

CLIMATE CHANGE AND NEW LIFE CONDITIONS IMPLY TRANSFORMATION OF OUR CULTURAL ORDERS - A DIALECTICAL ECO-LINGUISTIC CONTRIBUTION TO AN ECO-CIVILIZED DEVELOPMENT¹²

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Abstract: How can Eco-linguistics contribute to an elaboration and realization of UN's global goals for sustainable development? The paper outlines a few principles for the communication both inside and across the communities and eco-zones, dealing with the interdependency of the three parameters of the biological, social, and ideological conditions. Climate change is today an obvious example of dramatical change of human life conditions forcing the need of sharing territories and goods in more solidarity ways. The situation calls for new ways of trans-cultural communication and life-forms with deep respect for the wild and civilised ecology of all species.

¹ *In honour of Jørgen Døør 1933-2021. This summer Jørgen Døør died 88 years old. He was a constitutional part of the ELI-tradition and one of the convenors of the first international conferences in Ecolinguistics in the 1990's.*

² *This paper is a revised and updated edition of a paper presented by Bang and Bundsgaard in the conference ICE-4, at SDU, Odense, Denmark, August 14th, 2019. We are happy to publish this edition together with our colleague Anna Vibeke Lindø. We have cooperated since 1990 as members of the ELI-Research Group for Ecology, Language, and Ideology, together with Jørgen Døør, Sune Vork Steffensen and others. For further details on our tradition "Dialectical Linguistics & Communication" established in 1972, please see "Interview with Jørgen Christian Bang & Jørgen Døør" in ECO-REBEL, January 2020.*

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The paper refers theoretically to the Eco-linguistics tradition from 1987 until today, especially The Danish Dialectical Theory of Language and Eco-linguistics (BANG; DØØR; NASH; STEFFENSEN, 2007), and focuses on elaborations and analyses of all kinds of language & languaging (communication, interactivity, discourses, dialogues, and texts) in the context of reorganising the local and global human life forms into more socially equal and sustainable eco-civilizations.

Key-words: Climate Change and the Core Contradictions; UN Sustainable Development Goals; Dialectical Ecolinguistics; The Dialectics of the Culture-Nature Relation; Trans-Cultural communication; Ecological Democratic Dialogue.

Resumo: Como a eco-linguística pode contribuir para a elaboração e realização dos objetivos globais da ONU para o desenvolvimento sustentável? O artigo descreve alguns princípios para a comunicação dentro e entre as comunidades e ecozonas, levando em conta a interdependência dos três parâmetros das condições biológicas, sociais e ideológicas. A mudança climática é hoje um exemplo óbvio de mudança dramática das condições de vida humana. Ela impõe a necessidade de compartilhar territórios e bens de maneira mais solidária. A situação exige novas formas de comunicação transcultural e formas de vida com profundo respeito pela ecologia selvagem e civilizada, de todas as espécies. O artigo se refere teoricamente à tradição ecolinguística de 1987 até hoje, especialmente a Teoria Dialética Dinamarquesa de Linguagem e Ecolinguística (BANG; DØØR; NASH; STEFFENSEN, 2007) focalizando nas investigações e análises de todos os tipos de linguagem e languagear (comunicação, interatividade, discursos, diálogos e textos) no contexto da reorganização das formas de vida humana locais e globais em eco-civilizações mais socialmente iguais e sustentáveis.

Palavras-Chave: Mudança climática e as contradições nucleares; Os objetivos de desenvolvimento sustentável da ONU; Linguística dialética; Dialética das relações cultura-natureza; Comunicação transcultural; Diálogo ecológico democrático.

1. The situation today - two years after ICE-4

In the summer 2019 our focus was on the Climate Crises. Today also the Corona pandemics is an obvious global crisis that reveals the unbalanced relationship between human species and the rest of the life on our planet, the Earth. Both crises challenge the human life forms and cultures, especially the degree of industrialization over the last three centuries.

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As Greta Thunberg formulated the urgent problem in her famous speech in Davos in January 2019: “Our house is on fire”, she asked the leaders to act immediately. The metaphor “our house” is a brilliant expression consistent with the Greek word ‘Oikos’, meaning ‘house’ and ‘home’. Oikos is the root of both Economy and Ecology, and thus Greta Thunberg implies a reference to the state of both our *economical*, and our *ecological* systems as burning. Even though both UN and many countries have formulated goals for a 100% reduction before 2050 of the human footprint and production of CO₂, it was ironically the Corona crises that in a few months in the beginning of 2020 almost stopped aeroplanes and international travelling and caused dramatical changes in the everyday life of most people all over the world. Furthermore, the economic dispositions of the governments clearly became a matter of political decisions and not only a result of market dynamics or national economics. After more than one and a half year with Corona restrictions it has been a serious question for many people whether we have to come “back to normal life” as before the corona. That means that it has been more obvious that our way of life up till now is catastrophic in many aspects, not at least in relation to other species and wild nature.

Broadly speaking the corona crisis has brought us closer to *revisit our culture-nature relation* in order to recognise ourselves as parts of nature, and the other species as important parts of our common nature, being environment for each other in a vital symbiosis. Human beings do not have to control and restrict all other inhabitants of the Earth; however, we should live together in respect for each other’s values and needs.

In that way we must recognize organic, dialectical, bio-dynamical, and ecological principles for all aspects of our future social, natural, and mental lives and logics.

In this paper we present parts of our Dialectical Ecolinguistics in order to contribute to a theoretically based dialogue on how we turn ourselves and our capitalistic - and greedy - culture into a sustainable way of co-existent living. So, by means of a theoretical consideration we will raise our awareness on the implications and systematic devastating effect of our life forms on both our environment and our own wellbeing as human beings. We have to come to terms with the systematic barricades and shortcomings of our thinking, empathy, consciousness, and willingness in relation to our social and natural praxis and logics.

Paradoxically, it looks like a systemic blockage for the necessary changes of human life forms, that the most rich and privileged parts of the people and nations all over the world are against

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changes that can threaten the privileged positions; even though everybody could be part of lifeforms with better internal and external balances by sharing the goods and spaces with respect for the needs of each other. Simply formulated, we have to exchange our competitive capitalistic economy and praxis with a sustainable ecological economy based on the principle of sharing – both sharing among human beings and sharing among all the living creatures of the Earth.

It is necessary to realize that the dominant cultures of human beings even cause the problems we have to solve from now on, and during the next thirty years. The problems are of both local, and global nature, and call for developing sustainability, both locally, and for the entire Earth. The concept of globalization ought to be reconsidered in a way that on the one hand understands the Earth as a unity, and on the other hand understands the divine diversity of individuals, both plants, microorganisms, animals, and humans, as being parts of local biotopes and eco-zones.

We will examine the implications of some vital oppositions with reference to our Model of core contradictions (Figure 2). Then we will discuss how we can contribute to the democratic dialogue both inside and across cultures, both inside and across language societies. Here we present our concepts of intra-, inter-, and trans-cultural communication (Figure 3) and use some principles of a democratic dialogue (Figure 4). Finally a list of challenges and a postscript are formulated.

2. Theoretical comments on some core contradictions.

It is relevant to recall the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* adopted by all the United Nations Member states in 2015.



Figure 1: UN Sustainable Development Goals

“The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice. The Goals interconnect and in order to leave no one behind, it is important that we achieve each Goal and target by 2030.” (<http://www.globalgoals.org>.)

From a dialectical point of view, there also is a close interdependency of all the political agendas for human beings, i.e., both security, migration, ways of production-distribution-consumption, economy-ecology, human life and life of plants and animals etc. – the earth is a unity of different species and eco-zones. Diversity and unity.

Here we will focus on *the culture-nature dialectics*. Culture is understood as the human way to live together with other humans and the environment, including all the animals, plants, microorganisms, and the elements soil, water, atmosphere, minerals etc. Culture implies all our activities – interactivities – developed to live and survive during generations. Culture implies all aspects ‘from need to nice’, both in *the natural bio-physical dimension and the social and mental ones*. That is, both what we are doing in the physical sense, and in the social sense, and what we

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think, say, write, and feel about ourselves and our environment and the interactivity; and what we DO NOT do, think, say, write, and feel.

Who are 'WE'?

We have to realize that very often our common 'WE' implies only the most privileged part of humans with a deep-rooted ideology assuming that we are and have to be the owner and master of the rational thinking and behaviour 'on behalf of god and nature'. Therefore, a point is that we must criticize and transcend our own CULTURAL BLINDNESS – OUR BLINDNESS OF PRIVILEGES. We have to develop the semantics and pragmatics of 'Our Culture' into meanings and praxis in harmony with the Earth and Nature.

Let us relate the problematics to our matrix of core contradictions.

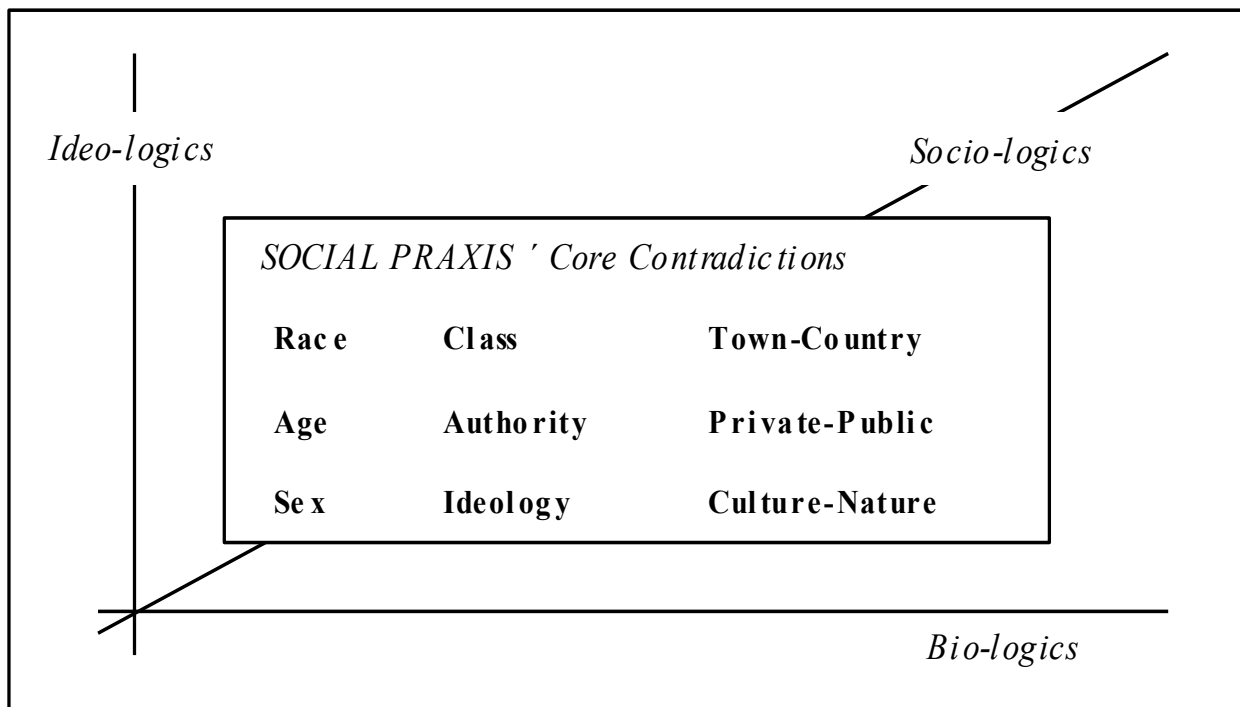


Figure 2: A Matrix of Core Contradictions (BANG; DØØR; STEFFENSEN; NASH, 2007)

A few words about the model. The model is developed in order to come to terms with some general constitutive conditions implying some historically specific contradictions and conflicts for any social praxis today. The heuristic model reminds us to be aware of the *three dimensions* of any problem,

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- (a) **the bio-logical and physical** dimension implying all the ‘natural’ relations of our world – the rules of nature;
- (b) **the socio-logical** dimension implying all the social laws, economy, power, and conventions for the inter-action and inter-relating of human beings – both the institutionalized organisations, nations, and the tacitly accepted social norms and conventions;
- (c) **the ideo-logical** dimension implying all the knowledge, believing, thinking, values, attitudes, ethics, truth, religion –both our explicit, and implicit worldview.

The three dimensions are dialectically interrelated and cannot be reduced to being parts of a monological system. Of course, you can deduce, or infer, a lot of e.g., human thinking from both the natural and social conditions; however, thinking also has its own indispensable modes of existence and logic. On the one hand, every dimension has its own logics, and on the other hand, the other dimensions constitute the conditions for the effect of the dimension in question.

In relation to the climate, we will examine both the natural causes for the state and changes of the climate, and the social and mental causes. This is a dialectical point; we understand or explain the existence and experience as rooted in many causes and not as a result of only one cause. However, each phenomenon might meet its turning point when the constitutive conditions of one dimension comes to a critical boundary.

Like the dialectics of the three dimensions, our model implies the dialectics of some core contradictions of the social praxis. Let us explain: Any human being is dialectically related to and with other human beings, both genetically and constitutively. The relations among human beings constitute a vital part of the individual identity and characteristics; a complex dialectical relationship implying similarities and differences between all people in the world. By birth we are already placed in specific relations of different age, child-adults, sex and gender relations, race, ethnicity, class position, property, natural environment, available food, drinking, and air, technical equipment, authorities, languages, values of everybody and everything, behaviour, etc. We become members of families, groups, institutions, nations, with and without belongings. Some people have many friends and belongings, and a valued identity, some have too few and live as fugitives, excluded from appropriate land, water, shelter, and goods, being without nationality and human rights.

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Thus, we are from birth – and before that – very differently positioned in all aspects of human life, both naturally, socially, and mentally. We are opposed to each other in many dimensions, and in that way, we cannot talk about a human being as a common unity of the human species. However, we will talk about human rights for every person of the world.

Our list of core contradictions illustrates some of the common conditions for human identity today. We underline that people all over the world are very differently situated, both within a local area, within a nation, within an eco-region, and within the global society. What YOU have to do, what WE have to do, what YOU can, what WE can, and ought to do, all those are questions interwoven in the social dialectics.

Therefore, we cannot discuss the problem of the culture-nature relation without analysing and criticising the social formations we are parts of.

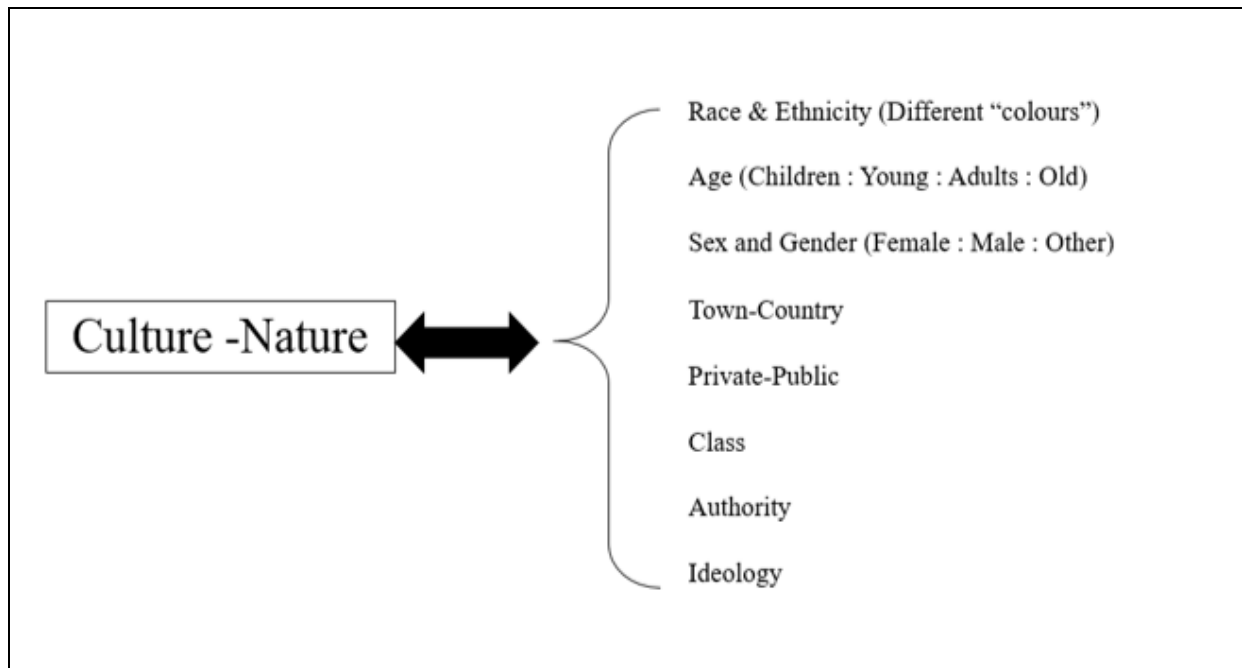


Figure 2a: A Matrix of Core contradictions with focus on the dialectics of culture-nature in relation to other dialectically constituted relationships.

The contradiction of Culture and Nature is dialectically related to the other core contradictions in all the three dimensions of logics: Bio-, Socio-, and Ideologic.

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Each of the core contradictions is constituted by a dialectical relation between at least two dialectically related positions of the persons. Let's briefly exemplify:

Race & Ethnicity: You are socially pre-positioned by your race characteristics – and one race or ethnic group dominates the other groups and the individuals of the group. The specific dominance form is historical, i.e., it is changing over time, but until now 'black and brown' people are suppressed by 'white' people, and by the institutions in most western countries, including directly or indirectly colonized areas. Sometimes the suppression is more or less tacitly reproduced; sometimes the suppressed people protest locally, and perhaps broadly in a country and even over greater parts of the world. The point is that the suppression works in all fields of society, even though it may be reinforced or weakened by your membership of the other core contradictions. "Black lives matter" is a relevant protest against racism, and our challenge is of course to change that racist core contradiction all over the world, as equity is a necessary condition for sustainable, fruitful, and peaceful human relations.

In a similar way we can recognize the systematic asymmetry of **Sex & gender** between 'male' and 'female' human beings, both in relation to general social power and privileges and in relation to our right to our own body and sexuality. Here we can see the Me-too-movement, and the LGBT+ movements as relevant protests against the dominant sexist – and binary - culture.

Equal rights for the different **Age**-groups including the protest of the youth against the older generations' climate destructive lifeforms can be mentioned here, with Greta Thunberg as a prominent example.

The exportation of dangerous waste and outsourcing of unhealthy production from rich towns and countries to poor people and areas are examples of the **Town-Country** relationship at a global scale.

The relationship of **Private-Public** is deeply related with individual capitalistic ownership, private property, and the governmental institutions and deserves very much rethinking and democratic, ecological, and sustainable development.

Class-contradictions imply all systematic un-equally distributed relations to production, distribution, and consumption, like **Authority** implies the distribution of personal power, whereas **Ideology** implies the hegemony of belief and worldview, e.g., the opposition between the different religions of the world or within a community. Ideology also implies the contradictions of the different, competing scientific paradigms, some of which dominate in certain times and areas. In

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his famous book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Thomas KUHN introduced the concept of paradigm shifts. Perhaps, we can hope that we now will see a general shift of scientific paradigms into a more ecological and organic way of doing and use science theoretically and practically.

As you see, the culture-nature-relation relates dialectically to all other core contradictions and cannot be separated from these. This means that changes in one imply changes in all the other.

Hereby the goals meet a lot of **challenges**, e.g., directly, and indirectly resistance from the parties (people and companies) that are used to dominate the relation in question and thus profit on the recent state of affairs: “white, male persons of middle age, owners of property, authority, western ideology, living in comfortable zones”.

In a narrower sense, **science is itself a part** of the dangerous state of the climate and environmental crises whether we deal with disciplines in the fields of the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, health sciences, engineering, or agricultures. As mentioned above we are looking forward to a shift in the scientific paradigms. The sciences should change **the de-contextualizing and de-personalizing** ways of exploring and interacting with the nature; we have to realize the interdependency of nature and our behaviour as mentioned in *UN's Sixth climate assessment report* (IPPC 2021).

Our language about nature is often objectifying the nature, placing human beings as the benefiting, thinking, understanding, defining subject and agent of the processes and products.

It seems obvious that the preorganized international society cannot solve the problems, as pointed out by e.g., Greta Thunberg. It is obvious that the nations tend to maintain their own national interests; the branches of production and the market have their own logics for the desirable development and monopoly; the military and industrial strong parts of the world seem engaged in power fight. Even the rich Denmark tends to exclude fugitives and Muslims from access to national and human rights. We are far away from equity and fair sharing of property and goods.

3. Two ideas for the ecological democratic dialogue in a heterogenous world.

Traditional communication theory meets the dualism between symmetrical models and the real diversity among all individuals. On the one hand, the communication is considered to be

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symmetrical, on the other hand the involved persons are different individuals with different experiences, languages, backgrounds, in short: different positions in the totality of dialectical oppositions. It is not only a matter of different national languages as e.g., English, Danish and Portuguese, it is also a difference in the basic individual meanings and deep semantics because of the different life conditions and contexts.

Therefore, our suggestion complements the general concepts of translation between different languages as a well-known method for international communication. We relate to the useful concept of ‘*linguaging*’, implying that we are developing language when we are deeply involved in communication with partners of different cultures than our own. Cultures are developed by groups of people who are sharing life circumstances. For example, people in a village or region, people sharing a common language, people with common jobs, people of the same age or gender, people of the same religion, people from the same social class. Thus, we are all part of more cultures. In cultures, people develop ideas and values that are consistent with their circumstances and place in the biological and social world, and they develop shared deep semantics. They develop common ways of doing and tools, common traditions, common ways of understanding and communicating, and they develop procedures for inter-action.

In Bundsgaard; Lindø; Bang (2012) we explored the aims and objectives of language learning in a connected and interdependent world. We identified three contexts in which we meet as humans:

- 1) *Intra-cultural* situations, where participants come from the same culture, and therefore share understandings, values, ideas, procedures and so on.
- 2) *Inter-cultural* situations where the participants are from different cultures, but over time and practice have developed ways of inter-acting across differences, often through developing institutions: schools, state, parliaments, the market etc.
- 3) *Trans-cultural* situations where the participants come from different cultures, with different values, ways of interacting, traditions and so on, and therefore need to find ways to interact with attention to the differences in identification, values, metaphors, traditions and so on.

Figure 3: Intra-, Inter-, and Trans-cultural communication.

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As you may have experienced, we often understand some underlying human sense of humour or grief beyond the language or words available. In a way you can feel and understand some common communication without the common words, and sometimes without no earlier common experience.

Thus, we suggest exploring the idea of **Trans-Cultural Communication**. That could be a way to go behind our own convenient cultural assumptions, both in relation to far away foreigners, and in relation to our everyday communication.

It could be an experimental way to share and develop our knowledge and projects across the different cultures. Perhaps it could improve our willingness to share our life activities in a deeper democratic, ecological way.

A similar experimental model is our ethical model for the Democratic Dialogue. Again, we have to realize that we are different individuals constituted by both common, and different characteristics and meanings, beliefs, interests, capacities, etc. The democratic communication doesn't have the purpose to win or convict the other person, but to establish a common friendly relationship. That means, that we together in a joint dialogue explore and negotiate our terms for the handling of problem X in four steps,

- (a) **Principle of similarity and sharing:** What do we already share?
- (b) **Principle of different identities:** What are the differences that we cannot suspend and therefore have to respect? And what are the differences that we can modify without losing our identity and dignity?
- (c) **Principle of experiment:** How do we formulate the solving of the problem X by means of our common and different capacities, in a way that fulfils our common and different identities?
- (d) **Principle of evaluation and revision:** How do we establish the social and biological conditions for our experimental agreement, and how do we secure a revision procedure?

Figure 4: A model for the democratic dialogue.

Of course, this is only a sketch, however it should illustrate an alternative way for the ideas of 'the free and equal communication' in a democratic way, and on a basis of different power distribution.

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That kind of dialogue is seen in many countries that have established *Citizen Councils*, representing people from a wide range of social positions, cf. the following quotation from OECD (2021),

Around the world, public authorities from all levels of government increasingly turn to Citizens' Assemblies, Juries, Panels and other representative deliberative processes to tackle complex policy problems. They convene groups of people representing a wide cross-section of society for at least one full day — and often much longer — to learn, deliberate, and develop collective recommendations that consider the complexities and compromises required for solving multifaceted public issues.

4. A list of challenges.

Let us suggest a list of 17 challenges for the western world, and Ecolinguistics, and ourselves.

It is a challenge for humanity to transform our cultural forms, including all our institutions in a way that respect the sustainability of the life of the Earth. The recent life forms of human beings destroy the life conditions for future generations.

Our common house IS on fire – our house is the planet Earth and there is no time and nowhere to escape.

Our rationality of production, distribution, communication, and consumption is dominated by capitalistic Economy and power relations that are ethnocentric and ignore the balances of culture and nature and all the core contradictions of race, ethnicity, sex, age, class, ideology, authority, town-country, public-private.

Our aesthetics and prejudices are formed by our cultural history, esp. farming, fishing, manufacturing, imperialism, industrialism, technologies, educational institutions, churches, universities, medico-media-military-complex.

Today we must recognize that we as human beings mutually have to share across all the core contradictions, and in sustainable balance with all the living plants and creatures of the world.

It is a challenge for Eco-linguists to contribute to the transformation in democratic and peaceful ways, including sharing of all knowledge, transforming the monopoly of patents and ownership of vital knowledge and resources.

We must contribute to a global solidarity by developing and sharing the alternative suggestions and technologies.

We must develop transcultural communication that allows a global democratic dialogue on the implied contradictions, cf. Bundsgaard, Lindø; BANG, 2012.

We must contribute to *Ecological Imagination and Empathy*.

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We must contribute to an ecologically and democratically based Economy, both locally, regionally, and worldwide.

We must contribute to new standards for ecological, biological, organic growing and production, that explicitly reflect all relevant footprints and indicators for sustainability and diversity in relation to biological, social, and mental constituents of human life.

Human beings do not have to behave as the owners of the earth, or the privileged race created in the picture of a god but be good neighbours for all species of the earth.

We have to produce, to like, to prefer, and to feel well in future of sustainable life forms, e.g., ecological economy, equality, naturally based culture, friendship, natural colours, food by organically grown vegetables, organic clothes, houses, transport.

We have to find solutions of the problem of privilege blindness that means that many people have privileges by the dominant social forms and feel an interest in prolonging that way of life.

Ecolinguistics must criticise and analyse discourses on the necessary transformation in order to contribute to public transparency of the involved interests.

However, we have to realize that constituting social institutions to a high degree rest upon power and knowhow controlled by multinational monopolistic consorts.

We have to support and develop democratic councils of the different generations and of the diverse social categories.

Postscript

In our presentation two years ago, we referred to Greta Thunberg's important activities with the following umbrella:

Greta Thunberg creates a brilliant discourse and dialogue very similar to our theoretical framework and the critical traditions since the 1960's, implying both feeling, thinking and action.

Thunberg has attracted a lot of attention from across the world, and kids are following her example by striking and protesting. In their arguments, catchphrases and explanations, Thunberg's words and arguments are echoed and expanded upon.

We hope that all of you, all of us, will support the younger generation and people all over the world by doing our best - both professionally and private – to transform the fatal social, biological, and mental cultural order into sustainable ways of living – that is to make our sciences to life sciences.

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