"DOCUMENTARY LINGUISTICS AS A MEANS TO ACHIEVE THE MDGs"

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STRUCTURE OF THE TALK

1. The setting: history … teaches us NOTHING!
2. Goals
3. Documentary Linguistics (DL)
4. The MDGs
5. DL and the MDGs
6. Conclusion

1. HISTORY ... TEACHES US NOTHING

- The early generations of Missionaries in the 1880s, despite the pressure of the colonial powers, understood the necessity and advantages of Mother-Tongue Education. The Basel and Bremen missionaries were very successful in this (Graham 1971; Andoh-Kumi 1994; Owu-Ewie 2006, Atindogbé 2009, etc.).

UNESCO

and

U N E S C O

- In 1953 UNESCO published the expert report on The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education and this continues to be the most frequently cited UNESCO document on language issues in education. […]

[…] Significant changes have taken place over the past fifty years, however: [...]; many hundreds of languages have disappeared throughout the world and many more remain endangered;

More specifically relating to education, Article 5 of the 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education says:

'the members of national minorities [have the right] to carry on their own educational activities, including… the use or the teaching of their own language, provided… that this right is not exercised in a manner which prevents the members of these minorities from understanding the culture and language of the community as a whole and from participating in its activities'.

In 1964, i.e. 3 to 4 years after independences in Africa, UNESCO published the expert report on the Use of the Mother Tongue and the Preparation of Alphabets for Literacy …[UGANDA]

'In 1976, Article 22 of the 1976 Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education says:

'With regard to ethnic minorities, adult education activities should enable them to... educate themselves and their children in their mother tongues, develop their own cultures and learn languages other than their mother tongues.'

The role of the mother tongue in education was also referred to in the 1978 Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice that recommends in Article 9 that 'steps should be taken to make it possible for [the] children [of population groups of foreign origin] to be taught their mother tongue.'

- In 2006, Article 6 of the Action Plan for the implementation of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (adopted in 2001), defines the role that languages should play in the field of education including respect for the mother tongue, linguistic diversity at all levels of education and the promotion of multilingualism from an early age.

...In the meantime:

The

MDGs

(2000)

- Should I also mention the hundreds of publications on the issue? Maybe a few:
- Andoh-Kumi (1994);
- Benson (2000, 2002, 2009);
- Chumbow (1984, 1992),
- Gbedemah (1975);
- Kamwangamalu (2004);
- Owu-Ewie (2003, 2006);
- Ndhlovu (2008); UNESCO (2010), etc.

✖ In June 2010, Adama Ouane, Director, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning , wrote:

"Africa is the only continent where the majority of children start school using a foreign language. Across Africa the idea persists that the international languages of wider communication (Arabic, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish) are the only means for upward economic mobility. ..

[But] New research findings are increasingly pointing to the negative consequences of these policies ... We recommend that policy and practice in Africa nurture multilingualism; primarily a mother-tongue-based one with an appropriate and required space for international languages of wider communication."

THUS, ...

- After 50 years of independence, Africa is still qualified as a underdevelopped, and is likely to remain mired in poverty unless Africans can do what developed countries have done to achieve sustainable growth: incorporate science, technology and innovation into their economic strategies.

(Juma and Yee-Cheong 2005)

- Despite the national (?) and international efforts for drastic improvement, the situation is not changing …

The Colonial Languages-Only Language Policy of Education is still notorious in the many African countries …

- Yet, we are just 3 years before the deadline of 2015 …

× "Despite aggregate gains worldwide in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA), the state of development for the world's ethnolinguistic minorities continues to lag behind, putting them at risk for even greater disparities that hinder efforts to overcome poverty, illiteracy and disease; as well as increasing the likelihood of conflict arising from exclusion" (ICLE & the MDGs; Bangkok 2010).

- and this, despite a raising of alarm:

- "Achieving the Millennium Goals by 2015" – what does this statement mean in a world where the environment is being degraded in many areas, poverty is increasing, and the gaps between rich and poor individuals and nations are widening?

(Dr. Kamal Bawa, Professor of Biology at the University of Massachusetts, Boston) [keynote address at the International Symposium on Agrobiodiversity - University of California - April 2008]

× This pessimistic question calls for answers and energetic reaction:

× My concern in this paper is to look at things from a linguistic perspective, because, it obvious that:

"Any African Studies discourse that overlooks the role and place of language would be incomplete because language occupies an important position in any meaningful dialogue on African development and on Africa's engagement with herself and with the wider international community." (Ndhlovu 2008: 1)

"[…] language policy and planning in Africa are not yet well integrated into national policy frameworks for poverty reduction and sustainable development. Nevertheless, there are clear potential links between language policy and planning on the one hand, and the Millennium Developments Goals on the other. (Bennett, oral communication, WOCAL 6).

However it a well known fact that:

"for ethnolinguistic minorities to be effectively included in global campaigns such as the Millennium Development Goals, awareness raising and capacity building is needed with the full spectrum of development actors (governments, non-governmental organizations, multilateral agencies and donor institutions)

regarding the interrelationship between language, education and development, as well as strategies for including a strong focus on ethnolinguistic minorities in national education and development planning."

(ICLE & the MDGs; Bangkok 2010).

What I mean by "the linguistic perspective" is precisely the role a newly emerging discipline of Linguistics, Documentary Linguistics (**DL**), could play in the process of obtaining change through knowledge …

2. GOALS

➢Show that DL, as an academic discipline, has the potential:

+ to bring a qualitative and quantitative change in the outcomes of our research,

+ can contribute directly and indirectly to the attempt to achieve the MDGs by 2015...

✖ Use the potentials of a discipline like DL as a pretext to convince the African leaders to invest in research.

3. DOCUMENTARY LINGUISTICS (DL)

✖ DL is "concerned with the methods, tools, and theoretical underpinnings for compiling a representative and lasting multipurpose record of a natural language or one of its varieties" (Gippert, Himmelmann and Mosel 2006:v).

3.1. LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION (LD)

✖ "The aim of language documentation is to provide a comprehensive record of the linguistic practices characteristic of a given speech community. Linguistic practices and traditions are manifest in two ways:

(1) the observable linguistic behavior, manifest in everyday interaction between members of the speech community, and

(2) the native speakers' metalinguistic knowledge, manifest in their ability to provide interpretations and systematizations for linguistic units and events.

This definition of the aim of a language documentation differs fundamentally from the aim of language descriptions."
(Himmelmann 1998)

3.2. LANGUAGE DESCRIPTION (LDes)

"A language description aims at the record of a language, with 'language' being understood as a system of abstract elements, constructions, and rules that constitute the invariant underlying structure of the utterances observable in a speech community." (Himmelmann1998).

Himmelmann (2006:15) says that the following features are crucial in DL:

- *Focus on primary data* – language documentation concerns the collection and analysis of an array of primary language data to be made available for a wide range of users;

- *Explicit concern for accountability* – access to primary data and representations of it makes evaluation of linguistic analyses possible and expected;

- *Concern for long-term storage and preservation of primary data* – language documentation includes a focus on archiving in order to ensure that documentary materials are made available to potential users into the distant future;

- Indeed, an unprecedented innovation of DL is the high use of information, communication and multi-media technologies which make documentation and the preservation and dissemination of language data possible in ways which could not previously be envisioned (Austin 2007:1).

- *Work in interdisciplinary teams* – documentation requires input and expertise from a range of disciplines and is not restricted to linguistics alone;

- *Close cooperation with and direct involvement of the speech community* – language documentation requires active and collaborative work with community members both as producers of language materials and as co-researchers.

- Thus, DL is more speech community oriented. It is highly concerned with the roles of language speakers in documentary projects, their rights and needs in ways not previously considered within linguistics (Thieberger and Musgrave 2007).

✖ "fieldwork methodology has, in the last decades, progressed from a typically non-cooperative model (research *on* a community) to a cooperative model which in its strongest form explicitly empowers speech communities (research *on, for* and *with* a community)"

(Cameron et al. 1992, cited by Dwyer 2006:32)

3.4 SKILLS OF DOCUMENTARY LINGUISTS

× Austin (2007) proposed the following (incomplete) list of skills for documenters:

- *Project conception, design and management* - familiarity with documentation theory, applied ethics, intellectual property rights and socio-cultural issues, stakeholder communication,

- *Grant application* writing,

- *Media management* – recording techniques, field methods, data transfer, backup,

- *Data and metadata management* – data and metadata representation (XML, relational database models), transcription, linguistic analysis (phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics) and annotation, use of linguistic software tools (Transcriber, Shoebox/Toolbox, ELAN, IMDI), data integrity and sustainability (Bird and Simons 2003), workflow design and management,

- *Mobilisation* - familiarity with applied linguistics concepts (orthography design, lexicography, curriculum development, policy formation, revitalisation), publication skills, multimedia design and implementation (Csato and Nathan 2003, Nathan 2006, Nathan and Csato 2006),

- *Team-based research*, skills sharing and transfer, capacity development,

- *Reporting*, presentation, writing and communication skills.

4. THE MDGₛ

"A list of goals to reduce poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental destruction and gender discrimination, established at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000."

(EKD Glossary, available at
http://www.ekd.de/english/1714-ekdtext91_7.html, accessed 06.11.2010)

"[…]. The MDGs commit the international community to an expanded vision of development, and have been commonly accepted as a framework for measuring development progress."

(FOA/Netherlands Glossary, available at
http://www.fao.org/ag/wfe2005/glossary_en.htm, accessed 06.11.2010)

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

5. DL AND THE MDGs

5.1 FOCUS / ULTIMATE GOAL of DL:

+ **Preserve endangered languages**

+ **Preserve languages of ethnolinguistic minorities**

Indeed,

- For the last decade, DL seems to be the most appropriate response to many of the world's endangered languages and support to speakers of these languages in their desire to maintain their languages.

  (Whalen 2003, Austin 2007).

5.2 FOCUS/ULTIMATE GOAL of MDGs

+reduce poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental destruction and gender discrimination

Indeed,

- The MDGs are eight time-bound goals meant to provide concrete, numerical benchmarks for tackling extreme poverty in its many dimensions. They include goals and targets on income poverty, hunger, maternal and child mortality, disease, inadequate shelter, gender inequality, environmental degradation and the Global Partnership for Development. (UNDP 2010)

Looking at their focuses or ultimate goals, one will suggest that there is a strong link, a dependent link, between DL and the MDGs.

DL can be said to constitute the plinth upon which the MDGs rest ...

First,

- Preserving a language in not only preserving a means of communication that enables people to generate, share and disseminate knowledge, know-how, experience, etc. but also preserving the culture and customs of the speakers.

  Yet,

"Culture, in all its dimensions, is a fundamental component of sustainable development. As a sector of activity, through tangible and intangible heritage, creative industries and various forms of artistic expressions, culture is a powerful contributor to economic development, social stability and environmental protection.

✖ *As a repository of knowledge, meanings and values that permeate all aspects of our lives,* *culture* *also defines the way human beings live and interact both at local and global scales."* (UNESCO 2010)

✖ *Culture* *is precisely the medium through which individuals express their ability to fulfil themselves and is therefore an integral part of development.* (UNESCO,2009)

Consequently,

Preserving a language (through DL) is contributing to the stabilization of

1) "*a fundamental component of sustainable development*,

2) "*a repository of knowledge, meanings and values that permeate all aspects of our lives* [...]

i.e. in both cases CULTURE" *...*

Second,

to reduce poverty and hunger (MDG1), illiteracy (MDG 2), gender discrimination (MDG 3), child mortality (MDG 4), disease (MDGs 5 and 6), and environmental destruction (MDG 7) one need to invest in education, more precisely in mother-tongue education …

Through mother-tongue education, there will be generation of new knowledge based on local cultural identity, easy appropriation of existing one, for a better control on one's life;

Through mother-tongue education, there will be effective dissemination of knowledge, know-how and experience;

Yet,

Mother-tongue education is possible only through the production of teaching and learning materials. Language Description (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, etc) is a pre-requisite for the creation of alphabet, and the preparation of materials such as primers, reading and writing books, dictionaries, etc.

for children. Remember that one of the skills of the documenter is *Mobilisation*, i.e

familiarity with applied linguistics concepts (orthography design, lexicography, curriculum development, policy formation, revitalisation), publication skills, multimedia design and implementation.

(Csato and Nathan 2003, Nathan 2006, Nathan and Csato 2006),

Furthermore, note that the production of such materials may be part of the deal when applying for funds for DL. In other words, LDes serves MDG2 (achieve universal primary education) very well.

As for the reduction of poverty and hunger (MDG1), discrimination of gender (MDG 3), child mortality (MDG 4), disease (MDGs 5 and 6), and environmental destruction (MDG 7), the most efficient strategy lies in sensitization campains. And this can be better achieved in the mother-tongue.

As rightly put by (Brenzinger 2009: 39):

"The use of African languages can make a difference in health education and awareness programs. In campaigns, people must be addressed in their own languages in order for them to reach a thorough liberated understanding of the conditions of exposures and risks of HIV infections. " (MDGs 5 and 6)

- DL equally feeds Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine: the folk use and phytonomy of medicinal plants in local languages is crucial in the treatment of diseases (MDGs 5, 6).
- One of the best way to ensure environmental sustainability (MDG7) is the promotion of environmental awareness, biodiversity training, park ranger capacity.

- *Local language field guides* to national biodiversity (zoonymy, phytonymy and myconymy) constitute an asset. DL, in dealing with specialised vocabulary, constitutes a prerequisite for such a publication.
- The World Bank reports that the lack of easily accessible biological information in many developing countries hinders developments projects that can contribute to poverty alleviation. DL fills that gap.

An international assessment of the MDGs by the UNDP in 2010 reveals, amongst others, that **The Global Partnership for Development (MDG 8) can also be strengthened in the areas of access to technologies, […].**

It appeared that more effort is needed to increase the access by developing countries to appropriate technologies, including those for health, communications and climate change. This involves strengthening incentives that support innovation, improving access and financing research, intellectual property and context-specific technologies.

Remember that:

- DL highly uses information, communication and multi-media technologies;

- a language documenter must be familiar with applied ethics, intellectual property rights and socio-cultural issues, stakeholder communication

Furthermore,

Two of the features listed for DL -*work in interdisciplinary teams*, *close cooperation with and direct involvement of the speech community*,

and most of the skills of the documenter -*project conception, design and management*; *grant application* writing; *team-based research*, i.e. skills sharing and transfer, capacity development; *and reporting*, i.e. presentation, writing and communication skills

constitute appropriate training to language documenters or any negotiator involved in a scheme for Global Partnership for Development (MDG 8), especially in areas of migration and remittances, and foreign investment.

6. CONCLUSION: THE QUESTION

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO ACHIEVE THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS by 2015? (UNDP 2010)

3 THINGS:

1. Embark on DL!

2. Add 2 new MDGs to the existing ones:

+ Achieve real democracy, respect of constitutions and elections' verdicts in the African countries by 2015 ...

+ Achieve peace in all African countries by 2015

3. Make the MDG Africa Steering Group less elitist …

Homework:

In how many African languages are the eight MDGs translated?

Oh! One last thing!

"Why and how Africa should invest in African languages and multilingual education: An evidence – and practice based policy advocacy brief" (UNESCO 2010).

ThE LEsSoN:

NEVER GET TIRED !!!!

Thank you for your kind attention!