

»Nature« and »Environment« in German and Portuguese Sustainable Development Strategies for Johannesburg 2002

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ABSTRACT

The recent Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development was an important symbolic moment, in spite of the poor results some people claim to have emerged from it. The very fact that official written texts were produced for a wide discussion in many participating countries is a positive side-effect, as it enables the almost unique possibility of using parallel corpora for the analysis of the respective language and underlying assumptions. This could lead to the identification of some potential causes for conflicts and misunderstandings. Both texts were produced according to a (supposedly, at least) common intention, so they may be seen as functionally equivalent. In spite of that, there are obviously huge differences, not only in extension, but also in the type of lexical combinations and stylistic features used. Words like ambiente, in the Portuguese language, and Umwelt, in German, as well as natureza/Natur, appear in very different lexical environments, so that one can, by means of a distributive methodology, obtain a picture of what might be intended with their use in the two countries. Another issue brought about by this analysis was a reflection on the concept of »foreign« language. This raises the question not only of knowing whether, or to what extent, written texts like these are really intended to have an effect on (local) people's minds, but also about pragmatic/cultural constraints that have influenced their very shaping.

Key words: corpus linguistics, Johannesburg, sustainable development, lexical analysis

Corpus and Method

This work deals with the preparatory documents for the Johannesburg Summit (August 2002), produced by the Portuguese and German governments^{1,2}. Both

claim to be open for further discussion and developments, including, I assume, the study of the language used in them. Both were available through the Internet*, and both are obviously made of »words«. Now, a word can be seen as a node establishing a number of relations to other words in or outside texts, as if having a sort of »lexical backpack«³. Speakers and writers never just use (or, as linguists, analyze) words, they actually deal with latent »cognitive worlds« as they are reflected in the web of semantic interrelations (e.g. »meanings«) activated through language use. This »backpack« can be studied through the scrutiny of distribution, that is, by analyzing the number and type of contexts where a certain unit of language appears in particular texts.

This concept was central to the linguistic school called »distributionalism«, being especially associated to the name of Leonard Bloomfield, who didn't want to have much to do with »meaning«. He thought that such a quest would stand beyond the scope of true linguistic endeavors. Hans Jürgen Heringer, however, combined Bloomfield's distributionalism with Ludwig Wittgenstein's idea that to study the meaning of a word is to study the way it is used, in order to analyze, through a computer-aided investigation, the meanings of German nouns associated with certain feelings – for instance, *Liebe* (»love«) or even *Beton* (»concrete«)⁵. Not only has the same significant different meanings according to chronology and context, but these meanings can be assessed objectively by means of electronic syntagmatic extraction procedures. Dealing with different languages, it becomes possible to get a more accurate pic-

ture of societal (or even governmental, political, official) »feelings« or intuitions towards certain »international« buzzwords of contemporary discourse, a very representative one being *nature*, which stands for one of the two main topics of this congress (the other one is *humankind*). Heringer could obtain a picture of the most frequent collocations for the German *Natur* in different texts, and presented his results in some beautiful graphics looking a bit like stars. So, for the German writer Goethe the lexical »radiation« of the word *Natur* involved links to syntagmatically neighboring words like *schön* (»beautiful«), *Farbe* (»color«), *organisch* (»organic«) or even *Gott* (»God«). As for the German press of the eighties, the result was different: *Natur* appeared in other collocational settings, involving the co-occurrence of words like *Technik*, *Umweltschutz*, *Umwelt*, etc. So whereas to Goethe *Natur* was a beautiful, maybe sacred thing, in the eighties the same word clearly meant »problems«, along with the need for solving them.

I did not intend to analyze the exact content of both documents chosen as a *corpus* (the strategic goals themselves of both countries concerning sustainability in the context of the Johannesburg Summit), but instead I tried to focus on a few linguistic aspects only. Much more could be said based on this material, and I surely did not wish to reach some sort of atemporal truth. Parallel *corpora* are very useful, because they are like photographs: not reality itself, but somewhat representative. Anyway, although the chosen texts were equivalent in time and purpose (and in that respect they couldn't be more equivalent), I came across signif-

* A sample of the main goals of the German strategy was prepared as a small brochure for free distribution with the press, namely, with the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*.

** An analogy to the »ecological backpack«, a concept which stands for the amount of resources spent for producing, using and discarding all the commodities that are ubiquitous in the industrial societies we live in⁴.

icant differences, although it was not the concept of »sustainability« itself that constituted the topic of this study, but especially two of its »satellites« in these particular documents (words like germ. *Natur*/port. *natureza* and germ. *Umwelt*/port. *ambiente*). I have scrutinized their collocational environment, as they appear in strings composed of the word itself plus 10 other words to the left and to the right, though deliberately understanding by a word, and now for technical feasibility reasons, a string of characters separated by a space. The lexemes under scrutiny could be seen as two »pockets« only of the »backpack« of meanings carried by the German and Portuguese words for *sustainability*.

Economy or Ladies First?

This option did not prevent me from digressing around whenever interesting peripheral evidence concerning these two particular topics could be found, thus integrating them into a larger subset of ideas revealed by the *corpus*. Because, for instance, I intuitively thought that *ecology* had to do with the particular set of words under scrutiny, I also tried to investigate, by using the same method, the syntactic surroundings of words containing the element *eco* / *öko* in these *corpora*, that is, to obtain those strings that dealt specifically, and explicitly, with »ecology«. Rather surprisingly, it became evident that words with the *eco-* (German *öko-*) prefix were practically absent, so I didn't have to do it. In the Portuguese text there is almost no explicit talk about »ecology«, as we can see from the number of occurrences of words like *ecológica* [5], *ecologicamente* [3], *ecologia* [0]. The same is

valid for the German document: *Öko-Audit* [1], *Ökobetrieb* [1], *Ökolandbau* [2], *Ökoprodukt* [2], *Ökoprofit* [1], *Ökosteuer* [1], *Ökologie* [1], *ökologisch* [2], *Ökosystem* [1], *Ökosystemschutz* [1].

Instead, in both documents there are quite many *economy*-words. In the Portuguese one, the lexical cluster involving *económico*, *economicamente*, *economia* reaches an amount of 125 occurrences, and a similar situation happens in the German document, where *Ökonomie* and *ökonomisch* appear 45 times. *Wirtschaft* and *wirtschaftlich*, together, are used no less than 354 times. No matter how difficult an accurate counting might be, due to the different organization of the vocabulary dealing with this notion in different languages, it seems that some sort of lexical substitution is (or was?) underway, for it has apparently become more fashionable in both countries (than, say, in the eighties) to use the corresponding words for *sustainability* than for *ecology*, even though in some cases the same, or similar, realities might be meant.

Nevertheless, what seems to be fashionable (or maybe »politically correct«) in one country actually is not in the other one, so another strangely absent (or present) words in both documents are, to me, port. *indústria* [-] / germ. *Industrie* [-], practically absent from both documents, port. *família* [-] / germ. *Familie* [+], absent in the Portuguese document but quite frequent in the German one; port. *geração* [-] / germ. *Generation* [+], practically absent* in the Portuguese document and frequent in the German one. A similar correlation can be noticed by analyzing the relative frequency of words like port. *vida* [-] and germ. *Leben* [+].

* In the Portuguese strategy the term *geração* («generation») is used in a completely different sense, namely standing for the relative stage a certain country is, at a particular moment, concerning environmental issues. According to this quite widespread view, there are countries which have environmental concerns of the «first», »second» or »third generation«. Societies are thus viewed in a hierarchical but simplistic way (»more developed« / »less developed« / »developing«), an argument that contributes to the idea that each country has its own (fixed?)

The German text seems to more explicitly address traditional »women's« issues (family, children, health, nutrition and so on), while the Portuguese one, again, barely mentions them, at least in the analyzed contexts.

The relation between words and reality is by no means direct: can it be that the fewer words there are for something, the more that something is important in a particular culture/discourse, and vice-versa? Or are we dealing here with a gap between ideology and language? In fact, this particular finding is interesting, because we have a conservative government in Portugal, whose personnel in charge of this document (and there are/could be women involved) seems to be allergic to the word *family*. On the other hand, we have a left-wing government in Germany, which uses it profusely throughout the document. In the German document, while to some extent also marginalizing (so-called) women's issues, or at least while integrating them in other issues (*Frauen* is in itself not a very frequent word in this text), the feminine form is gently placed *before* the masculine one, when addressing, for instance, human actors involved in the discussion of consumer topics (*Verbraucherinnen und Verbraucher*). In this case, we are not necessarily dealing with an inversion of some kind of language default, namely by referring the socially minder or differently valued entity first, but maybe of simply continuing the usual praxis of, for courtesy reasons, giving precedence to the ladies (the »lady's first« maxim), a very common feature also in patriarchal discourse. It is questionable whether it really turns out to be more friendly and thus effective than the attitude of doing away with every single instance of explicit »feminine« visibility through lan-

guage – something which is clearly (and, to me, even bluntly) the case in the Portuguese document.

Looking at the Title

Whereas the Portuguese document (*Estratégia Nacional de Desenvolvimento Sustentável*) includes the adjective *national*, the German one (*Perspektiven für Deutschland. Unsere Strategie für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung*) does not. Instead, in the German document a possessive pronoun (*unsere*) is placed close to *Strategie für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung*. Nationalism is not popular in Germany, whereas in Portugal, and especially through the importance of football teams in international competitions, some degree of »nationalism« is understood by the majority of the population as normal and even desirable. If people do not necessarily enjoy many aspects of the daily life in the country they live in, they might tend, in a compensatory way, to identify with the most popular national (or local) football myths, something which nowadays seems to happen in a strangely intensive way. Maybe as a result, the (cautious) ironic/pejorative plural *futebóis* (to me, uncommon in the German language) is being increasingly used in colloquial (women's) Portuguese.

Furthermore, there seems to be no *we* in the Portuguese text, in contrast to what happens in the German one. In fact, words like *we* and *our* (reminding the reader, implicitly, of the title of the Brundland report from 1987, *Our Common Future*) appear very frequently throughout the German text and simply never occur in the Portuguese one. Only a »nation«, or a »nation-state« is presupposed in the Portuguese document as source (or even

place on a scale, being unable to skip one stage or degree in order to achieve what other societies already have, one consequence of this assumption being that pollution is presented as an inevitable consequence of »modernization«.

recipient) for this knowledge/discourse. In the Portuguese title a rather formal register is used, in my view much too vague and abstract. Instead, the German text talks about *perspectives*, in a more appealing, »inclusive« or »participatory« way. The word *Leitbild* (»vision«) is very frequent in the German text, a fact that contrasts with the Portuguese document, where it seems to be more fashionable to talk about a *strategy*.

The German word *Nachhaltigkeit*, also present in the title**, has to do with »doing something (perhaps even working hard or intensely) in order to get results that last for a long time« (*etwas hält nach*: »something can last for a long time«). Not everything that lasts or persists in the biosphere for a long time is desirable. In German, *Dauergifte* are, for instance, *hormonal disrupters* (»POPs« or »persistent organic pollutants«). On the other hand, it might well be that the Portuguese word *sustentabilidade* does not associate primarily with a temporal frame but instead, though not in everybody's mind, of course, and through the contiguity with the expression *ganhar o sustento* (»to earn a living«), with sheer survival during the following month or so. The difference between »now« and »tomorrow« (or also, between the actual and the virtual; reality and utopia; short-term or long-term) is perhaps morphologically more relevant in the distinction between *sustainable* and *sustained development*, a language resource which is also present in the Portuguese language: *desenvolvimento sustentável* vs. *sustentado*.

This morphological differentiation is not typical for the German language:

there is *nachhaltige Entwicklung*, but not **nachhaltbare Entwicklung*. There might be an undesirable interference with the food products people buy at the supermarket, which are normally *haltbar bis* ... (»best before«), an expression which is followed by the indication of a particular day/month/year. The nominalization of the verb *halten* is also widely used in compound words like, for instance, *Tierhaltung* (»cattle breeding«), *Haushaltung*, (»home management«). As an adjective, the same radical can qualify what is (not) possible to say or do: *Solche Politik ist nicht haltbar* / *this policy is not sustainable* / *essa política não é sustentável* (»this policy can not be stated; affirmed; taken seriously; it can not be consequently put into practice; it is not an honest, rational, realistic policy«, etc.). In these last meaning(s) *halten* does overlap with the Portuguese verb *sustentar*.

The eutrophication of sustainability words^{6,7} in current political discourse is becoming serious – people now talk about *sustained unemployment* or *sustainable football*, whatever that might be! Even though this problem is not specific of these two languages, the words for sustainability carry different associative backpacks – in fact, quite a normal consequence of language diversity. If there were not diversity in the world, how could people feel the need to talk to each other?

Does Environmental Sustainability Only »Speak« English?

The Portuguese document follows, more closely than the German one, lan-

* It should be noted, though, that the verb *participar*, in Portuguese (in contrast to the German *sich an etw. beteiligen*), is not free from ambiguity. It can also be used to mean »reporting e.g. a crime to the police, or to the authorities«.

** There could be some alternatives, for instance: *Tragfähigkeit* (»carrying capacity« / port. »capacidade de carga«), *Zukunftsfähigkeit* (»possibility of future«), or even, but not that much anymore, I think, *Dauerhaftigkeit* (»durability«).

guage uses that are common in English. A good example is the English preference for the expression *nature conservation*^{*}, parallel to the Portuguese use of this terminology: in this particular document the expression *conservação da natureza* is quite frequent. In fact, there is practically no use of the alternative expression *protecção da natureza* (»nature protection«), so that a common mistake of German people living in Portugal is to speak about *protectores do ambiente* (a direct translation of the German *Naturschützer*) when they mean what is normally described in English or Portuguese by *environmentalists* or *ambientalistas*. This allows for a much less explicit linguistic mention of the idea of »protection« (and that especially nature is to be protected). In the German language, the word *Konservativismus* is totally unusual in this particular context, being widely preferred the term *Naturschutz*^{**} – literally, nature protection. People normally do not say that they conserve their children, but they do protect them. Moreover, they can take measures to *conserve* their furniture, or maybe grandmother's delicious jam. Both in Portuguese and in the German language the verb *conservar/konservieren* can be used, for instance, for »freezing cells for technological applications« or »preserving e.g. wood or metal from rotting or from corrosion«, a procedure involving, in many cases, highly toxic chemicals. In order to *conserve* something people have to process, manage, contain or transform it. In sum: people have to manage it, instead of just letting it be what it is by itself.

The influence of the English language on this particular Portuguese vocabulary can also be seen in the widely used word *impact*, for instance in *environmental impact assessment* (German: *Umweltverträglichkeitsprüfung*; Portuguese: *estudo de impacte ambiental*). *Impacts* can be either positive or negative^{***}, but the word itself immediately reminds me of the *impact of a missile*, or the *impact of the news*, associations that, in my view, are equally valid for the Portuguese language, in spite of the Portuguese distinction between *impacte* and *impacto*, often stressed among experts for environmental issues. These lexical parallels are due to the Latin heritage that is, for well-known historical reasons, more or less pervasive in European languages, even though the German language maintains, for many purposes, and in this case too, a double terminology: the Latin word along with the vernacular one. Fact is, in the German language it is more frequent in this corpus to talk about (*Umwelt*)*verträglichkeit*^{****}, being *Verträglichkeit* the German vernacular form for *compatibility*/port. *compatibilidade*. It is possible to say *Zwiebeln kann ich nicht gut vertragen*, implying something similar to a digestion process (»I can't digest onions very easily«), and perhaps that is what an *impact* should look like! Now, trying to »translate« this tiny little pocket of this lexical backpack, how about talking more about *digestibility* (by nature) in the context of *sustainability* discussions? It would nevertheless be interesting to redefine »compatibility« as having more to do with a *pact* for fu-

* Cf. also *conservancy*, even *conservationism*, something distinct from *conservatism*.

** A word that relates etymologically to the English verb *to shut*, but perhaps also, although remotely, to other words like *schätzen* («to estimate, to respect, to value») or *Schatz* («treasure»).

*** This seems to be an important idea in the Portuguese document, for instance when it talks about *positive* or *negative externalities* – a synonym, mainly used in economics, for the idea of an «impact».

**** For the sake of semantical differentiation, and also for stylistic reasons (avoiding the repetition of a word in the same paragraph), one can also find in the German language the word *Kompatibilität*.

ture generations than with its (im)possible »negative« form: *impact*.

The overall tendency for using English in international, scientific and economic affairs, in spite of many obvious advantages, has led to a somewhat bizarre situation: it seems that nowadays Portuguese citizens, mostly in technical or scientific professions (and I would say this text was produced by a group of experts) understand English almost better than their own language, as one could perhaps infer by reading the following sentence¹: »*Para ter uma dimensão global, o desenvolvimento sustentável pode e deve tirar o maior partido da globalização*« (»making globalization work for sustainable development«). In this case, particularly in a text that, as far as I could understand, was written by Portuguese people and supposedly directed mainly at a Portuguese-speaking audience, an explanation in English is given at the end of a Portuguese sentence, as if the authors wanted to make sure they are saying exactly the same things they had previously heard or read in English, something that looks a bit like the attitude of a student trying to do his best to satisfy the teacher, whoever he or she might be in this case.

There is a similar use of other English expressions like *boundary conditions*, *benchmarks*, *eco-procurement* (whatever that might be) and even *millenium development goals* – this one being another concept I could not at first imagine what it could stand for, especially because the (buzz)word *millennium* is nowadays used to label a variety of undertakings, international or national, public, corporate or

even religious. In this case, the United Nations Millennium Goals for Sustainability^{**} are perhaps implied, but they do not seem to be thoroughly explained or developed in the Portuguese text. A number of those goals have to do with social and gender issues that are not very explicit in the Portuguese document. In another situation, the English word *decoupling* (»decoupling economic growth from resource exploitation«) is used explicitly in order to explain the meaning of a Portuguese word that had been previously chosen, but maybe was felt as not very »familiar«: the verb *dissociar* (»*dissociar o crescimento económico do uso dos recursos*«). For those who don't follow the discussion of these matters, a possible (but definitely wrong) interpretation of the resulting statement could even be that »economic growth has nothing to do with resource depletion« and people should not confuse both topics, the English language thus being used to stress the »scientific« credibility of this idea. Another example is the expression *capacity building*, which is, to my view, in the Portuguese document incorrectly translated into *desenvolvimento de capacidades de gestão* (building of management capacities), as if only these capacities were important for sustainability. In the German document, some foreign (English) expressions do appear, but in my opinion not, like we have seen in the Portuguese one, in situations where it might be difficult, for the common citizen, to understand what is meant.

Another aspect where the Portuguese document »speaks« a sort of foreign language can be seen in the huge amount of

* Translation (b. t. a.): »In order to have a global dimension, sustainable development can and should make the best use of globalization«.

** See, for more details, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>. The goals are: 1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; 2) Achieve universal primary education; 3) Promote gender equality and empower women; 4) Reduce child mortality; 5) Improve maternal health; 6) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; 7) Ensure environmental sustainability.

acronyms, many of them left unexplained, referring mostly to organisms and institutes under the control of the State or belonging to the state administration. On the contrary, the German document has a detailed glossary in the end, where the acronyms used are also explained. We are dealing here (particularly in the case of the Portuguese document) with a group language, perhaps only meant for engineers, financing institutions, etc. As for the »social« actors (that should be) highly involved in discussing sustainability, the least that can be said is that they are nearly absent from the analyzed strings in the Portuguese document. In fact, there seems to be a lot of talk about places, the nation, the country, the *território* (»territory«) – a central word in Portuguese environmental discourse* – but not a single string where environmental NGO's, churches and many other subsections of the civil society are mentioned, at least in the vicinity of words like *natureza* or *ambiente*. »Enterprises«, »sectors«, even the »markets« are in fact mentioned, and I really did not know to what extent I should include them in a topic dealing with the presence of the »social«. Besides, it is pretty clear that the State sometimes seems to be mingled with the euphemistically so-called *sectores* (»sectors«), meaning either the »relevant« parts of the economy (maybe business as usual...), or the main domains of environmental concern (air, soil, water).

The very presence, in the German document, of »we« had already made me suspicious that there was or could be the need to harmonize different (even contradictory) interests, not only those of the State itself. In the strings for *<umwelt>* /

<natur>, a number of actors that simply do not appear in the Portuguese one are mentioned. Not only environmental NGO's are widely present but also, although to a smaller extent, *Wirtschaftsverbände* (economic or professional associations), trade unions or consumer associations. In fact, also the churches are explicitly considered as having had an important role in the previous discussion of this document, even though they do not appear in the strings that have been counted.

Text Structure and Extension

The German document is clearly more inclusive than the Portuguese one, and maybe this in part explains its extension and argumentative structure, thus contrasting with the more descriptive structure of the Portuguese document, resembling a sequence of topics /suggestions/ vaguely defined goals or even procedures, a bit like in an instruction manual. Looking at the table of contents of both documents, we notice that there is a sort of paradox: the Portuguese document simulates structure, whereas the German one reveals it to some extent in a more natural though discrete way, without explicitly stressing this particular aspect or word. The obsession with structure can be seen in the very layout of the Portuguese document, with lots of topics, extensive numbering, observations in the margins of each page (mostly quite redundant), the use of character differentiation (bolds, titles, subtitles, etc.).

At least in one situation this overemphasis on structure could not prevent redundancy: one sentence was literally cop-

* It is even present in the name of one of the major Portuguese environmental NGOs (GEOTA: Grupo de Estudos de Ordenamento do *Território e Ambiente*). In the German language, however, *Territorium* seems to have quite different connotations, as far as I could understand from an electronic survey in the magazine *Der Spiegel* (years 1994–2000), being frequently used in news and articles about wars and similar events, and thus not, like in Portuguese, as more or less equivalent to the first element in the German compound *Raumplanung*.

ied from one point of the document and pasted into another part; interestingly, one dealing precisely – though in fact vaguely – with the topic of »access to information«. Some non-identified restrictions connected to this issue are thus stated at least twice, which are patent in the careful choice of the conector *mas* (»but«): »o acesso à informação é crucial em democracia, mas a informação só se torna eficaz se os cidadãos a relacionarem com um quadro de conhecimentos e a usarem para resolver problemas, formar opiniões e efectuar escolhas«. (»Access to information is crucial in a democracy, but information can only be efficient if the citizens are able to relate it with a certain frame of knowledge and if they use it to solve problems, for opinion-making and to make choices.«) From this I could very reasonably assume that the Portuguese citizens are seen as unable to use information effectively, a sentence thus implying the hidden assertion: »why should governments bother at all about giving people more access to information?«

The fact that this sentence is repeated in the document, and not actually explained, even stresses this particular point.

In the Portuguese language the word *estrutura* (»structure«) itself seems to be a very powerful source for metaphors for things that are described as inherently good or at least desirable (and I do not contest this assumption), but it is also a word deeply connected to the strong construction industry, and also to the habit of thinking of ideas through the looking-glass of metaphors for buildings and construction activity, in fact a very anthropocentric way of looking at reality. The high frequency of the word *estrutura* can also be seen as a fashionable trait in current Portuguese political discourse. Indeed, in this document there is some talk (mostly in very vague terms) about *structuring documents, factors, projects* – even an *approach* can be *structuring*, and not only

structural or *structured*. In the German text, however, it is especially in constructions like *Strukturwandel* that the corresponding word appears, among with other uses of the word *Struktur*, but it clear that the meaning is quite different. A *Strukturwandel* (»mudança estrutural«, »structural change«) does not necessarily imply the maintenance or expansion of already existing damaging structures. In the German text, *Struktur* is used in contexts where, for instance, excessive land use for *infrastructure* is openly criticized and when the need for »land recycling«, or the policy of freeing of space from urban use to other uses or even non-uses (for conservation, for example) are addressed.

The fact that, in the Portuguese document, we are dealing with something as rational as a *strategy* (and not merely with something utopian or romantic like a *perspective* or a *vision*) could perhaps be interpreted as a very important aspect, because words like *estratégia* or *estratégico* (»strategy«/»strategic«) also appear very frequently: in the Portuguese document, no less than 6 times only in the table of contents! A *strategy*, however, is a concept that reminds the reader of the ways topics tend to be conceptualized in fields like economics or even military/defense affairs, which are inherently competitive rather than cooperative – as if we really needed that much something like a »military intervention« to recover from urban chaos or forest fires. Another word which is differently used in the German and Portuguese language is the adjective *militant*, mainly pejoratively used in German, but associated to »engaging for a cause« – a positive and even, to some extent, a religious thing – in the Portuguese language. The peaceful revolution of 1974, which led to the end of fascism, is closely associated to the then active »military armed forces movement«, which put an end to colonial war. We could ask our-

selves whether it is really true that the more words are used (or rather, the more frequently a certain word is used) for something, the less »thing« there actually is... This could be valid for the above mentioned overemphasis found on »structure«, in a country where the urban littoral, in contrast with the interior, now plagued with forest fires and desertification, has grown disproportionately, and very chaotically, in the last decades.

Following the same line of thought and looking at the structure of both documents by commenting a little bit more on their table of contents, one can notice that a fair amount of pages (more or less from the beginning until page 22) is dedicated, in the Portuguese document, to contextualization, preliminary remarks, historical background. The actual strategy for sustainable development is dealt with in a relatively small group of pages. Then, from page 43 to the end of the document, which comprises 71 pages, a great number of tables, graphics, etc. appear. It becomes clear why the word *strategy* had to be repeated 6 times only in the table of contents, and also why, in the neighborhood of *ambiente*, another frequent word in the Portuguese document is *ambiente* itself.

As for the structure of the German document, another thing to notice is that titles seem to be much more specific. Right at the beginning, there is some talk about »future generations«, or about a generation contract, and this idea is repeated many times throughout the text. There is – a bit redundantly but also in a much more detailed and concrete way – quite a lot of talk about quality of life, mobility, health issues, energy, transportation, agriculture, etc.

Another very important difference is the extension of both documents: the German text has 343 pages, comprising a total of 71,287 words. The Portuguese one amounts, as we have seen, to 71 pages

and around 22,403 words. Excluded from this total were glossaries and lists that functioned as annexes, although not the tables in the end of each text, which, at least in the case of the Portuguese document, occupied a large number of pages. In the German document there is a comparatively smaller number of graphics and columns.

A list of the most frequent words in both documents gives us insight about the more important absent issues in the Portuguese document, as they inevitably are suggested by the very disparity in length that has just been mentioned. They might be a symptom of a different cultural perception of the problem, and not so much as missing information, if one could really consider the Portuguese discourse in this document as a synthetic one, something which is not the case. If I rather boldly prefer to talk about »missing information«, that has to do with the fact, broadly recognized by many of the involved in environmental issues, that Portugal still has a long way to go in the public discussion of matters of sustainability.

Of course the difference in the number of pages could at first sight correlate with the one in the number of inhabitants from both countries: more or less 80 million in Germany and around 10 million in Portugal. This could falsely be understood as an explanation for the different level of detail which the topics are dealt with. Such a conclusion should in any case be previously supported by a comparative scrutiny of other documents that could be produced by other pairs of countries but involving the same relation between number of inhabitants and number of pages. Considering the number of countries where Portuguese is spoken it is not difficult to conclude that the relative poverty of this text cannot be explained based on a strictly quantitative account. I would not dare to imply that

the very fact that the Portuguese document is so small could function as a hint that we actually do not have to talk much about sustainability, because we already live sustainably. That would not have a thing to do with the reality I can perceive with my own eyes.

More About *Natur/Natureza* and *Ambiente/Umwelt*

An analysis of strings of ten words occurring to the right and to the left of the element <*natur*> in the Portuguese text (about 85 strings) made me conclude that there is a quite strong emphasis on the »institutional« side of environmental issues. In 33 strings European Union (or other) programs for the environment are referred, and, among them, those strings where the word *conservação* (»nature conservation«) appears, so the whole debate had to be introduced in Portugal from the outside (in fact, one of the chapters deals with the process of »introducing« the concept of sustainability into the Portuguese context). A second important number of strings deals with nature mainly seen as a resource to be managed and used (27 strings), and in 5 strings the word *património* (»patrimony«) occurs – which actually means »heritage from the father« in etymological terms and is another central word in Portuguese environmental discourse, but without having an exact correspondent in German. In 7 strings the word *natureza* appears in a much too vague meaning: simply as »kind« (something of this or that nature or kind). There is practically no talk about risks or about protection, so it seems that nature, whatever that might mean, is not really at risk despite devastating forest fires.

As for the German text, in about 183 strings for <*natur/natür*>, by far the greatest number (67) have to do with the word *Naturschutz*. *Natur* is also seen as a resource, but there is quite a lot of talk-

ing about trying to simulate nature itself – *naturnah* (something which does not appear in the Portuguese text). A number of strings deal with »taking care of«, being »fair« to nature (*naturgerecht*), being compatible (*verträglich*) with it. In some strings a concept occurs that is totally absent from the Portuguese document: »the basis of life« (*Lebensgrundlagen*). There is some talk about problems too, about »pollution« or »contamination« (*Belastungen*), »threats« (*Bedrohung*), »danger« (*Gefahr*), »consequences« (*Auswirkungen*) or even »catastrophe« (*Katastrophe*). Nature is also seen as a »vital space« or »habitat« (*Lebensräume* – notice the plural form!), as »natural balance« or »economy«, even without human interference (*Naturhaushalt*), or as a »place for rest and recovery«. Only once the word »science« (*Wissenschaft*) appears in the neighborhood of *Natur*.

Both in the German as in the Portuguese document the words *ambiente* and *Umwelt* appear in a much greater number of strings – so perhaps sustainability has not so much to do with *nature* [– human] as with explicitly human matters, which can be a pretty anthropocentric way of describing reality. In the Portuguese text, again, by far the largest number of strings for <*ambient-*> have to do with institutional issues, with 43 strings. In 40 strings the word *ambiente* stands for a vague conceptual domain, or for a very fuzzy notion of »environmental politics«. There seems to be more concern for money issues and for problems of environmental diagnose, evaluation or (environmental) indicators than, more directly and explicitly, with »environmental protection«. Problems, negative impacts or negative »externalities« are referred in a total of 17 strings, but then again not all impacts and externalities are negative. Could it be that pollution pays? Anyway, the word *poluição* (»pollution«) does not occur in the Portuguese document at all, but instead there is some talk about *qua-*

lidade ambiental (»environmental quality«). Even a »right to the environment« (*direito ao ambiente*), analogous to the right to go on strike, to vote, etc., is present in the Portuguese text.

Again, in the strings for the German <*umwelt*> (about 416), »protection« is the leading concept (*Umweltschutz*). The idea of »compatibility« (*Umweltverträglichkeit*) and even »friendliness« (*Umweltfreundlichkeit*) towards the environment has an important role to play, but it is only possible to protect what people know is at risk, so the third greatest number of strings deals, in fact, with pollution / contamination (*Belastungen*) or, more vaguely, with consequences or impacts (*Auswirkungen*). Not only »commissions« are needed, but also NGOs, dialogue, and indeed a »pact« for the environment. Agriculture and transportation are named in a very relevant number of strings. There is also some concern about global environment issues, as well as about health or energy problems. Words implying the notion of »responsibility« and »compromise« appear some 5 times each. »Management« does not seem to be that important (while in the Portuguese document *gestão* is a very important word), and maybe people do not believe that romantically anymore in an »intact« environment, although the very presence of this word (*intakt*) in two strings might be relevant. Anyway, costs seem to be not that central as in the Portuguese document, along with *Sicherheit* (»safety«), which is nevertheless mentioned, although environmental *standards* are to be kept, again something the Portuguese document seems to practically ignore.

Final Remarks

The two documents chosen as a *corpus* show different perspectives, rooted in bigger economical and cultural contexts, so the dynamic part-whole relation that determines a specific lexical or structural

configuration in a particular »Language-World-System«^{6,8} at a certain moment still needs to be studied. The perception of the difficulty and, to a great extent, even meaninglessness of comparing language fragments or »chunks« *per se*, not sustained in a broader (communicative or anthropological) perspective, gave rise to these final remarks, which allow me to be cautious about possible reasons for the results being the ones the data have shown. In applied linguistics *corpus*-based approaches are usual, but sometimes I do have mixed feelings towards a *corpus*: a living language is something embodied, and thus has not much to do with a *corpse*, but instead with a *body* of living speech acts or speech behavior. Nevertheless, I found it revealing to obtain a quantitative account of the language used in these important fragments of contemporary political discourse.

Only a small number of languages in the world have a written code, though. Their speakers often do not have the means to scan their language for this type of research, so how many more definitions or perspectives could there be »floating around« for the kind of international words under scrutiny? Are they, or possible corresponding language items, in fact being used in that many languages? I wonder if the situation I have described about the Portuguese official discourse on this issue is transferable to other parts of Europe or of the world, and so could not help feeling that written language, especially for the official purposes that have been described, and for dealing with such a vital issue of our time, can look somehow like »frozen« speech – so how can it be that representative of their speakers? It is not plausible that a single written document, like each one of these, can reflect the whole range of variability associated to the notions that are evoked in the citizens' mind concerning sustainability, especially in a world full of cultural, eco-

nomic and social disparities, and where literacy levels are also very different.

My final remarks are not quite conclusions but questions. As a Portuguese native speaker, I was especially concerned with the language used in the Portuguese document. Is this language *use* or *abuse*? Is it somehow *useful*? To what extent is this language my own language? Or strictly the language of the state I was born into? Does something so abstract as a nation or state really speak? Who speaks here, anyhow? In the name of whom and for whom? To what extent can this type of written language be considered a secondary code, or rather, for *representational* (though not totally *representative*) purposes like these, a primary one? Could the parallel terminology I have found in the English and Portuguese language partly explain the *cliché* of the so-called »Atlantic vocation« of the Iberian cultures, as it has been described by the Nobel Prize winner José Saramago in his novel

»Jangada de Pedra«⁹, where the Iberic Peninsula, like a boat made of stone, starts separating from the rest of Europe, floating towards the »New World«?

I cannot perform what is now being called an L.I.A. (*Linguistic Impact Assessment*)¹⁰, in order to get a glimpse of the impact or digestibility of this kind of discourse in the citizen's minds. But much worse than the absence of a L.I.A is, to me, the idea that among different cultures or even different members of supposedly same culture there is really nothing to talk about. The fact that these texts exist, imperfect and perhaps here and there unclear as they are, and the fact that people still try to discuss these things, is a sign that we can actually cooperate – even mediated by the English language, but aware of the problems this might raise – in order to decide what »we«, now as a planet, really want or do not want to achieve with the concept of »sustainability«.

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»PRIRODA« I »OKOLIŠ« U NJEMAČKOJ I PORTUGALSKOJ STRATEGIJI ODRŽIVOG RAZVOJA, JOHANNESBURG 2002.

S A Ž E T A K

Međunarodni skup o održivom razvoju u Johannesburgu bio je simbolički važan trenutak bez obzira na loše rezultate koji su prema nekima iz njega proizišli. Pozitivna je već i sama činjenica da su sastavljeni službeni dokumenti predani na razmatranje u zemlje sudionice omogućili korištenje paralelnih korpusa za analizu pojedinih jezika koja može ukazati na moguće uzroke konflikata i nerazumijevanja. Iako su dokumenti na različitim jezicima pisani s istom namjerom pa se mogu smatrati funkcionalno ekvivalentnima, između njih postoje velike razlike ne samo u obimu, već i u upotrijebljenim leksičkim kombinacijama i stilističkim sredstvima. Riječi kao *ambiente* (port.) i *Umwelt* (njem.) kao i *natureza* / *Natur* pojavljuju se u različitim leksičkim okruženjima tako da se distributivnom metodologijom može dobiti slika o namjeravanom komunikacijskom cilju u dvije zemlje. Sljedeći problem koji se pojavio tijekom analize je značenje koncepta »stranog« jezika. Razmatra se pitanje ne samo o tome da li uopće postoji namjera i uolikoj mjeri da proizvedeni dokumenti imaju utjecaja na lokalno stanovništvo, već i problem pragmatičnih i kulturnih ograničenja koja su utjecala na njihovo stvaranje.