

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.

Abstract (cont.)

- 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 will summarize and update my Ph.D. dissertation (2010) in Intercultural Studies from Fuller Theological Seminary.

The Challenge

Vision 2025 → Training many more Africans (and others) to be translators.

For many, more abstract and analytical subjects are difficult to grasp and apply to their own languages, e.g.

Semantics and Phonology (including phonologically-conditioned allomorphy).

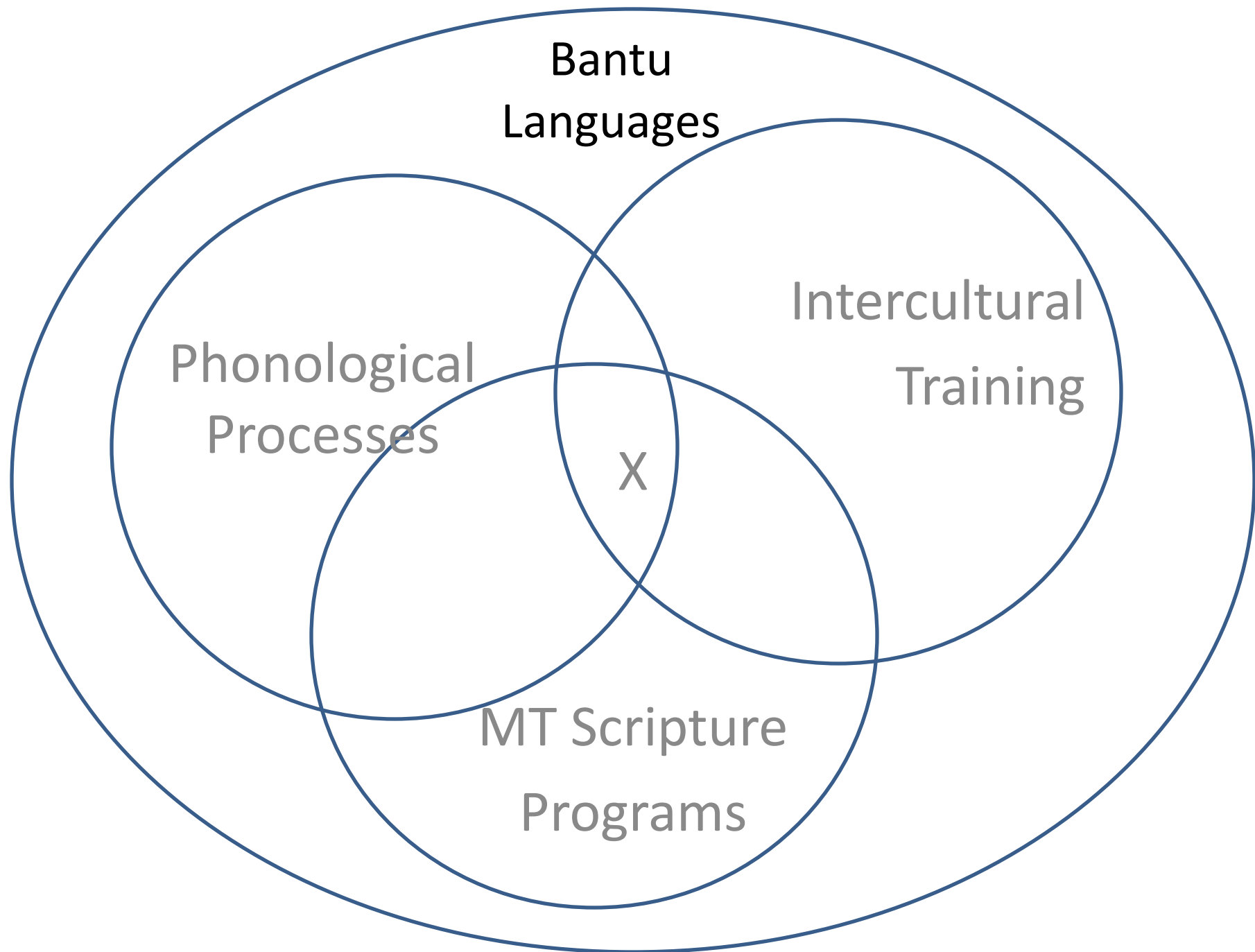
My research variables & context

Research Variables:

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

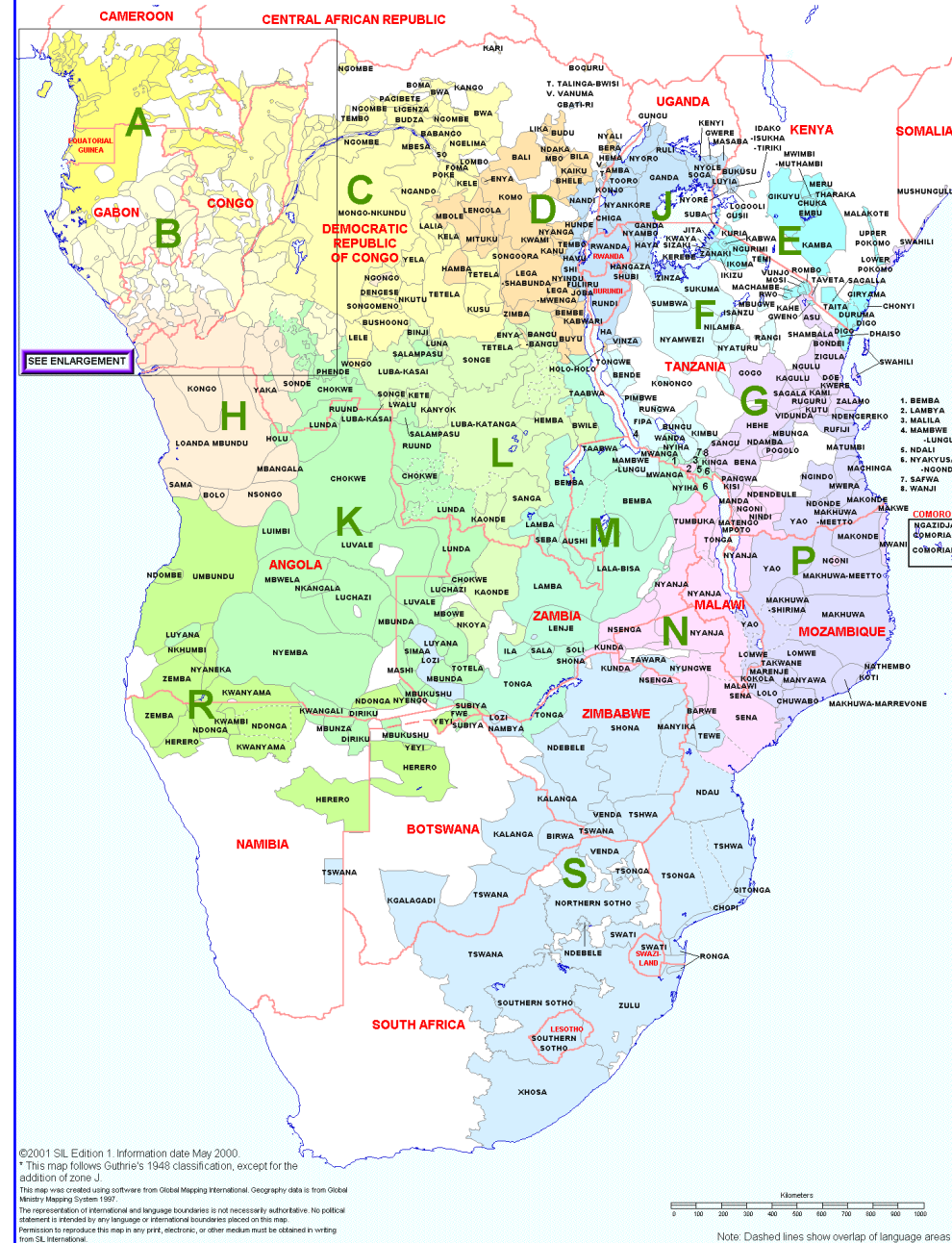
Overall Context:

Bantu Languages



**Almost half of these
500 languages do not
yet have any of God's
word, spoken by about
14 million people.**

Groupings based on Guthrie, 1948*



Case Studies of 3 Anglophone TDPs

1. Pan Africa Christian University (PAC),
in Nairobi, Kenya, offered a 4-year BA in BT
2. Africa International University (formerly NEGST),
also in Nairobi, has a 2-year MA

(Note: Both PAC & NEGST TDPs founded
by Dr. Ronnie Sim 20+ years ago)

3. Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN)
offers a 4-year BA and an MA (begun 10 years
ago, incorporating practicum courses)

Case Study Methodology

- Archival documents (e.g. proposals, emails)
- Participant Observation (of courses)
- Ethnographic Interviews (of present and former students and trainers)

And especially:

- Focus Group Interviews (of students, grads)

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

Two Rubrics for Analyzing Data

I. Learning Styles-Multiple Intelligences Matrix from the Integrated Learning Model (Silver, Strong & Perini)

A. Four Learning Styles (cf. Jung and Kolb):

Mastery (Sensing-Thinking)

Interpersonal (Sensing-Feeling)

Self-Expressive (Intuitive-Feeling)

Understanding (Intuitive-Thinking)

B. Howard Gardner's Intelligences

- Verbal-Linguistic
- Logical-Mathematical
- Spatial
- Musical
- Bodily-Kinesthetic
- Interpersonal
- Intrapersonal
- (Naturalist)

II. Ted Ward's 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
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- 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

FINDINGS: Key Indicators Organized by Area

Area 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).

Area 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.

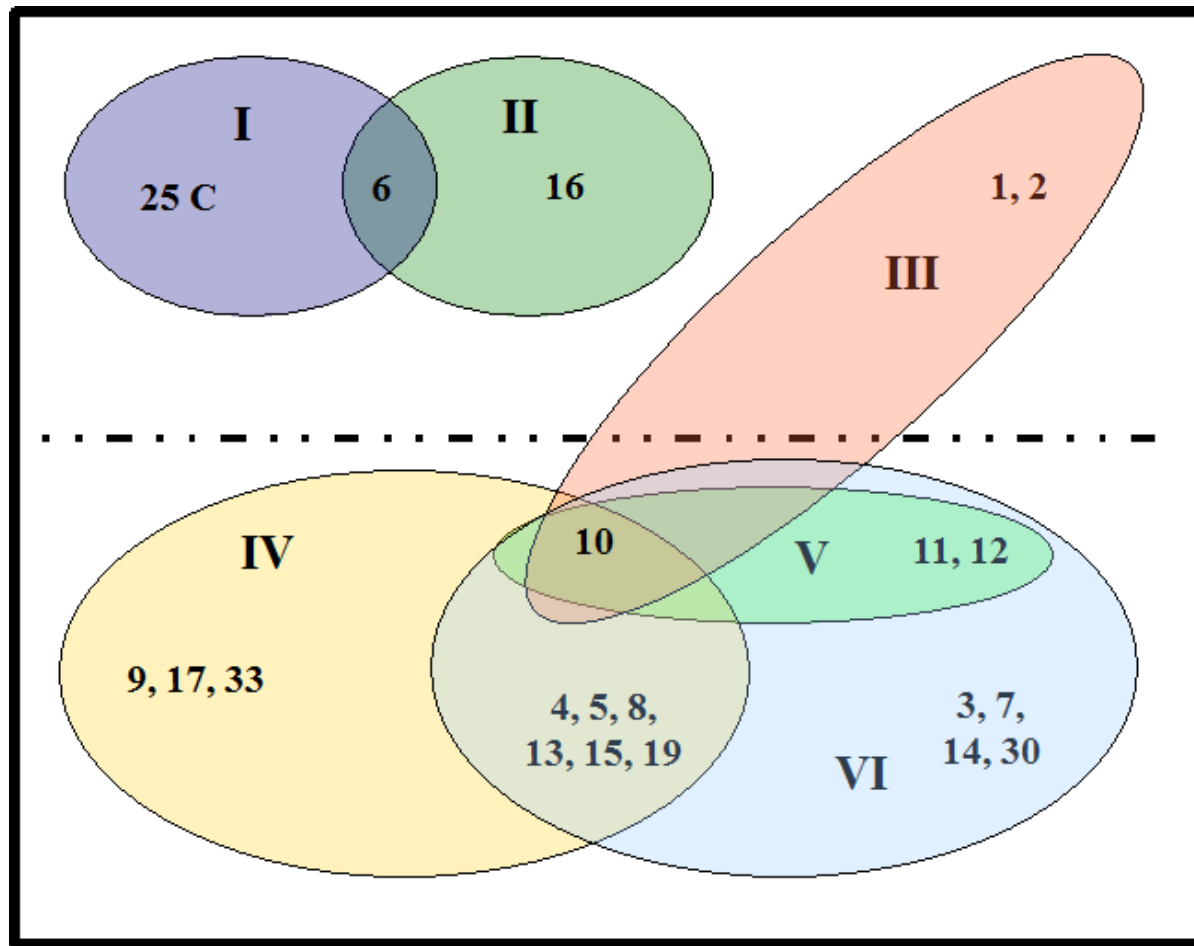
Area III: Relevant examples and exercises, preferably from local/African context
1. Many African language examples, both those given by trainers and those elicited from students, are crucial, and even more are needed, specifically for Semantics.
2. Many exercises, especially using African languages, 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)

Area 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).

Area 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)

Area 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).

Relationships Between Ward's Levels and Key Indicators



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.
- **Need to contextualize training at a deeper level**

(repeated) Ted Ward's 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
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- 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

3 Major Findings

1. Predominant Learning Style:

African students are generally much more Global/Relational than Linear/Analytical, both in how they learn and content interests (cf. Bowen and Bowen)

2. Trainer/Student Roles:

African students want trainers to be Mentors or even Patrons (cf. Chinchén), like Master Craftsmen training Apprentices, rather than as “Facilitators”

But especially:

3. Insider versus Outsider Perspective:

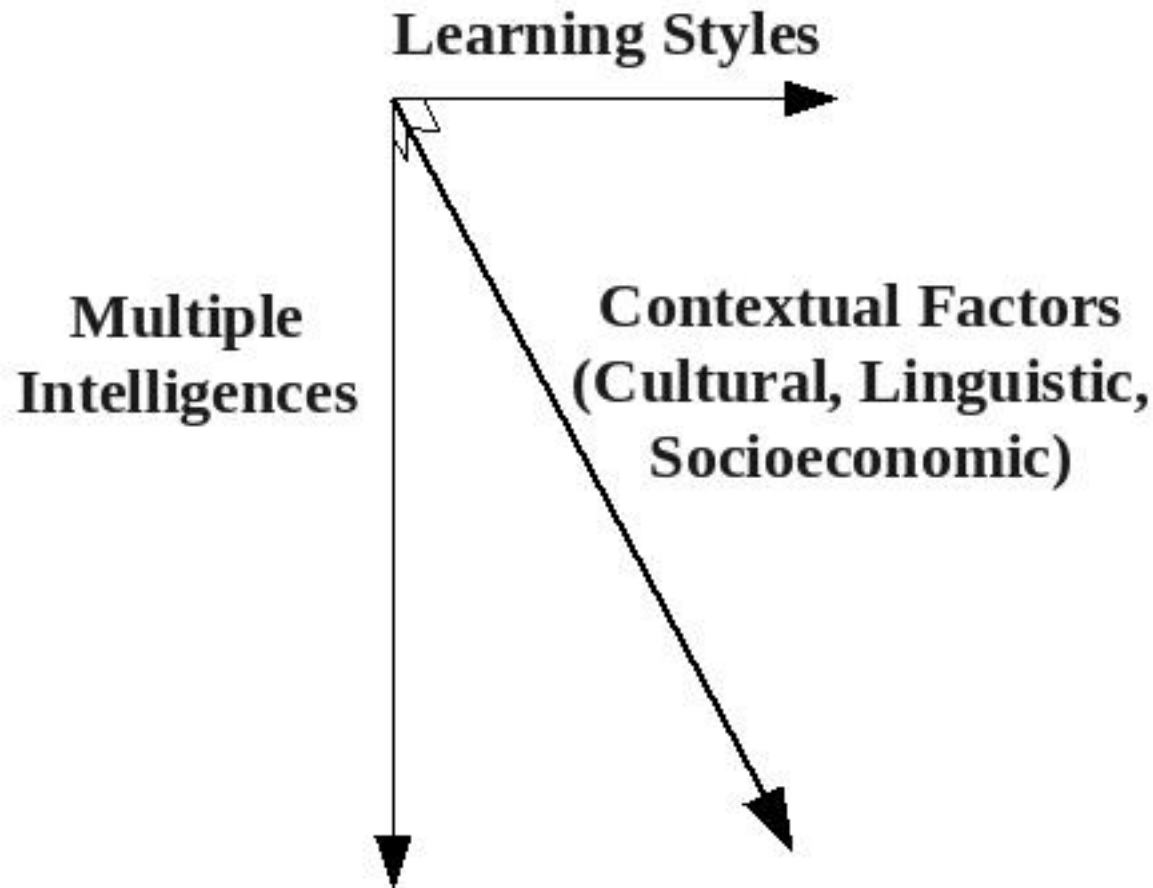
Different methodology and content needed for training students to study their own languages as insiders rather than outsiders, e.g. Wieseemann's "Discover Your Language" and Kutsch Lojenga's "Participatory Research"

- Help students to make explicit what they know implicitly about their own languages (not the same as their surface "intuitions")
- Distinct recommended learning objectives are needed for training insiders

A “Translation” Problem

- We have “translated” our training programs to Africa and adapted them (à la Ward’s levels 1-3), but they have not been appropriately contextualized (à la Ward’s levels 4-6).
- Crucial to consider contextual factors when “translating” a training program from one context to another.
- Otherwise, the external structures are maintained, without meeting the intended goals/functions.

Transcultural Training (extension of Shaw 1988): Add a third dimension (Contextual Factors) to the Integrated Learning Model



3 Recommendations

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 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 generally need different skills (than outsiders) for making explicit what they already know implicitly.
- 3. Target the Mastery (Sensing-Thinking) learning style, rather than primarily the Understanding (Intuitive-Thinking) style.

Subsequent Application

- Since completing my doctoral research (2010), I have been involved in three training programs, where I have sought to integrate my findings:
- 1. i-DELTA (Institute for the DEvelopment of Languages and Translation in Africa) Director.
- 2. North Dakota SIL, teaching Field Methods.
- 3. CanIL (Canada Institute of Linguistics), teaching Phonology and assisting with FM.

i-DELTA (2010-2013)

- Two-month-long 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, e.g. Grammatical Analysis & Discourse Analysis built upon Kroeger's Grammar Discovery, and Phonology was taught with Orthography in mind.

UND-SIL Field Methods (2014)

- Students read and we discussed CKL'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 CKL's participatory methods.

CanIL Phonology (2014-2015)

- Introductory Phonology:
I make explicit from the start and several times during the course the importance of Phonology for Orthography development.
- I also expanded the introduction to Lexical Phonology, indicating how it applies to Orthography development.

CanIL Field Methods (2014, 2015)

- 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.
- (Not generally aware of neutralization.)

CanIL Field Methods (cont.)

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

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Comments/Questions