Nurturing linguistic and communicative expertise in/for academic and professional sustainability

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Thank you for extending the opportunity to participate in this historic event. I feel particularly honoured to have been asked to deliver the SEKOM inaugural lecture.

In celebrating Nancy Lea Eik-Nes's contributions to the 'becoming' of SEKOM, it seems appropriate to read a written speech – with no powerpoint slides! I hope it is 'pointful' and not 'powerless'. This is a maiden attempt, with the task to communicate well!

Let me begin with the title of my lecture, especially the first word in the title – 'nurturing' – which came to mind in association with Nancy when I was approached by Goril Thomassen Hammerstad to embrace the talk-task. Many of Nancy's students and colleagues at NTNU will not hesitate to call her a 'nurturer' – to use a green, ecology-friendly metaphor educationally. Her teaching and mentoring style resembles gardening; she has the equivalent of the proverbial 'green finger' dedicated to caring for all – almost with the adage: 'let all flowers and weeds bloom together'! She not only inspires her students but also her students inspire her. It was her 'inspiring students' who were the foundation of her PhD in applied linguistics from NTNU, exploring the connection between writing and identity through the medium of her inspiring students' 'inspiring' logs – what later became dubbed as 'dialogging' to mean dialogues surrounding logs. Here are a couple of photos where Sturla and I are engaged in the dia-logging process in the physical, wooden sense in the cabin surroundings in Oppdal. Note that one needs an expert to learn from prior to claiming the expert status for himself! I believe Sturla's logging expertise existed independent of his professional expertise in foetal medicine. Talking of dia-logging, yesterday I was in the process of dia-hedging in Aalborg (as seen in the picture). I very much look forward to SEKOM producing a PhD on the topic of dia-hedging in years to come!

If I recall my numerous visits to Trondheim, starting with 2006 and also my last visit a month or so ago, every time we have met up for a social catch-up, Nancy unfailingly appraises me about her past and current students' achievements in a selfless manner, rather than talking about herself. No wonder sometimes these social-catch-ups last for

hours in the cosy home setting (a recent one clocking 8 hours!). For me, Nancy embodies the skill of transference in a loosely psychoanalytic sense: she unequivocally transfers or redirects her experience and expertise to her students. So her students' success stories tend to reflect Nancy's professionalism – leading me to the conclusion that, in a mildly conspiratorial way, she is human and not self-less after all! In Nancy one sees a conflation of **academic expertise and professional expertise** – a distinction I will come back to during the course of the talk. Let me just wrap up this introductory framing by saying that Nancy's contributions to the writing programme at NTNU have been phenomenal, so it is very fitting to dedicate this lecture to her legacy on the occasion of the launch of SEKOM!

The focus of my written-to-be-spoken talk will be the nature of linguistic and communicative expertise with regard to academic and professional lifeworlds. I will address the core matter of SEKOM, which is implied in the last word of the title – 'sustainability' – in suggesting how a commitment to nurturing academic and professional expertise at the linguistic and communicative level through the teaching and research programmes will connect to the work lives of the graduates when they leave the university. In my view, through fostering such a linkage can SEKOM remain sustainable for the foreseeable future.

The nature-nurture interface and the notion of competence

Still echoing the word 'nurturing' in my title, let me begin with the nature-nurture interface which is no longer regarded as a divide but as a dialectical relationship better understood through the metaphor of ecology. The nature-nurture synergy is most pronounced in the field of genetics, where biological determinism combines with societal/environmental affordance, thus generating a climate of healthy ambivalence or more precisely, '**variants of uncertain significance'** (that is a genetic sequence change, whose association with disease risk is currently unknown; metaphorically speaking, current genetic knowledge remains a 'fly in the ointment').

In a parallel way, we can approach knowledge and awareness of language/communication through the nature-nurture dialectics. There is some truth in language and communication skills being inborn abilities and competencies, heralded by the Chomskyan revolution, which is enshrined in the notion of **the universal grammar**. But then the research strand labelled **language socialisation** would urge us to think that, paradoxically speaking, we are not born with language abilities but rather we socialise into language and at the same time we need language in order to socialise. Communication is thus implicated in both language development and socialisation of self.

The self, as George Herbert Mead insisted, is a social process that evolves vis-à-vis the generalised other. According to Mead (1934):

> "The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there at birth but arises in **the process of social experience and activity**, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process […] The organised community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self can be called **'the generalised other'** … It is in the form of the generalised other that the social process influences the behaviour of the individuals involved in it and carrying it on…"

Intriguingly, babies communicate first and learn to use language later. One wonders, apart from language and communication being intertwined, whether communicative competence does precede linguistic competence. In several multicultural contexts that I have studied, involving migrants and asylum seekers in institutional and professional settings, it is not uncommon to locate communicative or discourse competence ahead of linguistic competence. Discourse competence (= contextual appropriateness) is connected with linguistic competence (= grammatical correctness) but these two concepts should not be conflated. As Joel Sherzer (1987: 296) points out: "Discourse is a level or component of language use, **related to but distinct from grammar**". To quote Dell Hymes (1972: 277-278): "a person who chooses occasions and sentences suitably, but is master only of fully grammatical sentences, is at best a bit odd. Some occasions call for **being appropriately ungrammatical** […] There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless".

How does Hymes' proclamation made in 1972 fare in our times and age, 45 years later? Insights from the classical studies about language socialisation are as relevant today as they were in the past decades. Building on Schutz's (1964) 'common scheme of reference' and Garfinkel's (1967) 'practical reasoning', Cicourel (1974: 30) proposes the notion of **'interpretive procedures'** which "provide the actor with a developmentally changing sense of social structure that enables him [sic] to assign meaning or relevance to an environment of objects". These are relevant traditions to consider when positioning and profiling the role-responsibilities of language and communication units such as SEKOM. The challenge is: (i) how to prepare students 'appropriately' – even if ungrammatically – so they show readiness for their future work lives; and (ii) how to strive for a balance between discourse/communicative competence (= rules of use) and linguistic/grammatical competence (=rules of grammar), and certainly not the latter at the expense of the former.

If we take the academic setting – and academic writing, in particular – we see major lapses in students' work at a level beyond grammar. Students may produce correct sentences, conforming to the standards of academic writing, but not follow the requirements of what is considered an appropriate genre (= systematic literature review; rationalisation of conceptual and methodological frameworks; maintenance of consistency in the language of analysis; making evidence-based claims; critical discussion of research findings etc.). Many researchers call the latter **'genre knowledge'** which is distinctive from linguistic knowledge and subject knowledge. Even when producing doctoral and post-doctoral work, academic researchers may display high quality linguistic and subject knowledge but fail to communicate genre knowledge.

The first key point I wish to make is that communicative knowledge is intimately embedded within genre knowledge, but one does not necessarily entail the other. Through taught programmes and feedback procedures, language/communication teachers need to make their students constantly aware of the nuances in the configuration and re-configuration of these different types of knowledge to guarantee academic success. But the task does not stop here – for both the teachers and the students – as academic success is only a first step towards being ready for professional lives. The academic training, including acquisition of and socialisation into genre-specific knowledge, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for success in professional career trajectories. The task therefore is one of mapping academic competencies on to professional competencies and, as a corollary, to embed as much of professional competencies as possible in an anticipatory way into the academic curriculum.

Characterising communication

Turning to communication beyond the curriculum, it is important to recognise that communication is not a natural phenomenon as such but that communicative competence can be nurtured through training and critical awareness raising. Here I offer a five-fold characterisation of communication as follows:

- **Communication as common sense**, as the mundane, natural, cultural construct. Like a native speaker of a language, one is a competent communicator even though s/he may not be able to explain how the language system or communication system works using a metalanguage (scientific terminology).

- **Communication as skill/behaviour**: from within the discipline of psychology, there is a routine aspect to behaviour patterns. Behaviour operates at a generic level, with the same norms and expectations within socio-cultural groups, which can be extended to organisational and professional groups. More importantly, the assumption is that behaviour can be taught/learnt (self-taught and self–learnt), modelled upon and socialised into experientially.

- **Communication as art:** here subjectivity, intuition, judgement are intrinsic to communicative practice. In considering communication as an art, we appreciate variability in how we communicate, independent of the formal teaching and training that we undergo.

- **Communication as science/knowledge**: Different human and social science disciplines – psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy as well as linguistics, rhetoric and semiotics – are the key contributors. As a scientific discipline, communication is rich with theories/principles underlying how we communicate – ranging from Peirce's interpretability of signs in terms of icons, indexes and symbols to Grice's cooperative principle to Brown and Levinson's politeness principle to Sperber and Wilson's relevance principle; from Foucault's knowledge/power dialectics to Bourdieu's field, habitus, doxa and symbolic power to Habermas' strategic and communicative action to Bakhtin's dialogicism, polyphony and intertextuality.

- And last but not the least, **communication as practice**. Apart from being both a science and an art, communicative practice is premised on interpretive repertoires, which can be mastered through exposure and education.

At the core of this taxonomic exercise is the overarching injunction that if we think of communication as behaviour, then everything has message value. Watzlawick et al. (1968) illustrate the postulate **'one cannot not communicate'** with reference to schizophrenic patients:

> "If schizophrenic behaviour is observed with aetiological considerations in abeyance, it appears that the schizophrenic tries *not to communicate*. But since even nonsense, silence, withdrawal, immobility (postural silence), or any other form of denial is itself a communication, the schizophrenic is faced with the impossible task of denying that he is communicating and at the same time denying that his denial is a communication." (Watzlawick et al. 1968: 50-51)

Meaning making and understanding are central to communication, which means the other-orientation is the defining feature of communication. Concerning children, Piaget (1932) remarked that children "fail to understand one another … because they think that they understand one another" (p.101). He goes on to make the general point: "the words spoken are not thought of from the point of view of the person spoken to, and the latter … selects them according to his own interest, and distorts them in favour of previously formed conceptions" (p.98). The other, as I shall continue to illustrate further, will be constituted differentially in the academic context and in the professional work-life context. Meaning making thus amounts to lifelong learning.

The message I am trying to convey is a simple one. The significance of language and communication in academic and professional life courses is hugely important and that competence in language/communication cannot be a taken-for-granted entity that one is born with, with the attendant assumption that students should be left alone to fend for themselves. By extension, then, university teaching should stay focused on content and remain indifferent to the mode. And this myth certainly needs exploding and I see SEKOM playing a crucial part in this endeavour.

It is instructive to signal here the other side of the equation. There seems to be a widespread misconception in the university sector that language/communication is a behavioural skill and that language/communication teachers need to take on a servicing role with the explicit goal of academic skills development – away from content knowledge and to an extent, away from genre-specific knowledge in the sense I have described earlier. Such a stance (and I know there are expectations in this regard as far as SEKOM is concerned) would be so myopic and unproductive. It would signal a gross undermining of language and communication expertise borne out by colleagues within SEKOM and beyond. Paradoxically, in foregrounding the academic skills component and our skills expertise we may sustain our practical service-level relevance, but this may mean we run the risk of devaluing the symbolic aspects of languaging/discoursing/communicating in the academic and professional marketplaces.

From competence to expertise

In order to make my point I wish to move away from competence to expertise – expertise is not generally equated with skills; it does subsume skills and much more. In passing, I should add that the duality of skills vs. knowledge is not sustainable. For instance, the surgeon's expertise is the skill in surgical procedures; an instructor of proficiency courses

has expertise in teaching/learning skills). For me, **"skills are that part of expertise that is acquired through practice"**.

With regard to the competence-expertise conundrum, I would suggest that, unlike competence which is often taken as an either-or concept, **expertise is a layered and scaler concept**. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) identify five discrete levels in the development of expertise:

- **Novice** (one who adheres rigidly to taught rules or plans, with little situational perception and no discretionary judgment);
- **Advanced Beginner** (one who follows guidelines for action based on attributes or aspects; with situational perception still limited, all attributes and aspects are treated separately and given equal importance);
- **Competent** (one who can cope with "crowdedness", and sees actions at least partly in terms of longer-term goals, conscious deliberate planning, standardised and routinised procedures);
- **Proficient** (one who sees situations holistically rather than in terms of aspects, who sees what is most important in a situation, perceives deviations from the normal pattern; decision-making becomes less laboured, and uses maxims for guidance, whose meaning varies according to the situation);
- **Expert** (one no longer relies on rules, guidelines or maxims, and has an intuitive grasp of situations based on deep tacit understanding, one who uses analytic approaches only in novel situations or when problems occur, with a vision of what is possible).

Note that 'being competent' is a mid-level state within the cline of novice to expertise. A competent individual has to strive towards being 'proficient', and ultimately, 'an expert'.

In the field of nursing, Patricia Benner (1984: 31-32) offers the following definition of expert performance:

> "**The expert performer [is one] who no longer relies on analytic principle (rules, guidelines, maxims)**. The expert nurse, with an enormous background of experience, now has **an intuitive grasp** of each situation and zeroes in on the accurate region of the problem without wasteful consideration of a large range of alternative diagnoses and solutions."

This very much echoes Donald Schön's (1983: viii) conceptualisation that "competent practitioners … **exhibit a kind of knowing-in-practice, most of which is tacit** … Indeed, practitioners themselves often reveal a capacity for reflection on their **intuitive knowing** in the midst of action and sometimes use this capacity to cope with the **unique, uncertain**, **and conflicted situations of practice**." In a similar vein, Woolery (1990) sees expertise as "performance without conscious awareness of the knowledge being used". It also echoes what the Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman and his colleague Amos Tversky call **'the cognitive heuristics'** – the cognitive shortcuts people employ in making judgements under conditions of uncertainty.

The calibration of the novice-expertise continuum constituting as many as five layers is intuitively appealing and helpful in going beyond a dichotomous characterisation of novice vs expert as two ends of the spectrum. But this delicate calibration does not lend itself to phenomenological understanding or discursive description. We need to move away from typologies surrounding the novice-expert continuum and consider instead the **mutation/transformation of expertise in situ**. I borrow the notion of mutability from both linguistics (accent studies) and genetics (DNA sequencing), to argue for significant alterations in our appreciation of various levels of expertise.

One way of making sense of expertise is by juxtaposing it to **laity or lay knowledge**. Alfred Schutz (1964: 122) contrasts **expert knowledge [specificity] and lay knowledge [typicality]** as follows:

> "The expert's knowledge is restricted to a limited field but therein it is clear and distinct. His opinions are based on warranted assertions: his judgements are not mere guesswork or loose suppositions. The man on the street has a working knowledge of many fields which are not necessarily coherent with one another. His knowledge of recipes indicating how to bring forth in typical situations typical results by typical means."

So far I have been talking about expertise as a scaler concept (i.e., developmental stages of expertise) and expertise as a divisive concept (i.e., expert vs non-expert). In our contemporary society, **expertise is also a diffused concept**, that is, expertise is widely distributed in society and in workplaces, as in the case of distributed expertise across specialists (Tuckett et al. 1985) in critical decision making scenarios. Additionally, we can extend the notion of distributed expertise to include **expert systems** as well as **knowledgeable citizens**.

Nowadays we see the emergence of so-called **ordinary experts** (Tolson 2010) in response to the affordance of social media and the new forms of consumerism – such as beauty gurus and family chefs in YouTube vlogs. In the web-mediated environment, it is no longer possible to discriminate between traditional categories such as professional and amateur when appraising beauty gurus, because the inherent ambiguity of their position requires that for the sake of professional success they should pose as amateurs (Riboni 2017). There seems to be a shifting trend, moving away **from "credentialed experts" to "citizen experts"** in everything from restaurant reviews to medical advising – what Beth Simone Noveck (2015) labels **"technologies of expertise".** Ordinary people make claims to expertise as a way of promoting their skill-set and service. There are gardeners relabelling themselves as 'tree surgeons' and bakers calling themselves 'cake experts' as they appropriate technical language to sound credible, mostly noticeable in the inflated price tags. The tree surgeon charges twice as much for the same gardening job. The expert cake is expensive though it tastes the same!

Extending the diffused nature of expertise, let me draw on the notion of **the expert patient** – e.g. chronic patients having access not only to biomedical knowledge via the internet but also to experiential knowledge directly and indirectly – directly because of living with long periods of illness; and indirectly because they often participate in patient associations and use blogs, chat lines etc. Access to biomedical knowledge is facilitated by e-health literacy as information becomes accessible via the internet. The notion of 'expert patient' captures both e-health literacy and their embodied experiential knowledge. The expert patient has always existed – more so in the 17th and 18th centuries when they were expected to write detailed case histories for the physician's attention (see Reiser 1978).

In the language of PC (I mean **patient-centredness**, not political correctness, although patient-centredness is a form of political correctness), patients are no longer understood as **'unknowing bodies'** but as people with **autonomy, subjectivity, agency** (Sullivan 2003) – they are no longer just passive recipients of treatment and therapy. In a sense, patient-centredness does not just mean equipoise and equality of relations, it also raises a potential threat to the practice of doctoring and biomedical knowledge. The phenomenon of 'difficult patients' or 'heartsink patients' extends beyond the hypochondriac to include those who seem to have assimilated a fair amount of biomedical knowledge from the internet which remains at a level of 'uncertain significance'.

A parallel can easily be drawn to the academic setting where student-centred learning takes priority and could pose challenges for teachers' expertise. When do students'

knowledge, like that of the expert patients, gained from outside the curriculum and combined with their experiential learning at the individual and group levels, supersede the teacher's stock of subject knowledge, and even genre knowledge?

Professional expertise is open to challenge not only by the so-called 'lay experts', but also by the very existence of expert systems which can undermine the expertise of the profession, individually and collectively. Following Giddens (1991: 18), in post-modern societies, "knowledge and information are ordered into expert systems, i.e., modes of technical knowledge which have validity independent of the practitioners and clients who make use of them".

Let me briefly digress to say **what an expert system is** and how it impacts upon the practising of expertise. Very crudely speaking, expert systems are knowledge processing and knowledge generating automated machines. In this sense, decision aids such as algorithms, screening programmes, clinical trials, electronic templates, test results, transcription notations are exemplars of expert systems. The experts now rely on such expert systems in their everyday activities. Increasingly experts will be recognised in terms of how they relate to expert systems, rather than their judgement and intuition. For instance, biomedical expertise is no longer seen to reside in one's head but being systems-dependent. Knowing will soon be replaced by where to find knowledge. This is true in the academic sphere as students rely on sources such as Wikipedia. The threat from expert systems was anticipated by Ivan Illich 40 years ago when he pronounced: "As techniques multiply and become more specific, their use often requires less complex judgements and skills" (1977: 33).

The communicative basis of academic and professional expertise

Drawing from the extant literature on expertise – mainly from a cognitive perspective based on games such as chess – **the key components of expertise are as follows: scientific knowledge; experience in a field of practice; pattern recognition; and acknowledgement by others**. Expertise in professional practice from a discursive/communicative perspective is relevant, but there are teething problems of definition, description and measurement of expertise.

What constitutes knowledge/expertise at the language/communicative level and how we calibrate the different hierarchies of knowledge/expertise are pretty nuanced. As language/communication educators and researchers we are faced with a two-fold challenge: (i) Does language/communication practice index expertise?; and (ii) Is it

feasible to operationalise the novice-to-expert taxonomy in terms of communicative expertise? The short answer to the second question is mainly negative; whereas the answer to the first question is a resolute yes – which I wish to take up next. I first provide two anecdotal examples.

Is the choice of tumbler gendered, or simply a display of noviceness?

The location is a restaurant in Kuala Lumpur and my host is the Dean of the Faculty (female). We both ordered watermelon juice to go with our meals. The waitress, however, brought the juice in two different tumblers – mine looked like a bear jug and hers a slim-looking tall glass. It was intriguing for me as I expected the same juice to be served in similar tumblers as we were paying the same price. It was clear that because of the variable size of the two tumblers, we were being offered different quantities of juice. The Dean's interpretation was that this was gender-tailored service. My interpretation differed and I put it down to the waitress's noviceness. Our disagreement had to be settled, so I asked if I could speak to the restaurant manager to determine the waitress's work profile. The manager accepted that it was an error of judgement and apologised while confirming that she was a trainee waiter who only had a few days of work experience at this particular restaurant.

Is volume of talk an indicator of expertise or noviceness?

A second episode also concerns the restaurant scene and the location is Jyväskylä in Finland – last month. We were at one of the reputed restaurants in the city, which had a rich history, imbued with a musical tradition. The waiter appeared over-enthusiastic in his communicative style – offering hyper-explanations not only about the menu but also about the history of the restaurant. In the end he even insisted we should take a tour of the other parts of the building. This manifest level of communication, for me, signalled that he was new to his role as a waiter. I have not got round to verifying this yet!

Talking more or volubility – that is, asking more questions and explaining in abundance – is associated with noviceness in professional practice in nursing, medicine etc. Junior doctors in the intensive care unit are known to be explaining more – straight from the textbook – as a way of displaying their medical knowledge to reassure patients and family members but also as a way of minimising sensitive and awkward questions being directed at them for which they may struggle to give appropriate answers. Likewise, studies have shown how nurses lacking training and experience would ask far more questions when taking patient history than those who are trained and experienced. Experienced, expert

consultants do not usually offer hyper-explanations but make their presence affordable for client-initiated questions requiring a measured response.

'Communicative expertise', as I have been discussing so far, includes not only knowledge/skill *about* the mechanics of communication but also the channels through which the other types of knowledge/skill (including scientific, experiential, technological, organisational, legal and ethical) *are* communicated in real-life settings. In this sense, expertise – as a discursive phenomenon – applies equally to professional conduct as well as to ordinary everyday practice in many academic and professional settings.

If we take the healthcare profession as an exemplar, both scientific expertise and experiential expertise have to be mediated through what is referred to as **'clinical judgement'**, similar to Aristotle's notion of **phronesis** – which is described as the flexible, interpretive capacity that enables moral reasoners to determine the best action to take when knowledge depends on circumstance. Montgomery (2006) calls this **'practical knowledge'**, which is closer to intuition, that is a merger of knowledge, skill and experience (Benner and Tanner 1987), echoing **'tacit knowledge'** (Polanyi 1958). The operational dimension of expertise, the know-how knowledge is what Schön (1987) calls **'artistry'** which is typically used as a 'junk category' to describe what cannot be 'assimilated to the dominant model of professional knowledge'. Perhaps 'junk knowledge', if I were to use my linguistic licence, is what we need to becoming 'appropriately ungrammatical', to reiterate Hymes' words.

As long as expertise is conceived of as a combination of intuition, judgement and tacit knowing-in-practice, it will be in stark contrast to expert systems which include organisational rules and regulations, aimed at standardisation, proceduralisation, routinisation of practice – often imposed by management. Ironically, expert systems utilise input from professional experts, but in turn they regulate and even dictate professional practice. There is optimism, however, that expert systems will "not possess the attribute of 'experience' which contributes to the development of pattern recognition" (Woolery 1990: 773).

It is through the exercise of practical judgement in context-specific communicative ways that professional expertise can be sustained. Surely there is a close connection between language and communication and this intersection is the existence of what we would call **the metalanguage** – or the framing language – which borders on communication, in academic and in many professional settings. As Watzlawick et al. (1968: 53) maintain: "t**he ability to metacommunicate appropriately** is not only the *condition sine qua non* of

successful communication, but is intimately linked with the enormous problem of awareness of self and others".

In trying to draw my talk to a closure, let me relate the notion of expertise to the twin settings in my title – **academic and professional**. In the academic context, it is required that students display their knowledge and reasoning in manifest ways through flagging, sign-posting, defining terminology etc. In other words, we encourage our students to err on the side of metacommunication. But such an elaborate communicative style in a professional work environment would be labelled 'academic' where reasoning should be tacit and implicit and the communicative style is meant to be inference-rich. This is particularly true, say, in high stake environments like the operating theatre. Rather than exchanging explicit instructions and advice tokens, **online commentaries** focused on the patient's current state (e.g. the blood pressure is too low; the face seems discoloured) function as request for next action for the relevant team member.

As a way of summary, professional expertise is routinely manifest discursively – via talk, text and other modalities. But this manifestation is necessarily context-sensitive, defying any easy one-to-one correspondence for purposes of definition and assessment. Following from this assumption, in this talk I have tried to suggest that it is a particular challenge to calibrate in measurable ways the novice-expert professional continuum vis-à-vis layered discursive/communicative expertise. More generically, drawing on the classic distinction between **know-that and know-how** as suggested by Gilbert Ryle (1949), the question remains: how does knowledge-based expertise (know-that) map onto the representations and articulations of such knowledge/expertise (know-how)? Communication here is more than the mechanics of information transmission – it constitutes the means through which knowledge/expertise is indexed in action. This would call for a consideration of the positioning of the language/communication analyst and his/her knowledge/expertise in interpreting talk, text and other modalities as expert systems in the intersectional sphere of institutional and professional orders. There is thus the need for collaborative research involving (professional) discourse analysts and (professional) discourse practitioners through a shared (meta)language. We also need to go beyond language as such in its oral and written form to encompass all other dimensions of communication – academically and professionally.

As SEKOM develops, the engagement with the language-communication interface needs to be three-fold, keeping in mind the mutative nature of the novice-expert continuum:

- **Theorising communication**

- **Analysing communication** (rigorous and robust analysis to test theory and as a precursor to assessment; this includes a movement from gaze to glance [Sarangi 2017])
- **Assessing communication** (in educational and other institutional and professional settings such as healthcare, social work, policing, legal settings, municipalities, corporate businesses and finances, translating/interpreting etc.)

The overarching question is: how through our academic programmes do we scaffold and nurture our students to first succeed academically by appropriating a communicative style which is elaborate, extensive and manifest? At the same time our responsibility is to prepare them for the workforce where the academic communicative style needs to be transformed and become more latent and tacit. In other words, how do we help mutate **academic expertise** needed for crossing the gates of higher education to **professional practice expertise**, and thus make it a sustainable enterprise? This I see as a challenge for university-level education in general, and for SEKOM in particular.

Sustainability has to be managed through diversity – i.e. diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches in language/communication research and teaching and also through engagement with a diverse range of professional settings, while developing a research-cum-impact agenda. A recipe for such a sustainability agenda would be:

- affordable presence
- reciprocity of perspectives
- joint problematisation
- thick participation
- collaborative interpretation and
- provision of hot feedback

This has to remain a list for the time being for the sake of closure.

There have been many false narrative closures during my talk. Let me come to the real closure as I quote Lyotard (1984: 48, 53) concerning our **postmodern condition**: "The question now asked by the professionalist student … is no longer 'Is it true?' but 'What use is it?'". SEKOM, and the higher education sector in general, needs to stay tuned to this urgent and eternal need for the linguistic/communicative operationalisation of expertise, so it remains functional in later life!

In dedicating this lecture to Nancy, as my concluding remark, I would like to return to where I started – this time with a twist to the title – underlining Nancy's nurturing expertise and how this can be communicated to the current and future flag-bearers of SEKOM! **In a nutshell, expertise has not only to be nurtured but also to be communicated as communication does index expertise.**

I wish SEKOM a very fruitful and sustainable future!

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