
REVIEWS AND NOTES

A REVIEW OF IRMI MARAL-HANAK'S *LANGUAGE, DISCOURSE AND PARTICIPATION – STUDIES IN DONOR-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT IN TANZANIA* *

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Maral-Hanak, I. *Language, Discourse and Participation – Studies in Donor-Driven Development in Tanzania*. Wien: Lit, 2009.

In *Language, Discourse and Participation – Studies in Donor-Driven Development in Tanzania* Maral-Hanak investigated the discourse between donors and communities as shown in two rural development programmes in Tanzania. Her study is based on data which were collected during the 1990s, a decade marked by a major change in development approach. During the 1980s, the planning and implementation of development projects was donor driven with little possibility of contribution from local communities. In addition, at this time there was little academic interest and what was written in theory was significantly different from what was occurring at the community level. In the 1990s the unequal power relations began to be acknowledged by all participants. The result was a tentative collaborative process that acknowledged the importance of both donor and local communities in implementation of projects. Maral-Hanak analyzed the force of language usage, namely the power over others by means of discourse strategies during this period of change.

Development practice and networks are characterized by asymmetric power relations: money, knowledge and political power are unequally distributed in our globalized world. During the first decades of development co-operation participants from the donor side acted in relative isolation without taking the opinion and views of the local communities into account and they saw no problem in this divide between the developed and developing worlds. The critical approach especially from scientists and politicians from Africa, including the donor community was to pass on the responsibility for development programs and projects to the stakeholders under the disguise of 'ownership' while the fundamental elements of management (financing, outline of legal and political parameters, technical knowledge, topics in global discourse, *etc.*) remained in the hands of the donors.

This contradiction of discourse and action was the main topic of Maral-Hanak's analysis. Her approach draws on methods and findings of several disciplines. Her work included several disciplines: development studies, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. It is on the one hand a case study, which has been conducted in two very diverging areas in Tanzania; and on the other hand it offers a description and analysis of participation and power within the context of bilateral development co-operation.

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The study starts with a broad introduction into the subject and field of research and then turns to the context of rural development in Tanzania. Maral-Hanak makes the point that:

During the 1990s, participation, empowerment and gender were cutting-edge concepts of international development co-operation in Tanzania. In rural development, they largely replaced modernist approaches to agriculture that had dominated much of the 1960s and 1970s. [...] from the perspective of Tanzanian peasant farmers, participatory approaches of the 1990s often did not have much new to offer. Despite the change in actors and discourses, propositions made and contributions required by development agencies were familiar from earlier 'development encounters' with the state. This historic contextualisation is important in understanding the principal dilemmas and challenges of participatory rural development in present-day aid networks (p. 16).

Accordingly she starts with the description of measures taken by colonial governments concerning legal and bureaucratic regulation of agricultural production and its gender-related consequences. After independence, the government continued to follow these plans until the evolution of the new approach to community-based projects of a new ideology, Ujamaa ('Tanzanian socialism'). Theoretically Ujamaa was meant to be the basic concept for 'development from below'. In reality the rural population experienced 'development from above' through pressure of party and bureaucracy. But more clearly than in other African societies the position of women came to the fore.

The increase in rural community projects in the 1970s, combined with a global economic crisis, led to a collapse of the Tanzanian economy. Structural adjustment followed and during the 1980s and 1990s there was a growth in individualization, which resulted in a marked rural-urban migration.

Research carried out in several regions in Tanzania indicated that structural adjustment in Tanzania did not have the intended effect of inducing agricultural growth, but rather motivated peasants to opt out of commercial agriculture. [...] and] also point to the problem that diversification of economic activities aggravates social division within rural communities (pp. 31f.).

The disempowerment of the state led like in all 'partner' countries of development co-operation to a very significant position of civil societal organizations of development co-operation. NGOs introduced new actors to development co-operation even though many actors remained the same despite the change from state to NGOs.

In the 1990s, NGOs became the main actors in social development, linking themselves to a dominant discourse on participation, gender and empowerment. More than a decade later, the NGOs' record on participation remains questionable. The peasant agrarian transition has meant that rural societies are increasingly turning away from agricultural production, with many of them unable to secure alternative livelihoods. Social service provision remains poor, while material inequality persists. [...] Participation, empowerment and gender approaches, while remaining important potential challenges to existing inequalities and injustices, have made little impact on development practice (p. 54).

Maral-Hanak's outline of this colonial and recent history of community-based development is an excellent contribution to the historical contextualization.

Chapter 3 focuses on the international setting, on the strategies of donors and the changing concepts. The establishment of a participatory approach by development co-

operation organizations went hand in hand with a formalization of planning, a tendency that tended to exclude the 'target group'.

The spread of participatory approaches to mainstream aid organizations was accompanied by the tendency to implement the concepts of alternative development through technical blueprints rather than political transformation. [...] Participation remained preoccupied with local project and programme realities, while the larger socio-political framework causing underdevelopment received little attention (p. 63).

Through this mainstreaming by donors and executing organizations real participation is ignored by the powerful actors, they use strategies of switching responsibility and anonymity of protagonists (*e.g.*, usage of linguistic nominalization) to present participation as a transfer of responsibility to the target group, which includes the responsibility of undesirable development. Maral-Hanak describes instruments of planning (*e.g.*, Project Cycle Management, Logical Framework/Logframe, SWOT, *etc.*) and discusses how these instruments are compatible with participation. Several theoretical approaches follow and she closes the chapter with the conclusion:

What becomes a cutting-edge trend is not necessarily what people need in particular social and historic circumstances, but what is convenient to the powerful. In most cases, newly-introduced concepts are not very innovative anyway, but rather newly dressed versions of well-known motifs and topics. Donors set criteria that enforce adherence to ever-changing cutting-edge trends, and 'partners' adapt and negotiate their plans accordingly. As we have seen, planning tools like 'Participatory Rural Appraisal' or 'Gender Planning' are contradictory and problematic in their own terms. The process of 'mainstreaming' these concepts into development practice has unfortunately not resulted in the transformation of aid relationships. One could rather say that if anything has been transformed, it is the originally radical concepts that have become meaningless add-ons to neoliberal policy (p. 102).

Chapter 4 focuses on sociolinguistic and discourse analytical tools. The author starts with a description of the multilingual setting and colonial and postcolonial (racist) concepts of diversity as they can be found in several other African countries in a similar situation. Several sociolinguistic concepts are discussed. Very important for her analyses is the concept of linguistic imperialism ('describes the powerlessness of those marginalized and excluded by present day linguistic policies in Africa' [p. 112]) and in this regard also the question of human rights in terms of usage of languages. With the description of the sociolinguistic setting Maral-Hanak marks the crossing to her two field studies in north western Tanzania and Zanzibar. In both areas the programmes analysed were focused on rural development.

Chapter 5 offers an insight into code switching and borrowing as criteria of measuring social distance. The analysis of the data offers a complex answer to the relatively simple question 'Codeswitching – an obstacle for participatory development?' Generally, codeswitching offers the possibility to facilitate access to information, but at the same time it also serves as a linguistic feature to mark social distance. 'The phenomenon remains ambivalent: on the one hand, prevailing codeswitching patterns are part of an exclusive language of staff in development organizations that exacerbates hierarchies and distanced expert status; on the other hand, codeswitching is a creative and autonomous practice that makes maximum use of given language resources' (p. 167). Specific topics require – in combination with linguistic competence and the according style of speech – a change of code, most of the time that is a switch from the local language to

English or the borrowing of English loans into Swahili as dominant language. Maral-Hanak claims an increasing engagement in corpus planning as it has already been done since colonial times in the Swahili speaking area for other domains in development cooperation. In addition she suggests an increasing engagement in a consequent bilingualism.

Participation seen from different positions is discussed in Chapter 6. The starting point is the assumption (well documented with an analysis of documents and processes) that participation has indeed changed the controlled communication of donor to community but with regard to asymmetry too little modification occurred. 'Inequality within aid relationships, however, has not disappeared. Instead, control and disciplinary measures are exercised in more subtle ways' (p. 171). Maral-Hanak's analysis of communicative events provides evidence of this control: 1) target groups formulate their positions in foreclosed consensus with the (assumed) aims of the donors or their agents; 2) the enforcement of dominant ideas within the target groups leads to an exclusion of minority opinions and 3) groups which had no time to attend the programme meetings are not considered. Communicative marginalisation and unequal power relations can be illustrated relatively easy considering the following categories: regular participation in the meetings, protocols of activities, control over time and location but also the turns and *topoi*. Acceptance of preconditions and accordance with the plan are constantly introduced into discussion as conditions by project management and achieved using different strategies. The analysis of the data shows:

Supporting peasant farmers in establishing their own organizational structures and managing meetings and other communicative encounters was therefore a relevant part of programme activities. However, this was also a domain strongly affected by the organizational constraints of the implementing organizations. [...] Egalitarian methods of interaction effectively helped peasant farmers engage in democratic decision-making processes. However, the beneficiaries' initiative was invariably channelled into a narrow range of choices within the respective organization's larger policy framework. The occasional moderated brainstorming or voting by hand was rare and served either to focus on activities that had largely been decided on elsewhere, or to legitimize extra efforts (p. 213).

Chapter 7 summarises the results in five thematic domains: 1) the structure of the project excludes marginalised groups; 2) hierarchical power relations based on gender are only approached on a very superficial level; 3) target groups have no influence on important decisions; 4) nationwide programmes aid participation and 5) Asymmetries with a global origin do have an impact on grass root level.

Maral-Hanak's study discussed the wide gap between the call of participation in international development discourse and the actual behaviour on a local basis: to maintain or not maintain this request. The different levels of analysis and the methodological approach well complement one another. The final result is more positive on a local level than on an international level. The strength of this study is the broad contextualisation of the development discourse in the historical and political setting and fits very well into the growing scientific works addressing participation and asymmetry of power. Clearly based on empirical data Maral-Hanak's study offers a well-balanced account of an important topic.

NOTE

* In memory of my dear colleague Irmis Maral-Hanak who died on 27. 8. 2011.