

Abstract

The paper looks at the function of local languages as the primary medium for introducing innovative concepts to developing communities, and hence as a prerequisite to *communicative sustainability*. It examines language-related factors that need to be taken into account in elaborating strategies aiming at sustainability in development. In particular, it highlights (i) the often counterproductive effects of interpreting; (ii) native procedures of argumentation and negotiation conducive to the adoption of a project; (iii) the relation between discursive behaviour and the mutual perception of partner roles.

Insights presented in the paper draw on a pilot study focusing on the role of local language in agricultural extension, conducted during the launching phase of a project of cassava growth diversification among the Toura in Western Ivory Coast. The local language principle is illustrated by the *konon*, a traditional procedure designed to legitimate an innovative message by assigning it the status of an object of negotiation. A questionnaire on the relationship between language and development, elaborated and field-tested in the context of this project, offers a methodological basis for an interdisciplinary approach towards a better integration of the language factor into a comprehensive strategy of development (in the French version, Bearth/Fan 2002).

Key words: Language, development, intercultural communication, communicative sustainability, translation, interdisciplinary research methodology.

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