura area, or, the other way round, the Tura territory is defined as the physical space where the Tura language is the default medium of communication. This claim – made by J. Baya in discussing the Tura sociolinguistic profile (Appendix T-4 to the Annual report) - boils down to stating that, as far as language use in dealing with community affairs is concerned, there is no choice. Contrary to what happens in more potentially exocentric, or at least less radically endocentric communities with a more open "language market", language choice is not an issue which would come up, or would ever be addressed even in deference to face needs – i.e. for politeness' sake - at the beginning of a meeting held in a Tura village. The question is settled in advance by virtue of a local norm conveying exclusive prerogatives to the local language, in contrast to comparable situations where language use is negotiable. Language endocentricity cannot be reduced to a matter of being competent vs. incompetent in any given language. Competence in another language (with a radical shift away from Tura - an option in earlier times - towards French in the younger generation) is being valued for purposes of interaction with external (i.e. non-Tura) agencies but does not offset lack of competence in Tura. Competence in another language – be it French - is not considered, in the Tura context, to be a valid compensation for incompetence in one's own. Language endocentricity has far-reaching consequences for social status derived from communicative competence. The overriding criterion of using the Tura language as an expression of adhesion to the values of Tura society, and of cohesion of Tura society itself, defines the relation between power and language in a way which is quite different from what we find in other societies and possibly, to judge on the basis of preliminary analyses by R. M Beck, from what we find in Herero society.

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<sup>1</sup> This can be substantiated from various data sources for the African subprojects. There are indications that the Indonesian subproject will yield similar evidence from ongoing field research.

This would seem to be reflected in the scarcity of references made to language *per se* in Tura recorded "development talk", both from the pre-war period (prior to November 2002), where recordings from organized meetings on development issues are available, and from current recordings from the war and post-war era where such meetings either did not take place or could not be recorded. Where language becomes an issue, be it spontaneously by being evoked the people themselves, or be it through being imposed by the research agenda (e.g. when language-related issues were raised from the "12 questions" questionnaire; Benomba interview, Sept. 12, 2002), the debate invariably thrives in the direction of the axiom of local language primacy, confirming again the endocentricity hypothesis.

On the other hand, the language question does surface as a prominent topic in a diaspora recording currently being analyzed (Tou-DG-201). One may therefore ask if there is a systematic difference between Tura urban and village communities in their deal with language, and how this difference is to be accounted for. A likely hypothesis which comes to mind is that the degree of prominence of language as a topic in development-related communication reflects the different sociolinguistic context in which intra-group communication takes place in the diaspora setting as compared to the village. The language issue in the case under review, however, cannot be reduced to a simple application of society-driven or institutionalized language attitudes to a newly arising situation. Rather it follows from the way in which it is being negotiated between the participants that it is intimately linked with the material issue which has a strong and explicit bearing on village development.<sup>2</sup> The reason for the decision eventually adopted in favour of the Tura language is clearly motivated by the desire of the leaders of the meeting to strengthen in-group social cohesion. Coming from a quite different background, this observation further strengthens the argument previously drawn from the Herero data, which traces the relevance of language to sustainability to the need for social cohesion.

In the metropolitan melting-pot of Abidjan, multilingual competence becomes the key to survival, and the ethnic languages the dispreferred option in public interaction. The Tura diaspora, according to their own opinion of themselves, strives for perpetuating endocentricity in the Tura home, aiming at transmission of the language to the next generation even in the urban context according to a widely shared ideal of the community. And yet, maintaining it as a tool for interaction in the public space of an urban environment becomes a matter of negotiation and deliberate choice even in a totally Tura-speaking social context. If the decision in favour of Tura in the particular context is motivated mainly by social cohesion, as we think it is, it is again congruent with the observations made above on the Herero case: The rehabilitation of the local language in a setting which does not a priori favour its use, or which may even disfavour it, is motivated by the recognition of its importance for social cohesion, which in turn is seen by the local actors as an essential prerequisite to development worth its name.

### 1.3 What general conclusions can be drawn from these essentially local gleanings from two quite different African societies? Two conclusions seem to be immediately relevant:

- (i) Acknowledging the role of the local language as a stamina for development, attested in widely divergent situations, should be expected to have some bearing on development planning and strategies. It might for instance lead to the conclusion that language choice and language-based activities must be given increased attention in the phases of development planning and initial expert-target group communication, as well as in monitoring development processes beyond that initial stage.
- (ii) A local knowledge-based approach to development – widely propagated today - cannot by-pass the local language as the code in which such knowledge is "saved" and kept in memory. Local language therefore also provides the "code" through which this same information is most naturally and most readily retrievable.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The meeting had been convened with the explicit purpose of founding a diaspora women's association ("Filles de Kpata") with a view of giving them a voice in community matters affecting their village of origin.

<sup>3</sup> Development researchers are often inclined towards a view similar to the one suggested by our preliminary results in this respect. Having, however, a social sciences personal learning background, they do not feel equipped to address language-related issues with sufficient confidence. Beyond arguing the case of language in development, one of the challenges facing the LAGSUS project in the long run may consist in developing an interdisciplinary research tool capable of integrating linguistic and discourse-analytical aspects of development research into its scope, and in its ability to put such a tool within reach of researchers from other disciplines.

## 2. **The epistemological relevance of language to development research - fa plea for local language hermeneutics (LLH)**

The second major conclusion to be drawn from the initial phase of the project is that it lends ample credence to the postulate of a language-oriented approach as an indispensable epistemological principle for research on development communication and development-related processes in general, and on development processes taking place in multilingual environments in particular.

Even under the ideal assumption of symmetrical bilingualism, languages are not substitutable at wish. Different languages are used by different people for different purposes. Under given circumstances, things tend to be said in one language, which would not be said, or would be said differently, in the other. Apart from more superficial differences (grammar, lexification), there are coherence conditions (completeness of argumentation, etc.) which are specific to language communities.

In the LAGSUS context one could therefore ask, separately for each inquiry: What kind of information relevant to our research *could not have been obtained* if instead of the procedure of recording, transcription and analysis of local discourse a seemingly less costly by-pass solution had been adopted, e.g. working through a second-language source supplemented by translation? Probably, the answer would be: *Most of it* could not have been obtained in comparable quality and reliability.

- 2.1. *Breadth and depth of information.* It is safe to assume that many villagers, let alone women, would not have contributed to group interviews about crisis and development in the Tura region if interviews had been conducted in another language than Tura. This applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to data from Herero local communities, whether they be community meetings – "primary data" to use the terminology of the Herero research team -, or data collected at informal gatherings (secondary data in their terminology).
- 2.2. *Validation.* By and large, our data owe their weight and argumentative strength to the fact that they were validated by a representative body of the local population in an environment considered as natural by them; or failing this, that the transcripts are such that they are open to inspection and validation by informed and critical locals. This would not be possible to the same extent if primary data (in the more usual sense of this term) were not at the same time local language data; usually the majority of the population concerned by the data would be excluded from the validation process. One of the results to be expected from the research is an insight into "local viewpoints" on matters such as development, sustainability, and development communication. Abstraction from the language in which these viewpoints are debated and from which they are extracted considerably heightens the risk of loss and distortion of relevant data.
- 2.3. *Gender and naturalness of setting as a condition for participation.* Insights into procedural aspects of local discourse - some of which were shown to be relevant to the question of gender in relation to participation in decision-processes, as demonstrated by several papers presented at the Windhoek conference in August 2004 – directly hinge on naturalness conditions which in turn are intimately bound up with unimpeded participation in development discourse. These conditions are generally better fulfilled where people feel "linguistically at home".
- 2.4. *Triangulation as a methodological prerequisite to global relevance.* Human interaction in its concrete manifestations is primarily local, i.e. it depends for its interpretation on knowledge available in and through the local context. The methodological question, then, arises why and how "merely" locally produced knowledge, could have some bearing on issues beyond the local context.  
The principle by which observations on locally embedded data may acquire global or even simply supra-local relevance is *triangulation* (a notion borrowed from geography). Triangulation presupposes the comparison of locally relevant and potentially very diverse data by applying to them sets of criteria under (as much as possible) controlled variables. Triangulation (a strong point of methodology in the longitudinal study on sustainability in a Nigerian village by Morse et al. 2000) adds strength of argument, so to speak exponentially, through the multiplication and diversification of the sampling on which it relies. Thus, from a scientific standpoint, the extension of the empirical field of the research to other parts of Africa, as is the case with the Ugandan project introduced as a consequence of the crisis in Ivory Coast, results in a considerable gain in validating potential for the key hypotheses of the project. The same may be said, *a fortiori*, for corroborating data from Indonesia and other parts of the world which may hopefully become accessible through associated projects.

In sum, the strongest point which can be made in favor of what might be called *local language hermeneutics (LLH)* is (a) its potential for generating hypotheses (local viewpoints on X), and (b) its added potential for validating these hypotheses.

### **3. The relevance of language to development – apparent counter-evidence**

An important criterion which a claim to scientific innovation must meet is its capacity of dealing with apparent counter-evidence without dismissing it offhand. At the outset, a disclaimer seems in order: Beyond assuming the relevance of language both to development itself (see point 1 above) and to research about development and development communication (point 2), it was never claimed, within the LAGSUS research context, that local language is the panacea to solving development problems, nor that giving preference to local language strategies in propagating innovative ideas causes these ideas to become automatically sustainable. Both the Herero and the Tura data offer empirical support in favor of the thesis of communicative sustainability, but both also contain elements that may count as *bona fide* counter-evidence against its interpretation in isolation from other factors.

- 3.1. There is no one-to-one correlation between language choice and success of a given development intervention. The Boergoat meeting (see Appendix H-1 for details), though entirely conducted in Herero and according to locally accepted patterns of interaction, as well as under the control of Herero-speaking agents, was considered a failure both by those involved and by external observers.
- 3.2. In the Tura case, reasons advanced by the people themselves why some development activities were maintained in spite of the crisis, and some others were not, and why some were even newly introduced as a direct or indirect consequence of the war, are mainly economic not linguistic.
- 3.3. R. Döbel (Annual report 2003-04 of the Sociological module, on Herero informal interviews) finds that "active members of the younger generation see the appointment of insufficiently educated people with insufficient knowledge of English (which is the official National Language) to offices under the traditional authorities act as a major impediment to local development". Rather than contradicting the fundamental hypothesis about the relation between language and communicative sustainability, this finding a collateral hypothesis already formulated in the Project Description (slightly updated from the version submitted to the Volkswagen Foundation in November 2002, p. 25): "*reliance on the local language alone is not sufficient* to produce desired sustainability effects in the long run in all areas concerned by development. Effective control over resources – natural as well as human – requires access to communicative resources beyond, and in addition to, those offered through the local language. An operational definition of communicative sustainability, while insisting on the significance of the local language as the generally most neglected ingredient, will have to include the broadest possible definition of locally available - or locally needed - communicative resources."
- 3.4. At first glance at least, arguments for a negative correlation between neglect of local language and lack of sustainability, are easier to come by than data supporting the positive counterpart of this conditionality. Leaving aside or neglecting the locally dominant language, or relegating it to a secondary function in the chain of transmission of innovative content, sharply diminishes the prospects of specific development ideas taking root in peoples minds, of becoming something which is "owned" by them. Such a neglect or underrating thus constitutes an epistemic, social and cognitive obstacle to successful outcome of development - a safe recipe to its unsustainability. For example, J. Baya traces the lack of sustainability which resulted in the total collapse of the National Park project of the Mont Sangbé in the Tura area during the crisis, to the strategic confinement of the local language to a merely passive role in a one-way communication process at the time of the initiation of the project (Appendix T-2a, Baya Nr. 10). But even in this case, caution prevents us from claiming a simple straightforward and predictable negative cause-to-effect connection between the failure of the management to make full use of the language potential in the project planning process on the one hand, and the material outcome of the corresponding development project on the other.
- 3.5. "From the perspective of development sociology, the data so far points to the decreasing importance of language issues under conditions of increasing competition for resources: under conditions of extreme poverty – which seems to characterize significant parts of the population in the Herero reserve of Otjohorongo -, as well as in the Tura area because of the civil war, but also with respect to significant parts of the population around the Lore Lindu National Park in Sulawesi." (Appendix S-6: R. Döbel, Annual report 2003-04 of Sociological module.) Perhaps surprisingly, this working hypothesis of an inverse correlation between relevance of language and increasing competition for resources, does not

seem to hold unconditionally. It is contradicted by evidence of the strengthened role of the local language as a kind of communicative survival kit - as the indispensable and explicitly recognized communicative resource for successful self-organization in a period of extreme threat, and as an essential ingredient to ongoing local crisis management (J. Baya, T-2a, item 10, paper read at the Windhoek conference).

Concluding this section, we may say that taking into account apparent counter-evidence, apart from making co-operative research more interesting and stimulating, is a prerequisite, alongside with triangulation (see 2.4 above) and local language hermeneutics (see 2) to the dual scientific goal (a) of sharpening positive hypotheses based on reasoning and observation, and (b) of falsifying and hence (if applicable) validating these hypotheses.

#### 4. Implications for Development theory

"Wo das staatliche Gewaltmonopol kollabiert, hat positive Entwicklung keine Chance." (E+Z 4/2004, p. 143, inlay of title page.) Observations based on local discourse and action in the context of the Ivorian crisis lead to challenge the conventional wisdom encapsulated in this statement, or to challenge at least the peremptory conclusion and the implications for the *dos* and *don'ts* of international development policies which it tends to carry with it. Ultimately, this will lead to question the particular notion of development which lies behind the E+Z statement and which has been responsible for public thinking on discontinuation of development co-operation under the premises of instability and war. Interviews conducted among the Tura population after a minimum of security had been restored indicate that a number of innovations were directly traced to the war situation and its impact on society and economy:

1. New economic activities (or shift of emphasis in existing activities);
2. New forms of co-operation and solidarity;
3. Change of gender relations;
4. Change of generational contract (possibly);
5. Emergence of a previously inexistent local viewpoint on limitation of natural resources and ecological sustainability.

This conclusion is eloquently supported by similar observations – particularly on points 1 and 2 - made by D. Fan in the East African context (cf. Appendix T-2a: D. Fan, "Le développement est-il possible en temps de guerre?", 3p.), based mainly on first-hand evidence from the Eastern Congolese Ituri region.

4.1. The preliminary analysis of the sources from the Tura home area yields not only ample reference to local strategies of crisis management, mostly at the village level, but also - as predicted by our methodology (Project description, Nov. 2002, p. 17 (i)) - to underlying presuppositions and motivations which would most probably not have come to the open under normal conditions. Under the pressure of unforeseen conflict and external threat, however, deeper reasons in favour or against change of behaviour do come to light and may become the subject of open debate. Societal and relational constraints restricting individual and collective freedom of action may suddenly become objects of negotiation. Putting together the puzzle of evidence from a protracted period of political and economic crisis behind the lines in Western Ivory Coast leads to a number of unorthodox working hypotheses contradicting the E+Z theory from evidence that is based on local experience couched in local language:

- (i) People do not wait for restoration of some sort of *status quo ante* in terms of institutional security before resuming development-oriented thinking.
- (ii) Focus on day-by-day survival quickly gives way to developing individual and collective innovative strategies on the basis of a modified set of premises in response to a new and potentially unstable, even threatening situation – strategies which are not fundamentally different from those being considered for change in general, including classical development under "normal" conditions.

- (iii) Forced re-assessment of one's own situation triggers reflection on available resources beyond the usual limits.
  - (iv) Local resources of crisis management - including communicative and linguistic resources - are brought to the attention of local actors and give rise to the construction, by local populations, of *local models of development* adjusted to their needs and possibilities.
  - (v) Strategies developed in response to situations of crisis have a considerable potential for sustainable innovation.
- 4.2. The claim of a positive, unexceptional connexion between crisis and development leads to considerations which go beyond the assumptions underlying the original Project description in terms of the presupposed normative framework under which "positive development" is supposed to take place if one adopts the E+Z maxim. The hypothesis of a collective process of reflection leading to heightened awareness in specific domains as a consequence of crisis – e.g. regarding the ecological dimension of development as in the Tura case – can no longer be discarded. For a similar view, see the special issue on survival in wars in Africa ("Überleben in Kriegen in Afrika") of *Comparativ* 1998/2. e.g. Frank Schubert, "War came to our place. The 1981-1986 Ugandan Civil War in the Luwero triangle", p. 27-42.
- 4.3. In the total absence of external incentives, the question of endogenous motivation of development becomes an issue of vital interest. The breakdown of structures providing guidance, support and monitoring of development projects from the outside, while leading to less than ideal and in fact quite unfavourable conditions from the perspective of "positive development", offers an ideal frame for testing the extent to which development can be endogenously motivated and sustained. While it is true that this issue had not been explicitly put on the original research agenda, it is at the same time a useful addendum to it, particularly in the light of the so-called post-development debate (Rahnema & Bawtree 1997, Maiava n.d.<sup>4</sup>).

## 5. Methodological issues

### 5.1. Towards a metric of communicative sustainability (CSI)

In terms of the overall goals as formulated in the Project description, an important goal of the research is to propose an operational measure of communicative sustainability (Project description Nov. 2002, 4.2, p. 20). What is the current state of the project in respect to this ambitious goal? A crucial preliminary stage would seem to be to identify possible parameters relevant to this purpose.

Extrapolating from preliminary analyses of available data, the divergence respectively convergence of "parallel" discourses (DSL-centered vs DTL-centered)<sup>5</sup> seems to offer a rational basis for identifying and factorizing variables underlying communicative sustainability, with possible ramifications far beyond local contexts of development.

Some preliminary evidence for the viability of this parameter comes from the Baluli/Uganda (an instance of radically disconnected discourse in terms of the identification of the causes of negative development such as the causes of the current drought), the Tura (divergence of local vs. national vs. global viewpoints on development and related issues), and the Herero (remarkable instances of convergence reported by R. Döbel, Appendix S-6)<sup>6</sup>.

An appropriate heuristics allowing the criterion of divergence/convergence of thematicity and viewpoints to be made operational may be called "Differential discourse analysis (DDA)". DDA is based on a number of rather simple key hypotheses:

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<sup>4</sup> Rahnema, Majid & Victoria Bawtree (compilers), 1997. *The Post-Development Reader*. London/New Jersey: Zed Books. Dhaka: Univ. Press. Halifax (Nova Scotia): Fernwood. Cape Town: David Philip.

Maiava, Susan. 2002. When is Development not 'Development'? Recognizing Unofficial Development (or Practising Post-Development). *Contesting Development: Pathways to Better Practice*. (= 3rd biennial conference of the International Development Studies Network of Aotearoa New Zealand, Dec. 5-7, 2002, Massey University, Palmerston North, N.Z. <<http://devnet.massey.ac.nz>> [1<sup>st</sup> Nov. 2004])

<sup>5</sup> DSL, DTL = Development source language, development target language (see Project Description, Nov. 2002, p. 4).

<sup>6</sup> Section entitled: "Sustainability, the TKFA, and the communal area of Omatjette in the context of the land question in Namibia."

- (i) Local discourse on local development (DTL-d, usually conducted in the language in which everyday matters are discussed and decisions are taken) is a/the crucial link in the chain leading from input to implementation, and ultimately to sustainability;
- (ii) Non-local discourse on local development (DSL-d, typically conducted in a language other than the one the people themselves would use in their everyday dealings with matters of development) is by default not identical in scope and purpose with DTL-d;
- (iii) DSL-d fans off into e.g. regional or national official and expert discourses which may in turn diverge from, or converge with, global discourses on general and specific aspects of sustainability.
- (iv) The difference between DTL discourse and DSL discourses ( $\Delta$ -d s(t)) provides an inverse measure of communicative sustainability.

An evaluation metric could be constructed along two complementary and partially independent dimensions, which are applied to selected parameters, very much like it is done for development sustainability indicators (cf. Bell & Morse 1999; Morse et al. 2000).<sup>7</sup> Parameters can be representations of elements of development ideology as they can also be quite practical issues, with broad leeway to adjust to the variability of concrete situations. The two dimensions to be considered in the immediate analytical future (eventually, the relevant parameters may turn out to be much more numerous!) are:

- Convergence vs. divergence of parallel discourses in respect to specific issues of recognized interest at the local level, whereby convergence raises the score of a given CSI while divergence lowers it.
- The connectedness vs. disconnectedness of parallel discourses. The yardstick for connectedness are mutual knowledge and mutual - or even unilateral - acknowledgment of the discourse of the other, different of one's own, on a given issue. While it is assumed that connectedness can be relatively easily ascertained through data from spontaneous discourse or from elicited meta-discourse; it must be clear that connectedness is not the same as empathy or adhesion. The *connectedness metric* constitutes an independent variable; it can however provide an indication as to the possibility of bridging in a practical way existing communication gaps between actors at various levels.

## 5.2. Endogenous vs. exogenous sources – a false alternative?

Among the questions raised by the invited external reviewer, Prof. U. Ruppert (Univ. of Frankfurt), at the Annual conference in Namibia (three questions formulated in her mail of Sept. 19, 2004, also accessible via LAGSUS Forum), the one concerning a possible methodological fallacy in the external/internal dichotomy ranks prominently:<sup>8</sup>

"Erstens ein eher banales Argument, das Sie sicherlich in aller Ausführlichkeit besprochen haben: Binäre Konstruktionen von Wirklichkeit sind u.a. deshalb problematisch, weil sie Gegensätze suggerieren, die in komplexen Realitäten selten in so simpler Form aufzufinden sind, wie sie theoretisch gedacht werden. Zudem sind mit dem Denken in Dichotomien stets Zuschreibungen verbunden, die von den Hierarchien geprägt sind, die sie hervorbringen. Wer definiert, was endogen und was exogen ist? Die lokalen Communities oder die "ProjektmacherInnen"?"

Zweitens sind beide Perspektiven, sowohl die exogene als auch die endogene relational und zugleich kontextabhängig zu sehen. Was jeweils als endogen oder exogen betrachtet wird hängt davon ab, wer wann danach fragt und mit welchem Erkenntnisinteresse danach gefragt wird. Ein anschauliches Beispiel dafür aus dem namibischen Projektkontext ist der Berater Tschimune, der je nach Perspektive und Gegenstand der Debatte in der einen oder der anderen oder vielleicht sogar in wechselnden Rollen erscheint. ..."

Ruppert's caveat against a distorted analysis of the empirical facts due to forced dichotomization - as suggested *inter alia* by project-owned formulas such as the "replacement

<sup>7</sup> Bell, Simon & Stephen Morse, 1999. *Sustainability Indicators. Measuring the Immeasurable*. London/Sterling: Earthscan.

Morse, Stephen & Nora McNamara & Moses Acholo & Benjamin Okwoli, 2000. *Visions of Sustainability. Stakeholders, change and indicators*. Aldershot/Burlington (USA), Singapore, Sidney: Ashgate.

<sup>8</sup> With her kind permission, I quote her contribution literally as it was formulated in an informal mail exchange between herself and the project coordinator in September 2004, in which, on the latter's request, she had accepted to enlarge on some of the comments she had made during the LAGSUS Annual conference in Namibia, in August 2004.



of an external message by an endogenous message", taken to be an operational criterion of "communicative sustainability" according to the Project description (November 2002 version, pp. 4, 13) - has been recognized as highly important by the project participants, and one which will continue to have to be closely monitored as the collection and analysis of data progresses. At the same time, discarding the endogenous/exogenous dichotomy as nothing more than a fallacy (which, of course, is not at all what she suggested!) would not do justice to the variety of situations which development communication, and research on it, is inevitably bound to address. To take a rather straightforward example: the calamity of the Ivorian civil war which, from what we can say, has radically altered development perspectives in the Tura area and to which current development discourse invariably addresses itself, cannot on any account, in this particular case, be classified in any other way than as an irruption of an external factor. Incidentally, the ability of the Tura village leaders to impose their view of its being totally external and its endorsement by the population was even an essential prerequisite for them to deal with the situation in a comparatively successful manner (see Appendix T-5 on Tura local crisis management).

Beyond such merely punctual evidence is the rather permanent psychological fact that the dichomotization of human activities and ideologies into "internal" vs. "external" seems to be an undeniable universal tendency.

What might be suggested as a compromise solution to this methodological dilemma is (i) to replace the treacherous dichotomy between "external" and "internal" factors by the notion of *boundary*, and (ii) to de-objectivize the latter by giving it a constructivist, non-static and deictic interpretation. Whatever ontological status someone might then be inclined to attribute to boundaries, boundaries "exist" first of all in the minds of people, and therefore in the way they construct their discourse and categorize the things they refer to in their discourses. This view is not in contradiction with the fact that boundaries tend to be perceived as existents by players in the game and therefore play an important role as arguments in consensus finding and decision-taking processes.

Furthermore, objects of discourse are – often implicitly – situated with respect to boundary constructs as either "internal" (this side of the boundary relative to someone's viewpoint) or "external" (on the other side relative to a discursively selected viewpoint). It is with respect to such boundary constructs that something – a message, a course of action, just any phenomenon - will be classified in people's local discourse as "internal" or "external". The need to think and talk in terms of boundaries seems to be a universal tendency if not a universal constraint; one could call it an invariant of human cognition. (In recent linguistic theory, this has been recognized most clearly in Antoine Culioli's *Théorie de l'énonciation*, and perhaps in Langacker/Lackoff's *Cognitive Semantics*).<sup>9</sup> One of the eminently positive effects of dialog is that situated discourse objects may, as it were, change their position relative to a boundary construct – e.g. move from "outside" to "inside" - and that boundaries may be blurred or become irrelevant, mostly but not exclusively, I presume, as an effect of discourse activities whereby in terms of potential impact on boundaries, local discourse and hence local language may again come into play as preferred options. (Non-verbal types of symbolic interaction may also play an important role in removing boundaries, e.g. shaking hands with one's enemy.)

In sum, we must recognize that an adequate metalanguage for describing processes and effects linked to human communication cannot dispense with the axiomatic category of boundary, which in turn seems to imply an internal/external dichotomy of some sort. Linking

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<sup>9</sup> Bearth, Thomas. 2001. Review article: Antoine Culioli (1995), *Cognition and Representation in Linguistic Theory*. [Edited by Michel Liddle, transl. with the assistance of John T. Stonham.] Amsterdam: John Benjamins. In: *Pragmatics and Cognition* 9:1 (2001), 135-146.

this necessity up with Ruppert's well taken caveat leads us to conclude that from a constructivist view, this dichotomy is (a) de-objectivized, and (b) is not static.<sup>10</sup>

### 5.3. Principles and pitfalls of LLH

Having opted within LAGSUS for local language and local discourse as heuristic starting points and also as ultimate instances of appeal for validating purposes, we should be aware of some of the pitfalls which may turn the advantages of a local language-centered approach into disadvantages. This will become more important as the centre of project activities shifts from data collection and transcription to full-fledged analysis. For example:

- (i) *Essentialism*, the danger of taking at face value what people pretend to say. This is a well-recognized pitfall in research on development and elsewhere (see Lachenmann 2004, p. 123, and further quotes *ibidem*)<sup>11</sup>. Letting the people speak for themselves, and recording what they say in a given local language, if done under the assumptions of naive meaning postulates, increases rather than decreases the danger of essentialist reductionism. For convenience, we may put it like this: Native discourse presupposes not only the native speaker's ability to encode but also the *native addressee* and his ability to decode and interpret what is said, and

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<sup>10</sup> A striking example of this was provided on Oct. 11, 2004, in a meeting at the Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne. The meeting had been convened by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in co-operation with federal agencies in charge of development policy and higher education in order to encourage Swiss universities to co-operate more intensely with the Association of Francophone Universities (AUF), whose representatives were the invited guests.

In his final speech, one of the AUF delegates made explicit *their* strategy in trying to provoke more interest and engagement from the Swiss scientific world. He expressed the hope that the Swiss universities will come forth with a declaration of commitment at the annual conference of the AUF in Phnom Penh in May 2005. At the same time, he said that it is up to the Swiss universities themselves to formulate and spread the message which will hopefully bring about this desired result. Literally he said: The francophone organization (although it knows itself best, TB) will not substitute itself to the Swiss university representatives in their role of key communicators to the final recipients – Swiss university members and institutions - of the message which the AUF delegates had come to deliver on that day.

According to this speech, the effect intended by the AUF delegation in organizing the Lausanne meeting was itself communicative in nature; it illustrates rather well the principle of communicative sustainability.

Moreover, the outlined strategy attests to the fact that boundaries exist and that boundaries are important – in this case the Swiss university landscape which was portrayed as lying outside the main sphere of activities of AUF up to now. With respect to such boundaries something will be regarded as internal or external. This applies in the highest degree to important messages and their identified sources: they will usually be classified and evaluated as internal or external."

From this observation, the need for communicative strategies to not only "transmit the innovative message" but to give it the stamp of having passed the boundary ("dédouanement") follows directly. This is an indispensable prerequisite to ownership and hence to sustainability. As the example shows, this prerequisite is so strategic that it overrides other factors such as fuller access to information, which in this case would have meant that the AUF, knowing itself best, would have taken upon itself to define appropriate strategies of spreading the message within the Swiss university landscape. In the present case, this would not even have involved crossing linguistic barriers, since both the source and at least the primary addressees of the message are French-speaking.

The *Kono* procedure of the Tura attests this same principle: it draws its justification from recognizing some message as "external" relative to its own inherited discourse, and then changing its status to "internal" relative to the local discourse universe, allowing it to become part of the target group's own discourse. See Bearth, Thomas & Diomandé Fan. *La langue locale – facteur méconnu du développement. Bioterre. Revue Internationale des Sciences de la Vie et de la Terre. No spécial.* (= Actes du colloque international sur la Recherche en partenariat pour un développement durable en Afrique de l'Ouest, Centre Suisse de Recherches Scientifiques, 27-29 août 2001, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire). 2002. 344-357. English version: T. Bearth & D. Fan, 2004. The local language - a neglected resource for sustainable development. *Trans* (internet journal for culture sciences) nr. 15. (Sept. 2004), 64. *Transkulturelle Kompetenz in der Umwelt- und Entwicklungskommunikation* (ed. Ernest W.B. Hess-Lüttich). <[http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/06\\_4/bearth15.htm](http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/06_4/bearth15.htm)>. Also in: Herbert Arlt et al. (eds.), 2004. *The Unifying Aspects of Cultures*. Vienna: INST. Book & CD, CD Section 6.4.

<sup>11</sup> Lachenmann, Gudrun. 2004. Researching Local Knowledge for Development. Current Issues. In: N. Schareika & T. Bierschenk (eds.), *Lokales Wissen. Sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*. 123-148.

the latter, while reflected in the former's activity, is not directly accessible to the observer-analyst's naked eye but only via a far from simple process of inferential hermeneutics.

- (ii) Premature generalization: "X says, therefore the Tura/Herero/Kaili people say ..." *Stereotypes* are perhaps the best-known example of this type of error: "This is the way the women of the X group are, behave, talk."

Among the "antidotes" to these pitfalls, the following will be standard procedures of valid local language hermeneutics:

- Recognizing *the implicit* as the standard source of meaning postulates relative to a given source and a given communicative setting, acceptable as hypotheses but still to be validated (see following paragraphs).<sup>12</sup>
- Validation via *intertextuality*: Recurrence of motives in different texts uttered by the same individual or group of people under different or analogous circumstances may serve to corroborate, modify or invalidate hypotheses about discursively manifested attitudes.
- Validation via *metatextuality*: Providing speakers with an opportunity to listen and comment conversations in which they participated results in at least some presuppositions and implications of the latter being made explicit.
- Validation through *triangulation* (see point 2.4 above): the same heuristic procedures (questionnaires, interviews, etc.) are applied to different groups of people at different times in different settings (Morse et al. 2000:54), using controlled variables as defining criteria of communicative situations.

#### 5.4. The interdisciplinary dimension

LAGSUS as a collaborative effort between sciences of language and sociology in the field of development carries a great promise. The practical implications, limits and immediate goals of this co-operation are currently under review. A provisional revised plan of interproject activities for the current period drafted by R. Döbel is enclosed in his Namibian report (Appendix S-6).<sup>13</sup> U. Ruppert's, in her follow-up to LAGSUS annual conference<sup>14</sup>, posits the landmarks of this collaboration rather clearly and succinctly:

"Mein drittes Argument, das ich in Namibia versucht habe, deutlich zu machen, hängt allerdings mit meinem Begriff von social change oder präziser von social innovation zusammen. Wenn nämlich sozialer Wandel als Kern (oder zumindest einer der cornerstones) von sustainable development anerkannt wird, dann können die external pushing factors für diese Prozesse kaum auf exogenous "messages" reduziert werden. Vielmehr sind die pushing factors meiner Auffassung nach sehr komplexe Sets von Faktoren, wie sie Michael Fremerey in seinem Vortrag als "external interventions" charakterisiert hatte. Denn exogenous messages kommen nicht allein als sprachliche messages in den indigenous communities an, sondern die sprachliche Ebene ist eingelassen in eine Intervention die zugleich einen Machtkontext abbildet und von institutionellen Arrangements geprägt ist. Daher war mein Vorschlag, angelehnt an Fremereys Ausführungen zu external interventions, die exogenous messages einer etwas genaueren Betrachtung zu unterziehen und sie in dreierlei Hinsicht zu befragen:

- a) Auf welche Form von sozialem Wandel zielt die message/intervention?
- b) In welche Machtkonstellationen (politisch und ökonomisch) ist die message/intervention eingelassen?
- c) In welche institutionellen Strukturen ist sie eingebettet?

Meine Vermutung ist, dass die Bildung solcher Thesen über die Ausgangslage der einzelnen Feldforschungen eine vergleichende Anlage der case studies sehr erleichtern könnte. Ausserdem glaube ich, dass eine angemessene Auswertung der Daten ohne die Formulierung solcher Annahmen über den Kontext in dem sie erhoben wurden, schwierig werden wird."

<sup>12</sup> "L'attribution de telle ou telle signification à tel ou tel énoncé n'aura pas à être motivée par l'observation directe de cet énoncé, mais par les avantages qu'elle comporte lorsqu'on explique les effets de sens produits par cet énoncé." (Ducrot, O. *Le dire et le dit*, Paris: Minuit. 1984:61) The classical reference in the Anglo-saxon world for this insight are the writings by H.P. Grice on conversational maxims as sources of inferential meaning. Logic and Conversation. In: P. Cole & J.L. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics* vol. 3 (*Speech Acts*). New York. 1975;41-58. For a readable introduction, see Levinson, Stephen C. *Pragmatik*. Tübingen: Niemeyer. 1990, ch.5.

<sup>13</sup> Available on request.

<sup>14</sup> Quote from U. Ruppert's mail to the co-ordinator, T. Bearth (19 Sept. 2004). Cf. footnote 8.

### **5.5. The comparative dimension**

See U. Ruppert's suggestion in the last paragraph of the preceding quote. On a procedural level, cross-project analysis of selected documents will be a major step towards achieving a sufficient overlap of material between the subprojects. Intersecting attention to data will be particularly important for integrating the sociological and the discourse-analytic perspectives via a common empirical basis. A first interproject workshop for putting this into practice is planned for January 2005.

## **6. Outlook/Priorities**

### *Scientific objectives for the current period*

- Redefine goals and priorities for each subproject with enough overlap so as to facilitate cross-project comparison.
- Cross-project analysis: look at each others' data - across disciplines and across projects. See 5.5.
- Relate hypotheses about Power and Trust to hard and demonstrable linguistic evidence.
- A bunch of mini-case studies providing evidence for demonstrating the validity of the methodological claim made in point 2 (local language hermeneutics).

### *Theoretical and methodological issues*

- What is communicative sustainability? Develop and test a set of criteria.
- Differential discourse analysis (DDA)
  - Convergence vs. divergences
- On the field: cultivating the grassroots level personal relationships. Key indicators of communicative sustainability may occur in informal talk where development issues are not focussed but nevertheless present through casual association.
- Focus on community meetings and the emergence (or training) of leadership. (R.M.Beck's suggestion to reinforce comparability.)
- The endogenous/exogenous dichotomy: see 5.2 above.
- What to do further with the 12 questions? Is it primarily to be used as a tool for heuristics (guide to preliminary interviews), or a grid for analysis once the interviews are done, or both? Its relation to inferentiality (5.3).

### *Resources to be further developed and shared*

- Library and internet resources
- Forum
- LAGSUS webpage.<sup>15</sup>

For the LAGSUS research group  
Prof. Dr. Thomas BEARTH (project co-ordination)

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<sup>15</sup> The supervisors' meeting (Nov. 15, 2004, Frankfurt) entrusted Mr. J. Vossen with the task of ensuring that the site will be (i) safe from misdirected interventions from outside which had paralyzed for some time; (ii) will be regularly alimanted by the project participants and thus reflect the current state of the project; (iii) will become an open forum for all those interested in the topic.

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