24. LINGUISTIC INEQUALITY IN THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR: UNRAVELING ENGLISH-CENTRIC MULTILINGUALISM

Maria Rosa Garrido

<a> INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the central role of language in humanitarian aid practice, policy and evaluation has received more scholarly attention (see e.g. Banda & Oketch, 2009; Delgado Luchner, 2018, Footitt, Tesseur, & Crack 2020; Garrido, 2022; Roth, 2019). However, Tesseur (2021) claims that there has been yet little attention to language and translation policy in international organisations that are key actors in delivering the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), based on social inclusiveness, to make their services linguistically accessible for grassroots communities (p.263). Assumptions about language and language planning are implicit but rarely visible in humanitarian aid discourse (Taylor-Bleech and Benson, 2017). In fact, the humanitarian workers that Footitt, Crack and Tesseur (2020) interviewed felt that language was institutionally accorded a low status and that "language needs and challenges were not systematically discussed in the context of programme planning, delivery and evaluation" (p.97). Limited resources and the imperative to deliver specific project objectives to the donors makes it difficult for Northern humanitarian agencies like Oxfam to adopt multilingual policies. Thus, many adopt English as a lingua franca internally (Tesseur, 2021:262) and *ad-hoc* solutions for unplanned linguistic needs in the field (see section 5.2.). Language training requires a significant time investment which is difficult in intense situations with high rates of turnover, personnel rotation and limited administrative budgets (Crack, 2019).

This chapter focuses on English-language publications, and I am not aware of any relevant literature in French, Spanish or Portuguese. Furthermore, due of a lack of Arabic skills I am unaware of Arabic literature on the topic and there might be interesting case studies given the centrality of Arabic-speaking regions in humanitarian operations today. As a Catalan-born sociolinguist who is fluent in English, Catalan, Spanish and French, my scholarly perspective on language and humanitarianism has been shaped by my fieldwork in a local migrant-support NGO, an international solidarity movement called Emmaus and more recently, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC henceforth). In this chapter, I adopt the Development Assistance Committee's (2007) definition of "humanitarian aid":

> "Assistance designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies. To be classified as humanitarian, aid should be consistent with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence" (cited in Carbonnier, 2015: 40).

The DAC's definition above covers development aid, emergency relief, disaster prevention and post-war recovery, but it does not include military assistance. Nonetheless, "humanitarianism" has become a buzzword used for other purposes, especially as humanitarian language and images are mobilised to justify military operations, as for example in the Western intervention in Iraq in 2003 (see Fassin, 2012).

The next section (section 1) will delve into the current anti-racist, decolonising demands in the context of (linguistic) localisation in the humanitarian aid industry. Section 2 will briefly present a short conceptual framework on language as a social practice and its role in the (re)production of social inequalities. Section 3 will explain strategic multilingualism in Northern Agencies and discuss the effects of English dominance. Section 4 will present three key issues that emerge from the literature: 1) unequal listening relationships in the humanitarian chain, 2) different forms of language mediation with local communities, 3) unequal linguistic expectations for expatriate and national staff. Section 5 will identify new avenues for research into language in humanitarianism from a social justice perspective.

<a> 1. CURRENT DEBATES: COLONIALISM, LOCALISATION, AND LANGUAGE

"We take responsibility as leaders of an organisation that is part of development and humanitarian sectors which have racism, colonialism and white supremacy deeply embedded in their mindsets, culture, practices and structures."

(A statement of solidarity from the leadership of *Save the Children UK*, 19th June 2020, https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/blogs/2020/blm-solidarity-statement-charity-leadership-team)

In 2020, the global *Black Lives Matter* movement protests also impacted the international humanitarian aid sector with stronger calls to reform Northern agencies (NA henceforth) like Oxfam, MSF or Save the Children by putting anti-racism and decolonialisation at the centre. Racial justice protests demand that power be relinquished to local workers and communities in whose countries humanitarian crises are unfolding (see chapter 15 by Naranyanaswamy on Race and Racialisation in Aid Organizations). As I will discuss in Section 4, the humanitarian aid industry is based on the continued relations of power among humanitarian organisations, between different types of workers and offices within the agencies, and between humanitarians and local populations (see chapter 18 by Ward and Bian on Class Matters in Humanitarianism). Against this backdrop, the UN SDG 10 seeks to "ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions" (Target 10.6). Footitt (2017) argues that embracing the necessary multilingual and intercultural contact zones to achieve this SDG is difficult and implies a painful reflection on power and prejudice for large British NA (pp.518-519), exemplified by the *Saving the Children UK* quote above.

Both the academic literature and critical voices within the industry denounce lingering colonial structures and practices in this global industry (Currion, 2020). Northern humanitarian agencies have networks that resemble those of colonial maps (Fassin, 2012) and aid flows tend to map onto soft power, post-colonial relations (Currion, 2020), with international headquarters in the Global North and increasingly in urban humanitarian hubs. These international agencies set the agendas and fund projects written in English and using the right terminology, with a disregard for local languages (see section 3). Local civil society is made to fit the mould of the Northern NGO rather than making space for more linguistically, culturally or politically appropriate forms. This marginalises local civil society (see chapter 13 by Choudhury Lahiri on Citizen's Groups and Grassroots Humanitarianism) and organisations without access to this "global development English", potentially convertible into funding grants from donors. In addition, these agendas tend to construct beneficiaries as rural "others" and helpless victims who are illiterate and monolingual (Banda, 2020). Critical scholarship has taken issue with the conceptualisation of "the local" as a binary opposite of "the international" and its related Eurocentric worldview (Roepstoff, 2020: 289). The essentialisation of "the local" also reproduces stereotypes such as the Global South as local, particular, traditional, and parochial and it bypasses the heterogeneity of actors locally as well as their multiple transnational connections in the humanitarian sector.

As a result of this dichotomy, there is a linguistic work division between humanitarian actors: "upstream" actors with a monolingual ideology that benefit from professional translation into a handful of core languages and "downstream" actors providing *ad-hoc*, informal and hybrid language solutions. For instance, "national" staff have multilingual repertoires that tend not to be institutionally recognised because they are considered to be "a talent", whereas expatriates are required to have repertoires in a handful of colonial languages like French or English regarded as technical skills (Garrido, 2017). The social inequalities between expatriate and national staff (see section 5.3.) are partly (re)produced through English dominance in linguistic requirements and expectations. The politics of geographical mobility, indexed by language requirements, entails unequal access to social mobility through career progression and institutional authority (Roth, 2019). This is at odds with the localisation agenda to create an inclusive organisation that values diversity among staff and effectively communicates with local communities (see chapter 6 by Youakim and Stephan on Localization and the Humanitarian Sector).

In line with SDG10, the "localisation" agenda of humanitarian aid encompasses a process of "recognising, respecting and strengthening the leadership by local authorities and the capacity of local civil society in humanitarian action, in order to better address the needs of affected populations" (Roepstorff, 2020: 285). In addition to redressing the neo-colonial power imbalances between the Global North and the Global South, the pragmatic grounds for localisation include aid effectiveness, cost efficiency, increased access to people in need and even security concerns for international aid workers. The call for localisation has stimulated a debate on how to better integrate local voices, especially the needs and views of the affected population into humanitarian responses (Roepstorff, 2020: 292). The main changes in NA include decentralised offices in the Global South and enhanced partnerships with local/Southern NGOs. These changes have triggered the creation of language and/or translation policies to cater for the need of documentation in other languages, translation into local languages and accessible English provision for non-native speakers (Tesseur, 2021).

Overall, there are some hopeful signs that NA are increasingly recognising the centrality of language for diversity and inclusion to eventually shift power dynamics and colonial structures (Tesseur, 2022). For instance, the Oxfam headquarters staff's largely unquestioned choice of English to collaborate with country delegation staff has started to be challenged (Footitt et al., 2020: 87). As a result of individual initiatives, in-country colleagues have been able to use Spanish, French, Arabic and Portuguese in reports. Nevertheless, the Oxfam policy changes do not necessarily translate into changes in (perceived) practice, with English as the dominant language to the detriment of other working languages (Tesseur, 2021:276). Traditionally, translation for expatriate employees does not foster social justice but actually perpetuates inequalities between English-speaking expats and multilingual national staff (see section 3 below; Roth, 2019: 48). As a case in point, the Amnesty International Language Resource Centre mostly invests in supporting translation into the four main institutional languages (English, French, Spanish and Arabic) with English as the primary source language. However, the volume of words translated *into* English increased in 2016 as a result of the decentralised governance model and local content production (Combeaud Bonallack, 2018: 96-97).

<a> 2. LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

In this chapter, I understand language as a form of social action (see Heller, 2007) and not simply a system of signs as posited by traditional structural linguistics. Language practice and policy in situated contexts are constitutive of broader social, historical, and economic processes such as nation-building, higher education internationalisation or localisation in humanitarian agencies. From a Foucauldian perspective (1969), language practices construct and not simply reflect social reality. By studying language, we contribute to knowledge about the social world. Along these lines, the chapter adopts a critical approach which assumes that language produces and reproduces social difference and social inequalities in institutions and situated interactions (Heller, 2011:34). According to Bourdieu, "linguistic exchanges are also symbolic power relationships where the power relations between speakers or groups are actualised" (Bourdieu, 1982:1, my translation). In other words, the sociology of language should study the relationship between the mapping of linguistic differences (e.g. legitimate language vs. vernacular varieties) onto social differences among speakers (e.g. gender, legal status and social class).

Thus, transformations in language practice and policy are part and parcel of social justice arrangements. Fraser claims that "justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life […] as full partners in social interaction" (2005: 73). Linguistic diversity structures societies at institutional, local, national and global levels and language competence mediates social participation (Piller, 2016:2). In other words, language is an important aspect of our social positioning, and the way speakers use it can open (or close) doors. Fraser (2005) conceives of social justice as three interrelated dimensions that apply to language (see also Piller, 2016):

1. **Economic redistribution:** How does language mediate access to material resources, such as humanitarian employment (see section 5.3.) or aid (see section 5.2.)? This dimension looks into the relationship between language and economic inequality.
2. **Cultural recognition:** Which values are attached to language varieties and speakers in institutionalised hierarchies (see section 4)? This dimension is concerned with the relationship between linguistic diversity and cultural domination.
3. **Political representation:** How do communication participation frameworks shape legitimacy and equity of participation? This dimension deals with issues of voice and listening (see section 5.1.).

<a> 3. ENGLISH-CENTRIC MULTILINGUALISM IN NORTHERN HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES

Northern agencies (NA), the main focus of studies reviewed, do not typically feature language policies on their webpages (see also Taylor-Leech and Benson, 2017:5) with the marked exception of the United Nations[1]. However, the largest NA (e.g. ICRC, Save the Children,

[1] "Official Languages", United Nations, https://www.un.org/en/our-work/official-languages (date accessed: 10-10-2022)

Oxfam) adopted written language and/or translation policies as they underwent processes of decentralisation and localisation (Tesseur, 2021). Unlike UN agencies with a foundational multilingual policy anchored in equality among working languages, international humanitarian agencies such as Oxfam and Amnesty International opt for a "strategic multilingualism" of a set of core/working languages designed to increase the organisation's growth and impact through selective translation based on current needs (Tesseur, 2014: 568). The designation of a set of core/working languages depends on the limited funds available for translation (Tesseur 2014: 563). Thus, international non-profit organisations usually have one or two administrative languages for international communication (usually English and/or French). Professional translation and interpreting services are only provided for a handful of linguae francae (such as English, Spanish or Arabic) for communication with donors and the general public (Delgado-Luchner, 2018:61; Footitt et al., 2020:94). Policy documents focus on written translation into international linguae francae and largely overlook the need for interpreting and translation into local languages. *Ad-hoc* solutions are often found to address structural language needs such as interpreting during staff training sessions or translating project applications (Tesseur, 2022).

Let us examine two examples of NA adopting "strategic multilingualism". The ICRC has two administrative languages, English and French, and restricts translations to 7 working languages also including Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Portuguese and Chinese. Today it relies on both in-house and freelance translators to cater for other ICRC departments' translation requests into these 7 working languages. In 2017, translation had been partly delocalised to Regional Communication Centres (Russian to Moscow, Spanish to Buenos Aires, and 85% of Arabic to Cairo) from headquarters. Tesseur (2014) has documented the history of language policy and strategy at Amnesty International since its first language policy in 1987. Amnesty International designates English, French, Spanish and Arabic as core languages whereas other languages are handled locally. It plans language and translation in a "strategic" way to increase the organisation's impact and growth. Amnesty International considers a language to be strategic when investing in it for a substantial period of time (over 6 years) contributes to its "growth, diversity, participation and increased activism" whereas a "tactical" language would enhance the impact of a particular project (see Tesseur 2014: 568). Similarly to the ICRC's Regional Communication Centres, Amnesty International set up the Language Resource Centre, "a virtual network of professionals operating from different offices around the world", in order to adopt to changing needs and contexts (Combeaud Bonallack, Bagnudo and Liaño Moral, 2014). It provides professional services in translation, interpretation, production and digital services mainly in the core languages (Combeaud Bonallack, 2018).

The existing language policies select a handful of linguae francae, often colonial languages, to reach a wide audience with little investment but they reproduce colonial structures and relations of inequality between Northern donors, agencies and expatriate workers and their local partners. Research about multilingualism in humanitarian aid has consistently commented on the linguistic inequalities and resulting social exclusion engendered by the dominance of English in the humanitarian industry (e.g. Banda and Oketch, 2009; Crack, 2019; Footitt, 2017; Footitt et al. 2018, 2020; Garrido, 2017, 2021; Roth, 2019; Tesseur, 2021). English (or to a lesser extent, other dominant European languages) is still regarded to be necessary as a written language to seek funding from all over the world. It also provides much of the development vocabulary and buzzwords, even used in translation, that Northern donors expect. This "global development English" presents major challenges for Southern offices, organisations, and communities (Footitt et al., 2020: 186, see also Banda and Oketch, 2009; Crack, 2019, Frings-Hessami and Oliver, 2022). They have to master *written* English to translate calls, write credible applications and write evaluation reports without learning or translation support.

> "This linguistically untranslated vision produces a decontextualised development reality in which donor/SNGO relationships are perceived as unequal from project inception to implementation, and one in which the responsibility to understand, learn and adapt clearly rests with the agencies in the South, rather than with the funders in the North." (Footitt et al., 2020: 193).

As a result, the unquestioned English requirement favours NA (and their branches) over local organisations and grassroots communities, so that in practice "large (Northern-based) NGOs are the only organisations with the skills and capacity to win funds" (Crack 2019: 164). NA such as Oxfam become a proxy representative of the community within a process of "NGOisation" involving professionalisation and elitism of Northern NGOs (Choudry and Kappor, 2013, in Crack 2019) and leaving local organisations with connections to the communities out. A hopeful prospect is the diversifying landscape of donors and South-South partnerships (e.g. in Latin America). For example, local NGOs in Peru perceived non-Anglophone donors as more linguistically open than Anglophone donors, signalled by the readiness to speak Spanish and accept applications in this other colonial language (Footitt et al., 2020: 192). This development could lead to a pluralisation of languages in a more regionalised aid system (Roth, 2019: 49).

A major challenge inherent in the Anglophone development vocabulary is the untranslatability of concepts such as “gender”, “empowerment” or “sustainability” into a wide array of linguistic and cultural contexts (Footitt et al., 2018: 5). They are often translated with a neologism (e.g. *empoderamiento* in Spanish) that do not translate the full meaning or left in the original English (Footitt et al., 2020:189). Nonetheless, local communities might regard them as “Western” concepts: “human rights” in Russian or in Kyrgyz are “two empty words” linked to “European values” for a lot of people in Kyrgyzstan according to the director of a local NGO (Footitt et al., 2018: 21). Therefore, they require multilingual explanation and negotiation (see Banda and Oketch, 2009) but an interpretation that works for a given community may not work for another because of different dialects and cultural norms, e.g. across Chichewa communities in Malawi (Footitt et al., 2018: 23). A remarkable exception is the alternative Latin American tradition of development that entered the humanitarian discourse both linguistically and culturally in the 1970s. For example, the adoption of concepts like *concientización* (Spanish) / *conscientizaçao* (Portuguese) from Progressive Liberationist thinking, and even their translation into English and French, has been documented in other continents (Footitt, 2017: 527). In Peru, some central concepts such as *acompañamiento* which are difficult to explain and translate into English are assumed to be comprehensible to foreigners who observed the project implementation (Footitt et al., 2020: 190). By and large, “this mutual untranslatability can make it difficult for fieldworkers to explain to HQ or donors how communities describe their local reality, and for communities to understand the nature of development projects” (Footitt et al., 2018: 5). A national employee in Dhaka (Bangladesh) claims that “a lot is lost in translation” (p. 11) between oral communication with local partners and beneficiaries in Bangla and the required reports in English for the NA headquarters (Frings-Hessami and Oliver, 2022).

<a> 4 POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LANGUAGE IN HUMANITARIANISM

<b> Key Issue 1: Unequal Listening Relationships in the Humanitarian Aid Chain

In order to grasp the political economy of language in the humanitarian industry, it is essential to examine communication and listening zones in the aid chain from donor to beneficiary.

From the viewpoint of Northern agencies (NA), we should consider the different potentially multilingual "contact zones" involving co-presence and interaction within radically asymmetrical power relationships in the humanitarian aid chain. Delgado Luchner (2018: 46-47) identifies the following contact zones: 1) between the NA and the donors, 2) between the NA and local partners (either country offices or Southern NGOs), 3) between the local partners and beneficiaries, and 4) between the NA and beneficiaries. This aid chain is a "brokerage chain" made up of several institutional nodes as intermediaries linked by mutual dependencies as the actors "upstream", notably the donors, mainly rely on "downstream" local partners to implement and evaluate these programmes through listening practices with the beneficiaries (Delgado Luchner, 2018:46). Based on the assumption that spaces of development are inherently multivocal and multilingual, Footitt et al. (2020) propose "listening zones" as potential spaces of coexistence, hybridity and learning where language plays a prominent role in actual encounters between humanitarian workers and local communities. Listening is a relational process influenced by assumptions (notably about language), geographical locations and language of the multiple actors (Footitt et al., 2020:79).

The unequal power relationships in the aid chain influence the ways in which local partners and humanitarian workers engage in listening. Donors, such as the UK Department of International Development (DFID, see Crack 2019), expect NA and their partner organisations to listen and interact with local communities in order to obtain beneficiary feedback for accountability, evaluation and monitoring and produce reports on measurable outcomes in English (see Frings-Hessami and Oliver, 2022). Despite the centrality of beneficiary empowerment, participation and feedback, DFID assumes that NGOs are good at listening to the communities and that they have the language competences to do so without double-checking (Crack, 2019). In addition, "what is often implicit in the policy debate about 'voice' is the assumption that those speaking (aid recipients) and those listening (aid providers) can communicate in the same language" (Crack 2019: 161). Further down the aid chain, NA do not problematise language in project design so there is a generalised absence of language planning and budgeting for translation and interpreting (see section 4.2.). This has a negative impact on the humanitarian workers' actual ability to listen to the communities served. In fact, different listening practices depend on who the humanitarian actors would listen to, when listening would take place, in which language(s) and formats (Footitt et al., 2020: 82). Overall, participatory approaches to humanitarian aid assume two-way communication between humanitarian workers and local populations (Contact zone 3) but we know little about these linguistic and listening practices, with few existing studies on (informal) interpreting practices.

Footitt et al. (2020) identified two main types of listening on the part of in-country workers: *institutional listening* as a built-in, mechanistic process linked with upstream accountability and *informal listening* that opens up to project criticism from the communities and other ways of doing and being (see also Crack, 2019 for similar perspectives on beneficiary voice). The former, institutional listening, takes the form of focus groups, community meetings, one-on-one interviews to collect answers to predesigned topics and questions. This "highly mediated" type of listening aimed to take stock of project progress and outcomes and left little space for personal relationships or discussions outside the institutional mission. In order to overcome these institutional constraints, informal ways of listening are highly dependent on the humanitarian workers' agency to emphasise "values of trust, the commitment to help others, to stand by people, and demonstrate respect for their ways of working and being" (p.90). This type of listening draws on "linguistic hospitality" (Ricoeur, 2004), aiming to learn from others' languages and cultures without assuming that one's own repertoire is sufficient. Informal listening practices included jointly interrogating the meaning of certain buzzwords, such as "empowerment" or "safe space", and institutional terminology through multilingual practices (Footitt et al., 2018, 2020: 92). They also allow NA managers to recognise the local partners' effort in writing reports in English and address their own comprehension of "low-quality reporting" (ibid). Frings-Hessami and Oliver (2002) show how Bangladeshi employees of a NA came up with innovative ways of navigating accountability tools and information systems developed by and for English speakers. For instance, they would communicate in Bangla with local partners and prepare draft reports in English for the local partners to fill in numbers or translate them from Bangla (p.10). In other words, linguistic and cultural issues were resolved through personal agency rather than institutional planning.

Owing to the unequal relations between North-based donors/organisations and South-based partner organisations, the latter must implement programmes and adapt (English-dominant) language policies to local contexts. While English dominance is prevalent in written communication with funders or Northern headquarters (Footitt et al., 2020: 187), face-to-face dealings with local communities are multilingual. Longitudinal studies of development projects in Peru, Malawi and Kyrgyzstan (Footitt et al., 2018, 2020) and Kenya (Oketch and Banda, 2008; Banda and Oketch, 2009) conclude that NA and their local partners should advocate for a multilingual approach for beneficiary inclusion and participation instead of monolingual policies and practices, i.e. adhering to a single language of interaction, either a L1, dominant language or colonial language. Concerning the latter, English plays a double-edged role since beneficiaries expect "a sprinkling of English" in sessions rather than the exclusive use of African languages, owing to its prestige, but its exclusive use can exclude people with low/no competences, notably through English jargon (Oketch and Banda, 2008: 8-9).

Oketch and Banda's fieldwork in the Nyanza province of Kenya (Oketch and Banda, 2008; Banda and Oketch, 2009) questions widespread policy assumptions about rural communities as homogeneous, monolingual and illiterate. The authors problematise the scholarly and policy monolingual bias that equates effective communication with a common language, be it an assumed L1 or a dominant language. Their rare analyses of actual interactions between humanitarian workers and community members show that functional multilingualism ensures not only effective communication but also everybody's inclusion and participation. In this multilingual province, functional multilingualism combines Kiswahili and English as official languages in Kenya serving as linguae francae[2], Dholuo as the most widely spoken language in the province by the Luo ethnic community, as well as other local languages such as Olusuba, Kikuria and Ekegusii (Banda and Oketch, 2009: 166, see also Oketch and Banda, 2008 for communicative functions). Linked with informal listening above, the beneficiaries' demand to be addressed in African discourse with elements of English or their use of counter African multilingual practices ensures accessibility, allows a collective negotiation of meaning and levels power relationships between the humanitarian workers and the local communities. It contests and resists the dominant English-based institutionalised discourse through a compromise to "mix" the languages in their repertoires.

[2] Kiswahili is a widespread lingua franca in East Africa and it is official in countries like Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Congo and Uganda. In colonial Tanzania it was used for lower levels of administration and education, which paved the way for its official status post-independence (Pawliková-Vihanová, 1996). In 2010, Kenya adopted Swahili as the language of administration and primary education in addition to English. In 2017, the East African Community and Rwanda adopted Kiswahili as one of their official languages. In Uganda, English was the only official language since independence (1962) and it adopted Kiswahili as an official language in 2022.

<b> Key Issue 2: Language Mediation for Communication with Communities

As a consequence of the unequal relations in the humanitarian chain, donors and Northern agency headquarters favour written translation in colonial languages such as English, French and Spanish by paid translation teams whereas professional translation and interpreting into local languages is largely absent in actual project implementation (see section 3). Although local organisations cite languages as important at each project stage, translation and interpreting needs were given little consideration throughout the project cycle and were only an "afterthought" (Footitt et al 2020). As a result, the latter *invisibilised* language services were not allocated a budget and they were considered to be an administrative cost, more liable to funding cuts and restrictions, and their contribution to the project implementation was not monitored and evaluated (ibid). In the general absence of financial resources for translation, *ad-hoc* linguistic and cultural mediation with beneficiaries is often left to humanitarian actors (Delgado Luchner, 2018) who act as *figures of interpretation*, namely, "people who interpret" in hierarchical structures and for different motivations (Meier-Lorente-Muth-Duchêne, 2021: 5-6).

These figures take on translation and interpreting as an additional activity and range from (i) humanitarian workers, including bilingual staff who might have been trained in or recruited for their language competences (see e.g. Peru case study below, Frings-Hessami and Oliver, 2022; Roth, 2019), (ii) beneficiaries who provide their services as "incentive workers", such as UNHCR interpreters who are refugees themselves (Delgado-Luchner and Kherbiche, 2018), and (iii) volunteers from the local community who should translate the local partner's vision into global development English, often with donor-specific terminology (Footitt et al., 2020:188). If the local organisations cannot find or afford a translator, they use Google Translate (Footitt et al., 2018: 20). For example, a Peru case study (Footitt et al., 2020) showed that there is a major need for Quechua and Aymara, as well as a very localised form of Spanish, for communication with beneficiaries in the Andes and Amazon regions. Although the Southern organisation's internal communication was in Spanish, it was essential to hire, or to train, field personnel fluent in Quechua for projects in rural areas and among migrants in cities. The interviewed humanitarian workers highlighted the importance of forming alliances with the community and identifying suitable community mediators (such as teachers in bilingual schools).

These figures of interpretation are, according to Delgado-Luchner and Kherbiche (2018: 421), "'humanitarian actors who happen to interpret' rather than 'interpreters who happen to work in the humanitarian field'". Non-professional interpreting is the norm due to the lack of trained translators in local languages, even for expat "interpreter" positions at the ICRC, and the urgency of informal recruitment when a crisis unfolds (Delgado-Luchner and Kherbiche, 2018). Their role as interpreters is secondary and they primarily identify with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality and the NA, which can become a place of residence and work with mobility restrictions (Delgado-Luchner and Kherbiche, 2018). This type of work entails in-betweenness as cultural mediators in a sensitive and confidential context of armed conflict. They help NA reach the grassroots level thanks to their language skills and they are typically embedded in both the local context and the international humanitarian industry (Footitt et al, 2020: 101). Banda and Oketch (2009) refer to them as "cultural brokers" between humanitarian and institutional discourses in English and a hybrid, multilingual discourse understood by local beneficiaries. Rather than colonisation of local discourse, these authors documented the transformation of institutionalised discourses to fit in with local discourse practices in multiple languages. They claim that this hybrid discourse is socially transformative because it broadens participation and inclusivity as well as minimising power relations based on the knowledge of institutional language.

Marais and Delgado-Luchner (2018) claim that the Western conference interpreting model based on the substitution of one language with another does not work in multilingual contexts like Kenya where it is imported and translator training disregards African languages such as Dholuo or Kilamba in spite of their importance in public service and dialogue (see also Banda and Oketch, 2009). These *ad-hoc* translation solutions present several problems at an institutional level, including

(i) waste of financial and staffing resources, as linguistic mediation puts a burden on bilingual staff who should be doing other tasks (Footitt et al., 2020: 88) and duplicates efforts (Tesseur, 2021: 272),

(ii) low quality of translation, as proofreading is not required and the use of terminology (e.g. international human rights) might not be consistent (Tesseur, 2021)

(iii) ethical issues relating to the exploitation of volunteers, notably in agencies such as "Translators Without Borders" (see Piróth and Baker, 2020), and "incentive workers", who are refugees with limited opportunities to earn a wage on the labour market (Delgado-Luchner & Kherbiche, 2018) as well as the precarity of language intermediaries working for short-term projects for various military and humanitarian agencies (Baker, 2014).

<b> Key Issue 3: Unequal Linguistic Requirements and Expectations for Expatriate and Resident Staff

Most NA such as Oxfam, Doctors Without Borders or the ICRC still deploy a commitment to direct institutional representation by "outsiders who exert control" over the majority of multilingual, trained national employees (Redfield, 2012) through the use of dominant European languages (Footitt et al., 2018; Roth, 2019). At the ICRC, Norlin (2016) documented that employment category (i.e. resident vs. mobile) was a more central diversity issue than gender (p.46). Inspired by Henri Dunant (founder of the ICRC) and the MSF pioneers, the imagined face and voice of humanitarianism remains that of the White, male adventurer moved by the suffering of racialised others in far-away lands (Fassin, 2012). As a result, there is a micropolitics of mobility that constructs and legitimises the different staff categories within NA, mainly, mobile / international vs. resident / national (see Garrido, 2017; Roth, 2019). Although expatriate or international humanitarian workers are the minority in NA, the "phantom" of this idealised humanitarian figure shapes the expectations of interlocutors. Redfield (2012) exemplifies this with his fieldwork experience. When accompanying a local Ugandan MSF team leader to visit local communities, he was assumed to be the person in charge as a White man. This national employee found the knowledge of local languages and cultural practices to be a "mixed blessing" (Redfield, 2012: 364) to garner respect as a project leader compared to an outsider. Like other Ugandans in positions of professional responsibility, she tried to "look" the part, in smart clothing, and she spoke in an authoritative way and often in English, the national language of education (p.365).

Banda (2020) interrogates what and who the humanitarian workers represent from the perspective of local communities in a specific development project in Kenya. He observes that "they drive expensive cars, wear expensive clothes, and use English, which they use to mark their [higher socioeconomic] class" (p.9) as part of the "global middle class" and carriers of the international NGO's ideology. As we saw in section 3.2., national employees (and often beneficiaries) are generally more multilingual than expatriate staff and act as figures of interpretation for expats into local and regional languages that have less institutional value in NA (see also Roth, 2019). Nonetheless, the narrow institutional definition of multilingualism as a core set of colonial languages reifies the figure of the expatriate as "global middle class" as their linguistic repertoire affords them greater geographical and social mobility than those of other humanitarian actors. For these expats, the lack of competences in local languages is not problematised while English is expected. According to Roth (2019),

> "aid workers from the Global North are not to the same extent expected to learn the vernacular language of their host country and some aid workers who are native speakers of English do not speak a second language" (p.40).

Broadly speaking, senior managers are commonly expatriate staff on fixed-term assignments and are only required to speak English and other major colonial languages, notably French (see Garrido 2017 about the ICRC). Based on its language policy, the ICRC currently requires fluency in English and highly recommends French for mobile posts because they are used as linguae francae for internal communication in the vast majority of country delegations[3]. These requirements are identical to those of MSF for field staff, which require "fluency in English" while "fluency in French allows for more opportunities for placement"[4], mainly in Francophone missions in Africa (see Garrido, 2022). On the other hand, the linguistic requirements relating to European languages contributed to a Eurocentric worldview that was held to be universal and made it difficult to listen to the local communities (Footitt, 2017: 522). Despite the institutional requirements for international languages, some ICRC mobile staff decided to learn "bits and pieces" of local languages to respond to unplanned linguistic needs in the field such as lack of interpreters for confidential encounters and supervising interpreters as technical language workers (see Garrido, 2020). International experience as expatriate humanitarians correlates with a cosmopolitan orientation constructed through learning local languages other than the required linguae francae. Elsewhere, I concluded that "linguistic investment in non-strategic languages like Kurdish during humanitarian missions

[3] "Working in the field", ICRC, https://careers.icrc.org/content/Working-In-The-Field/?locale=en_GB (date accessed: 23-01-2022)

[4] "General criteria for working in the field", Doctors Without Borders, https://msf-seasia.org/14216 (date accessed: 23-01-2022)

seldom translates into economic capital but it is converted into symbolic capital indexing professional mobility and flexibility" (Garrido 2020, p.63).

Many NA valorise their expatriate employees' lack of local ties, often indexed through a lack of local language competences, and give them greater freedom of movement and access to information (Garrido, 2017). For example, only expatriate delegates and interpreters are allowed to conduct "interviews without witnesses" with prisoners as representatives of the ICRC. National staff are perceived as less neutral in the conflict than expats and too close to the interlocutors owing to their competences in local and/or regional languages and recognisable geographical varieties (see Hassemer and Garrido, 2020 for Arabic). In addition, the majority of national / resident staff are less visible than expatriates, who are the visible representatives with authorities and in the media (see Redfield, 2012: 363). As a marked exception to this general trend, the UN recognised "knowledge of the local language of the country" as an asset for international professionals at UNICEF[5]. In 2020, the ICRC designated non-European "important regional languages" such as Pashto, Kinyarwanda and Hausa as assets for mobile staff selection for the first time, at the same level as a third "working language" besides English and French (see Garrido and Sokolovska, 2022). Within the framework of localisation strategies (see section 3), some NA such as the ICRC and MSF have aimed not only to expand the diversity of international (expatriate) personnel but also to improve the working conditions of national staff (Redfield, 2012: 360). Nonetheless, it is unusual to find NA that offer skill training for national or in-country staff, including English language acquisition support for career development within the humanitarian agency and market (Footitt et al., 2018).

<a> 5. FUTURE RESEARCH ON MULTI-LINGUIALISM, SOCIAL INEQUALITY, AND HUMANITARIAN AID

Research on language and social (in)equality also needs to be decolonised from Western perspectives on research, language and humanitarian aid (see Marais and Delgado-Luchner, 2018; Tesseur, 2022). The existing research has mostly analysed data from NA, their head

[5] "Requirements for the International Professional Category", UNICEF, https://www.unicef.org/careers/sites/unicef.org.careers/files/2019-08/Detailed_requirements_for_IP_Staff.pdf (date accessed 23-01-2022)

offices and expatriate workers and has been largely conducted by Western institutions and researchers and published in English. The unfolding "localisation" agenda and social justice protests are promising avenues to see how language policy and planning expands to non-European languages and includes more voices in the future. Given that this is still a limited field of research, future studies should focus on other contact zones in the humanitarian aid chain involving partner organisations, national staff, and beneficiaries. This lens would shed light on the linguistic needs of national staff and their use of information systems (Frings-Hessami and Oliver, 2022:14) in addition to the implications of language repertoires and informal mediation for local participation in projects (Delgado-Luchner, 2018: 62). As research projects, scholars and data from the Global South take a more central position, we will be forced to rethink our concepts and dichotomies, such as translation vs. interpreting, local/national vs. international languages, among others.

Methodologically, the sensitive and confidential nature of humanitarian encounters makes access to the actual interactions between humanitarian actors difficult (see chapter 35 by Bandara et. al. on Humanitarian Research Ethics). The rare studies that analyse these interactions (Banda and Oketch, 2009; Oketch and Banda, 2008) nuance and destabilise certain assumptions about language practice and power relations between humanitarians and beneficiaries. More ethnographic observations and interactional analysis would allow us to go beyond declarative data and provide in-depth accounts of the limits and affordances of certain language varieties and practices for humanitarian aid (Garrido 2020: 76; Tesseur, 2022). These data would also open a window onto the ways in which language matters in different types of humanitarian intervention, notably emergency aid vs. development cooperation. As researchers, participant observation opens up the possibility to engage in research on, with and for the participants in a social justice agenda (Cameron et al., 1992). This enterprise calls for an interdisciplinary approach (Carbonnier, 2015: 6) that examines and questions taken-for-granted categories such as "English" or "expatriate".

In Piller's words, "it is only by contemplating how injustice might be overcome that the abstract concept of justice acquires content" (2016:274). However, the language-related issues in this chapter are part of the broader power dynamics in the humanitarian aid chain. Although sociolinguistic interventions are an important terrain for redressing social inequality (see Tesseur, 2022 for proposals), their actual impact in reducing social injustice is necessarily curtailed because racial, gender and class inequalities largely surpass language

(Bucholtz et al., 2014:351). Therefore, addressing language issues is a necessary but insufficient step towards eliminating colonial structures and inequalities in the humanitarian aid industry.

<a> REFERENCES

Baker, C. (2014). The local workforce of international intervention in the Yugoslav successor states: ‘precariat’ or ‘projectariat’? Towards an agenda for future research. *International Peacekeeping,* 2(1), 91–106.

Banda, F. (2020). Sociolinguistics and modes of social class signalling: African perspectives. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 24(3), 3-15.

Banda, F. & Oketch, O. (2009). ‘What can we say when the English used has gone so high-tech?’: Institutionalised discourse and interaction in development projects in a rural community in Kenya, *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 4(2), 165-181.

Bourdieu, P. (1982). *Ce que parler veut dire : L’économie des échanges linguistiques*. Paris: Fayard.

Carbonnier, G. (2015). *Humanitarian economics: War, disaster and the global aid market.* London: Hurst.

Combeaud Bonallack, P. (2018). Amnesty International Language Resource Centre: Overview of current context and vision for the future. *Translation Spaces*, 7(1), 92–105.

Combeaud Bonallack, P.; Bagnulo, P and Liaño, J. (2014). Amnesty International Language Resource Centre as a Source of Opportunities for Research on Translation and Interpretation. Article presented at the 2014 Translation Research for Industry and Governance Conference.

Crack, A.M. (2019) Language, NGOs and inclusion: the donor perspective. *Development in Practice*, 29(2), 159-169.

Currion, P. (2020, 13 July). Decolonising aid, again. *The New Humanitarian*, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2020/07/13/decolonisation-aid-humanitarian-development-racism-black-lives-matter [date accessed: 23-01-2022]

Delgado Luchner, C. (2018). Contact zones of the aid chain: The multilingual practices of two Swiss development NGOs. *Translation Spaces,* 7(1), 44–64.

Delgado Luchner, C. and Kherbiche, L. (2018). Without fear or favor? The positionality of ICRC and UNHCR interpreters in the humanitarian field. *Target*, 30(3), 408-429.

Fassin, D. (2012). *Humanitarian reason: A moral history of the present*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Footitt, H. (2017). International aid and development: Hearing multilingualism, learning from intercultural encounters in the history of Oxfam GB. *Language and Intercultural Communication,* 17(4), 518–33.

Footitt, H. A., Crack, A. M., & Tesseur, W. (2018). Respecting communities in international development: Languages and cultural understanding. University of Portsmouth and University of Reading.
www. readi ng. ac. uk/ web/ files/ modern- langu ages- and- europ ean- studi es/ Liste ning_ zones_ repor t_-
EN. pdf Accessed 3rd December 2020

Footitt, H. A., Crack, A. M., & Tesseur, W. (2020). *Development NGOs and languages: Listening, power and inclusion.* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fraser, N. (2005). Reforming justice in a globalizing world. *New Left Review*, 36, 69-88.

Frings-Hessami, V. and Oliver, G. (2022). Clashes of cultures in an international aid organization: Information cultures, languages and the use of information systems. *Journal of International Development*, 34(7)1414-1429

Foucault, M. (1969). *The archeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. New York: Pantheon books.

Garrido, M.R. (2022). The evolution of language ideological debates about English and French in a multilingual humanitarian organisation. *Language Policy*, 21, 47-73.

Garrido, M.R. (2020). Language investment in the trajectories of mobile, multilingual humanitarian workers. In M.R. Garrido and M. Sabaté-Dalmau (Eds.), Transnational trajectories of multilingual workers: Sociolinguistic approaches to emergent entrepreneurial selves. Special Issue of *International Journal of Multilingualism,* 17 (1), 62-79.

Garrido, M.R. (2017). Multilingualism and cosmopolitanism in the construction of a humanitarian elite. *Social Semiotics*, 27(3), 359–69.

Garrido, M.R. and Sokolovska, Z. (2022). Regard historique sur les régimes multilingues de deux organisations internationales : le Conseil de l'Europe et le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge. In R. Haus, C. Robert, S. Vicari and C. Gaboriaux (Eds.), Le multilinguisme dans les organisations internationales. Special Issue of *Mots. Les langages du politique,* 128, 27-44.

Hassemer, J. and Garrido, M.R. (2020). Language as a resource with fluctuating values: Arabic speakers in humanitarian and social work. In K. Kraft and M. Flubacher (Eds.), The promise of language: Betwixt empowerment and the reproduction of inequality. Special Issue of *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 264, 131–161.

Heller, M. (2007). Bilingualism as ideology and practice. In M. Heller (ed.) (2007) *Bilingualism: A Social Approach* (pp.1-22). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Heller, M. (2011). *Paths to Post-Nationalism. A critical ethnography of language and identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marais, K. and Delgado-Luchner, C. (2018). Motivating the translation-development nexus: Exploring cases from the African continent. *The Translator*, 24(4), 380-194.

Meier-Lorente-Muth-Duchêne, B.A.S.S. (Eds.) (2021). *Figures of interpretation*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Norlin, A. (2016). Gender equality and diversity at the International Committee of the Red Cross. Lausanne: University of Lausanne: Unpublished MA Thesis.

Pawliková-Vilhanová, V. (1996). Swahili and the dilemma of Ugandan language policy. *Asian and African Studies*, 2, 158-170.

Piller, N. (2016). *Linguistic diversity and social justice*. Oxford University Press.

Piróth, A. and Baker, M. (2020). The Ethics of Volunteerism in Translation: Translators without Borders and the Platform Economy. *Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Translation Studies*, 5(3), 1-30.

Oketch, O. & Banda, F. (2008). Multilingual discourse practices in community development in Nyanza Province, Kenya. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 26(1), 1–11.

Redfield, P. (2012). The unbearable lightness of expats: Double binds of humanitarian mobility. *Cultural Anthropology* ,27 (2), 358–382.

Roth, S. (2019). Linguistic capital and inequality in aid relations. *Sociological Research Online*, 24(1), 38–54.

Taylor-Leech, K. & Benson, C. (2017). Language planning and development aid: the (in)visibility of language in development aid discourse. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 18(4), 339-355.

Tesseur, W. (2022). *Translation as social: Translation policies and practices in non-governmental organisations*. London: Routledge.

Tesseur, W. (2021). Translation as inclusion? An analysis of international NGOs' translation policy documents. *Language Problems and Language Planning,* 45(3), 261–283.

Tesseur, W. (2014). Institutional Multilingualism in NGOs: Amnesty International's Strategic Understanding of Multilingualism. *Meta: Journal des Traducteurs*, 59(3), 557–77.