

Toward Transcultural Training in Linguistics for Mother Tongue Translators

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Abstract

Hundreds of languages in Africa are still unwritten or do not yet have Biblical literature translated into them. To help meet this need, SIL and partners have developed translation degree programs for training Africans in linguistics in several countries across Africa, largely adapted from Western training programs. However, for many African students, this formal training has not adequately prepared them for working in their own languages.

I conducted three case studies of translation degree programs in two Anglophone African countries, using focus groups, archival research, participant observation and ethnographic interviews. The purpose of this research was to develop new contextual approaches to intercultural training in linguistics for African mother tongue translators, to improve and facilitate the linguistic training process and improve the quality of mother tongue Bible translation and literacy.

The findings of these case studies indicate the need for more than just revising the present programs. Instead, because of significant cultural differences in dominant learning styles and preferred trainer-student relationships, and especially the distinct needs of those who study their own languages as insiders rather than as outsiders, there needs to be a new contextualized translation of the training program—transcultural training—in order to more effectively prepare African language speakers for their contribution to mother tongue Bible translation, literacy and Scripture use.

This paper summarizes and updates my Ph.D. dissertation (2010) in Intercultural Studies from Fuller Theological Seminary (SIL e-book 38 at: www.sil.org/resources/publications/entry/47858).

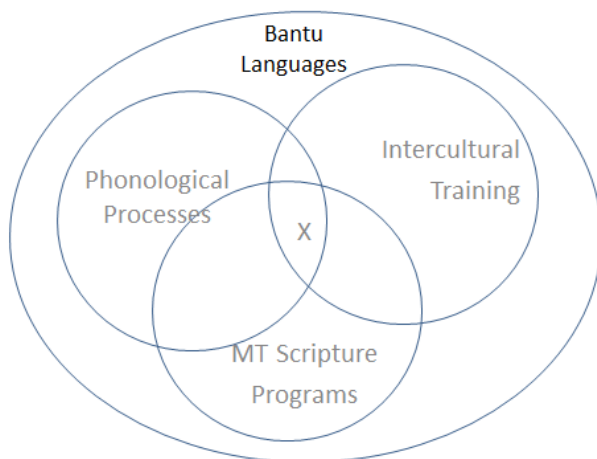
The Challenge

In order for Vision 2025 to become a reality, many more Africans (and others) need to be trained at higher levels in linguistics and related disciplines. For many students, more abstract and analytical subjects are difficult to grasp and apply to their own languages, e.g. Semantics and Phonology (including phonologically-conditioned allomorphy).

To address this challenge, my doctoral research at Fuller's School of Intercultural Studies addressed three research variables:

1. Phonological Processes: Analysis & Description
2. Mother Tongue Scripture Programs
3. Intercultural Training

in an overall context of Bantu languages, in which over half of the 500 languages (spoken by about 14 million people) do not yet have any of the Bible.



Case Studies of Three Anglophone TDPs

I conducted case studies of three translation degree programs taught in Anglophone Africa:

1. Pan Africa Christian University (PAC), in Nairobi, Kenya, which offered a 4-year BA in BT
2. Africa International University (formerly NEGST), also in Nairobi, which has a 2-year MA
(Note: Both the PAC & NEGST TDPs were founded by Dr. Ronnie Sim 20+ years ago)
3. Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN), which offers a 4-year BA and an MA
(begun 10 years ago, incorporating practicum courses)

The qualitative research methodology used for these case studies was based on:

1. Archival documents (e.g. proposals, emails)
2. Participant Observation (of courses)
3. Ethnographic Interviews (of present and former students and trainers)
and especially:
4. Focus Group Interviews (of present students and graduates)

The following table summarizes the participants in each case study. In particular, for the TCNN study, almost all of the (24) students were interviewed in a focus group and/or individually.

SUMMARY OF CASE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

School & Group	Tot	M	F	Ken	Sud	Tanz	Eth	DRC	Nig	UK	USA	Other
PAC												
Total TDP Students	85	69	16	19	21	14	8	4	1	0	0	18
B.A. Focus Group	5	2	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Student Interviews	16	13	3	10	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Trainer Interviews	9	2	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	2
NEGST												
M.A. Focus Group	4	4	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Student Interviews	7	5	2	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Trainer Interviews	6	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	1
TCNN												
Total TDP Students	24	20	4	0	0	0	0	0	24	0	0	0
Practicum Students Focus Group	7	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0
1st year B.A. Focus Group	12	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	0
Student Interviews	12	8	4	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	0
Trainer Interviews	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	1

Rubrics for Analyzing Data

I used two rubrics for analyzing the data resulting from the case studies. The first one, the Learning Styles-Multiple Intelligences Matrix from the Integrated Learning Model (Silver, Strong & Perini 2000) combines four learning styles (cf. Jung 1923 and Kolb 1984) with Howard Gardner's (1993) Multiple Intelligences. (Note: Most Western education generally addresses (only) the Verbal-Linguistic and Logical-Mathematical intelligences (cf. SAT and GRE exams) via the Understanding (Intuitive/Thinking) learning style.)

A. Four Learning Styles

Star Trek example

Mastery (Sensing-Thinking)

Scotty (engineer)

Interpersonal (Sensing-Feeling)

McCoy (doctor)

Self-Expressive (Intuitive-Feeling)

Kirk (captain)

Understanding (Intuitive-Thinking)

Spock (science officer)

B. Multiple Intelligences

Verbal-Linguistic

Logical-Mathematical

Spatial

Musical

Bodily-Kinesthetic

Interpersonal

Intrapersonal

(Naturalist)

I also analyzed the data using Ted Ward's (1973) six "distinct levels of tasks in the adaptation of instructional materials":

Level 1 Translation (language)

Level 2 Adjusting the vocabulary

Level 3 Changing the illustrations to refer to local experiences

Level 4 Restructuring the instructional procedures to (better) accommodate the pedagogical expectations of the learners

Level 5 Recasting the content to reflect local world-and-life views

Level 6 Accommodating the learning styles of the learners

For each method used in the case studies—focus groups, interviews, archival documentation and participation observation—I collected all of the key factors and indicators which arose. For each case study I compiled the key factors and indicators which appeared in more than one of the sources above. I then compiled the key factors and indicators which appeared in at least two of the case studies. Finally, I identified which of Ward's levels each key factor related to.

In the following tables, the key factors and indicators are organized by level:

Level I: Students' fluency and ability in the language of instruction (English)
6. The students' level and ability in English affect their comprehension, ability to do analysis and their overall performance. (also Area II)
25c. (More) formal training is needed in academic writing (NEGST).

Level II: Vocabulary issues (for example, too difficult or too technical)
6. The students' level and ability in English affect their comprehension, ability to do analysis and their overall performance. (also Area I)
16. Because many new concepts are difficult to understand and internalize, simplifying and limiting technical terminology help students to understand more crucial concepts.

Level III: Relevant examples and exercises, preferably from local/African context
1. Many African language examples, both those given by trainers and those elicited from students, are crucial, and even more are needed, specifically for Semantics.
2. Many exercises, especially using African languages, are crucial for learning (these are distinct and in addition to African language examples given in class).
10. Trainers need to have African cross-cultural training and experience, as well as African language experience. (also Areas IV, V and VI)

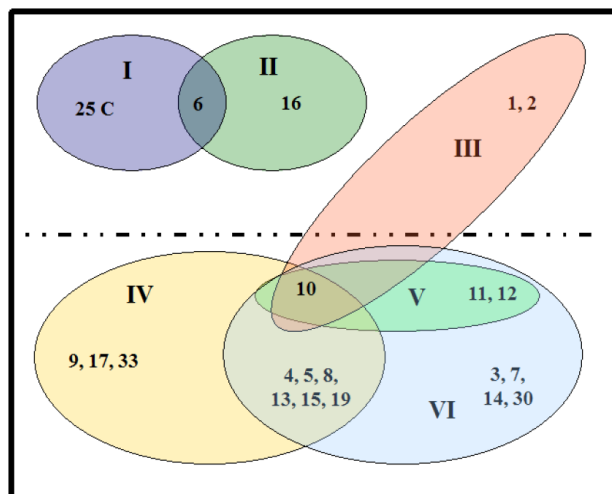
Level IV: Pedagogical methods and student/teacher expectations of Africans
4. More practical and interactive training—class discussions and asking questions (by trainers and students)—is more effective than just lecturing. (also Area VI)
5. Each TDP should have a Field Practicum component, even though this introduces many challenges (including orientation, scheduling and travel). (also Area VI)
8. Students being assigned topics to research and present to class (“students teaching students”) was very helpful for learning. (also Area VI)
9. The students’ interpersonal relationships with trainers are very important and are especially valued by African students.
10. Trainers need to have African cross-cultural training and experience, as well as African language experience. (also Areas III, V and VI)
13. Students need more time for the studies, so may need adjustments to their workload and/or help with time management. (also Area VI)
15. The use of audiovisual aids, such as videos, greatly supplements lectures.
17. Giving out handouts in classes can assist students’ learning.
19. The students need to see, demonstrated and repeated for them, clear and explicit instructions on how to do analysis (PAC). (also Area VI)
33. Teacher/student roles and expectations are important to understand, and to revise or clarify as necessary for more effective training (TCNN).

Level V: Content connects with/relevant to local/African cultures/worldviews
10. Trainers need to have African cross-cultural training and experience, as well as African language experience. (also Areas III, IV and VI)
11. Students want to see the connection between what they are studying in the classroom and its application to the “real world.” (also Area VI)
12. Students need to apply their training to their own languages. (also Area VI)

Level VI: African students’ learning styles (generally more global/wholistic)
3. Students want integration and an overview of how their courses fit together in the overall Bible translation task.
4. More practical and interactive training—class discussions and asking questions (by trainers and students)—is more effective than just lecturing. (also Area IV)
5. Each TDP should have a Field Practicum component, even though this introduces many challenges (including orientation, scheduling and travel). (also Area IV)
7. Understanding African learning styles, especially more global, is essential for being able to train effectively, in particular for Phonology.
8. Students being assigned topics to research and present to class (“students teaching students”) was very helpful for learning. (also Area IV)
10. Trainers need to have African cross-cultural training and experience, as well as African language experience. (also Areas III, IV and V)
11. Students want to see the connection between what they are studying in the classroom and its application to the “real world.” (also Area V)
12. Students need to apply their training to their own languages. (also Area V)
13. Students need more time for the studies, so may need adjustments to their workload and/or help with time management. (also Area IV)
14. Analysis is especially difficult for many students and takes much time, particularly in courses like Phonology and Semantics.

15. The use of audiovisual aids/videos greatly supplements lectures. (also Area IV)
19. The students need to see, demonstrated and repeated for them, clear and explicit instructions on how to do analysis (PAC). (also Area IV)
30. Nigerians learn more aurally than by reading, so reading aloud can be helpful, including for learning/using Biblical languages (TCNN).

This Venn diagram re-presents how these factors relate to the levels, demonstrating the great overlap between levels 4, 5 and 6, while levels 1 and 2 do not overlap at all with the other levels.



Key Factors in Levels 1-3 versus 4-6

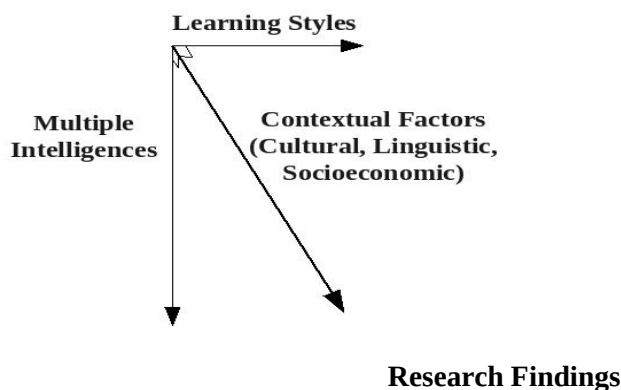
While there remains a need for more relevant local examples (e.g. in African languages), most of the key indicators and factors were related to Ward's final three levels, i.e. accommodating the pedagogical expectations, worldview and learning styles of the learners.

Hale (1986:23) observed that "[t]he problems associated with [Ward's] levels one through three are relatively easy to understand and address," while the final three are much more challenging to accomplish. It is significant that all three final levels involve accommodating to the learners' culture, whether in their pedagogical expectations, their worldviews, or their learning styles.

To successfully achieve these levels requires a significant understanding of each of these domains, all of which are aspects of culture that are usually implicit and not readily observable. Thus, in order to effectively adapt training curriculum, much more study and greater understanding of the receptor culture, as well as the source culture, is needed. That is exactly what Shaw's (1988) transcultural factor in translation is all about.

I believe we have a translation problem: we need to contextualize training programs to a much deeper level. Therefore, I propose adding a third axis/dimension—for contextual factors (e.g. cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic)—to the Integrated Learning Model, in order to have Transcultural Training.

These contextual factors may interact significantly with the other two dimensions, e.g. students' mother tongue and the language of instruction impact the Verbal-Linguistic intelligences.



I had three major findings in my research, regarding:

1. Predominant Learning Style:

African students are generally much more Global/Relational than Linear/Analytical, both in how they learn and their content interests (cf. Bowen and Bowen 1989). Therefore, instead of targeting primarily the Understanding (Intuitive/Thinking) learning style, we should target the Mastery (Sensing-Thinking) style, especially since it aligns better with the preferred trainer role (cf. #2 below).

2. Trainer/Student Roles:

African students want trainers to be Mentors or even Patrons (cf. Chinchén 1994), as Master Craftsmen training Apprentices, rather than as “Facilitators” which is our (present) Western preferred role. Although the Patron role is often abused, Chinchén argues that it can and should be redeemed, especially since it was the primary role Jesus used and calls us to use in apprenticing disciples.

But especially:

3. Insider versus Outsider Perspective:

Instead of training students to analyze their own languages as if they were outsiders, our training programs need different methodology and content to train them to study their own languages as insiders rather than as if they were outsiders, e.g. Wiesemann’s *Découvre Ta Langue* (DTL) and Kutsch Lojenga’s (1996) Participatory Research.

We need to help students make explicit what they already know implicitly about their own languages (this is not the same as their “hunches”). We also need distinct recommended learning objectives for training insiders to study their own languages.

Recommendations

Accordingly, I have three recommendations based on my research:

1. Training needs to be much more integrated. Ties between Phonology and Orthography must be made explicit, both for motivation and understanding “Mega-courses” such as “Analyzing and Representing Sound Systems” would help students better see how topics fit together. Practicum courses are crucial to help students apply what they are learning much sooner.

2. Africans studying their own languages typically need different discovery skills for making explicit what they already know implicitly.
3. Our training should target the Mastery (Sensing-Thinking) learning style, rather than primarily the Understanding (Intuitive-Thinking) style.

Subsequent Application

Since completing my doctoral studies (2010), I have been involved in three training programs, where I and others have sought to integrate my findings:

1. Director of i-DELTA (Institute for the DEvelopment of Languages and Translation in Africa).

Two-month intensive academic courses, in English (Kenya) and French (Ouaga, Yaoundé).

I directed program and co-taught Sociolinguistics and some Phonology lessons.

I encouraged other trainers to integrate my recommendations into their teaching, including:

a. Grammatical Analysis and Discourse Analysis both built upon Kroeger's (2009) Grammar Discovery (which in turn built on Wiese's DTL and Kutsch Lojenga's Participatory Research), helping insiders to make their implicit knowledge explicit

b. Phonology was taught with Orthography in mind, making connection throughout the course.

2. North Dakota SIL, teaching Field Methods.

Students read and we discussed together Kutsch Lojenga's article "Participatory research in linguistics."

One student, who directs the linguistic training for a mission group, said he planned to completely overhaul their linguistic training based on Kutsch Lojenga's participatory research methods.

3. CanIL (Canada Institute of Linguistics), teaching Phonology and assisting with FM.

Introductory Phonology:

I make explicit from the start and several times throughout the course the importance of Phonology for Orthography development. I also expanded the Introduction to Lexical Phonology, indicating how it applies to Orthography development.

Field Methods:

FM students read and discuss in class CKL's article on participatory linguistic research.

After students have written up an initial phonology description, sessions with the LRPs demonstrate the power of their "insider" intuition about "same or different" sounds. (They are generally not aware of neutralization.)

We continue to "wrestle with" how to revise and update how Field Methods is taught, in light of the changed field situation, to help "insiders" discover their own languages, i.e. by making explicit their implicit knowledge.

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