

## **(RE) CONCEPTUALISING LANGUAGE IN DEVELOPMENT: TOWARDS DEMYSTIFYING AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PARADOX**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Development in non-Anglo-European peripheral societies and minority communities continues to be dominated by an updated but resistant discourse of modernisation, and by the expectation that development depends on English. We argue for the demystification of development and English by examining the paradox that an imposed Anglo-European ontology and epistemology as encoded in English results in development failure. We will illustrate our theoretical argument with examples drawn from our ongoing research on language in development in the Solomon Islands over the past three decades.*

## INTRODUCTION

What is “societal development”? Whose language is going to be used in defining it? Does it make a difference which language is used? We address some answers to these questions as a way of moving towards a (re) conceptualisation of language in development. We argue that language is critical in development not only as a medium of communication that may or may not be understood by the target population involved. Rather, language is critical because embedded within it are an ontology and epistemology of people’s understanding of the world and lived experience. When English (or another international language) is used as the primary medium of communication for introducing and constructing development in non-Anglo-European (note 1) peripheral, especially rural, societies, it creates a paradox for the target community. The paradox is that development, which is supposed to liberate people from economic and other hardships, results in failure instead of success because English discourse inevitably imposes an Anglo-European ontology and epistemology that are foreign to and divorced from people’s lives. Development so presented is mystified, and creates in people’s minds an unrealistic, sometimes cultic image of what an improved life would be. Much of the failure of development in such societies is due to the paradox so created.

We begin with a brief discussion of the interrelationships among ontology, epistemology, indigenous epistemology, language and discourse. From there we outline the history of how development has been conceptualised since World War II, and the discourse of development as it is still applied to/in peripheral societies. This discussion leads to our argument for a form of development anchored in indigenous ontology and indigenous epistemology, which we illustrate with examples drawn from three decades of our ongoing research on language in development in the Solomon Islands. We close with implications for development and the role of English.

## ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY, LANGUAGE AND DISCOURSE

**Ontology** refers to the nature and essence of what exists (what is) and the objects of knowledge construction (Pojman 2001). It includes presuppositions about known objects (what is out there in the world). In other words, like epistemology, ontology is not value-free but rather a human social construct that reflects culturally prescribed or presupposed representations of reality. Accordingly, while there are or may be entities which objectively exist outside of the realm of human understanding, much of what we understand about social reality or the external world is subjectively acquired or constructed. **Epistemology** refers to both the theory of knowledge (how we know) and theorising knowledge, including the nature, sources, frameworks and limits of knowledge (Goldman, 1986, 1999; Fuller, 1988; Audi, 2010). Epistemology is concerned with who can be the knower, what can be known, what constitutes knowledge, sources of evidence for constructing knowledge, what constitutes truth, how truth is to be verified, how evidence becomes truth, how valid inferences are to be drawn, and the role of belief in evidence (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo 2013, 2001, p. 57).

The prevailing mainstream paradigms for ontology and epistemology as discussed in Western philosophy and philosophy of science are assumed to be universalistic. From the gaze of mainstream, centre, or “developed” societies, the ontological and epistemological processes

of "other" societies --- especially Third World societies on the periphery of world power, underprivileged ethnic minorities within the dominant centre --- are often referred to as "world view", defined as a cultural group's "way of looking at reality" consisting of "basic assumptions and images" (Kearney, 1984, p. 41) and often are typically treated as a mix of commonsense knowledge and scientifically ungrounded ideas.

It is only recently that the universality and privileged status of mainstream science and Western philosophy have been challenged by feminists epistemologists (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Kearney & Kinsella, 1997), scholars in cultural psychology/cognitive anthropology (Sinha, 1997; Rogoff & Lave, 1984; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Chaiklin & Lave, 1996) and indigenous scholars from the periphery (Gegeo, 1994, 1998, 2001; Imbo, 1998; Meyer, 1998b, 2000; Smith, 1999; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000; Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001). These new bodies of work focus specifically on epistemology and its relation to culture, arguing persuasively from evidence-based research that all human societies and groups, small or large and industrialised or non-industrialised, engage in epistemological work.

Below the surface level of behaviour and the linguistic level of morphology and syntax is a set of deep propositions and images that shape perceptions, information processing, and the assignment of values. It is this deeper level of thinking and understanding --- the level of cultural models and indigenous epistemology--- that lies at the heart of cultural identity, thinking and behaviour. **Cultural models** are those "prototypical event sequences (Quinn & Holland, 1987, p.7) organised into schemas and scripts, often represented as propositions and images that organise cultural knowledge cognitively (D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Shore, 1996), probably as constructs of neuronal networks (Edelman, 1989, 102). General-purpose models or premises operating across cultural domains give culture its distinctiveness and the sense of its internal coherence (Quinn & Holland, 1987, pp. 34-35). Of course, culture is not uniformly held or practised within a group: competing or partial models, contradictions, resistance, and alternative framings and content whether implicit or explicit are characteristic of all cultural knowledge systems.

By **indigenous epistemology** we mean a cultural group's ways of thinking and of creating knowledge, (re)formulating and theorising about knowledge via traditional discourses and media of communication, anchoring the truth of discourse in culture and lived experience (Gegeo, 1994, 1998; Watson-Gegeo, 2001). It assumes that all epistemological systems are socially constructed and (in)formed through socio-political, economic, and historical context and processes. As a concept and approach to epistemology, indigenous epistemology coincides with **standpoint epistemology** as developed by feminist scholars, which recognises that "knowledge claims are always socially situated" (Harding, 1993, p. 54) rather than universalistic. That is, knowledge is always created in a particular situation or context by a particular group of people, whether or not it results in universal insights. With cultural psychology and cognitive anthropology, the notion of indigenous epistemology is predicated on the assumption that all learning is situated in multi-layered social contexts and cannot be treated as "de-contextualized" or abstracted from real life conditions (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave, 1996).

Language and discourse practices are essential to people's learning and thinking processes

because they encode a group's cultural knowledge and indigenous epistemology (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1999). Discourse practices are the nexus of the formation, transformation, and use of cultural knowledge and indigenous epistemology. Through discourse people think through problems and issues, create and reproduce social relations and behaviour, enact or resist oppression, make claims and pursue various goals. Together with the lexicon of a language and cultural models for/of thinking and behaviour, discourse organisation shapes and supports thinking and knowledge creation.

Learning an additional language can enrich a person's experience of the self and reality. However, when one's first or heritage language is discredited and negatively sanctioned, the result can be personal fragmentation, distortion and ultimate death of culture and subjectivity (Hale, 1992; Huebner & Davis, 1999; Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1999). After all, language shapes or informs personal and group identity as it is the communicative medium through which reality is articulated. For development, the imposition of an outside language on a target community inevitably imposes an Anglo-European ontology and epistemology that people cannot understand, that they find alienating, and that discredits what they already have in their culture. This sort of imposition, justified by modernisation theory, has shaped rural development and the role of language in development since World War II. To understand the interconnections among modernisation, development, and language, we need to briefly review the evolution of development thinking in the West since 1945.

#### DEVELOPMENT AND DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE

Although modernisation has been a significant force in shaping the world via colonialism and other social practices since the 1800s, it is generally associated with massive, targeted American attempts to rebuild Europe and Asia after World War II, and parallel attempts to develop poor Third World countries in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Pacific. In the 1950s and early 1960s, modernisation theorists laid out a paradigm that emphasized the necessity of people's willingness to make sweeping changes in their social institutions and relationships in order to gain technological skills and knowledge required to function in the modern world (Apter, 1965, p. 67). Under the modernisation paradigm, development has been large-scale, top-down and centralised, and introduced industries and economic enterprises typically owned and controlled by outside corporations and Anglo-European managers. It assumed a one-size-fits-all mentality which prescribed that projects that worked in one area of the world could be transplanted to other areas without much cultural or context specific adjustments. Development strategies used outside the U.S.A were often also applied to economically underprivileged minority communities within the U.S.A. Classic modernisation theory reflected what Habermas (1971, 1979) called a "technical cognitive interest" that assumed all human and social problems were subject to a technological, instrumentalist solution. Technology implies science, and science implied experimental and quantitative methods for conducting research on development processes and projects.

Epistemologically, modernisation theory assumed a stage model of unilinear development or progress, starting with traditional society and ending with modern, developed society (Parsons, 1971; Rostow, 1964, 1971). The discourse of modernisation posited a strong contrast between

“traditional” and “modern” that ignored the complexities of constant ongoing social change and millennia of contact through trade, colonisation and religious conversion, among so-called “traditional” societies, as well as the uneven nature of “modern-ness” in the so-called “developed” world. Modernisation discourse assumed that “Western society... provides the most developed model of societal attributes ... power, wealth, skill [and] rationality” and therefore should be a model for everyone else (Learner, 1964). As Western-controlled and Western-oriented development projects repeatedly and rapidly failed in the 1950s and 1960s, modernisation theorists blamed failure on Third World societies themselves, arguing that this failure was due largely to such internal factors as the people’s strong adherence to archaic cultural values, institutional weakness, high illiteracy, under-capitalisation, and technological stagnation or absence (Gegeo, 1994; see Learner, 1964; Apter, 1965; Etzioni-Halevy, 1981).

Beginning in the mid-1960s, a variety of critiques of modernisation were made and alternative development paradigms were set out by development scholars and practitioners. Critics argued that modernisation created dependent development in which local people were never given an opportunity to acquire knowledge and master the skills necessary to carry out development of their own, and resources and profits in Third World countries were ripped off by transnational corporations who owned the industries and agri-business in which local people worked as casual wage labourers (Frank, 1967, 1972; Chilcote, 1984). The assumption that development is necessarily unilinear or that there is a single correct path to development was also rigorously challenged (Bablewski & Hettne, 1989), as was the assumed sharp division between “traditional” and “modern” (Webster, 1991).

Central to modernisation development strategies was the assumption that increased literacy rates would ensure a skilled population and lead to sustained development. The acquisition of English was viewed as essential because English provided access to technological knowledge, and came with a vocabulary for values and information that was lacking in indigenous Third World languages, according to mainstream assessment.

The primary alternative paradigm to modernisation has been rural development, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. The central focus of rural development is on the needs and concerns of Third World populations in rural areas (Gegeo, 1994, p. 63). The aims have been to improve the living standards of rural people by ensuring that their basic subsistence needs are met; to ensure less vulnerability to natural disasters and poverty, and a more beneficial link to other parts of the national economy by making rural peoples more productive; to make development self-sustaining by encouraging self-reliance and participation in planning; and to do all this with as much “local autonomy and as little disruption to traditional custom as possible” (Lea & Chaudhri, 1983, pp. 12-13). Decentralisation of development is a key strategy in rural development. Qualitative studies have been undertaken to examine local conditions and how rural development projects fare.

While rural development has emended some of the excesses of modernisation-style development, in practice projects continue to fail in the periphery. If anything, the radical shifts in globalisation over the past three decades, emphasizing restructuring, out-sourcing, and free trade have intensified pressure on fragile economies in the Third World to focus on large-scale, centralised,

export industries, to continue to depend on overseas aid when available, and focus almost exclusively on economics and urban development.

Moreover, despite its advances over modernisation and its good intentions, the rural development paradigm ironically continues to impose the language (i.e. English) and discourse of the modernisation paradigm. Both paradigms metaphorically have taken a technological and clinical approach to development, conceptualising the so-called "lack" of development as an "illness" needing to be treated by the centre's "remedies".

The discourse of development today also continues to follow the modernisation paradigm in two other ways: first, in its emphasis on English as the most effective language of development; and second, in its continuing to be inextricably tied to English even when English terminology is translated into local languages. The latter occurs because the underlying ontology and epistemology for development terminology and its use in discourse is still Anglo-European even when it is justified in terms of "grass-roots" or "bottom-up" development. The role of this underlying Anglo-European ontology and epistemology is not always unconscious. Language planning, for instance, traditionally focused on issues of linguistic control of local or indigenous languages. Under modernisation, to become "politically sanctioned in the interest of development", indigenous languages were said to "need to be purified, reformed and modernized" (Eastman, 1983, p. 117). Even when that has not been an overtly held position, standardisation and other processes of artificially creating or enforcing a national or regional literate language --- and literacy is one skill assumed by both modernisation and rural development paradigms to be central to development --- has tended to reduce the complexity of meaning(s) in target language variety. English is still the primary language used to promote development in many Third World communities where there are multiple indigenous languages that make translation costly.

What kinds of conflicts between Anglo-European/modernisation and indigenous ontology and epistemology arise that cause projects to fail? What would an indigenous perspective on language and development look like? We turn now to addressing these questions, using examples from development projects in Kwara'ae, Solomon Islands over the past 50 years.

#### **AN INDIGENOUS EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON LANGUAGE AND DEVELOPMENT**

Development is not simply a matter of reducing the rate of poverty or illiteracy, or improving people's health, or addressing material and physical needs. Development is also social, cultural, linguistic and spiritual. For most Third World peoples, development is therefore holistic, not linear and not focussed exclusively on economic and economic-related issues only. To succeed, projects and activities must be grounded in peoples' understandings and be within their epistemic horizon (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 2012), that is, within their ability to theorise and create knowledge from and about, such that they can continue to usefully expand their knowing. Projects must also be conceived and conducted via peoples' own languages and discourse processes that together encode their ontology(ies) and epistemology(ies).

We draw a distinction between "information" and "knowledge", a distinction that is recognised in

both Western and Kwara'ae epistemologies. **Information** refers to data or "facts" (for instance) that may be collected or acquired by reading, observation, oral presentation, opinion, or other means, but which may or may not be valid or true. The Kwara'ae term for "information" is *fa'arongo'a* (report, information). **Knowledge** is the result of an epistemological process, and applies to any body of empirical facts gained through/by study or observation, together with the ideas inferred or developed from these facts via epistemological processes. Knowledge thus connotes understanding that is evidence-based or factually justified instead of mere true belief. The Kwara'ae term for knowledge is *sai'iru'anga* ('the knowing of something'). The distinction between information and knowledge is highly significant because it marks the contrast between introduced information around which most outside-supported development has occurred in the Third World, and locally created knowledge from experience with or without exposure to outside information that is the hallmark of successful rural development projects in Kwara'ae and elsewhere. Central to the distinction between information and knowledge are language (semantics, structure) and discourse processes through which the epistemological processes for creating and reformulating knowledge operate.

To illustrate the importance of indigenous epistemology, language, and discourse processes to successful development, we will now examine four kinds of approaches to development as illustrated by projects we have observed in Kwara'ae: 1) outsider introduced and controlled, using Anglo-European epistemology and English; 2) outsider introduced, insider controlled, using Anglo-European epistemology and English; 3) insider introduced and controlled, using Anglo-European epistemology and English or direct translation from English into the local vernacular; and 4) insider designed and controlled, using indigenous epistemology and language/discourses.

*1. Outsider introduced and controlled development, based on Anglo-European epistemology and discourse practices.*

'Asai Demonstration Farm established by the British Solomon Islands Protectorate colonial government in central-west Kwara'ae in the 1960s was a classic example of modernisation with regards to its underlying assumptions and design, although publicly represented as rural development. The government's intent, which was never communicated to the local villagers, was to provide an agriculture and research training centre through which literate Solomon Islanders aspiring to a career in agriculture would receive first-hand experience in animal husbandry and crop diversification and other aspects of farm management towards building agribusiness in the Solomon Islands along capitalist lines. Villagers were to learn basic skills through observation and practice, the learning style assumed to be appropriate for and within the intellectual grasp of non-literate villagers. The farm was to revert to the original land-owners in 15 years, who would at that point receive a well developed farm much like those in Australia, New Zealand and England. Interestingly, however, while the labourers and resident student-trainees represented different parts of the Solomon Islands, none of the land-owners or their families were actually employed by the farm much less given any kind of managerial training in preparation for the take-over after 15 years. Throughout its existence, the farm was managed by Australian and New Zealand outsiders, and the primary role for villagers was as casual and below minimal wage labourers.

Villagers knowledgeable about the local ecological conditions (weather, soil types, flooding patterns of the large river on the farm's boundary, etc) were never consulted about whether establishing the farm or any of the activities undertaken there (cattle and pig ranching, crops, etc) would succeed. Within a few years, the farm developed very serious problems of erosion that increased ecological damage to the bordering river's shoreline in severe ways. Severe soil erosion resulted from the primary forest that used to protect the soil having been cut down to make space for farm buildings and projects. During one of the heavy rain storms the river flooded the farm and a large herd of cattle was drowned and washed away to the sea. Large acres of fruit crops were also destroyed in the flood. The ecological problems resulted, ultimately, in the colonial government having to pull out of 'Asai Farm earlier than was stated in the 15-years agreement. All office and farm equipment and most of the cattle and other farm animals were withdrawn and workers laid off. Some buildings and a few cows and pigs were left on the farm which the land-owners were told to sell or rent and with the cash resuscitate the development project. However, having been given no opportunity for basic training in Anglo-European style farming, the land-owners could do but little and after several years of unsuccessful attempts to get professional help from the Department of Agriculture, they became disillusioned and ultimately accepted the farm's demise as beyond their capability to reverse. With no security provided, the farm was vandalised beyond repair.

The farm was seen as a case of failure in development, one of many in the Solomon Islands. It could be argued, of course, that the farm's failure was not caused by mismanagement or other factors often associated with failure in development, but natural forces. However, as mentioned, the problem could have been easily avoided had the managers consulted the land-owners or other local villagers and their indigenous knowledge incorporated into planning and management.

One of the most marked ways in which 'Asai Farm's managers signalled their perspective on local villagers was in the use of language and discourse. All written materials related to the farm were in English, and communication with the workers was also in English or sometimes in Solomon Islands Pijin (SIP), the national lingua franca which many expatriates considered vulgar and refused to learn to speak. No attempt was made to communicate, even through interpreters, in Kwara'ae, the local indigenous language of the region, and the language with the highest number of speakers in the Solomon Islands. All "No Trespassing" and information signs posted around the farm's perimeter were all in complex English. Few villagers could read, much less speak, any English at all. The "No Trespassing" signs were part of a larger exclusionary discourse that distanced the farm's purpose and managers from villagers. The exclusionary discourse also included cutting off access to local paths that villagers used on a daily basis for such livelihood purposes as going to their gardens, collecting food resources from the rivers and sea, visiting relatives, attending important community events and connecting to the only junior primary school in the area. Moreover, to create large fields of cattle grass, substantial forest areas were clear-cut, destroying many resources of forest materials that were essential to the livelihood of local villagers (as well as severely affecting erosion patterns and ultimately leading to vast areas of land permanently lost to the bordering river in heavy rain). There were no meetings held to explain to villagers that these were the kinds of changes that would be imposed on life in the area once work on the farm was underway.



The exclusion of villager involvement, other than periodic below-minimal wage labour, was locally interpreted as running counter to the important cultural values of interdependence ('adofiku'anga), sharing (fangale'a'anga) and working together in love (rao kwaimafiku'anga), and led to frequent vandalism as mentioned, especially as ecological problems began to damage other villagers' land holdings. That farm officials seemed adamant to share their knowledge with villagers in a meaningful and bi-directional way, much less the foods and animals produced on the farm, villagers found frustrating yet not unfamiliar as it reflected the colonial mentality to which they were so accustomed. They were eager to learn new skills that they could apply in their own development projects, but the scale of the farm was beyond anything they could afford to set up or operate themselves, financially and otherwise. For instance, in most cases, the villagers did not own or have access to huge tracts of land that would be used exclusively for Anglo-European style farms such as 'Asai Farm. For most villagers, Anglo-European-style development such as exemplified by 'Asai Farm was welcomed but only to complement and not replace the indigenous mode of production as it will never fully support village life in the same culturally meaningful way that the indigenous mode of production has proven since times immemorial. For one thing, it requires, among other resources, knowledge, skills and capital that they normally do not have and must necessarily seek from the outside. As such Anglo-European development, they argued, is dependent development.

In any case, an indigenous perspective would involve the following process for establishing a major development project in a rural area. First, local villagers need to be involved from the beginning in the design of the project, if they are to become stakeholders in it. They have centuries of experience with the local ecology and the land, and thus can bring to the planning table knowledge that is as valuable as that outsiders can bring. Second, ways of doing things --- the essential socio-cultural dimension in any successful project --- must include indigenously based strategies, which means mutual adaptation. Third, both language variety and discourse processes at the very least must embrace local languages and discourse processes. Fourth, villagers need to be given apprenticeships in management and be allowed to adapt outsider-assumed "best ways of doing things" to local "best ways of doing things".

## *2. Outsider introduced, insider controlled development, based on Anglo-European discourse practices*

Workshops and training offered to villagers by development agencies often provide many illustrations of miscues and collisions when English-based, as well Anglo-European epistemologies and meaning systems counter those that are indigenously based. This happens even when the workshop project itself has been taken over by insiders and is thus presented to villagers as indigenously grounded.

In a workshop typical of many we have observed in Kwara'ae district, for example, the entire presentation was in a mixture of Solomon Islands Pijin (SIP) and English, although few villagers knew English; SIP was a second language to most, and the presenters were all from Kwara'ae and spoke Kwara'ae language natively. Among the many English terms/concepts discussed were "the good life", identity, security, self-respect, self-reliance, solidarity, equity,

and participation. All were epistemologically Western as presented, and assumed an American perspective on individualism, the self, social relationships, and the nature of success. All the terms have Kwara'ae equivalents, although it was beyond the training and knowledge of the Kwara'ae workshop presenters to translate the English into Kwara'ae, and they could only rely on the wordings in English and Pijin that they had learned to go with each term. This was clearly demonstrated when the presenters used overseas cases such as the people of Bosnia calling for "solidarity", instead of local ones of which there were many as the Solomon Islands was on the eve of a major internal political turmoil.

The problem would not have been solved merely by translation. In Kwara'ae, security and independence are glossed by *folo'afi'anga* ('look after/encircle/walk around with eyes alerted to any moving object'), *talasasiru'anga* ('doing things on one's own'), and related terms. However, underlying the Kwara'ae terms is an action metaphor: security is a **process** and is about what a person **does** to meet needs or execute responsibilities or duties. Epistemologically, this understanding differs from Anglo-European, especially American perspectives which focus on security as a state of being or **feeling**. "Feeling" (in English --- as there is no Kwara'ae equivalent) was emphasised in the workshop presentation.

In contrast to the Anglo-European perspective, the Kwara'ae concepts associated with security are based on a cultural model in which nature provides the resources, culture provides knowledge and skills, and one is to use these wisely in order to be on one's own **while at the same time interdependent** with others through sharing and exchange. Sharing within and across families is the definition of being on one's own, and is entailed by the cultural model of the person as a system or mosaic or many interrelated parts (*kula ki*), a major component of which is permanent and profound social connections to family (Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 2013, 2012, 2011, 1999). The *kula* system, in term, is closely connected to another set of cultural models involving the nature and purpose of life and the life-long goals of the person. For instance, the "good life" in Kwara'ae, *gwaumauri'anga* (living at the head of life), refers to the ideal state of completeness (*ali'afu'anga*) in which individual and collective/community spiritual, psychological, and physical needs are met and the well-being of the entire community is primary and promoted. Achieving the culturally-defined good life entails understanding and living out culturally-defined stages of adulthood, the focus of which is ultimately becoming an elder (*gwaunga'i*). Becoming an elder entails acquiring cultural knowledge, wisdom and spirituality. The underlying images involve being grounded in Kwara'ae history, language, key values, and community (more than 30 terms in high rhetoric, the formal discourse register, are associated with the concept of *gwaumauri'anga*; see Gegeo, 2013, 2012, 1994).

The farther one traces out the entailments of "security" across cultural models, indigenous epistemology, discourse framings, and Kwara'ae semantics, the farther one moves away from the Anglo-European notion of security as a feeling. Not only have villagers thought at length about security with regard to development, but they have thought much further than the simplistic assumptions of development agency training.

The account we have given for "security" can be multiplied were we to look at each of the concepts the workshop attempted to address --- including such basic term as "participation".

The villagers at the workshop were puzzled. They asked each other, "Is what I am hearing new? Am I not self-sufficient when I plan my garden? I don't have to pay rent or power bills, I live on my land, I meet all my basic needs by selling garden produce in the market. Isn't 'security' what I already have? The particular development workshop from which we drew this example was not only ineffective, it was destructive to villagers' sense of efficacy and worth and, for many, re-opened the wounds of the treatment to which Solomon Islanders were subjected under colonisation. The workshop resulted in the villagers resisting to cooperate with the development agency and suspicion of all future workshops (for a full account, see, Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 1999).

*3. Insider introduced, controlled development, using Anglo-European epistemology and discourse practices*

From the 1960s through the 1970s, Kwara'ae district experienced many development projects started by relatively educated Kwara'ae men who had received development training abroad in programmes intended to spread the "rural development" perspective as part of the decentralisation paradigm and encourage locally-designed projects. These projects were often organised around what outsiders taught educated locals about these indigenous people's own communities. That is, what the indigenous leaders to-be received in training was outsiders' interpretations and versions of core indigenous rural practices and understanding, often highly generalised to sound or look cross-cultural, e.g., pan-Pacific.

In one such project that received a number of outside awards over several years, a local clergyman in Kwara'ae district attended several workshops sponsored by various non-governmental organisations and by the United Nations, held in Fiji, Malaysia, and elsewhere. He returned to Kwara'ae with ideas about how to set up a multifaceted project involving youth training in carpentry, literacy for villagers, assistance to the poor and those with physical disabilities, and religious instruction. He also returned with a new notion of a "Melanesian Community" based on assumed pan-Melanesian values as taught in the workshops.

Partly because he was educated as a clergyman, and because villagers were highly interested in literacy and skills training, the project was at first enthusiastically joined by hundreds of adults and youths in the area. But soon very serious problems started to develop. Some of these lay in the clergyman's inability to manage a project as diverse and complex as he had designed, even though he received a great deal of funding from international agencies to support it. The workshop training had not sufficiently prepared him to plan, design, and manage a large project with many simultaneous activities.

Epistemological issues played a major role in the demise of the project, as well. As with the project discussed above, the clergyman was tied to English for presenting values and concepts that had been presented to him in his training as "Melanesian", but for which only English vocabulary was provided. "Other" people's values and culture when presented and explained even by well-meaning outsiders are changed in the process of explanation to the point where they (can) lose their semantic and epistemic indigeneity (see Gegeo, 1994, p. 417). As a result, despite his education and indigenous upbringing, the clergyman was unable to translate the English

terminology and concepts back into Kwara'ae and indigenous ontology and epistemology. In reassuring workshop attendees, he always said "we have these in our culture" but then could not explain how or what the equivalents were in Kwara'ae because the concepts as presented to him in his training were not in fact grounded in indigenous epistemology but Western epistemology. In fact, his own running of the project was distorted by his clinging to the values and practices as taught in the workshop, but which did not sound or seem indigenous to the villagers; rather the values and practices felt alien to the villagers. Fundamentally, the issue was that, although emphasising the importance of indigenous culture, the clergyman was interested in and actually promoting a Western/modernisation model of development by using a social discourse that was firmly grounded in Western epistemology and ontology and the Bible. For instance, he used frameworks of reasoning and body language that were Western, high frequency of code-switching between Kwara'ae, Solomon Islands Pijin and English, using English metaphors and expressions, and behaviour mannerisms that were more Western than indigenous. Villagers were not blind to this and often challenged him to be clear on what model of development he was committed to --- one grounded in Western epistemology and ontology or one grounded in indigenous epistemology and ontology or one grounded in a mixture of both. The clergyman's response to such challenges invariably was that only God has the answers.

As the project began to fail, the clergyman demanded, often at the pulpit during Sunday Mass, heavy monetary contributions from participants to keep it going, using the threat of God's punishment. Villagers found this very disheartening and offensive as they could not give more than what they could afford from selling garden produce at the local market. In resentment and fearing that the money they had contributed over the years was lost forever, villagers who worked in the project began themselves to steal from the project, which resulted in its ultimate collapse.

Youth who had received training in carpentry in the project, once the project was closed, were unable to support themselves financially with these skills in a rural area where few could afford to hire them to build a European-style house of wood and cement. The training offered on the project had not included skills in building houses from local forest materials, the kind of houses most villagers were living in. In fact, the youth had been trained in skills usable only in urban areas, which meant that many had migrated to Honiara, the capital city of the Solomon Islands, to compete for the few jobs available there, adding to the chronic problem of "urban drift" among youth in the Solomon Islands --- a problem which the clergyman's training in rural development received overseas was supposed to address.

#### *4. Insider introduced and controlled development, based on indigenous epistemology and discourse practices*

In the foregoing three cases, development information was presented or made available to villagers that did not become knowledge because it was not grounded in indigenous epistemology and culture, sometimes inappropriate to local conditions, and not relevant to people's lives. However, Kwara'ae villagers have not been idle themselves when it comes to development. Many have thought through, in fact have had extensive experience with, development issues and arrived at their own understandings of what should and can happen; they have thus produced new

knowledge about development using indigenous epistemology (ies) and indigenous language and discourse practices.

As a youth, Gwalona grew up observing 'Asai Farm, had participated in the clergyman's youth training efforts, and as an adult, attended the workshop we described earlier. He also participated in several other introduced development projects, and although he had only a year of formal schooling completed basic theological training at a local Theological Training Centre. For some years he worked for a construction company as a carpenter, but then returned home to his village due to ill-health from living in an urban area.

Gwalona was very critical of what he saw in all the development projects in which he worked, and he was determined to undertake activities that would both support him and his family and be successful. He observed that given the fluctuating economy in the rural areas, the best development strategy for a villager is to undertake several small projects at the same time so as to ensure a continuous income to supplement gardening. He was following the indigenous epistemological strategy of *fasiru doladola'anga* (mixed cropping) and *ru ngasi* (strong thing), i.e. projects that can be counted on to endure and produce regular income and that involve consumable items that the family and village can use should the market for them go down. Gwalona currently builds furniture he designs to function well on the uneven surfaces of local houses, making only one piece ahead of what he can sell. He and his wife also raise indigenous pigs rather than imported ones (that require special feed and are vulnerable to diseases), indigenous chickens that run free as opposed to penned chickens (that similarly require special feed and are subject to epidemics), and garden produce to sell at the district market. Gwalona's pig and chicken-raising projects run counter to the advice of government agriculture officers, yet he has suffered almost no losses from diseases and has instead been able to sell all he can raise. With his diverse, small-scale strategies, Gwalona and his family have been able to meet their children's school fees, family needs and accumulate a small savings. Drawing on indigenous culture, Gwalona said in a 1990 interview:

You have to do several things. One problem I see in development today is doing only one thing. And it is supposed to bring you all you need. But in *salafala* (traditional culture) to feed [yourself and your family], you raise several crops and do several activities – fishing, gardening, hunting, raising pigs. Life consists of nature and human beings working together. In [introduced] development determined by money, people see themselves as the only thing producing food. So they do one big project and it is supposed to bring them everything.

The guide for Gwalona's thinking comes from indigenous epistemology and concepts encoded in his native Kwara'ae language and discourse practices.

Gwalona's insights and approach are mirrored in those of many others in West Kwara'ae interviewed by Gegeo, in the 1990s (see Gegeo, 1994; 150 interviews were conducted). Kae, an unmarried woman who over the past 30 years has earned a small but steady income from pursuing a variety of small projects, said in interview that many Kwara'ae men's expectations about development success come from working in the cash economy, especially on plantations where they receive wages. Their attempts to put into practice the information they receive and

English concepts they learn from these experiences nearly always fail at the village level. She noted that women – who do not have a plantation experience – are more likely to follow cultural values in development, such as persistence, building a project slowly, and doing things “quietly” (*rao nene*, ‘work quietly/in silence’); i.e, without arrogance and boastfulness.

Kae and others emphasised gaining knowledge through observation and experimentation, guided by Kwara’ae cultural concepts and indigenous epistemology. Many commented that they saw their development projects as “schooling” (*sukulu’anga*), that is, “education or learning”, whether or not the projects succeeded. In fact, an interest in gaining knowledge whatever the project outcome was what sustained many of the villagers interviewed in continuing to pursue small development projects. The turn away from introduced to indigenous strategies was emphasised by many in the interviews. As Irosulia, who has tried many development efforts to support his family before settling down on indigenous strategies, put it in a 1993 interview:

I have been observing [rural development] more closely for these past few years, and today I realise that we the village people just didn’t know. We were being forced to do things in a different way, and that is why we did all kinds of things. But nowadays our eyes are open.

Indigenously-based projects can appear to be similar to introduced projects. However, a close examination of indigenously-based efforts reveals that the villager’s arrival at the project is via indigenous epistemology, their native language, and culturally-grounded discourse practices, not Anglo-European epistemology, English and outsider discourse practices. Because of their indigenous grounding, the behaviour, discourse, meaning, and outcome involved in the project will be entirely different from an introduced project. For instance, a rice project carried out via Anglo-European epistemology and English discourse structures is likely to fail while the same project carried out via indigenous epistemology and discourse structures will succeed (See Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002, 2001).

However, even when a project grounded in indigenous epistemology fails, the outcome is ultimately different from an introduced project. Because gaining knowledge is one of the primary foci of indigenously-grounded projects, transformation is experienced in the learner and understanding grows. Many villagers, in commenting on small projects that had failed and succeeded, remarked that through both successes and failures, they had gained self-confidence, development had been de-mystified for them, and they were no longer afraid to speak up for themselves rather than being spoken for in development efforts.

What we are pointing to here is another kind of transformation, as well, a transformation that must take place for development to succeed, beyond the issues of sustainability, and ecologically or economically appropriate technology, etc. This is a transformation in Anglo-European thinking about the value of indigenous epistemology and knowledge, and its role in outsider-supported projects. (Gegeo, 2012, 2003, 2002, 2000, 1999). The need for and nature of this transformation means that language and discourse practices in development must be reconceptualised, in fact, decolonised.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE IN DEVELOPMENT

The implications for language planning and teaching are several. First, development must proceed from within, that is, must be grounded in a local community's indigenous language(s), ontology (ies) and epistemology (ies) for it to be successful. This means that current power relationships between urban and rural societies must be reversed: development cannot be top-down and imposed from the outside, instead, it must be bottom-up and grow from within (Gegeo, 2000). Rural villagers must take the lead in development, supported by outside resources where useful. Although our point is not new, and various Anglo-European theorists have promulgated development theories based on bottom-up development in the past, (e.g., "grass-roots development"), the strategies proposed have never fully taken into account the complexities involved in indigenous knowledge systems and indigenous languages.

Second, the teaching of English as it relates to development must incorporate indigenous or local pedagogies, and indigenous ontology and epistemology in a comprehensive and nuanced way. The teaching of English therefore cannot be removed from issues of local culture and environment. English does have a role to play in development, since at least some even in a rural village need to have access to outside information that can be usefully incorporated into and become knowledge at the local level. We are not arguing for isolation of villagers from access to the outside world, which would in any case be entirely impossible today. Village life is constantly changing under outside influences that sometimes undermine and other times enhance village life. However, greater efforts must be made to integrate English language instruction with local cultural values so that meaningful translations, comparisons, and contrasts can be made and villagers can themselves integrate what they learn from the outside into their own practices in useful and meaningful ways: in other words, information be weighed and can become knowledge, where appropriate.

Third, it follows that materials used in teaching English must go beyond superficial incorporation of local "culture", to a more profound incorporation of deep culture. Teaching English inevitably is teaching Western ontology, epistemology and cultural models. It is not merely teaching literacy skills in an international language. Given this, then a more rigorous and genuine effort must be made to bridge differences in language and discourse in ways that are profound and respectful of what local cultures already have in them that often transcends introduced culture. Such efforts must go beyond simply making drawings in materials that reflect local ethnicity and landscape, or sweeping generalisations about, e.g., "Melanesian culture".

Finally, to accomplish the foregoing, teacher training must transcend superficial notions of communicative competence by sensitising teachers to an understanding of indigenous ways of thinking, knowing, and learning. That means teachers need to be far better and more deeply educated about the cultures in which they teach. It is not enough to throw up our hands and declare that the world is too complicated, that there are too many cultures out there for us to learn about. While it is true that we cannot be experts in all cultures, we have not done enough in second language teaching towards drawing on knowledge about their cultures that our students already have, to educate ourselves as second language teachers. If as teachers we say that we are engaged in service to the students and communities where we work and teach, and not just

earning a salary, then we must be language and culture learners in the context in which we serve, and not only teachers.

## CONCLUSION

The ideas we have laid out in this paper are consistent with the call for epistemological and ontological diversity that is increasingly being advanced in development, education, cultural studies, feminist studies, and ethnic studies internationally (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000; Pallas, 2001). Despite the burgeoning literature, the field of English as a second language seems to lag behind in addressing these concerns in language learning and teaching. Although there has been considerable research on the “new/world Englishes”, in reality much of ESL training still involves teaching Anglo-European ontology and epistemology along with English as a linguistic code. The problem continues because of inadequate teacher training and poorly developed materials.

In relation to rural development, there is also an urgent need to push the capitalist agenda further, in the direction of considering what happens when English is introduced to rural villages in Third World countries through literacy training and workshops, etc. One question that has to be addressed is the questions with which we opened this paper: what is “societal” development? Who defines it? We may have illusions about making our development efforts culturally congruent, but in reality as outsiders we always introduce notions of development based on our own cultural and social assumptions.

Those assumptions are encoded in the language we use to talk about development with others, and all too often, even when we learn another language, we continue to impose our cultural assumptions on that language, consciously or unconsciously. Unless we reconceptualise English language teaching, we will continue to contribute to the mystification of development and therefore its failure in Third World societies.

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## NOTES

We use “Anglo-European” and “Western” interchangeably; also “center”, “mainstream” and “First World” interchangeably; and “periphery”, “Third World” interchangeably. We are familiar with the problems with all these terms. Their use here is for convenience and communication only.



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