

***Ebolang*: the lasting challenge of an epidemic in multilingual Africa.  
The case of Western Ivory Coast**

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# EboLang

- NOT a new disease!
- A workshop that took place in response to an emergency  
An approach being developed and tested to make better use of language diversity in the context of epidemics and other large scale health threats.
- Stands for the hope that prevalence of multilingualism in Africa will cease to be seen as a hindrance, but rather as an asset for generalizing health literacy, and that it will find a place in health research and planning in Africa. • Ebo+Lang is like a pun: both parts are liabilities. Paperwork for obtaining health services is a job. Jointly, forms and services make sense. **Bringing them together can have a positive effect on individual, public and global health.**

# LINKING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH WITH PRACTICAL RESPONSE

- **Dr. Yves Séa, researcher at Institut de Linguistique Appliquée, and author of a module of health literacy in Wè, says: “The use of French as language of information, sensitization and communication in the context of the fight against the Ebola threat constitutes a major difficulty for comprehension by the Wè. ... And:**
- ***Wè as language of social mobilization and the transmission of medico-social knowledge requires the implication of Wè speakers during the various stages of production of such knowledge.”*** (Séa 2014: 2)

# CHANGE OF POLICY & PRACTICE REQUIRED

***The major challenge is redefining practices of communication in Public Health in such a way as to provide for the introduction of the local languages into health communication in rural Africa as well as in urban settings.***

*(H. J. Sey, PhD candidate at the Dépt des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication, Université FHB).*

# Evidence and counter-evidence

I.D., doctoral student, looking back on his experience as a participant of a campaign in his Jula home area states:

***Il est bon que les campagnes soient faites dans nos langues.***

These are convergent statements by young scholars from different institutions and language groups, made at the workshop at the height of an ongoing outbreak campaign led in the official language, French, and what is more, successful, if one takes as measure of success the fact that Côte d'Ivoire, in spite of being at highest risk, as President Ouattara declares before the UNO, quote from *Fraternité Matin* of 26 Sept. 2015, has no case of Ebola.

Mon pays est membre de l'Organisation du Fleuve Mano (Mano River). Il partage des frontières avec deux pays frères gravement touchés par l'épidémie d'Ebola, le Liberia et la Guinée. Il est donc, de par cette position, un pays à fort risque. Alassane Ouattara, Président de Côte d'Ivoire, devant l'ONU, 25 sept. 2014. Cit. *Fraternité Matin* no 14944 (26/09/2014, page 4).

## **Ebola as a diagnostic case of failure to voluntary compliance and its root in deficits of awareness of the role of language in health communication**

I subscribe to the view of my young colleagues, in the Ebola&AIDS followup taken as working hypothesis, open to falsification, yet highly credible. Does the case of CI not rather support the assumption that language is without or with little incidence on the prevalence curve of Ebola? I nevertheless subscribe to their claim that subsidiary goals of health communication fail to be attained, as formulated by Séa: *Wè as language of social mobilization and the transmission of medico-social knowledge.*

## **Theoretical foundation: Communicative sustainability vs. Communicative dependency**

As a hypothesis worthy to be considered by stakeholders of various disciplines not primarily interested in language, but conscious of problems of communication in multilingual environments, the theorem of communicative sustainability (CS) and its negative correlate, communicative dependency, is more appealing than the linguist's familiar call for local language to be incorporated in development planning. In its original formulation, it stipulates as an operational test of CS "auto-propagation of an exogenous innovative message in the target community, independently of external stimuli" (Bearth 2000). For a more explicit concept, see Bearth (2013).

# Definition of the GOAL of health crisis communication

**“Ownership of the message by the entire population characterized by cultural diversity”** (N’Guessan/Cissé 2011) in the context the fight against HIV-AIDS and of equity of access to treatment.

[www.csrs.ch/atelierlausanne](http://www.csrs.ch/atelierlausanne) (deactivated)

In operational, generalized terms this means:

Reproducibility of “knowledge” as an explicit goal of HIV-AIDS + Ebola communication;

Accessibility of this “knowledge” (not adhesion!) to “the entire population” in a (multilingual) community, defined by a shared communicative space.

Ownership of knowledge required for resisting assault on collective health... reduces communicative dependency (CD). Causing communities to be less dependent on external intervention, CD reduction, other factors being equal, is matched by substantial reduction of overall public health cost on a local, regional and national scale without, however, making external intervention superfluous. Health literates do not become doctors!



# Why was Côte d'Ivoire spared?

- Government response in good time
- Proscription of messages of fear. (But see Sey 2017.)
- Traditional chieftdom (+ notables); its fundamental loyalty.
- Volunteer activities, often involving more than one generation.
- Mobilization. Groundswell of determination. **Ebola as enemy nr. 1 backgrounds political polarization.**
- **Western Ivory Coast resilience falsifies views on causalities commonly held in the broader arena:**
  - War background in SLeone and Liberia played a major role. It might have been even more relevant in CI but did not.
  - Health infrastructure was just as much at a rock bottom level in the West of the country. (Cissé & Tanner 2007: 152f.)

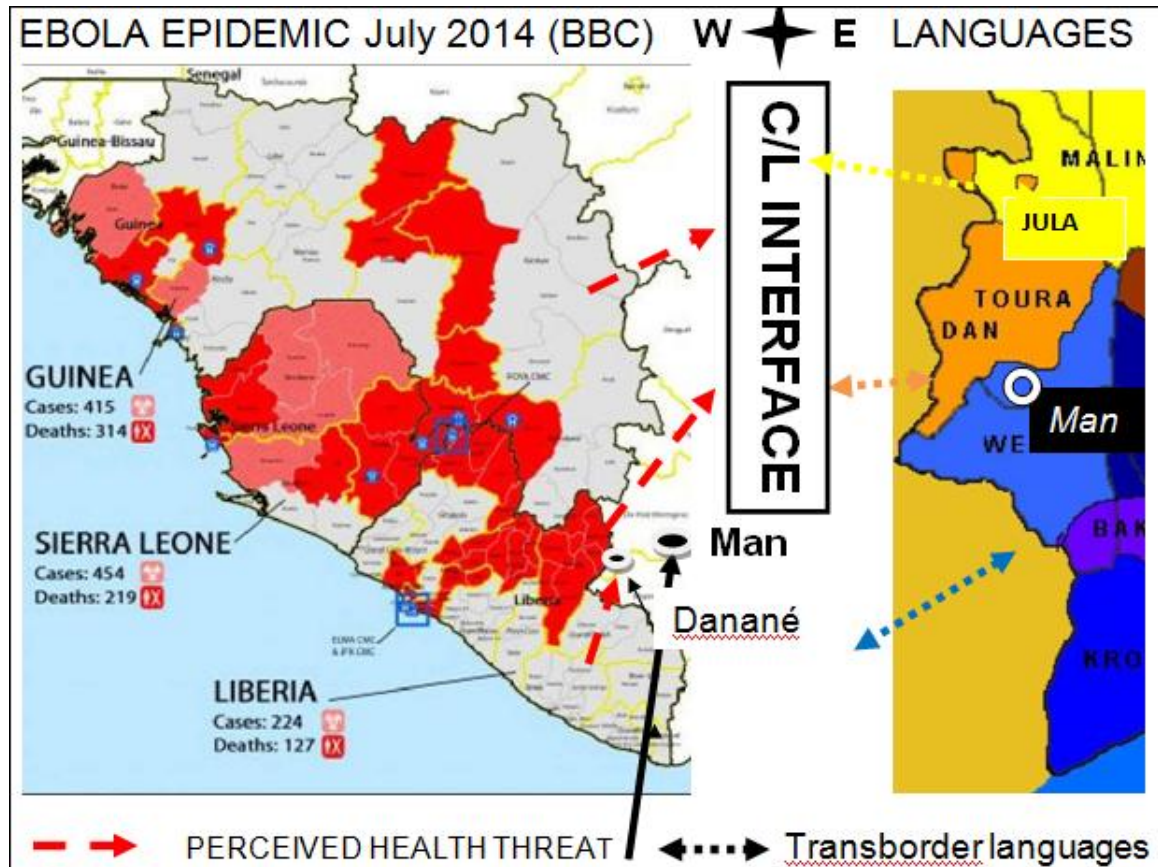
*Workshop, Man, 6-8 Oct. 2014*

*Langues locales et protection contre la menace d'Ebola*

Atelier de réflexion, de formation et de partage d'expériences

Lieu et date : Man, La Paye, 6-8 octobre 2014

## **THE ROLE OF LOCAL LANGUAGES AS A RE- SOURCE IN FACING THE EBOLA THREAT**



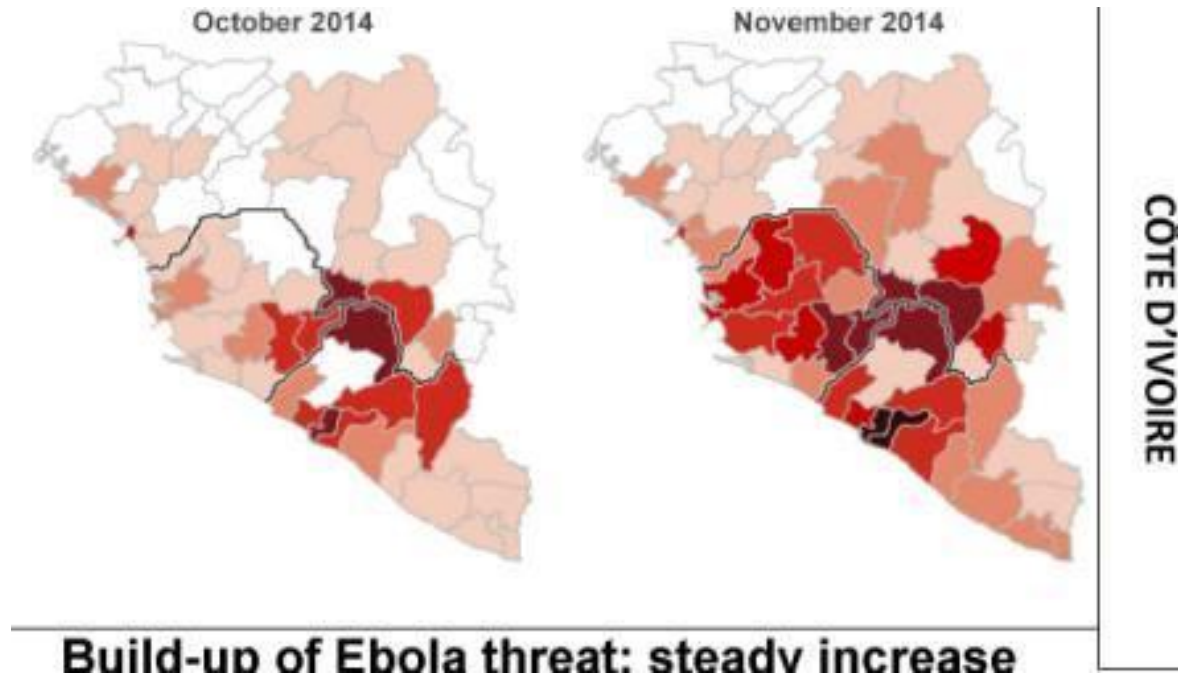
***Immediate proximity of border. Man: 80-100 km, Danané: 27 km (Liberia), Biankouma: 63 km (Guinea).***

A border that is porous, tortuous, same population (transborder lgs.) on both sides, densely populated.

## The interface communication/language (C/L)

- ***C/L interface factors:***
  - (i) unequal access to communicative resources (C) across L divides
    - > ***unequal access to health information***
  - (ii) hegemonic exoglossy (Bourdieu)
    - ➔ ***risk of exclusion***
  - (iii) CxL: multiply interdependent variables.

# Advance of Ebola in late 2014



# Research context

- No detailed mandate from CSRS or from ILA
- Assumption: *not a matter of mere replacing words in French by words in Dan, Wè, Tura.*

Prior research on epidemics in multilingual context

Bearth et al. 2011. HIV/AIDS communication facing African multilingualism. Univ. of Lausanne. *Synthesis report*

Prior research in local context: Singo & Bearth (2011a/b).

# Local languages for Ebola conscientization Workshop. 6-8 October 2014, Man

Result of short-term initiative, launched in Sept.  
2014

Consultation on the basis of a paper and prior  
experience: ILA, CSRS

Insertion in an ongoing agenda at the academic,  
post-literacy and artistic level.

All these were represented at the workshop.

# A glance at ongoing activities

The common denominator of all these activities, to which at the international level are to be added translation work done by TWB, SIL etc., is

1. Recognition of a deficit of information at the far end of the channel of transmission, a perception to the effect that people unable to understand the message through the main channel could not be left to themselves, percolation to bottom could not be trusted to be self-effective.
2. The message itself: highly **invasive**.
3. Compliance has a **high cost**. CONTEXTUALIZATION. Which of these activities is most indispensable, and what objectives are to be prioritized? What connection with zoonosis?



# Initiatives demonstrating need for LL

## FIGHE TECHNIQUE

TITRE : STOP EBOLA  
AUTEUR : ETOKAGUI MATOÏKA  
ARRANGEMENT : SEA CHERIF  
INTERPRETE : ETOKAGUI MATOÏKA & SEA CHERIF  
PRODUCTION : **F.A.B.** (Fédérale Artistique de Biankouma)

## ETOKAGUI MATOÏKA

De son vrai nom, SEA DOSSO KABILLI, originaire de l'ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire est artiste Chanteur, comédien et cinéaste.

## SEA CHERIF

Est artiste chanteur, arrangeur et technicien, il a fait les beaux jours du studio Séquence d'Abidjan de ALAIN SAWAYA dans les années 2000.

NB. Cet album d'un single à droit libre est destiné aux populations frontalières des deux pays contaminés. Il est notre manière à nous, artistes leader d'opinion, ressortissants de la région de BIANKOUMA, localité très proche de la Guinée voisine et du Libéria, d'appuyer les actions de sensibilisation déjà entreprises par l'état de Côte d'Ivoire pour éviter la propagation du virus à Ebola dans ces localités très exposées. L'album véhicule en français, en langue DAN, TOURA et WÉ les slogans du ministère de la santé, une autre manière plus pratique d'atteindre la sensibilité des populations-cibles.

SEA DOSSO KABILI  
Artiste et Président  
De la **FAB**

(Fédérale Artistique de Biankouma)  
Info line : 2207272501 / 22506421047

SEA CHERIF & ETOKAGUI MATOÏKA

DISENT  
STOP  
EBOLA

STOP  
EBOLA

STOP  
EBOLA

SINGLE  
EN APPUI A LA LUTTE  
CONTRE  
LE VIRUS A EBOLA

CD AUDIO GRATUIT  
A S'EN PROCURER

INFOLINE: 22507272501/06421047

# Sea Dosso *Kabili*: film/song/theater

A producer's ear close to the ground

## Languages

- French
- Dan
- Tura
- Wè



## Declared purpose

- Give local resonance to the messages of the Ministry of Health and the government campaign.
- Song: loosening of certain rules of verbal taboo. Yè mEE zE. 'It people kill.'
- Theme: Basics of **zoonosis**.
- Style: Dialog, argumentative, **humor**.

# Ambivalent perception of government messages (since March 2014)

## **Pre-/Proscription, decree**

Ban on bushmeat consumption

Ban on hunting

Refrain from touching cadavers

## **Inference**

*There must be another reason, and an ulterior motive behind it, such as the Ministry of Agriculture's attempt to oblige us to buy cattle meat from state-sponsored ranches (Zeh 2015)*

## **Cost**

**Understanding means** attributing an intention to the giver of the message

(Wilson & Sperber 2002, Relevance theory)

Failure will result in counter-claim

*: What has been our diet for centuries, how can it become a health hazard overnight? There must be a hidden agenda behind this talk...*

-> **Gap of knowledge.**

How fill such gaps of understanding?

# Methodology

***Without understanding how people understand and perceive a risk, and what their practices and beliefs are, change of behavior required for protecting people's health may not come about, and economic and societal perturbations will be aggravated. (OMS 2008: 5, transl. TB)***

***Work in groups per language on***

- 1. Government publicity in print, in public places.**
- 2. SOS international (critical test and analysis of pictorial communication)**
- 3. Terminology (preliminary list compiled by Prof. Remi Jolivet, Lausanne). -> Validation cycle**

ATELIER DE REFLEXION ET DE CONSCIENTISATION

Man, 06-07 octobre 2014

**LANGUES LOCALES ET PROTECTION CONTRE LA MENACE  
DE L'EBOLA À L'OUEST DE LA CÔTE D'IVOIRE**



**Kao kaakêea. Kao koo zin-à kaí-wii gèè bhà.**

**Nai oo, wei oo, kwèyêe oo, yana oo, kùyùtà-wiibò oo, sàà-wii oo ni wii kemò, ká ka gban kpó àle tóá.**

Eviter la chasse et la manipulation des animaux de brousse (chauves-souris, singes, gorilles, agoutis, antilopes, porcs-épics, etc).

# Bats in Dan-Blo (Danané)

Gbɔnggbɔ [gbɔng·gbɔ]·*n·Lissonycteris·angolensis·bat·(species)*¶  
Kpë·*n·Epomophorus·gambianus, Epomops·franqueti, bat·(species)*¶  
Nɛɛ·*n·Eidolon·helvum°; Nanonycteris*¶  
Nɛɛ·*gɔng·n·Micropteropus·pusillus·bat·(species)*¶  
vla = ·zla·*n·Rousettus·aegyptiacus·bat·(species)*¶  
vö·*n·Hypsignathus·monstrousus·big·bat·(species).·Short·flying·distance;··*  
*appears·between·7·and·9·p.m.;·cry·resembles·that·of·a·baby)*¶  
zla·*n·Rousettus·aegyptiacus·chauve-souris/bat·f·(espèce/species)*¶



Trade-off between danger of transmission and relative position on scale of high demand

# The village chief's favorites

Ebola est causé par un virus.

- Provoque une maladie sévère, avec hémorragies
- Plus de 90% en meurent
- Aucun vaccin, ni traitement n'est disponible
- De nombreuses personnes peuvent très vite être contaminées



Se propage comment ?

Les personnes malades peuvent transmettre cette maladie aux autres Personnes à haut risque :

- Membres de la famille
- Personnes soignantes





# Naming pathogenic processes-1

## Terms

Pathogenic agent

Host

## Neologisms

Yúá léwalá-kwèènné

Disease cause\_to\_arise-bug

Yúá zi yàà à gí-pòòñ

Disease buttocks rest it in-thing 'T  
'That which gives force to disease'

Yúá yàà à gí-wìì

*L'animal qui héberge la maladie*

Yúá bò à tà-wìì

L'animal vecteur de la maladie



# INCUBATION

Description as sequential action

-Nɔ' 'wɛ nɪan ɲɔn 'ku -sɔn  
-we' ɛ poa jri kraɛ

Moment illness is-REL person skin under

and\_then/before it puts eyes outside

# BODILY FLUIDS

Paraphrase in all languages, narrowly interpreted as referring to transpiration

'Ni wɪva ɲɔn mu

Water-REL come\_from person interior

# Validation cycle

## *Validation in five steps in (distant) research cooperation*

- 1. Linguistic adequacy. Verification by experts of the language being used.**
- 2. Check of terms with populations (elders, etc.).**
- 3. Contextual usage and comprehension check.**
- 4. Check with health workers in the local context (INHP, National Institute of Public Hygiene).**
- 5. Approval by administrative authorities (Préfet etc.), government.**

# Followup field inquiries

- Gaps in understanding and their consequences.
- Collaborative inquiries aiming at filling the gap, using resources of local knowledge.
- Ownership of knowledge.
- Autonomous propagation and application

# Follow-up inquiry-1

## *Report from Bogouiné II*

...a cross-sectional inquiry on the epidemic as understood in a large community, located 15 km from Man on the main road, a micro-universe of competing local opinions & views



ALPHABÉTISATION - TRADUCTION EN LANGUE LOCALE -

RECHERCHE LINGUISTIQUE - COMMUNICATION RURALE - FORMATION

# Fragile chains of transmission

- The line of transmission from Paramount chief via Public crier and community leaders (5 languages) relies on a C/L interface **s/c the educated young**, tuned to French broadcast.
- **“We are lacking the resources for our mediating role, the right vocabulary. Our messages do not sound real,”** regrets O.N., their leader.
- TO BE NOTED  
*Young Ivorians request language resources in their parents’ idiom enabling them to explain to them the meaning of messages in French vital for full understanding of health issues.*

# Followup inquiry-2. Collaborative research: purpose and fringe benefits

## The circle closes, outsourcing

- In Dio, 50 km north of Man, known for its rejection of an AIDS campaign due to taboo violation, the virus was given by Tura elders the name on the photo, likening its productivity hidden to the human eye to that of *the queen of the termites*, called **dènkènè**. Village talk on terminology thus contributed to awareness and acceptance of the paradigm of infection and incubation, setting the stage for the threat to be turned into an opportunity to cause the meaning of opaque etiologies to begin to dawn on Tura local constituencies.

## Pivot of understanding s



# The challenge

- The challenge for research and policy: *Making processes of understanding from below fruitful for creating knowledge in an environment still impregnated by the dominant language bias syndrome, unilaterally privileging the old top-down model of communication.*
- Advocacy for a linguistically inclusive approach to health is primordial.

**The challenge: heightened vulnerability due to linguistic and (often) physical remoteness.**

À-propos AIDS: Rural Africa, said to be today the area hit worst by the pandemic, is also, in global comparison, one of the linguistically most fragmented and stratified areas of the world. Endemic societal multilingualism, to the extent that it is insufficiently compensated by individual bi- or plurilingualism, constitutes a formidable barrier to the efficient transmission of key messages carried by Health Communication, an effect multiplied by social stratification and stigma.



# Beyond translation

1. Everybody is talking about translating knowledge into action.
2. We forget that before we may translate anything into action we may have to translate something into language of the prospective actors.

The principle: **No agency without loquency.**

3. But there is more to language as a resource than considering language as a receptacle of the finished product. Here we diverge from kfpe (2012)



# The village chief's favorites

# SOS International: doubtful case 1



# VALIDATION of TABOO.

## What is included? A grammar puzzle.

History of validation GS -> TB -> Dio - ILA (VT) - Comparison ¶

### Instructions for prevention Item 4 ¶

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Tura First draft<br>from French ¶ | Kao zin à yí sù páipáí é góí Ebola yuà mēē' à kwíí gí, à bhà. À yuen<br>oo, à gbo oo, à pu oo, à biin í oo, le ni à né-wíí. ¶ |
|-----------------------------------|---|

¶

### Tura revised draft ¶

UNDER NEGATION, ALL  
ENUMERATED  
TERMS ARE EXCLUDED

Taboo term ¶



Kao zin à yí sù páipáí é góí Ebola yuà mēē' à kwíí gí, à bhà. À yuen oo, à gbo oo, à pu oo,  
à biin í oo, le ni à né-wíí, kao zin à àle ke bha.

Eviter tout contact direct avec les liquides biologiques d'une personne malade du virus Ebola : le sang, les selles, les vomissements, la salive et le sperme.

MESURES PREVENTIVES CONTRE EBOLA MINISTERE DE LA SANTE, Version Toura

Version démo strictement réservée à l'usage aux fins de la recherche en cours.

¶

# Hygiene for the poor. Which alternatives?

Eau de Javel

Bleach



Ká zavèè yí wèin Ebola' mêè' à bhà à gbo ni à pu tà ke ká nuu à-lèè zúlúa.

Répandre de 'eau de javel sur les selles et vomissures des personnes malades avant

# Working hypothesis for recall

- The workshop is based on the principle that human language in its diversity is at the heart of the functioning of society, and of the individual in society. Society is considered from the point of view of its most varied facets and its multiple needs. Human communication, although by no means limited to the spoken word, cannot, however, do without it: the image calls for the caption, while the reverse is not necessarily the case. (Guide p. 3, Bearth 2014, unpublished)



# Specific hypothesis: diminishing inclusivity x heightened vulnerability

First and last: those most in need of inclusion (socially and thematically) are those most likely to be marginalized.

Collectives at the top of a scale of vulnerability and exposure to risk, are at the bottom of percolation effects from global efforts to diminish the risk.

Example : « eau javel/BLEACH ». It is one thing to be able to translate it, another to enable e.g. women to apply, and still another, to have the means to buy it. Remoteness is thus not merely a matter of language, or of finding the right word. The question, asked by several participants, whether finding the solution practically applicable in a given context, is part of the responsibility of linguistic mediation, got different answers.

ONE PARTICIPANT: Traditional Medecine has knowledge about de desinfection one might draw on in remote localities and poor constituencies.

Validation: This hypothesis of **heightened exposure going hand in hand with diminishing inclusion** in public health communication was confirmed in spontaneous narratives from resource persons, and also through IPS press release from the public simulation.

# Validation

- The public campaign generally creates needs and expectation which very often remain unfulfilled. (Kandopleu, comment IPS).
- Unfulfilled communication needs and expectations are the seedbed of parallel discourse which has the treacherous advantage of becoming local truth.
- Theorem of communicative sustainability.
- Bleu Guildas (ILA): expectations of populations.

# Conclusion-1 What remains?

Under a different scenario: no outbreak, no immediate threat, threat has subsided, case statistics tend to zero, what remains?

The question had been asked BEFORE launching the workshop.

One answer (11 Sept. 2014, J. Baya): *The workshop will contribute to enrich the vocabulary and will, through new knowledge to be acquired, contribute to instill a culture of prevention in the minds of the population.*

# Conclusion-2 *re* role of languages

- The call for **making health literacy multilingual**, far from weakening the role of French as the channel of ultimate reference, to the contrary enhances its efficacy by providing the message with the interface for processing and reproducing it in terms conducive to “**ownership of the message by the entire population characterized by cultural diversity**” (N’Guessan/Cissé 2011).

# Conclusion-3 Post-Ebola

- **Global welfare after Ebola not only calls for improved access to health services of poorer regions but for concurrent efforts to ensure equal and comprehensive access to relevant knowledge for physically and linguistically remote populations, empowering them as actors promoting their own health and managing at community level threats to their own and to humanity's health security. Ebola, by the unprecedented public attention it drew, presents a paradigm case calling for inclusiveness beyond preset limits.**

# Public health communication under emergency rule

- Convention on outbreak communication.
- Line of command: the Commander-in-chief = Préfet of the Regional Capital, Man
- Set an example: Clampdown on the editor of *Pamebame* in front of all of us.
- Close monitoring of Workshop.
- FollowUp Meeting with INHP director 8 March.
- Préfet with handshake, the only time in my 50 years, as a meanwhile well educated guest citizen I failed to reciprocate the gesture. I think we both understood.

# Kandopleu:

**Kandopleu widely covered by media, *but not translated into LL***



En Côte d'Ivoire, où aucun cas d'Ebola n'a été recensé, les autorités ont mené un exercice grandeur nature à la frontière avec le Liberia, le 13 août, pour se préparer à toute éventualité.

A man carries a placard reading "Kandopleu let's say stop to Ebola fever" in Kandopleu near Biankouma. Ivory Coast announced on August 11, 2014 that it has banned all flights from countries hit by Ebola as part of steps to prevent the deadly virus from reaching the west African nation.



An Ivorian policeman wears a face mask and gloves to protect himself from the Ebola virus in Kandopleu near Biankouma close to the border with Guinea and Liberia.

## Echos


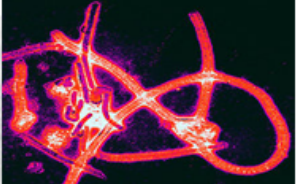
- « So people do not understand » (Teacher E. Veh)
- While... control measures have been applied, the current outbreak has highlighted huge gaps in prevention methods.
  - IPS, Aug. 26, 2014
- Ugandan site: Ebola has entered Ivory Coast.

# Pluralist Communication under these conditions is not approved: Clash

## Pamebame no 40 (Eastern Dan)

Pamebame Dan Est no 40

**BHÜÜNĚ ‘WO- -DHĚ EBOLA BHA, -KAA -NU KĚ -KĚ -**

|  |  |  |                        |
|--|--|--|------------------------|
| ‘Yua -zē -a -sē<br>‘bhaa ‘dhō.   | Bonne maladie<br>cela n'existe pas.  |  |                        |
| Kwa -mnu -wa pō<br>‘wōn yaa -yō -dhō.<br>‘yō -a yaagūyaa<br>‘dhō ‘dhō.   | duda DETRUIRE -<br>yua =dede REEL -<br>mū. Ebola -yua ‘kō<br>“dhū bha. =ya -ya<br>ATTEINT ‘me ‘ō -<br>bha “nēne “gbu-<br>FORTE FIÈVRE<br>=nē nu -a -mē -ta,<br>‘yō- -mē CETTE<br>PERSONNE -yō -pe<br>=dedewo | <b>PARENTS</b><br>‘wōn kwa<br>=ya da kō pē =ya -nu<br>sū” mē -bha.TOUT<br>EST GÂTĚ.<br>=gb<br>=dh  |                        |
| Le mauvais existe,<br>mais le pire existe.<br>-A -kē “dhū -sū<br>bha- ‘gū, ‘yua yaa -<br>yēnngsū ‘ō =ya zun<br>kwa -bha “kōdivua |  | -A -kē “dhū -sū<br>bha- ‘gū, EBOLA -<br>yua bha -wa -sū<br>“blū -wi -nu =nē -<br>bha. “Fēnng -nu 00,<br>-Vē -nu 00, Gbong -<br>nu Zua -nu 00 | MĚ<br>=DE<br>EBO<br>MĚ |

## Weekly briefing (Préfet)









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# Thanks

Aoo sε' oo.

Ka nuε.

Barika.

Ka wánglé.



