

**NAME:** Kirsten Van Camp and Kasper Juffermans

**AFFILIATION AND ADDRESS:** Ghent University and Tilburg University

Dept of African Languages and Cultures  
Ghent University  
Rozier 44  
9000 Ghent  
Belgium

Dept of Language and Culture Studies  
Tilburg University  
PO Box 90153  
5000 LE Tilburg  
Netherlands

**E-MAIL ADDRESS:** [KIRSTENVANCAMP@GMAIL.COM](mailto:KIRSTENVANCAMP@GMAIL.COM), [KASPER.JUFFERMANS@GMAIL.COM](mailto:KASPER.JUFFERMANS@GMAIL.COM)

**BIO DATA** (100 words maximum):

Kirsten Van Camp is an Africanist and sociolinguist who graduated from Ghent University (Belgium) in 2009 with a dissertation on ideologies of language and education in postcolonial Gambia. Since 2007 Kirsten has spent 5 months in The Gambia for sociolinguistic research as well as for volunteer work in a centre for emancipating education, where she has given intercultural training to Belgian exchange students. She is currently at the beginning of a new master in Governance and Development at the Institute of Development Policy and Management at the University of Antwerp.

Kasper Juffermans is a sociolinguist and Africanist who graduated from Ghent University (Belgium) in 2006. He is presently pursuing doctoral research on multilingualism and literacy at the Department of Language and Culture Studies at Tilburg University (Netherlands). Between 2004 and 2009 Kasper has carried out an aggregate of 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork on various aspects of language in Gambian society, including literacy instruction, language ideologies, vernacular literacy practices and the linguistic landscape. The working title of his dissertation is *Repertoires and regimes of literacy: A sociolinguistic ethnography of semiotic products and practices in urban and rural Gambia*.

**TITLE:** Postcolonial ideologies of language in education: Teachers and parents on English and local language(s) in The Gambia

**KEYWORDS:** medium of instruction, local languages, intercultural communication, vernacular voices, interpreter, West Africa

**ABSTRACT (FOR PROGRAMME SCHEDULE):** max. 100 words

This paper offers an analysis of ideologies of language-in-education (LiE) in The Gambia (West Africa). The data presented here consist of a transcribed group discussion involving teachers, parents, local politicians and an interpreter. This approach is proposed to pose an answer to the discourses of educationalists and policy makers that largely disregard local viewpoints on LiE. In taking vernacular voices seriously and mobilising them to guide our understanding of local ecologies of language, we attempt to 'disinvent' the Euro-colonial construction of local languages *from below* and imagine a more

African perspective on 'local languaging'.

**SHORT PAPER (FOR CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS):** 500 - 1000 words

As a British postcolony, English occupies a prominent position in Gambian public life. It is the language of parliament, higher courts of law, the written media, the linguistic landscape, tourism industry, and the eight o'clock news on TV. It is also the official medium of instruction in schools from nursery to university level.<sup>1</sup> It is not, however, the language most heard on streets, markets, school playgrounds, in minibuses, people's compounds, or the rice fields. These more informal domains are occupied by Gambia's nine or so local languages (LLs): the Atlantic languages Wolof, Fula, Serer, Jola and Manjago, the Mande languages Mandinka-Bambara and Serahule, and the Creole Aku. The Gambia has two *linguae francae*: Mandinka and Wolof.<sup>2</sup>

Against this background of multilingualism, this paper offers an analysis of ideologies of language-in-education (LiE). Makoni and Trudell (2009) argue that we need to include African perspectives on linguistic diversity. We understand this call not as a message to non-African sociolinguists to stop writing about Africa, but as an invitation to theorise about LiE in ways that are locally relevant and that take locally grounded views of language seriously.

In order to give audience to local voices in the Gambian debate on the medium of instruction, we have organised a metalinguistic writing contest in a rural lower basic school (Juffermans 2007) and, some years later, in the same school, a focus group discussion with teachers, parents, local politicians and an interpreter. The discussion, in English, Mandinka and Jola, was digitally recorded (approx. 90 min.) and transcribed with glosses for the sections in Mandinka (approx. 50 pp.) (Van Camp 2009). The data presented here consist of transcribed excerpts from the beginning of the discussion. We argue that it is useful not to dismiss vernacular voices on LLs and LiE as misled folk beliefs, but to take them seriously and let them guide our understanding of local ecologies of language.

The district chief, who does not await the first question to start talking, advances two key principles: the importance of learning English and the importance of learning the LL very well.

**Excerpt<sup>3</sup> 1: 00:11 – 00:21**

3. Ki (x [my question x])  
4. Ch [wo leŋ mu ... Angalais kaŋo karan] (2.0)  
→ *it is that, learning the English language*  
kaatu diyaakuja fo ntelu sii duniyaa ñookan  
→ *because willy-nilly, we will have to sit together in the world*

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<sup>1</sup> Initial steps have been taken to implement local language learning in early childhood education and the first three years of basic education. In reality, however, English remains the commonly accepted medium of instruction at all levels.

<sup>2</sup> No statistics are available for language use, but the statistics for ethnic groups are: Mandinka 36%, Fula 22%, Wolof 15%, Jola 11%, Serahule 3%, Serer 2%, Bambara 1%, Aku <1% (Housing and Population Census 2003). *Linguae francae* in The Gambia are Mandinka (mostly in the rural areas on the south bank, but also in large areas of the north bank) and Wolof (mostly in the urban west of the country, including Banjul and Serrekunda, and parts of the north bank).

<sup>3</sup> Ki: interviewer (Van Camp), Ch: district chief, I: interpreter, Px: unidentified participants.

5. I hm  
 6. Ch bari ñna kaŋo  
 → *but our language*  
 fo na ñente karaŋ la beteke (1.8)  
 → *we have to try to learn this very well*

The interpreter, who has an ambiguous role here as he both translates what the district chief and parents have said in Mandinka and voices his own opinions, repeats the points made by the chief:

### Excerpt 2: 01:29 – 01:59

44. I so the English langua[ge]  
 45. Px [(x)]x ((quiet))xx[x]  
 46. I [s]hould be t-spo should be taught in the schools but  
 the local language should be taught in the schools  
 ((loud) very well)  
 47. Ki o[k]  
 48. I [so] that whatever they are meeting they should meet in  
 the local language so that everybody will hear  
 49. Ki ok  
 50. I you know the English language is our official language  
 .. we cannot we cannot deviate it we cannot leave it out  
 we have to be taught it has to be taught in the schools  
 51. Ki ((quiet) uhum)  
 52. I you see? but you know since (foreign) so that if we  
 travel to your countries ..  
 53. Ki yes  
 54. I to the overseas we can be able to speak English language  
 but our language should be spoken in the (Eng) in the in  
 the Gambia here ... it is our own language

The interviewer follows the argument put forward in line 50 and brings up the possibility of using different LLs officially:

### Excerpt 3: 02:01 – 02:23

57. Ki do you think it is possible to use the local language as  
 an official language, like different local languages  
 58. I uhum  
 59. Ki as in official languages?  
 60. I a ya ko foon say a a a b-a b-a be possible la le ban a  
 moo fiŋ kaŋo waa ke na office langu-uh office kaŋo ti ..  
 → *she asked me if it is possible if black people's language can be  
 our official language*  
 komerj jaŋ na Angalais ka[ŋo fole fo xxx x hehe]  
 → *like here we can speak English*  
 61. Ch [a fa, a fa. a-afa x] possible x  
 → *tell her, tell her, tell her (x) possible (x)*  
 62. I ha, [ok ((chuckles))  
 63. Px [ye:s]  
 64. I he said yes, it's possible ((laughs))  
 65. Ch it's possible [(x x x xx)]

A rather crucial misunderstanding in the discussion, that becomes clear at a critical re-reading of the transcripts as intercultural communication, is the interviewer's and interviewees' different conceptualisation of LLs. The interviewer's 'different local languages' of line 57 is translated by the

interpreter in line 60 as *moo fiŋ kango* 'black people's language'.<sup>4</sup> The researcher's perspective or the Western-academic discourse on LiE conceptualises LLs in plural form, as the sum of a number of distinct languages. Languages here are understood as enumerable, separable, nameable entities. The interviewees' perspective or the local discourse on LiE conceptualises LL in singular as a generic term for the whole communicative-linguistic practices and manners of black people (cf. Collins 1998).

Throughout the discussion, local actors indicate to be in support of a greater role for LLs in Gambian schools, but refuse to separate *moo fiŋ kango* into nameable languages. They wish to keep aloof from deciding beforehand what specific LL should be included in and excluded from use in the classroom. In doing so, they make a collective statement against compartmentalising multilingualism (Creese 2008). Introducing LL(s) in Gambian schools, they suggest, should be done without formally determining which ones are legitimate to use in particular schools.

To conclude, we would like to address the question posed by Makoni and Mashiri (2007): Do we need a construct of language for language planning in Africa? On the basis of our fieldwork and in connection to the data presented here, our answer would be that it is indeed useful to clarify what we mean by language – what else is being planned? Yet, languages should not be constructed as thing-like, countable, separable entities in a one-to-one relation with ethnicity. The construct of language in discussing linguistic diversity and language planning in Africa should be fluid, flexible, non-compartmentalised, verb-like ('linguaging') and freed from Euro-colonial inventions.

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<sup>4</sup> Note also that 'official language' (line 57) is translated as *office kango* 'office language' (line 60).