

BEARTH, Thomas, 2008a. Language as a key to understanding development from a local perspective. A case study from Ivory Coast. In : Henry Tourneux (dir.) *Langues, cultures et développement*, Paris, Karthala, 309 p. Collection « Dictionnaires et langues ». 35-116.

The main purpose of this article is to explore the role of local language (LL) in development from an epistemological standpoint and, in doing so, to adduce first hand evidence for the necessity of taking into account primary LL data in order to understand local conditions for acceptance and sustainability of development interventions. Data collected over time among the Tura, a remote minority group in mountainous Western Ivory Coast, allows us to get a bird's-eye view on local development discourse put in historical perspective over more than four decades and to relate it – albeit selectively - to changing views at both the national and the global level during the same period. This multi-comparative approach to development discourse offers a point of departure for postulating indicators of communicative sustainability as prerequisites to the synthesis of exogenous and indigenous knowledge which in turn is considered to be a precondition for local development and for adherence to locally sustainable responses to global challenges.

The proposed trajectory through past discourses naturally leads up to a perturbed present, epitomized by the Ivorian civil war, an experience which shakes Tura society in its foundations - and to an apparent paradox. What resembles a cultural revival in the midst of the recent politico-economic crisis - the most incisive in the region since Samory's invasion at the end of the 19th century, and more so than colonial conquest - is symbolized by the Tura Language Festival in September 2004, Sept. 2005, and Sept. 2007. It would seem to suggest a less utilitarian approach to the role of LL and, more specifically, of linguistic minorities, in development than the one generally adopted.

The suggestion of a less utilitarian approach to development is however only partially borne out by the current post-crisis discourse of those who, particularly around Mont Sangbé National Park, one of the major casualties of the war, maintain their commitment to its idea in the midst of post-war poverty - yet another paradox for which the present context offers a reasonable explanation if one accepts the hypothesis, eloquently defended by a vanguard of young leaders, both male and female, that LL as the primary language of development may even be justifiable in purely utilitarian terms of income generation and economic stabilization.

As space permits, the paper will relate the Tura case study to similar findings in other parts of the world as they emerge from research carried out in the framework of LAGSUS “Language, Gender and Sustainability” sponsored by the German Volkswagen Foundation.

References

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