

# Can IK be Communicated through Foreign Languages Without Losing its Authenticity?

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we present an open issue for panel discussion on the relation between the language of knowledge transfer and the contextual and peculiar nature of indigenous, traditional or local Knowledge itself. We highlight intriguing opinions from language education experts, linguistics researchers and other stakeholders, that raise a number of concerns to be considered at this early stage of research development in indigenous knowledge technology. If language is entwined with the knowledge system itself can IK then ever be transferred across languages? In other words does IK lose its authenticity and values through translations and foreign language media?

## Keywords

Language, Language education, Knowledge transfer, Indigenous Knowledge, Traditional Knowledge, Local Knowledge

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the knowledge economy society not only modern knowledge is valued but also all past or unexplored knowledge from diverse communities. This IK is more and more demanded not only by local communities but also researchers. Constructivist school of thinking believes that knowledge is a personal construct, one's inner reality [1]; that the knowledge fits together through experiences as one encounters them. These include interactions with the "intangible" and tangible environment, which uses specific mode of expression embedded in a cosmology whose translation from one language to another is already difficult. This can even be complex for any parties involved in the attempt to electronically preserve and disseminate IK and traditional knowledge (TK). As a consequence the impact of knowledge transfer mode on the effectiveness of the value the knowledge holds may be questionable [2].

## 2. TOPIC

In Africa traditional knowledge has been orally passed for generations from person to person. IK will definitely join the pool of knowledge a Knowledge society will need, thus IK will need to

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continuously be generated at least by local communities, and be taught; and therefore using the mode of expression in existing in that community. In 1992, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) recognized [3] the value of traditional knowledge in protecting environment including the language regulating access to it and its use. And foreign languages used to transfer knowledge has become an increasing issue of contention in developing world since a few decades [4, 1, 5, 6]. The focus has been the language education in the first level of schooling; with often their influence in the mastering of knowledge at secondary or tertiary levels of education system. The motives been a mix of emotional, sociolinguistic, economic, educational and cultural and political factors. [1] has identified concerns like: (i) the uninformed attitude towards language in education by key stakeholders in Africa; (ii) Western experts' negative attitudes regarding African languages, and (iii) the lack of leadership from African universities in promoting and developing local languages. The following depicts some of this concerns, as reported from [1]: "A minister recalled a parent in a village saying to her: "It's not skill in his mother tongue which makes a child succeed in life, but how much English he knows. Is it going to be one type of school for the rich and another for the poor? At the end of the day we are expected to pass examinations in English!". But the question is what knowledge do we lose if it gets translated and transmitted in local language?

Concepts help build knowledge, and concepts are part of individual inner thinking process. Languages use articulated concepts to communicate or transfer ideas and information. According to [5, 4, 6] the education languages in most sub-Sahara African countries are legacy of colonial period, except for a few countries. Since the 60s there has being an increasing debate on the role of foreign languages unfamiliar and strange to local people mode of expression to effectively help them to acquire knowledge [2, 5, 6]. Some factors regarding language and development in Africa may include [1, 7] the strong reliance of modern development on knowledge and information; sources of science and technology in Africa are essentially from abroad, and mediated in languages non-indigenous to Africa.

To what extent can rational media validly transfer IK and TK to future generations? What about publishing IK in African Languages?

## 3. AIMS

The panel discussion aims to investigate the relation between language and indigenous knowledge to explore transferability across natural languages and its consequences on electronic preservation and dissemination; and, to sensitise IK researchers to

advocate for a more inclusive mode of expressions and natural languages in knowledge transfer.

#### 4. STRUCTURE

The Panel commences with an overview of what will be covered (10 min), a brief introduction to the panelists (2 – 3 min) and some rules (structure of session, timing, etc.). Then we will propose some warm-up Q&As to panellists followed by the main Q&As to drive discussions, including: interests in the topic; benefits and opportunities; case study story; and, challenges (35 min). We will have two rounds of audience's Q&As (each 10 min) with inter-panellists conversation in between (15 min) and a final wrap up (10 min).

#### 5. CHAIR & PANELISTS

##### 5.1 Chair

**Jairos Kangira** has a PhD in Rhetoric Studies (UCT) and is an Ass. Professor of English, at University of Namibia (UNAM). Prof Kangira previously worked in Zimbabwe universities and the Polytechnic of Namibia where he was instrumental in the founding of *Nawa Journal of Language and Communication* which he edited from 2006 to 2010. Kangira is the Editor-in Chief of *Journal for Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, a new peer-reviewed journal at UNAM. He has researched and published extensively in linguistics, literature and rhetoric.

##### 5.2 Panelists

**Lorenzo Dalvit** is a Senior lecturer and Head of the ICT Education Unit in at Rhodes University, SA. Dr Dalvit's academic interests span across Sociology, Linguistics, Computer Science, New Media Studies and Education. He has conducted pioneering work on the use of African languages and indigenous knowledge in ICT Education and published extensively in South Africa and internationally.

*“As long as ICT is accessed through a foreign language in Africa, it will remain “foreign”. For Africans to participate in the global community meaningfully and on a mass scale, their knowledge and language must be seen as part of - and not as opposed to - global knowledge and languages.”* Dalvit

**Sarala Krishnamurthy** is the Dean of the School of Communication, Criminal Justice and Legal Studies at the Polytechnic of Namibia. She has more than 25 years of teaching, postgraduate supervision and research experience in the areas of Stylistics, Applied linguistics, Post-colonial literature and Feminism, with several international publications. At present, Dr Krishnamurthy is compiling a corpus of English in Namibia as part of the International Corpus of English (the single one in the Southern African region).

*“...Instead of setting up ICT in conflict with IK and valorising it over other knowledge systems, it would be better if IK were acknowledged as a repository of wisdom and it be made accessible to all. In this context it is vital to focus on the issue of language. While it is a well known fact that language carves up the world in different ways, for the purposes of disseminating IK, translations should made available.”* Krishnamurthy

**Levi Namaseb** holds a Ph.D in Khoekhoegowab Literature and is a lecturer of Khoekhoegowab at the University of Namibia since 1984. He is a Labour Unionist (founding member of NANTU). His research and publications are ranging from education, politics, Khoesan linguistics and literature and lastly documentation of endangered Khoesan languages. He was involved in the efforts to revive a South African San Language, N|uuki and is a co-author of several publications relating to the documentation of N|uuki.

**HN. Muyingi** is the MTC Endowed Chair in ICT, School of IT at Polytechnic of Namibia. He has 30-year experience with European (Belgium) and African Education systems including work with UNDP in University of Rwanda, R&D and postgraduate involvements in Makerere University (Uganda), University of Kinshasa (DR Congo), and Fort Hare University, South Africa. Prof. Muyingi is a multilingual speaker.

*“The use of European languages as vehicle of instruction hampers progress in Africa and draws down the level of individual and schooling success. We strongly support the view that bilingualism education has strong potential to promote an holistic empowerment and the survival and preservation of traditional knowledge.”* Muyingi

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