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The discourse of lending aid on small-scale development project websites: Dutch depreciatory diminutives

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Abstract

This article offers an analysis of the use of language on the websites of Dutch and Flemish small-scale development organisations active in The Gambia. The scope of this research is the websites of 66 organisations found through the hyperlink page <http://gambia-hulporganisaties.startpagina.nl>. The texts on the websites form a small corpus of around 375 000 words. Methodologically, a discourse-analytical perspective is assumed, heuristically assisted by corpus linguistic software. Thus, the texts are analysed simultaneously from a macro and micro-level: large-scale lexical patterns are combined with smaller-scale, contextualised, individual chunks of text. After a brief outline of the projects' roots in tourism through self-reported histories of involvement and a cursory review of the literature on meanings and functions of diminutives in Dutch and other languages, the role of diminutives in the representation of the Third-World Other is explored. It is argued that diminutives in this context are used in an ambivalent way: diminutives express a sense of sympathy and at the same time reveal a derogative tone in descriptions of the Gambian side of the projects.

Key words: development aid, diminutive, Dutch, Internet, The Gambia, the Other, tourism

Introduction

Africa's smallest country, The Gambia (1.5m inhabitants, 10 380 sq km), is one of the best visited destinations for northern- and western-European tourists. With a share of about 15% the Dutch are, after the British, the second largest group of tourists to The Gambia, followed by the Swedes and Germans. Visitors from Belgium (both Flemings and Walloons) are still good for 3% of all international tourist arrivals by air (Gambia Tourism Authority 2007, figures for 2004–2007, Africans excluded from total). This makes Dutch a relatively important language for special purposes (i.e. tourism) in The Gambia.

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With a population of only 1.5 million, and a ranking of 155th out of 177 on the Human Development Index, the influx of more than 100 000 visitors every year counts as a major contribution to the economy of the country as a whole (Thompson et al 1995; Bah & Goodwin 2003) as well as to individuals – and their families – who are directly or indirectly employed in the tourist industry (cf. Nyanzi et al 2005; Lawson & Jaworski 2007). Besides the immediate contribution of tourists to the local economy there is another aspect of this intercultural enterprise: as a spin-off of tourism, hundreds of small-scale development organisations have been initiated by regular visitors, in cooperation with local people.

In this article, written against the background of a larger ongoing sociolinguistic and ethnographic investigation of multilingualism and literacy practices in The Gambia (Juffermans 2007 and 2008), I analyse the self-promotional discourse on the websites of these self-initiated development organisations. The scope of this research is limited to 66 websites and thus 66 foundations or non-profit organisations¹ of Dutch and Flemish origin only, all found through the hyperlink page <http://gambia-hulporganisaties.startpagina.nl/>. Together, the websites (downloaded and saved as .txt-files in March 2007) form a small corpus of around 375 000 words. Using these data, I investigate issues of Self and Other representation and focus in particular on the role of diminutive suffixes on the websites.

Methodologically, I assume a critical, discourse-analytical perspective (Fowler 1986; Slembrouck 1998–2006; Blommaert 2005; Van Leeuwen 2005; Jaworski and Coupland 2006; Verschueren forthcoming) aided by corpus linguistic software (WordSmith Tools, Scott 1999) as a heuristic and quantificative tool. This method allows me to look at the texts from simultaneously a macro-level (e.g. to retrieve large-scale lexical patterns and particularities), and a micro-level (smaller scale, contextualised, individual chunks of text) perspective.

I start section two with a discussion of the projects' roots in tourism through self-provided explanations for the emergence of the aid foundations. In section three I offer a tentative review of the literature on the meanings and functions of diminutives across languages, and elaborate on their functions in Dutch, emphasising the possibility to be used in derogatory and pejorative ways. In section four I explore the role of diminutives in the discourse of lending aid, arguing that diminutives can help create a patronising tone in talk about the Third-World Other in Dutch. Throughout the article I make ample reference to the original texts on the websites in their original Dutch version, with an accompanying translation in English (all translations are my own).

From tourism to aid

My attention was drawn to the existence of these projects a few years ago after a chance meeting with a friendly, retired gentleman on a chartered flight from Banjul to Amster-

dam, after a couple of weeks of fieldwork in rural Gambia. I noticed that the man, whom I shall call Wim, was repeatedly looking at the book I was trying to read: Katrin Pfeiffer's work on Mandinka narratives and music (2001). I cannot recall whether it was Wim or me who broke the silence to start the conversation that would last until our landing at Schiphol Airport, but I do remember that it somehow began with the mutual recognition of each other as not being ordinary tourists. I told him about my involvement in The Gambia as a student researcher, and Wim told me that he had already visited The Gambia some twenty times since the early 1980s, and that he was on the board of a charity that aimed to provide a better future for the Gambians through literacy education. Initially, he said, they had organised literacy training in English, but soon realised that the only viable way to functional literacy skills was to teach Gambians how to read and write in their own language first. This touched on my own research on literacy practices and the problems of English as the medium of instruction in primary education on several levels (see Juffermans 2007). Although I was, and still am, largely in favour of their aid initiative, it struck me that Wim admitted to being unaware of any efforts on the part of the Gambian government, on the subject of adult literacy education. I was further a bit dismayed with Wim's emphasis on tax benefits and the recovery of 'costs', as well as on his reported overall pattern of spending in The Gambia. What Wim and I have in common, however, is, among other things, a long-term engagement with the country that started with a fortuitous tourist visit.

This *rootedness* in tourism is equally true of most of the other aid workers, as reported on their project websites in the 'histories of involvement', as I suggest calling the sections where the initial motivation for the project is explained. **These accounts typically mention that the originator(s) of the project went to The Gambia for just another holiday, but were caught by a simultaneous 'wow' and 'shock' experience.** 'Wow', because they were amazed by the natural and cultural beauty of the country: *vriendelijk glimlachende Gambianen* 'friendly, smiling Gambians' (Stichting GET), *prachtige witte stranden, zon en die ongelooflijke gastvrijheid* 'gorgeous white beaches, sunshine and that incredible hospitality' (Stichting Kalipha), but at the same time shocked by *de keerzijde van dit prachtige land, voornamelijk in kleine dorpjes in de rimboe . . . veel ellende* 'the other side of this beautiful country, mainly in small villages in the jungle . . . a great deal of misery' (Stichting Baobab Nursery School), the *zeer schrijnende armoede* 'truly grinding poverty' (Stichting Wilko Gambia Foundation), and the *economische omstandigheden waarin de bevolking moet leven* 'economic circumstances in which the population has to live' (The Gambia Support Foundation).

This encounter with poverty outside of the hotel premises, it is reported, results in a strong feeling of having to do something for Gambians. In the words of Mr. and Mrs. van Trigt, with seven exclamation marks, *We gaan, waar we kunnen, deze mensen helpen!!!!!!* 'We will, wherever we can, help these people!!!!!!' (Stichting Wilko

Gambia Foundation). On the website of the Stichting Care Foundation The Gambia, we read that the Renkemas have pledged their hearts to this country, and at the end of her one-week holiday Mrs. van Cauwenberghe (from Stichting Sharanie) wrote that:

(1) (Stichting Sharanie)

Een gedeelte van mij blijft in dit land, en een gedeelte van Gambia neem ik mee terug!!

‘A part of me will stay behind in this country, and I shall take back a part of The Gambia!!’

Another important ingredient in the process from tourism to aid is the encounter with an ordinary (or extraordinary) local person, usually a man, who brings his guests to the real Gambia, away (but not too far away) from the ‘tourist bubble’ (Jacobson 2003; Van Beek 2007). It is during these excursions that the ‘wow’ and the ‘shock’ are experienced. These personal connections also provide the basis for institutional connections, in the form of a link with a school, hospital or community project, and this local person becomes the most obvious candidate to be the local representative of the foundation. Note that these personal contacts are very often firmly grounded in tourism, but that the network extends from there, more or less away from the tourist bubble.

Apart from a mentioning of coincidence and situational overwhelming, there are also comments on why The Gambia is a particularly good country to run an aid project.

The reasons mentioned here are the same that make it a successful tourist destination. The Gambia is often described as being an ‘Africa for beginners’, which means that it is part of the ‘real’ Africa (unlike Tunisia or Egypt, for instance), but smaller, more peaceful, friendlier, more manageable, etc. compared to sub-Saharan African countries. Also, the small scale of the country, both in terms of land area and population size, contributes to this sense of manageability as we read, for instance, on the website of Stichting Kinderen in Gambia:

(2) (Stichting Kinderen in Gambia)

U zult zich misschien afvragen waarom Gambia? Misschien was het toeval of heeft het zo moeten zijn, maar als je het land bezoekt wordt je vrijwel meteen gegrepen door de vriendelijkheid en vrolijkheid van de mensen. Gambia wordt ook wel de ‘smiling coast’ genoemd en doet zijn naam meer dan eer aan. Het is een van de kleinste landen in Afrika en misschien is het daarom wel leuk om hier onze projecten op los te laten, het maakt het allemaal wel overzichtelijker.

‘You may be wondering why The Gambia? Maybe it was coincidence or it had to be this way, but if you visit the country you will almost immediately be affected by the friendliness and cheerfulness of the people. The Gambia, also called the ‘smiling coast’, certainly lives up to that name. It is one of the smallest countries in Africa and perhaps that’s why it’s nice to try our projects here, it does make it all more manageable’.

Michele Schweisfurth, in a discussion paper on two applied academic projects on promoting democracy in (teacher) education, comes to the same conclusion: ‘Factors

of scale in The Gambia contribute to the potential of a small-scale project to impact on education practice in relation to democracy' (2006, see also Schweisfurth 2002). None of the project originators mention having received any formal training in development assistance prior to their Gambian holidays. For most visitors it is their journey to The Gambia that turned them from ordinary tourists into development workers. Issues of scale and size play a crucial role in enabling tourists to manifest their talent for aid work. The Gambia is not too difficult as a tourist destination in political (i.e. it is safe and peaceful), socio-economic (i.e. there is no famine or extreme poverty), and linguistic terms (i.e. you can speak English), and is moreover one of the nearest and therefore also most affordable faraway destinations for Dutch and Flemish travellers. For these self-made new players in the aid industry, this is the ideal playground in which to experiment with their charitable ideas and ambitious plans.

Diminutives in Dutch and other languages

The discourse of lending aid (as published on the charities' websites) has many stylistic and discursive peculiarities, including sociocultural and ethnolinguistic pejorative qualifications (e.g. the systematic use of *tribe* instead of the scientifically and politically more correct *ethnic group*), particular metaphors and fixed expressions, and a marked and profuse use of diminutive suffixes. It is on the latter that I want to focus in the remainder of this article.

Dutch is one of those languages that can morphologically express the smallness of things. In English, to specify that a tree is small, one has to use a pre-modifier, e.g. the adjective 'small' or 'little', i.e. *little tree*. In Dutch, there are three ways to do this: first of all, as in English, with the pre-modifying adjective *klein* 'small', i.e. *kleine boom* 'small tree', but also with the diminutive suffix *-je* (sometimes *-tje*, *-etje*, *-pje*, *-kje*) (for a discussion of the morphology of diminutives in Dutch, see Daelemans et al 1997 and Vandekerckhove 2005), i.e. *boompje* 'small tree', and finally by combining both procedures, i.e. *klein boompje* 'small little tree'.

The diminutive formation is very productive in both spoken and written Dutch, as it is in a good number of other languages around the world.² Cross-linguistically, diminutives can be used for a wide range of meanings and functions. Gigliana Melzi and Kendall King, in a study of the role of diminutives in Spanish mother-child conversations, surmise that across various languages the meanings of diminutives 'vary from denotational smallness to a range of connotative references such as playfulness or intimacy' (Melzi & King 2003, 282). According to Maria Sifianou (1992), in Modern Greek diminutives facilitate the expression of positive politeness, including affection, friendliness, the softening of negative force, and the mitigation of self-praise. Maria Voeykova notes that the use of diminutives by Russophone children functions both as

a means of expressing dimensional distinctions (smallness) and a pragmatic strategy of avoiding rudeness in cases where the non-diminutivised form would evoke this sense (1998, 102–103).

In the same volume (Gillis 1998), Ineta Savickiene describes that diminutives in Lithuanian denote both a difference in size (smaller or bigger) and in emotional evaluation (high or low estimation), including the expression of affection, endearment, admiration, sympathy, love, etc. She concludes that in children's and child-directed speech, the primary meaning of diminutives is pragmatic (or connotational) and that this pragmatic meaning also emerges much earlier than the semantic (or denotational) meaning of smallness (1998, 116 and 133–134). Still in the same volume, Dorit Ravid, in reference to the work of Ursula Stephany, notes in her study of the acquisition of diminutives in Hebrew, that diminutives (and hypocoristics) are 'particularly suitable to conveying the intimate, playful atmosphere of endearment and attachment typical of a caregiver/child relationship' (1998, 167).

Janet Watson (2006), in a morphological study of diminutives in (a Yemeni dialect of) Arabic, explains that there are both nominal and verbal diminutives and that the denotative meaning of the former is physical smallness, 'with connotations of affection and, less frequently, contempt'. Diminutivised verbs, here, denote the 'lightness/unimportance of the action of the verb, including diminution of harm,' with diverse and potentially conflicting connotations of 'contempt, pejorativeness, pretence, playfulness and jocularity'.

The core functions of diminutives in Dutch are the denotational expression of smallness (e.g. *boom* 'tree', *boompje* 'tree+DIM') and the connotation of cuteness and sympathy (*konijntje* 'rabbit+DIM'). This connotational meaning is central to the whole meaning of diminutivised forms. Rarely, if ever, for instance, are insects referred to in diminutivised form (e.g. *mier* 'ant', *vlieg* 'fly', *wesp* 'wasp', *kakkerlak* 'cockroach'). Although they generally appear to us as small creatures, they seldom enjoy our judgement of being cute or sympathetic, and therefore also do not normally merit diminutivised qualifications. It is perhaps because of this sense of cuteness and sympathy that, as Ravid notes, diminutives have such a central role in motherese and child language acquisition (see e.g. Melzi & King 2003, and the studies in Gillis 1998).

Daniel Jurafsky proposes that 'the origins of the diminutive cross-linguistically lie in words semantically or pragmatically linked to children' (1996, 537). Based on 'rapid inspection of grammars, dictionaries and secondary literature' (Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi 2001, 48) from more than 60 languages, he proposes a universal polysemic model in which CHILD and SMALL are prototypical senses of the diminutive suffix, with arrows going out from these two balloons ('nodes') to smaller, radial balloons of derived senses. His model is

divided into a semantic and pragmatic component. On the semantic side there are arrows leaving from the core sense SMALL to SMALL TYPE-OF, MEMBER, EXACTNESS, PARTITIVE and APPROXIMATION. On the pragmatic side there are arrows going out from CHILD to AFFECTION, PETS, SYMPATHY, and INTIMACY and from SMALL to CONTEMPT. Interestingly, from both CHILD and SMALL, there are metaphorical arrows to FEMALE, which is placed on the fringe of semantics and pragmatics (Jurafsky 1996, 542). The metaphorical conception WOMEN ARE (LIKE) CHILDREN/SMALL THINGS lies at the basis of this semantic relation (ibid, 546) and tells a lot about cross-cultural male–female power relations.

Dédé Brouwer, in her widely read non-specialist book in Dutch on women's language, *Vrouwentaal*, devotes only a few lines to sexist usage of the diminutive suffix *-je*. She describes that diminutives literally indicate small size and are figuratively used to caress or disparage something or someone. She claims that nominally used diminutivised adjectives are more frequent for young women than young men, e.g. *een dom blondje* 'a dumb blonde+DIM', and more often also tend to take a depreciative meaning when referring to women's things, e.g. *doktersromannetje* 'medical novel+DIM' as opposed to *oorlogsroman* 'war novel' (Brouwer 1991, 50–51).

Marianthi Makri-Tsilipakou, in the only article-length study on gender differences in the usage of diminutives I could find, comes to the conclusion that against the commonsensical conception that diminutives are pre-eminently women's usage in Greek, 'women and men are equally referred to in diminutive terms, but it is mostly men who produce them and mostly women who receive them' (2003, 714). Men, however, in her sample tend to use diminutives more often in an unfavourable sense, compared to women (ibid, 719). She thus problematises the stereotypical image of Greek women as the typical users of diminutives, and of Greek men as non-users of diminutives, and links this to the slow emergence of new, non-traditional Greek femininities and masculinities. In both Greek and Dutch (surmisably in other languages as well), there are different ways in which men and women use diminutives, and also different ways in which diminutives can be used to talk about the opposite sex.

All of the above studies acknowledge that diminutives can, in certain contexts, have derogatory meanings. This function, however, receives marginal attention compared to the affective function and, as far as I am aware, there is no study in which it is an explicit focus of research. Yet, as Brouwer's observations show, at least in Dutch the role of diminutives in constructing difference when speaking or writing about the gendered Other, is very pertinent. In the remainder of this article I will illustrate that this is also the case for the cultural Other, or at least for the Third-World Other.

Diminutives in development aid discourse

(3) (Stichting Wilko Gambia Foundation)

Alle eurootjes komen ten goede aan deze schooltjes en de kindertjes

‘Even the least number of euros will benefit these little schools and the little children’

(4) (Guestbook, Kinderhulp Gambia)

Ze zijn zo schattig, die donkere kindertjes

‘They’re so cute, those little dark children’

In our corpus (375 000 running words), a total number of 1 807 diminutivised items (not including proper names) were found out of a total of 448 different words. After lemmatising compounds with their headwords (e.g. *kleuterschooltje* ‘nursery school+DIM’ with *schooltje* ‘school+DIM’) and removing proper names a list of 364 words remains, of which 191 occur only once. This leaves the basic list in Table 1 containing 173 diminutivised words occurring (together with their compounds) at least twice.

Table 1: Frequencies of diminutivised words in the corpus (66 websites, 375 000 words)

Freq.	Diminutivised words
219	schooltje(s) 187+21, kleuterschooltje(s) 7+1, dorpsschooltje 2, basisschooltje 1
117	groetjes
95	meisje(s) 29+66
73	beetje(s) 69+4
60	kindje(s) 22+4, kindertjes 32, schoolkindertjes 1, sponsorkindje 1
43	stukje(s) 40+3
42	gebouwtje(s) 25+1, schoolgebouwtje(s) 7+1, toilet(ten)gebouwtje 6, toilettengebouwtje 1, noodgebouwtje 1
41	dorpje(s) 26+9, vissersdorpje 3, bergdorpjes 1
34	bankje(s) 5+27, schoolbankjes 2
33	tafeltje(s) 5+28
31	steentje(s) 30+1
28	busje(s) 24+2, minibusje(s) 1+1
27	bedrijfje(s) 16+4, loonbedrijfje 2, vervoersbedrijfje 2, autoverhuurbedrijfje 2, minibedrijfje 1
24	berichtje(s) 23+1
19	drankje(s) 13+6
	kantoortje(s) 14+1, bibliothecariskantoortje 2, schoolkantoortje 1, telefoonkantoortje 1
	plaatsje(s) 15+1, vissersplaatsje 2, werkplaatsje 1
18	spulletjes

15	kaartje(s) 7+5, wenskaartjes 3
	klasje(s) 8+5, schoolklasje 2
14	ziekenhuisje
	huisje(s) 6+3, elektriciteitshuisje 2, woonhuisje 2, wachtershuisje 1
13	handje(s) 9+1, kinderhandje 1, kushandje 1, bijdehandje 1
	plaatje(s) 5+5, kostenplaatje 2, glasplaatjes 1
12	(lees/kinder/school)boekje(s); broertje(s); kijkje; stoeltje(s); tripjes; weekje(s); (boek)winkeltje(s)
11	kleintje(s); petje(s); zusje(s); (e)mailtje(s)
10	jonge(n)tje(s)
9	groepje(s); (post)pakketje(s); (basketbal/voetbal/volleybal)potje
8	(klas)lokaaltje(s); (baby/kinder/water/groente)bedje(s)
7	bezoekje(s); (voetbal)broekjes; broodje(s); hapje(s); (school)meubeltjes; uitstapje(s)
6	(verjaardags)feestje; (baby/kinder)kleertjes; liedje(s); (hout)vuurtje(s)
5	biertje; dagje; heuveltjes; hospitaaltje; keertje; (verlang)lijstje; marktje(s); nieuwtje(s); nieuwsjes; pakje(s); spelletje(s); (sport/basketbal)veldjes; zakje(s); netjes
4	achter/speel/groententuintje; bordje(s); dwergstaatje; (kerst)geschenkje; jeetje; (opslag)kamertje(s); (nacht/keuken)kastje(s); keukentje(s); kliniekje(s); kneepjes; landje; plekje; poosje; schrif(t)je(s); (voetbal)shirtje(s); snoepje(s); tasjes; tijdje; verfje
3	bandje(s); briefje; doosje(s); duwtje; emmertje(s); (kennismakings)etentje; eurootjes; filmpjes; (gedachte)foutje; (keuken)hutje; klusjes; kopje(s); kringetje; middagje; plantje(s); rugzakje(s); schuurtje; stapje; stokbroodje; studentje(s); telefoontje; uniformpjes; uurtje(s); veendammertje; (berg)weggetje(s); woordje(s); zoontje
2	Afrikaantjes; bakje; balletje; blikje(s); bootje(s); centjes; datumvelletje; dingetjes; doekjes; dopje; draagmannetjes; eentje; enkelbandje; eventjes; fabriekje; flesje; footje; gemakje; gezinnetje; graantjes; grape(s); jaartje; jasje; jurkje(s); karweitje; kerstboompje; kinderhoekje; (markt)kraampje; kusjes; kussentje; laatje; lampionnetje; lintje(s); lootjes; manusje; matrasje(s); nichtje; nietje(s); paradijsje; presentjes; probleempje(s); puntje(s); rekje(s); restaurantje(s); restjes; (water)schoentjes; setje; snackjes; sorteerkusjes; (provincie)stadjes; stalletjes; sterretje; terrasje(s); tintje; traantje(s); uitwisselingstoernooitjes; verbandje; verhaaltje(s); (kinder)voetjes; voorbeeldjes; voorp(r)oefje; vraagje; vriendjes

Of the *hapax legomena*, i.e. those words occurring only once in the entire corpus (thus not listed in Table 1), there is one word that particularly deserves attention here: *zwartjes* ‘blacks+DIM’. It was found in the following sentence on the website of the Flemish non-profit organisation Gammol:

(5) (vzw Gammol)

Wij willen proberen met onze 'overschotjes' iets of wat licht te brengen in het soms echt uitzichtloze leven van vele 'zwartjes', niet meer dan zes uur vliegen van onze gezellige en comfortabele zetel.

'With our 'little leftovers' we want to try to bring a bit of light into the sometimes really hopeless lives of many 'little blacks', [living] at no more than a six-hour flight from our cosy and comfortable armchairs.'

This sentence has that rather impudent patronising tone that is characteristic of much discourse of development aid in general, but is particularly interesting for my purposes here because a diminutive suffix is added to the noun *zwarte* 'black'. Without the diminutive suffix, *zwarte* is not particularly offensive to black people (unlike *neger* 'negro', for instance – of which no occurrences were found in the corpus), but with the diminutive suffix, *zwartjes* 'blacks+DIM' becomes a disparaging term. It is not so much a racist slur (i.e. a term of abuse intentionally employed to cause grief) as an obtuse term for Africans that indexes a deeply ingrained way of thinking about cultural Others and relations between *them* and *us* in a Dutch-language context. With this particular use of the diminutive suffix, much more than only an appraisal of physical height is added to the word. A contrast is created in sentence (5) between a *they/them* and a *we/us*, between poor little blacks and strong rich whites, between hopeless and comfortable lives, between receivers and donors, etc. There can hardly be a more explicit example of the disparaging force diminutive suffixes can have.³ The examples that follow are more subtle, but contribute to the same general point: excessive use of diminutives in the context of talking (or writing) about the Third-World Other is part of a way of speaking that consciously or unconsciously establishes a sense of Eurocentric superiority, and contributes to an exaggeration of Otherness.

A great number of diminutives in the word list are not used in a particularly favourable or unfavourable way. We thus find such lexicalised items as *groetjes* 'greetings', *meisje* 'girl' and *beetje* 'bit' in the top five most recurrent diminutives. Also *stukje* 'piece+DIM', *berichtje* 'message+DIM', *drankje* 'drink+DIM', and *spulletjes* 'things/gear+DIM' are very frequent and 'regular' diminutives in everyday spoken and written Dutch. Further, also words referring to children (e.g. *kindertjes* 'children+DIM', *broertjes* 'brother+DIM', *zusjes* 'sister+DIM', *kleintjes* 'little one+DIM', *jongetje* 'boy+DIM'), or related to children (e.g. *kleertjes* 'clothes+DIM', *snoepjes* 'sweets+DIM+PL') are non-descript when observed context-independently. Words in the domain of education (e.g. *schooltje* 'school+DIM', *bankje* 'desk+DIM', *klasje* 'class+DIM') are, for this reason, also not particularly noteworthy in the list.

In the language of corpus linguistics, these words are not keywords for the genre of online published development aid discourse, and therefore do not tell much about the culture (Leech & Fallon 1992) or ideology (Sotillo & Wang-Gempp 2004) of which

these texts are manifestations. However, if we could establish that words in this particular domain are systematically diminutivised in contrast to a general corpus of written Dutch, this higher frequency of common core terms becomes culturally salient (Wolf 2003) and thus revealing about the communicative practices of aid workers. Against the high number of diminutivised words compounding with *school* 'school' (n: 219), there is an even higher (13 times higher) number of undiminutivised words with *school* (n: 3 012). Diminutives make up only 6.8% of cases where the word 'school' or a compound ending with *-school* is used, including references to particular schools in the Netherlands and Flanders, as well as the use of the homographic *school* 'school' in English as in *lower basic school*. With *kind* 'child', or compounds ending with *-kind*, which is the most typically non-lexical diminutivised word in Dutch, and does not have a homograph in English, this is 4.2% (n: 60 vs. 1 367): much lower than the 6.8% of *school*. 6.8% is therefore a very high percentage, and may very well reveal something about Dutch attitudes towards schools in The Gambia.

In the project description of Stichting Picca (6), *schooltje* 'school+DIM' and *gebouwtje* 'building+ DIM' are used in relation to the project's school where it is supposed to evoke a sense of sympathy. Undiminutivised forms are used when the landlord and the government are blamed for not acting in the best interest of schools in The Gambia. Diminutives here primarily express sympathy (i.e. Gambian schools are small and sympathetic), but are also a little patronising as there is an implied contrast with Dutch schools that are not small (but large) and not particularly sympathetic. Here, however, it could be argued that schools (and hospitals and villages) in the Netherlands and Belgium are indeed much larger than their Gambian counterparts, and that the use of diminutives is an ideology-free description of the actual state of affairs. However, the Gambian primary school where I did research in 2004–2005 (see Juffermans 2005 and 2007) certainly was not much smaller than the primary school I attended in the Netherlands in the late 80s, early 90s. Yet I cannot recall my old school often being called *schooltje* instead of just *school*.

(6) (Stichting Picca)

Na ons tweede bezoek aan Gambia en het schooltje is er nogal wat veranderd. We kregen daar echter eerst heel slecht nieuws te verwerken: het schooltje had namelijk helemaal geen gebouwtje meer! De eigenaar had de ganse school op straat gezet, omdat er achterstallige rekeningen waren, maar vooral omdat hij uiteraard meer geld kan krijgen als hij de klassen aan verschillende families kan verhuren.... Ja, blijkbaar kan dat zomaar in Gambia en doet de overheid ook niets om de scholen in deze te beschermen.

'Since our second visit to The Gambia and the little school, a lot has changed. We had to endure very bad news first, however, for the little school no longer had a little building. The landlord had turned the entire school out onto the street because there were overdue accounts, but especially because he could of course get more money if he rented the classrooms to different families.... Yes, apparently that's possible in The Gambia, just like that, and the government does nothing to protect the schools in this regard.'

Also, when diminutives are frequently deployed to accompany larger objects that are not normally diminutivised, such as buildings (*gebouwtje* 26x), hospitals (*ziekenhuisje* 14x, *hospitaaltje* 5x, *kliniekje* 4x), companies (*bedrijfje* 27x), offices (*kantoortje* 15x), factories (*fabriekje* 2x), markets (*marktje* 5x), and countries (*landje* 4x, *dwerfgstaatje* ‘dwarf state+DIM’ 4x), can we speak of a marked use of diminutives in this specific genre. Diminutives here seem to do much more than only offer an evaluation of actual size. Instead, I think there is a patronising sense in this use of diminutives: Gambian schools, companies, buildings, etc. are not only small and sympathetic, but also a bit pathetic, and in need of ‘our’ (speaking from a Dutch point of view) beneficial intervention. Diminutives in the corpus seem to serve a double function: (1) they portray Gambian things and structures as small and (sym)pathetic against which the aid initiatives can stand out as something grand and important; and (2) they put the achievements of the project itself into perspective.

On the FAQ section of Stichting Evenaar’s website (7), the small scale of the project is established through the use of diminutives in both the questions and answers: *ziekenhuisje* ‘hospital+DIM’, *bedrijfjes* ‘companies+DIM’, *huisjes* ‘houses+DIM’, *autoverhuurbedrijfje* ‘car rental company+DIM’. Note that in the final sentence, when reference is made to a company in the Netherlands, no diminutive is used. The natural (linguistic) form for a company in The Gambia is *bedrijfje* ‘company+DIM’, while when speaking about companies in The Netherlands it is *bedrijf* ‘company’, without the diminutive suffix. Although diminutives in this example are used to create a sense of sympathy, by virtue of the contrast with undiminutivised words for the same *signifié*, pragmatically a sense of depreciatory difference is established, compatible with the overall patronising tone of lending aid.

(7) (Stichting Evenaar)

*Hoe komt het ziekenhuisje in Gambia aan z’n geld? . . .

*Wat voor soort bedrijfjes zijn dat dan? . . . We investeren dus bijvoorbeeld in vissersboten, landbouw, een bakkerij, het maken van houtsnijwerken, maar ook in het bouwen van een restaurant en huisjes op het strand die door toeristen kunnen worden gehuurd. Ook hebben we een autoverhuurbedrijfje.

*En dat levert genoeg geld op? Ja en nee. We hebben afgesproken dat het ziekenhuisje nooit meer mag uitgeven dan dat er verdient wordt. Wordt er weinig verdiend, dan kunnen sommige dingen niet gedaan worden. Je kunt natuurlijk altijd wel meer geld gebruiken. Maar dan moet je er dus voor zorgen dat er meer verdient wordt. Geld verdienen is niet altijd even makkelijk in Gambia. En als je een nieuw bedrijfje opzet duurt het natuurlijk altijd even voordat het goed loopt en winst maakt. Tot die tijd kun je dus ook nog niet veel uitgeven. Dat is wel eens moeilijk om uit te leggen aan de mensen die geld gegeven hebben om zo een bedrijfje op te zetten. Maar als je dan uitlegt waarom wij zo werken begrijpt iedereen dat wel. In Nederland maakt een bedrijf ook vrijwel nooit in het eerste jaar al winst.

*How does the little hospital (DIM) get its money?

*What kind of small companies are you talking about? . . . So we invest, for instance, in fishing boats, agriculture, a bakery, the making of wood carvings, but also in the construction of a restaurant and little houses on the beach that can be rented by tourists. We also have a small car rental company.

*And does that generate enough profits? Yes and no. We agreed that the little hospital can never spend more than is being earned. If earnings are low, then some things can't be realised. You can of course always use more money. But then of course you have to make sure that more is being earned. Earning money isn't always easy in The Gambia. And if you set up a new small company it takes a while of course before it runs well and makes a profit. So until then you cannot yet spend much. Sometimes it is difficult to explain this to the people who have given money to set up one of these small companies. But if you explain why we work like this, everybody understands it. Also, in the Netherlands a company hardly ever already makes a profit in the first year.'

This discursive ambivalence can also be observed in the Dutch expressions *zijn steentje bijdragen* and *het is slechts een druppel op een gloeiende plaat*. The first saying, *zijn steentje bijdragen*, is roughly equivalent to the English expression 'to contribute one's mite' but uses a BUILDING metaphor and literally translates as 'contributing one's little stone' (*steentje* is the diminutive form of *steen* 'stone/brick').

On the website of Stichting Geef Gambia Toekomst (8), it is put forward that the problems of health care in the country are only as trivial as the cost of medicines and transport to health centres, and this makes Mr. and Mrs. Goedhart want to contribute their *steentje* to health services in The Gambia. Notwithstanding the modesty in this expression, the name of their organisation, *Geef Gambia Toekomst* 'Give Gambia a Future' is ambitious, to say the least. Also, in expressions on the websites of Haskerdijken-Bakalarr and Bijiloproject, grand plans and high goals are coupled with modest expressions and Dutch sobriety: they hope to contribute their *steentje* to respectively *de ontwikkeling van de kinderen aldaar* 'the development of the local children' and *om het leven in dit kleine dorpje in het verre Afrika wat aangenameer te maken* 'to make life in this small little village in faraway Africa a bit more pleasant'.

(8) (Stichting Geef Gambia Toekomst)

De mensen kunnen naar een healthcenter gaan of naar het gouvernement ziekenhuis in Banjul. Een consult na uren wachten kost slechts vijftien eurocent. Maar de medicijnen en de reis er naartoe is vaak al het probleem, dát kunnen zij niet betalen. Daarom lopen zij te lang door met hun kwaal en uiteindelijk wordt dit voor enkelen fataal. Doodsoorzaak 1 Malaria 2* Tuberculose 3* AIDS Dat is de reden dat wij, als het in onze mogelijkheid ligt, ook ons steentje bij dragen aan de gezondheidszorg in The Gambia.*

'The people can go to a health centre or to the government hospital in Banjul. A consultation, after hours of waiting, costs only fifteen cents (in the euro). But the medicines and the journey to the hospital are often already a problem: they can't pay it. That's why they keep going despite their ailment, and eventually this becomes fatal to some of them. Cause of

death 1* Malaria 2* Tuberculosis 3* AIDS. That's the reason why we, if it's within the bounds of our ability, also contribute our mite to health care in The Gambia.'

The second expression – often used on the websites to relativise the project's own realisations – is that the assistance offered by the foundation is only a *druppel op een gloeiende plaat*. According to my dictionary (Van Dale Groot Woordenboek Nederlands/Engels), this saying translates into English as '(just) a drop in the ocean'. The original, however, is metaphorically much stronger than its English equivalent, for in its literal meaning, the drop does not fall in the ocean but on a 'glowing-hot plate'. The conceptual metaphor employed here, to speak with Lakoff and Johnsson (1980), is that THE GAMBIA IS A GLOWING-HOT PLATE, and that Gambians are in the most deplorable situation of having to live on that glowing-hot plate and therefore desperately need relief. Feeding into this metaphor is the hot – and, during the tourist high-season, also dry – climate of The Gambia.

Once the charity has been established and the first project has been carried out, aid workers soon discover their own limitations and come to realise that it takes more than a small foundation to change the world. Yet, the originators still find enough personal and interpersonal satisfaction to go on with their work. The *maar toch...* 'but still' in the quote from Gerard Dunnink's Gambia Project (9) marks this discursive ambivalence and refers to the perceived results of the projects the foundation has already carried out and to the good feeling lending aid provides the aid workers, as is overtly acknowledged on the website of Gammol vzw (10).

(9) (Project Gambia Gerard Dunnink)

Het blijft een druppel op de gloeiende plaat maar toch.....
'It remains a drop on a glowing-hot plate, but still.....'

(10) (vzw Gammol)

Natuurlijk beseffen wij dat wij deze wereld niet kunnen veranderen, natuurlijk weten wij dat hetgeen wij (met uw hulp) ginder doen slechts de spreekwoordelijke druppel op de hete plaat is, maar eveneens hebben wij het ongelooflijk goed en dankbaar gevoel om deze druppel te mogen zijn.

'Of course we realise we can't change the world, of course we know that what we do (with your help) over there is only the proverbial drop (of water) on a hot plate, but at the same time we enjoy the incredibly good and rewarding feeling that comes with being this drop.'

Concluding remarks

In this article I have presented an analysis of a discursive genre at the intersections of several key sites of globalisation: tourism, development aid, and the Internet. These three phenomena can be characterised by Arjun Appadurai's five dimensions of global-cultural flows. Tourism is primarily a flow of people, as it consists of a series of service encounters between hosts and guests (Smith 1989) that Jaworski et al (in preparation)

have termed 'fleeting relationships', with accompanying flows of technology, capital, images and ideas (Appadurai 1996, 33). Development aid is, very much like tourism, also characterisable as a flow of people, money, objects and semiotic resources. Both flows are essentially from the north to the south, with very little real or equal intercultural exchange taking place. The main difference between the institutions of tourism and development aid lies in the degree of transience. Compared to the ephemerality of tourist–host encounters, development aid has a relatively long-term engagement with places and people.

The Internet, not yet fully operational and not nearly as central to the lives of so many people at the time when Appadurai wrote his book, is of course the mediascape *par excellence*: 'the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information ... to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world' (1996, 35). In these times of globalisation, technology has made it possible for an ever-increasing number of people to organise flows of texts and images for potentially world-wide audiences. In this world it is virtually impossible to engage with globalised activities without consulting, or even actively writing on the Internet (see, e.g., the appeal of travellers' blogs such as www.waarbenjij.nu). Also, the small-scale development projects I investigated in this article could not function without a site reporting on their activities on the World Wide Web.

In their outreach, however, the websites are not as global as the projects themselves. Whereas the organisations are bilateral Dutch–Gambian or Flemish–Gambian intercultural ventures, the websites are unilateral Dutch or Flemish products, often only launching a Dutch-language version. By this choice, or by this determination of linguistic code, the public of the text (Warner 2002) is restricted to the Dutch-language community, technically enabling world-wide access for everyone, while in practice restricting access for non-speakers of Dutch, including most Gambians. It is this exclusion of the second party from the process of discursive and enunciative formations (Foucault [1969] 2002, 34ff and 55ff) which renders the Dutch and Flemish representations about The Gambia problematic. It is like the difference between official, authorised biographies and unauthorised biographies. The Dutch and Flemish accounts of The Gambia and the projects are unauthorised, unilateral accounts, and are therefore problematic in a number of ways.

The main point of critique here is that there is too little real intercultural understanding – probably from both sides, but surely from a Dutch/Flemish perspective – as evidenced on these websites. The projects are evidently rooted in tourism and continue to be mediated through a tourist bubble, which does not allow for the best possible cultural immersion. Tourism does not seem to provide the best institutional framework to foster the kind of cultural understanding needed to carry out development aid projects on the one hand, and to write about issues of language, culture and poverty on a website, on the other hand.

This lack of cultural understanding in tourism and aid leads to stereotypical conceptualisations and descriptions of the Other, such as the down-grading or small-scaling of Gambians and their buildings, schools, hospitals, etc. The use of diminutives in development discourse exaggerates social and cultural differences and signifies intercultural distance rather than cooperation. This way of talking by people who are highly involved with intercultural projects and have repeatedly visited The Gambia, seems to me to reveal a general Dutch/Flemish pattern of talking and thinking about the Third-World Other.

APPENDIX

List of project websites referred to in the article

There are different terms for charitable organisations in Netherlandic Dutch and Flemish Dutch: In the Netherlands, *stichting* 'foundation' (F.) is used, and in Flanders, the abbreviation *vzw*, for *vereniging zonder winstoogmerk* 'non-profit organisation' (NPO), is used. Between brackets it is further indicated whether the project is a Dutch (NL) or Flemish (VL) initiative. Glosses are provided where the name of the organisation is not in English.

1. *Bijiloproject*, www.bijiloproject.net (VL)
2. *Gammol vzw* 'Gambia-Mol npo', www.gammol.be (VL)
3. *Haskerdijken-Bakalarr*, <http://members.home.nl/mrgombert> (NL)
4. *Project Gambia Gerard Dunnink*, <http://gambia.oene-info.nl> (NL)
5. *Stichting Baobab Nursery School*, www.gambiahulp.nl (NL)
6. *Stichting Care Foundation The Gambia*,
www.carefoundationthegambia.nl (NL)
7. *Stichting Evenaar* 'F. Equator', www.stichtingevenaar.nl (NL)
8. *Stichting Geef Gambia Toekomst* 'F. Give Gambia Future',
www.geefgambiatoekomst.nl (NL)
9. *Stichting GET* (Gambian Education Trust), www.stget.org (NL)
10. *Stichting Kalipha*, www.stichtingkalipha.tk (NL)
11. *Stichting Kinderen in Gambia* 'F. Children in Gambia',
www.kindereningambia.nl (NL)
12. *Stichting Kinderhulp Gambia* 'F. Child aid Gambia',
www.kinderhulpgambia.nl (NL)
13. *Stichting Picca* 'F. Bird', www.picca.be (VL)

14. *Stichting Sharanie*, www.sharanie.nl (NL)
15. *Stichting Wilko Gambia Foundation*, www.project-gambia-wilko.nl (NL)
16. *The Gambia Support Foundation*, www.gambiasupport.nl (NL)

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Notes

- 1 *Stichting* 'foundation' is the term for charitable organisations in the Netherlands. In Flanders, the abbreviation *vzw*, for *vereniging zonder winstoogmerk* 'non-profit organisation', is used.
- 2 The English language has a very rudimentary diminutive system, which is perhaps better not regarded as a system of diminutives at all. The term 'hypocorism' seems better suited to English. Diminutives are normally longer word forms (a suffix or infix is added to the basic form), whereas hypocoristics are (by definition) lesser forms of a word, e.g. *telly* for television.
- 3 *Afrikaantjes*, which has two occurrences in the corpus, is not used in the same way as *zwartjes*. It is used in the following sentence and repeated two sentences later: *In een marktkraampje worden afrikaantjes voor Afrika verkocht* 'In a little market stall africans+DIM are sold for Africa'. *Afrikaantjes*, here, are flowers – the African marigold. This example of homonymy underscores the importance of context and the need for concordance searches when dealing with word lists, so as to avoid hasty conclusions.

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