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Contact Zones of the Aid Chain: The Multilingual Practices of Two Swiss Development NGOs

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Abstract

Switzerland is a multilingual country with four official languages. As such, NGOs and other organizations based in Switzerland tend to have a comparatively high awareness of multilingualism. Based on in-depth interviews with representatives of two Swiss development NGOs, Caritas Switzerland and the *Fédération genevoise de coopération*, this paper aims to explore how Swiss development NGOs work multilingually at home and abroad.

By zooming in on the language practices that are used in the different contact zones along the aid chain we aim to provide a more nuanced picture of multilingualism in development projects. The two case studies show that professional translation is merely one of several strategies used to overcome language barriers in the aid chain. Others include *ad hoc* language mediation practices, reliance on bilingual staff and the use of a *lingua franca*.

Keywords: aid Chain, NGOs, non-professional interpreting and translation (NPIT), development brokerage, English as a *lingua franca* (ELF)

Ditosa is 12 years old. She lives in Mozambique and is a beneficiary of Caritas Australia's Project Compassion 2013. From the organization's website we learn that Ditosa enjoys coming to the NGO-funded children's centre in her village: "I like coming to the Centre because it helps me. I come to study and I get

something I don't get at school.”¹. Although Ditosa does not speak English, we read her in this language, no trace is left of her original words. In the accompanying video, an English voice-over replaces the original audio track. It is not possible to distinguish whether Ditosa made her statement in Portuguese, the official language of her country of origin, or one of many local languages spoken in Mozambique. Yet the voice-over reminds us that development projects are nearly always multilingual, and that the ‘beneficiary stories’ we read or hear have undergone several steps of translation, adaptation and transformation.

Development projects can be conceptualized as an “encounter” between the global and the local (Owen and Westoby 2012; Lewis and Mosse 2006b), a phenomenon of “interaction” between two value systems and cultures (Marais 2013). Participatory approaches to development (Mansuri and Rao 2013; Anderson et al. 2012; Mikkelsen 2005) place particular emphasis on the dialogical nature of these encounters. This idea of a dialogue, however, rests on the assumption that there is a possibility of two-way communication between two very different sets of actors: development workers and the local population. Despite the prevalence of “participation” and related development euphemisms such as “empowerment” or “partnership” in current development discourse (Moretti and Pestre 2015; Lewis and Mosse 2006b; Alber 2002), quite little is known about the emergent “developmental space” that is created through dialogue (Owen and Westoby 2012), and the communication practices that characterize this space.

In this paper, I aim to explore this developmental space as composed of several multilingual contact zones (Footitt 2017; Pratt 1991). By analysing the multiple language mediation practices that characterize the different contact zones of the aid chain (Cotts Watkins et al. 2012; Bebbington 2005) I wish to contribute to our understanding of development brokerage (Blundo 1995; Bierschenk et al. 2000; Lewis and Mosse 2006a) as a practice involving language mediation. Based on two case studies of development NGOs based in Switzerland, this paper illustrates the multiplicity of professional, semi-professional and non-

1 cf. <http://www.caritas.org.au/learn/programs/africa---mozambique-rural-icd-program/ditosas-story>, last accessed on February 24, 2018.

professional language mediation practices that exist within the aid chain and explores some of the factors that shape decisions around language use in the different contact zones. My analysis suggests that actors manage multilingualism differently at different stages of the aid chain, and that professional translation and interpreting practices co-exist with other strategies, such as using a *lingua franca*, or relying on bilingual staff as *ad hoc* language intermediaries.

Aid Chains and Development Brokerage

Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)² based in the donor countries of development cooperation funding, which we henceforth refer to as the 'Global North', generally work within an “aid chain” (Cotts Watkins et al. 2012; Bebbington 2005). Although the precise structure of this chain varies for each project and organization, it generally involves at least four core actors: the donor, an NGO in the Global North (“Northern NGO” or NNGO (Lewis 2010)), an NGO, grassroots organization, or an individual community leader in the Global South ('local partner') and the intended beneficiaries of the project (Figure 1). In addition to donors, most NNGOs also communicate with the general public in their own country or region, since they also rely on donations from individuals for their work. As such, the first node in the chain can be referred to as 'donors/general public'. The local partner of the NNGO is sometimes referred to as “Southern NGO” or SNGO in the literature (Lewis 2010), however, we prefer the term 'local partner', as this is the term used by our research participants and it also reflects the fact that the local partner can be a non-NGO civil society actor (churches, grassroots organizations, individual brokers). An SNGO is therefore one possible type of local partner in our aid chain.

The aid chain has been conceptualized as a 'brokerage' chain with several individuals or institutions acting as intermediaries (Bierschenk et al. 2000; Lewis and Mosse 2006a; Neubert 1996). Although the term 'broker' is generally used to refer to an NNGO's local partner in the Global South, the NNGO itself

² For a discussion of the term and its different definitions cf. Lewis (2010).

can also be viewed as acting as a broker (or facilitator) for its donors, who would not be able to reach the beneficiaries directly. The presence of multiple intermediaries (NNGO, local partner) creates mutual dependencies because of the principal-agent problem it poses: 'upstream' actors (donors/general public and NNGOs) “depend on intermediaries to implement programs, and they rely on these same agents for information about the success of the programs” (Cotts Watkins et al. 2012, 288). Since the term 'agent' is used in the development brokerage literature to refer to entities that act *on behalf of* someone else, we use the term 'actor' in this paper to refer to the more general notion of any individual and institution with agency.

Existing studies of development brokerage highlight the ability of brokers to use development interventions in order to pursue their personal interests (Blundo 1995), and 'translate' local needs into interventions (Neubert 1996).

Development agents can be mediators (Bierschenk et al. 2000), but also gatekeepers (Droz et al. 2010), or conscious manipulators of information and people (Boissevain 1974, 148 in Bierschenk et al. 2000, 20). In addition, brokers might also be tasked with convincing communities that a development intervention is relevant, and encouraging them to participate (Segers et al. 2008). Linguistic competence, including a mastery of development discourse (Escobar 1994) and associated 'buzzwords' (Moretti and Pestre 2015; Cornwall and Eade 2010; Alber 2002), is an important part of the broker's repertoire of skills.

The aid chain is therefore a multilingual communication chain (Figure 1), and the spaces between its different nodes are (potentially) multilingual “contact zones” (Footitt 2017; Pratt 1991). For the purpose of our analysis below, we conceptualize the general aid chain described above (donors/general public, NNGO, local partner, and project beneficiaries) as comprising four main contact zones: the interface between donors and the NNGO (contact zone I); between the NNGO and a local partner (contact zone II); between the local partner and project beneficiaries (contact zone III); and, from the perspective of the NNGO, which is the unit of analysis in our study, between the NNGO and beneficiaries (contact zone IV). Each of these contact zones is potentially a multilingual space where we might encounter translation and interpreting practices.

INSERT FIG 1 ABOUT HERE

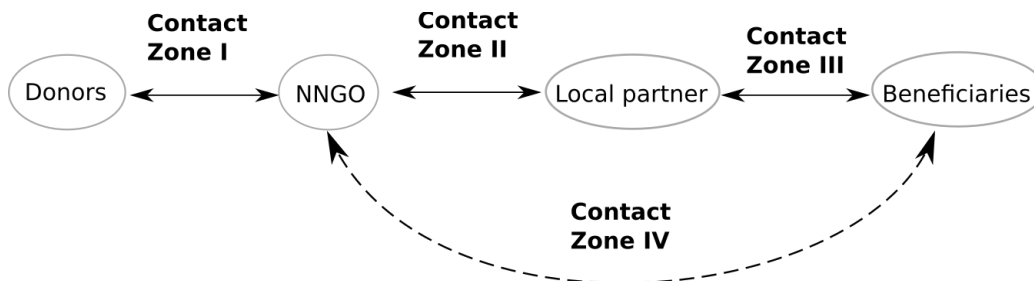


Figure 1: The generic aid chain and its contact zones

Language Mediation in NGOs

By linking participatory development approaches, which aim to empower beneficiaries, to the existing literature on language mediation in NGOs, we can analyse translation and interpreting practices in the aid chain as potentially instrumental for participation. Indeed, language mediation practices are essential in order to make development interactions less “extractive and monolingual” (Footitt 2017, 524).

The small yet growing body of literature about the professional and non-professional language mediation practices of NGOs has so far concentrated mainly on written translation (Tesseur 2017, 2014; Schäffner et al. 2014), which tends to be prevalent in contact zone I and, to a lesser extent, II. Indeed, some larger INGOs, such as Amnesty International for instance, have developed official language policies (Tesseur 2014, 565) to interact with donors and the general public, and organize communication between different country offices of the INGO. A particularity of NGOs is that their language practices are sometimes asymmetrical: the same organization might rely on professional and paid translators for one language combination, while involving volunteer translators for another language combination (Tesseur 2017, 2014). This suggests that NGOs approach translation in a pragmatic and flexible manner which evolves in accordance with the organization’s needs.

Even in the absence of clearly structured translation policies or practices, traces of multilingualism remain visible in the written texts produced by NGOs.

Development terminology in different languages can 'travel' from regional offices to NGO headquarters (contact zone II): Oxfam GB, for instance, included Spanish and Portuguese terms with explanations in English in its reports and internal documents to reflect the “alternative language of development spoken in Latin America and Brazil from the 1970s onwards” (Footitt, 2017, 527).

NGOs also use several languages to communicate orally, in particular during interactions between aid workers and aid beneficiaries (contact zone III). Existing studies of such oral communication practices focus mainly on interpreting in humanitarian organizations (Delgado Luchner and Kherbiche [*In submission a*], [*In submission b*]; Moser-Mercer et al. 2013). Although the humanitarian organizations analysed in these studies, namely the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are not NGOs, they operate within a similar aid chain comprising donors/the general public, headquarters in the Global North, local offices in the Global South and beneficiaries. As such, existing studies of humanitarian interpreting provide a useful starting point for a better understanding of interpreting practices of development NGOs. In particular, they shed light on the *ad hoc* and informal nature of interpreting found at this level of the aid chain: humanitarian organizations often rely on untrained bilinguals for language mediation (Moser-Mercer et al. 2013), they might specifically recruit expatriate staff interpreters (ICRC) or rely on incentive workers who are themselves part of the group of beneficiaries (UNHCR) (Delgado Luchner and Kherbiche [*In submission a*]), and whose understanding of their role as interpreters is closely linked to their view of their organizations' mandate (Delgado Luchner and Kherbiche [*In submission b*]). The existing literature thus suggests that there exist very different translation and interpreting practices within the aid chain, ranging from professional and institutionalized translation practices to non-professional and *ad hoc* interpreting practices. Furthermore, the aid chain involves 'upstream' and 'downstream' communication. These terms originate with the supply chain, which the aid chain concept is derived from. In studying communication flows in the informal economy in South Africa, Marais (2014) observed that traders

tend to communicate in English with suppliers ('upstream') and use several local and regional languages to communicate with customers ('downstream'). Since the NNGO is the point of departure in our analysis, we refer to communication between the NNGO and its donors or the general public in the Global North as 'upstream', and communication with its partner in the Global South and the beneficiaries of a development project as 'downstream'.

Bringing together the aid chain and language brokerage concepts allows us to gain an overview of the multiple multilingual practices that exist in a development project and the different steps involved in relaying stories like Ditosa's to an audience in the Global North. We shall illustrate how all of these practices come together in a development project, using two case studies to map the aid chain as a multilingual communication chain.

Case Studies

The two organizations described below are NGOs based in different parts of Switzerland: Caritas Switzerland (Caritas CH) has its headquarters in Lucerne, while the *Fédération genevoise de coopération* (FGC) is based in Geneva. Switzerland is a multilingual country, with a hierarchical language policy. At the national level German, French, Italian and Rumantsch have official status, while at the cantonal level only the national language(s) spoken locally can be used to interact with public institutions (German in Lucerne, French in Geneva). As such, Geneva and Lucerne are both officially monolingual cities within a multilingual country.

The two organizations were chosen because they reflect two modes of NGO organization that are to some extent 'typical' for the two major language regions of Switzerland. The structure of the FGC as a federation of smaller and mainly volunteer-based organizations is prevalent in the 'Latin' cantons of Switzerland: similar federations exist in Fribourg, Jura, Ticino, Valais and Vaud. However, such structures do not exist in the German-speaking cantons, where many larger and older Swiss NGOs, such as Caritas (Lucerne), Helvetas (Zurich), HEKS (Zurich), Swissaid (Bern) or Swisscontact (Zurich) have their headquarters. NGOs in the German speaking part of Switzerland tend to have a national reach

and to cooperate on specific topics through common platforms³ but they have not created federations at the cantonal or intercantonal level (Fino 2004, 99).

Caritas Switzerland

Caritas CH is a catholic organization that was founded in 1901, shortly after the first Caritas organization was established in Germany in 1897. The *Caritas Internationalis* network, which was subsequently created in 1951, today includes over 160 members worldwide⁴.

Caritas CH works nationally and internationally. The organization's development aid activities are coordinated from its headquarters in Lucerne. Caritas CH has country offices in several countries, for example in Kenya and Ethiopia. These country offices are part of Caritas CH and employ local and expatriate staff. Although they often engage in partnerships with the local member of the *Caritas Internationalis* network (e.g. Caritas Kenya), the country offices of Caritas CH are institutionally separate from these. As is the case in many other INGOs, the structure of *Caritas Internationalis* is highly complex and different members of the network with very similar names might work independently in the same location (Lewis 2010).

The "international cooperation" activities of Caritas CH, which include development and humanitarian aid projects, are funded through three main sources: contributions from third parties, such as Swiss Solidarity (*Chaîne du bonheur*) or other organizations within the *Caritas Internationalis* network (40,3%); private donations (31,7%); and public funding from municipalities, cantons and the Swiss Confederation (28,0%) (Caritas Schweiz 2017, 17).

Like other Swiss NGOs and institutions that aim to reach a national audience, Caritas CH works mainly in German and French. Only the most important publications are translated into Italian and none into Rumantsch. In addition, Caritas CH increasingly uses English to communicate with the general public, both through its website and select publications.

³ One such platform that includes Caritas Switzerland, HEKS, Helvetas and Swissaid is the "Swiss Water Partnership" (<https://www.swisswaterpartnership.ch>, accessed on February 20, 2018).

⁴ cf. <https://www.caritas.org/who-we-are/>, accessed on December 7, 2017.

Fédération genevoise de coopération

The *Fédération genevoise de coopération* (FGC) is a federation of Geneva-based NGOs that was created in 1966 and currently has around 60 members. Most of the member organizations are small volunteer-based NGOs, that are involved in development projects in the Global South and/or awareness-raising activities in Switzerland. The FGC funds its projects through contributions from private donors, federal grants from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), as well as grants from the canton of Geneva and from different municipalities within the canton (Fino 2004). Thus, although FGC member organizations are largely volunteer-based, their projects are in part funded by the same large donors that also finance the work of major professionalized NGOs such as Caritas CH.

In order to obtain funding through the FGC, individual member NGOs must submit a proposal, which is then evaluated by the 'Technical Committee' of the federation. The FGC establishes an annual financial report. Large donors, such as the SDC or the Canton of Geneva, thus have a single interlocutor instead of interacting with 60 organizations individually.

The FGC works at the cantonal level, while its member NGOs are active internationally. The FGC communicates mainly to a local audience, i.e. exclusively in French, which is the only official language in the Canton of Geneva. However, some FGC member organizations use other national languages, German in particular, for direct interactions with institutional donors or to reach a national audience through their website.

Method

The data presented below were collected as part of a larger study of brokerage and multilingualism in Swiss development NGOs funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation⁵. The data set is based on in-depth semi-structured

⁵ cf. <http://p3.snf.ch/project-171914>, accessed February 23, 2018.

interviews with individuals based in Switzerland who work or volunteer for one of the two organizations studied.

The data set includes 16 semi-structured interviews (6 for Caritas CH and 10 for the FGC), each lasting 45 minutes to 1 hour. The interview themes addressed include communication practices, the use of languages in interactions with different actors in the aid chain (donors/general public, local partners and beneficiaries, as well as other NNGOs within the *Caritas Internationalis* network in the case of Caritas CH, or other member organizations of the FGC), and the use of language intermediaries.

Participant Selection and Anonymization

The FGC is a federation of organizations rather than a single NGO. However, it was chosen as the unit of analysis for the case study in order to preserve the anonymity of research participants: given the limited size of the member organizations —the smallest run by one volunteer and the largest employing a dozen full-time staff—the names of individual member NGOs cannot be disclosed without compromising anonymity. The selection of organizations within the FGC was made to include organizations working in different regions (Africa, Latin-America and, to a lesser extent, Asia), on different development topics (water and sanitation, education, agriculture, health care), and with different transversal themes (cultural rights, food safety, gender equality, economic empowerment) in order to achieve some degree of representativity for the FGC as a whole.

Participation was entirely voluntary. Participants from Caritas CH were chosen in collaboration with a member of the communications team, who suggested interlocutors working either in external communication or responsible for the coordination of Caritas CH's development cooperation programs, and then forwarded general information about the project to these individuals. Potential participants from FGC member organizations were initially contacted via e-mail and received a general information sheet about the project that was supplemented with a short video message. The information sheet and the video message were sent to participants in the official language of their organization

(French in the case of the FGC, German and French in the case of Caritas CH). All participants who expressed an interest in participating after receiving the information document took part in an individual interview in French or German depending on participants' preferences.

Results

As initially hypothesized, multilingualism is managed differently in different contact zones of the aid chain, and the interviews with staff from both organizations under study reveal a complex picture. Language diversity tends to increase as one moves 'downstream', which is similar to what Marais (2014) found for language practices in supply chains of the informal economy. While there are differences between the two organizations, in particular as far as contact zones I and II are concerned, there are also important similarities, especially for contact zones III and IV.

Below we provide an overview of the languages used in each of the contact zones (cf. Figure 2 and Figure 3)⁶. Quotes from the interviews further illustrate the different communication practices in contact zones I to IV from the perspective of research participants.

Caritas CH

The aid chain of Caritas CH is composed of four highly multilingual contact zones (Figure 2). Professional translation and interpreting practices are prominent only in a small part of contact zone I, communication with donors and the general public in Switzerland, while non-professional translation and interpreting practices are prevalent in interactions between Caritas CH and project beneficiaries (contact zone IV). In the remaining parts of the aid chain, the organization uses other communication strategies, namely English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF) or leveraging the language skills of NGO staff based in Switzerland or in the Global South.

⁶ The most common languages are abbreviated in Figures 2 and 3 using ISO 639-1 Code: DE (German), EN (English), ES (Spanish), FR (French), IT (Italian), PT (Portuguese), and RU (Russian).

 INSERT FIG 2 ABOUT HERE

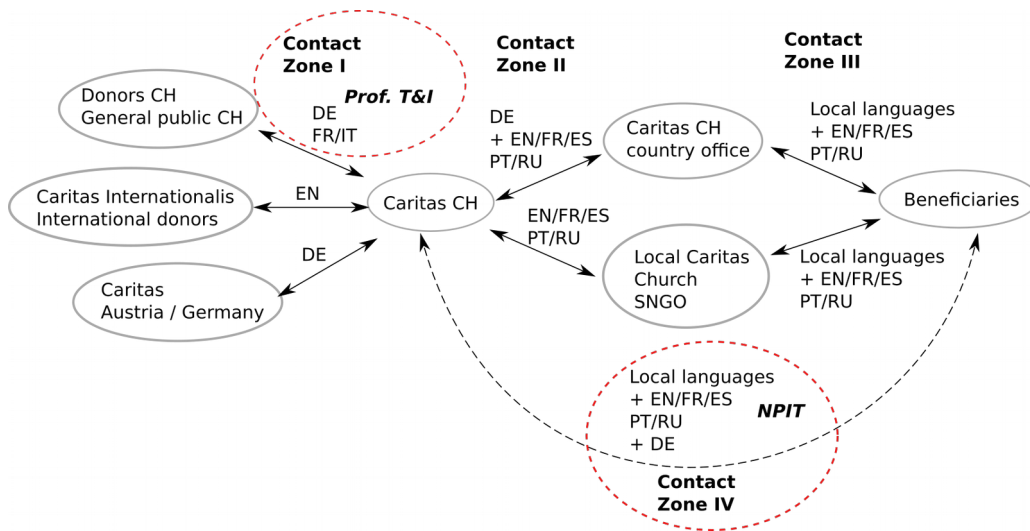


Figure 2: The multilingual aid chain of Caritas CH

Although German tends to dominate in Caritas CH's interactions with donors and the general public, the organization aims to include all national languages in its upstream communication, in particular for written publications. The communications team includes one professional translator working from German into French, while additional freelance translators are recruited for any combination involving German, English, French, or Italian when the need arises (*CaritasInt6*). For major public events, such as the yearly award ceremony of the *Prix Caritas*⁷, conference interpreters are recruited to work between French and German. In the 2017 ceremony, a Spanish-German interpreter was recruited for the Colombian laureates, and the content of the ceremony (speeches, video material, and visuals) was thus available in German, French and Spanish. These language mediation practices in contact zone I (translation of reports and communication materials, interpretation at public events) were the only professional translation and interpreting practices we observed in the Caritas CH aid chain.

7 cf. <https://www.caritas.ch/en/what-we-say/events/prix-caritas.html>, accessed December 15, 2017.

The use of ELF is another prominent strategy in Caritas CH's communication with institutional donors in Switzerland, specifically with the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC):

[Alle] Organisationen haben zu Beginn der Legislatur, wenn sie wieder Mittel [von der DEZA] wollen, ein solchen Grundlagenbericht, was sie tun möchten in den nächsten vier Jahren, zu erarbeiten. Als ich ihnen gesagt habe: „Wir schicken euch diesen Bericht, ihr bekommt ihn auf Englisch, aber auch Deutsch und Französisch,“ dann haben die bereits gesagt: „Da seid ihr in der Zwischenzeit die einzigen.“ Sonst wird es nur Englisch, praktisch nur noch Englisch angeliefert.
(CaritasInt2)

In order to get funding from the SDC, all organizations have to submit a general report at the beginning of each legislative term, explaining what they want to do during the next four years. When I told [the SDC]: “We’re sending you this report, and you will receive it in English, and also in German and French”, they replied: “You are the only ones left [that do this]”. Nowadays, these reports are basically only submitted in English.
(Author’s translation)

In the case of Caritas CH, an additional contact zone that was not hypothesized as part of the basic aid chain structure emerges from the interviews, namely communication with specific members of the *Caritas Internationalis* network. It is interesting to note that Caritas CH collaborates more closely with its German and Austrian counterparts than with other members of the network. The three NGOs pool resources for communication purposes and organize joint field visits, which is possible precisely because they share a common language:

Il y a eu une volonté, à un moment donné, de collaborer plus étroitement entre Caritas des pays germanophones [...] Je crois que

cette collaboration porte essentiellement sur l'organisation [...] de voyages de presse ou, tout simplement, de voyages de communicants des différentes organisations [...]. Si Caritas Autriche va dans un pays où on est engagés nous-mêmes [...] on va travailler avec le matériel de Caritas Autriche et réciproquement [...].

(CaritasInt4)

At some point there was a willingness to collaborate more closely among Caritas from German-speaking countries [...]. I believe that this collaboration mainly involves the joint organization of press trips or field visits for communication staff from the different organizations [...]. If Caritas Austria goes to a country where we are also working [...] we work with the material produced by Caritas Austria and vice-versa [...].

(Author's translation)

Although French is a co-official language in Switzerland, no similar collaboration exists with Caritas organizations in France or Belgium. This is mainly due to the fact that Caritas CH tends to produce original content in German and use French mainly as a target language for translations. This asymmetry between French and German is further reinforced by several factors linked to local circumstances in Switzerland: while many other institutions with a national reach are based in Bern, Caritas CH's headquarters are situated in the catholic canton of Lucerne. This makes it more difficult to attract French-speaking staff, who cannot commute daily from the French-speaking part of Switzerland, as would be the case in Bern (*CaritasInt 3*). According to participants, out of more than 100 staff in Lucerne, less than five are native French speakers, and most of them work within the team specifically tasked with communicating to a French-speaking audience (*Communication Romandie*). Some of these staff work remotely, while others live in Lucerne during the week and return to the French-speaking part of Switzerland on weekends (*CaritasInt3*). The physical presence of French speakers at Caritas CH in Lucerne is therefore marginal at best.

Nevertheless, Caritas CH remains aware of the importance of French: like many other NNGOs, the organization has in recent years decided to concentrate its activities in a number of priority countries (*CaritasInt5*). One participant indicated in their interview that the initial list of priority countries that was circulated internally did not include a French-speaking African country, and that this was corrected in a subsequent draft because French, as an official language of Switzerland, had to remain present in Swiss development work (*CaritasInt1*). French is also used in interactions with partner organizations in the Global South, in particular in officially 'francophone' African countries. Nevertheless, German remains an important language in this contact zone as well, since many of Caritas CH's heads of office are expatriates from Switzerland or Germany. This prominence of German in contact zone II is a specificity linked to the geographic origin of Caritas CH, however, the remaining languages that are prevalent in interactions between Caritas CH and its local partners are the large international languages that we find in most development encounters: English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, and, to a lesser extent, Russian.

In contact zone II, where development professionals from the Global North interact with their counterparts from the Global South, the mastery of these languages is largely taken for granted. Caritas CH staff are expected to be proficient in English, and, where relevant, also French and Spanish. Since English is used as a *lingua franca*, Caritas CH staff must be able to communicate orally and in writing without assistance. However, it is assumed that communication generally involves only non-native speakers of English, and that language quality is therefore secondary (*CaritasInt5*). Communication between Caritas CH and its local partners thus generally does not involve formal translation or interpretation, but the use of one or several large international languages (most commonly English, French or Spanish).

The data set analysed here only allows us to make limited inference with regards to communication and language mediation practices in contact zone III. This part of the aid chain remains to some extent a blind spot for NNGOs, and can only be explored further through interviews with staff based at local partner organizations. Caritas CH staff only witness interactions between their local partner and project beneficiaries during yearly field visits. These trips are

therefore also an opportunity to evaluate the quality of the relationship between these two groups:

Aber wenn [die Partner] neu sind, machen wir normalerweise so wie Testphasen, bis das wirklich aufgegleist wird. [...] [Und] man merkt schon, wie die Leute mit ihren Zielgruppen kommunizieren. Da merkt man schon sehr, relativ gut, wie gut das funktioniert und welches Vertrauen da ist, ja.
(CaritasInt5)

If [the local partners] are new we usually start with a test phase, before we really start working together. [...] And then you notice how they communicate with their target groups. You notice it very, fairly well, how well [communication] works and what trust there is [between them], yes.

(Author's translation)

When NNGO staff do not share a language with beneficiaries they also rely on non-linguistic cues to evaluate the quality of interactions. In this context familiarity with the local culture and customs plays an important role:

[S]i on a un minimum d'initiation et de familiarité [avec] le contexte culturel, [...] la façon dont les gens parlent. Rien que le son de leur voix au moment où il y a une surprise, au moment où il y a un certain malaise [...] ça permet de mieux comprendre.
(CaritasInt4)

If you are at least a bit familiar with the cultural context, the way people speak. Even [knowing] what their voice sounds like when they are surprised, or when a situation gets uncomfortable [...]. That allows you to have a better understanding.

(Author's translation)

Rather than perceiving language barriers purely as a disadvantage, participants from Caritas CH also viewed their inability to communicate directly with beneficiaries as aligned with a development approach that values the autonomy of the local partner (*CaritasInt5*). The language barrier, they argued, put a natural limit on their ability to interfere in the local implementation of a project. As illustrated in the development brokerage literature (Bierschenk et al. 2000; Lewis and Mosse 2006a; Neubert 1996), interactions between Caritas CH staff and beneficiaries during yearly field visits to African countries are often mediated (logistically, culturally and linguistically) by the local partner:

In afrikanischen Ländern ist es meistens so, dass die Projektmitarbeitenden übersetzen. [...] es ist nur die Mittelschicht, die dann die Sprache wirklich beherrscht, also, jetzt so ganz verallgemeinert gesagt, aber normalerweise haben die Zielgruppen von uns, das ist in eher weniger Fällen so, dass die wirklich Englisch oder Französisch sprechen.
(*CaritasInt5*)

In African countries the [local] project staff usually translate for us. [...] only the middle class really masters the language, I am generalizing, but normally our target groups would only very rarely really be able to speak English or French.
(Author's translation)

These language mediation practices in contact zone IV are largely informal. Generally, staff from the local partner organization with mastery of the language spoken by beneficiaries are called upon to translate for NGO visitors. Participants viewed the deep familiarity of local staff with the development project as an asset, rather than a potential problem. A trust relationship between the local partner and project beneficiaries is considered to be at the heart of a successful development project (*CaritasInt5*). The situation is somewhat different in Latin America, where beneficiaries are likely to speak Spanish or Portuguese, two languages that expatriate in-country staff and visitors from Caritas CH headquarters are more likely to master.

FGC

The multilingual practices in the aid chain of most of the FGC member NGOs surveyed (Figure 3) are to some extent simpler than those of Caritas CH. FGC member NGOs are smaller in size than Caritas CH and many of them rely mainly on volunteers, which places limitations on their ability to cover different languages.

 INSERT FIG 3 ABOUT HERE

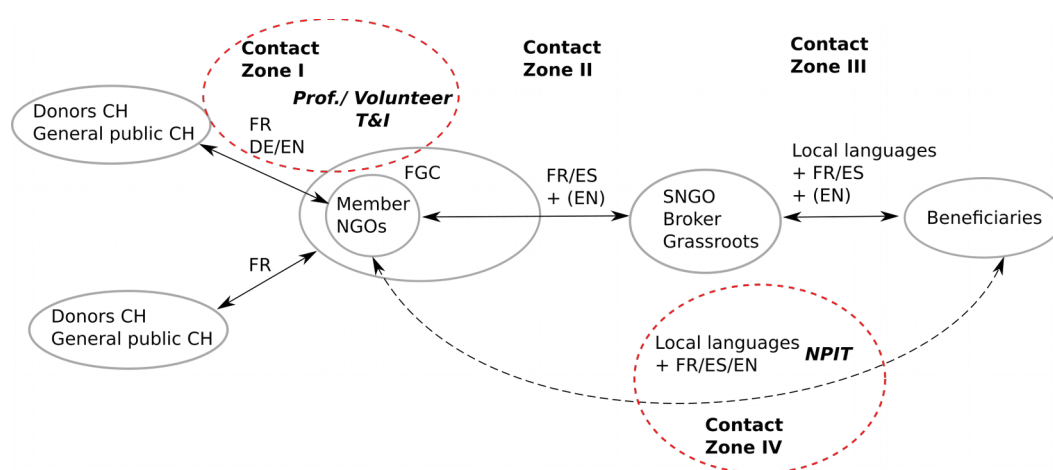


Figure 3: The multilingual aid chain of the FGC

The FGC communicates with major donors, including the SDC, exclusively in French, and ELF remains a marginal phenomenon at best. However, most FGC member organizations interact with donors and the Swiss population not only through the FGC but also directly, and many use additional national or international languages (mainly German and English) on their websites or in project proposals that are not submitted through the FGC. The language mediation practices used in this contact zone vary, and smaller NGOs in particular tend to rely on personal contacts and volunteer translators:

Alors, on est une association bénévole avec très peu de moyens dédiés à la communication, raison pour laquelle notre site a été fait

par un bénévole [...]. Et puis la traduction, elle a été faite par... je crois par sa belle-fille.

(FGCInt5)

We are a volunteer organization with very limited means available for communication, therefore our website was created by a volunteer [...]. And the translation was done by... I think his daughter-in-law.

(Author's translation)

Another, larger FGC member NGO that does not rely on volunteers for its core activities but is not large enough to employ an in-house translator, indicated that bilingual staff are called upon for minor translation tasks, while professional freelance translators are involved in the rare event where a publication is translated:

[O]n peut pas travailler dans [notre ONG] sans pouvoir traduire un peu. Enfin il faut en tout cas une ou deux ou trois personnes qui sachent... qui puissent le faire un peu pour toutes les petites choses.

(FGCInt12)

You cannot work in our NGO without having some translation skills. At least, we need one, or two or three people who know how to... who can do it a little bit for small things.

(Author's translation)

Although FGC member NGOs do not have the financial means to ensure the consistent use of professional translators in contact zone I, the quality of translations is considered important, in particular when communicating with potential donors. The NGOs therefore use strategies that approximate professional translation as far as possible.

In communicating with their partners in the Global South, the use of languages other than French encounters limitations for the small, volunteer-based NGOs

within the FGC. This aspect therefore influences the choice of countries the NGO is likely to work in. One participant indicated that it was difficult to find volunteers who were fluent in English and willing to dedicate their time mainly to communication and translation tasks (*FGCInt9*). The organization had therefore decided to discontinue their only project involving English, and focus exclusively on projects in West Africa involving French as the main language of communication.

Another participant volunteering for an FGC member NGO working exclusively in Latin America described that, because she lacked Spanish skills, her involvement was limited to administrative tasks (*FGCInt4*). Volunteers who manage projects and participate in the yearly project visits are required to have an excellent command of Spanish.

As with Caritas CH, communication between beneficiaries and local partners (contact zone III) is a blind spot for many FGC member NGOs. However, given that these NGOs tend to work in less formalized aid chains, where the local partner is sometimes an individual, or a representative of a grassroots organization, this is viewed more as a constraint than an asset. Indeed, several participants expressed concern regarding the role of the local partner and their relationship with beneficiaries:

Et ça, c'est vrai qu'au Togo, des fois on a de très beaux projets, très bien ficelés, très bien structurés, je me demande toujours si c'est la lecture du partenaire ou si ça vient de la base. Hmm... je sais pas répondre.

(*FGCInt10*)

It is true that in Togo we sometimes have very nice projects, very well conceptualized, very well structured. I always wonder whether it is the vision of the partner or whether it comes from the grassroots. Hmmm... I don't have an answer to that.

(Author's translation)

In order to evaluate interactions between local partners and beneficiaries, some FGC member NGOs rely on the language skills of their own staff or volunteers, including in more 'exotic' languages such as Swahili:

[...] il parle couramment swahili, et ça pour nous, c'était aussi une des conditions importantes [...]. Il comprend très bien [le swahili]. Et donc ça veut dire qu'on voit au-delà de juste la façade et c'est très important, je trouve, aussi dans un partenariat et ça manque à beaucoup, beaucoup d'associations [au sein de la FGC].
(FGCInt5)

He speaks Swahili fluently, and for us, that was also an important requirement [...]. He understands [Swahili] very well. So he can see beyond the façade and that is very important in a partnership I think, and it is something that many, many other [FGC member] organizations lack.
(Author's translation)

As in the case of Caritas CH, interactions in contact zone IV happen mostly during yearly field visits by NNGO staff or volunteers, who generally require language mediation from the local partner. Some research participants perceived this dependency on the local partner as a potential weakness or vulnerability, however this reflection often resulted from reading a summary of our research project, as they had not previously thought about the potential risks of involving local partners as language mediators:

[Je] réalise ça parce que j'ai vu votre questionnaire, que... quand tout se passe bien, ça pose pas de problème. Mais... je me demande, si un jour il y a un problème entre notre partenaire et les populations locales, nous on est complètement dépourvus.
(FGCInt10)

I realise that, because I saw your questions, that... when everything is going well, that isn't an issue. But... I wonder, if one day there is a

problem between our partner and the local populations, then we will be completely helpless.

(Author's translation)

In general, however, participants considered that relying on the local partner as a cultural and linguistic broker was an asset for their projects, as it allowed them to align their work more closely with local needs. Interestingly, one participant indicated that they expected their local partner to make their messages culturally appropriate through translation:

Mais je pense que c'est, au début c'était sûrement pas mal, parce que ça évite peut-être des heurts [...] nous on est souvent, on a une culture ou on est très direct, et eux ils prennent beaucoup plus les formes, ils arrondissent. Et donc la traduction permet ce type de choses.

(FGCInt1)

But I think that it is, at least in the beginning it was certainly not bad, because it can avoid clashes [...] we are often, we come from a culture where we are very direct, and they communicate in a much more toned-down way, they soften [the message]. And translation allows for this kind of thing.

(Author's translation)

Discussion

Caritas CH and the FGC use a variety of strategies to overcome language barriers in their aid chains. The geographic location, reach and size of each NGO seems to influence translation and interpreting practices in their contact zone with donors and the general public in Switzerland. Nevertheless, despite these differences, communication practices in other contact zones of the aid chain are strikingly similar: both organizations rely on local partners as linguistic and cultural brokers in encounters with beneficiaries in Africa and view this practice as largely unproblematic.

The interviews with Caritas CH and the FGC reveal that some NNGOs even consider their lack of mastery of the local languages spoken by beneficiaries as an asset. They view this limitation as conducive to strengthening the independence of the Southern partner NGO and ultimately beneficiaries themselves. In this constellation, the Southern partner NGO emerges as a crucial link in the aid chain, key to enabling or preventing beneficiary participation, namely through linguistic and cultural brokerage.

While the aid chain has so far been studied mainly in terms of funding and financial flows—which are largely uni-directional from donor to beneficiary—communication along the aid chain is bi-directional. Studying the aid chain from a language perspective allows us to shed light on the complexity of dependencies between actors, and highlight the agency and influence of actors in the Global South, whose language competence is one of the keys to successful project implementation. Indeed, both case studies illustrate that the NNGO is in many cases entirely dependent on their local partner for communication with project beneficiaries.

In both case studies language also emerges as one of the factors influencing NGO structure and operational decision-making: Caritas CH's close collaboration with its counterparts in Austria and Germany can be explained largely by a shared language, while the decision of FGC member NGOs to work mainly in countries where French or Spanish is spoken relates directly to the language skills of their own volunteers. Furthermore, the decision to include a 'francophone' African country in the list of priority countries for Caritas CH was presented to us as linked to the status of French as the second official language of Switzerland. Indeed, we could argue that not including French could have had a negative impact on the image of Caritas CH in the francophone parts of Switzerland or with federal institutions. This illustrates how language can shape the structure of development partnerships and influence where an NNGO decides to work.

These decisions have wide-ranging consequences for potential aid recipients and professionals working in the sector. Yet although language emerges as a factor to reckon with in the aid chain, the costs associated with overcoming

language barriers are, to our knowledge, almost never explicitly included in project funding applications.

While the two NGOs analysed here are aware of the need for accurate and reliable translation in interactions with donors and the general public, they are also convinced that professional translation and interpreting are not viable strategies in interactions with local partners or project beneficiaries. This belief is not only, nor even primarily, motivated by financial limitations but by the nature of relationships in the aid chain: trust between the NNGO and their local partner, as well as between the local partner and project beneficiaries is at the heart of development projects. Actors thus assume that the local partner is better positioned to mediate between NNGO visitors and project beneficiaries than an external interpreter who would not benefit from the same amount of trust. As in other non-professional translation and interpreting settings, such as interactions with police (Molefe and Marais 2013) or encounters between humanitarian aid workers and beneficiaries (Delgado Luchner and Kherbiche In submission a, In submission b), concerns regarding social capital and trust seem to take precedence over concerns of accuracy and neutrality. Indeed, participants viewed the quality of the relationship between local partner and beneficiaries as a reliable indicator of the quality of language brokerage services provided to them by the local partner.

The degree of formalization of translation and interpreting practices in development projects also varies according to the status of the languages used. Professional translation and interpreting practices tend to be found only for larger languages, and mostly in the contact zone between NNGOs and donors/the general public in the Global North. Local languages, on the other hand, are subject to non-professional interpreting and translation (NPIT) practices in encounters between NNGO staff and beneficiaries.

Conclusion

Like most beneficiaries of development projects, 12-year-old Ditosa from Mozambique does not speak English. In the aid chains of Caritas CH and the FGC, her story would have undergone several transformations. A statement collected during the field visit of an NNGO staff or volunteer, would first have

been interpreted into English by a staff from the local partner NGO. The visiting NNGO staff might have taken written notes in English, French, or German, and then included Ditosa's story in their project report. From there, Ditosa's voice would have travelled further, in order to become part of a yearly report to donors, or a fundraising document with multiple translations into large international languages.

More importantly, however, we might ask ourselves whether language played a part in Ditosa's ability to access the development project. Our findings indicate that language can have an influence on the selection of project countries and local partners by NNGOs. We might therefore hypothesize that the same applies to how local partners identify potential beneficiaries and that language skills might play a part in the beneficiaries' ability to participate in development projects. While the present study has concentrated on actors within NNGOs, additional research at other points in the aid chain is necessary to further explore the potential implications of a population's language skills for their participation in development projects.

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