

34: Evaluating the impact of participatory discourse analysis workshops in Cameroon and beyond

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Abstract: A successful translation and language development project must have a solid linguistic foundation. As local speech communities take on more of the technical responsibility for such projects, there is a greater need for community members to understand the linguistic features of their language in order to be able to accurately and effectively produce quality translations and other written materials. Linguists in SIL Cameroon have developed a training workshop that, through the use of participatory methods, takes the participants on a journey of discovery of the important grammatical features of narrative texts in the target language and their application to translation. Between 2016-2021, eight workshops have been organised. One challenge of this methodology is how to evaluate its effectiveness in achieving the stated objectives and whether the knowledge gained by the participants is being consistently applied in the translation process. Based on qualitative research questionnaires filled out by workshop participants, linguist facilitators and workshop leaders, this paper provides an assessment of the impact of participatory linguistic workshops in Central Africa and gives suggestions for further improvement of this method.

Keywords: participatory research, narrative text, learning transfer, natural translation, method evaluation

1 Introduction

It has been noted by many involved in language development that a solid understanding of the linguistic structures of a language is an important contribution to the production of quality translations and other language materials (Baker & Saldanha 2011; UNESCO 2012: 38-41; Schäffner 2013: 49-51; Stirtz 2015; Stirtz 2018; Blecke 2020; Murrell 2022). These days, outside funders¹ have increasingly put the technical responsibility for such projects into the hands of local speech communities in collaboration with short-term input from external experts, rather than relying on the long-term presence and skills of outside professionals. Therefore, these community members would benefit from training in the analysis of the linguistic structures of their language and how to apply this knowledge to the production of quality translations and other written materials.

Especially as it concerns the production of a quality translation, it is important that the translator from the local speech community understands not only the principles of translation and exegesis but also the linguistic structure of a paragraph, section, and of an entire text – be it narrative or non-narrative – both in the source and target languages. If a particular translation is inadequate, it is often at the discourse level. The most common skills lacking in novice translators have been identified by translator trainers as the following:

¹ Various outside funders are active in Francophone Africa including The Seed Company, Global Partnerships and several Wycliffe Alliance Organisations. Some of these outside funders recognise that they do not have the technical expertise needed to ensure an effective translation and are looking for that help elsewhere. All of the workshops discussed in this article have been a result of the outside funders' request for technical support for Bible translation projects.

- producing a translation that flows well in the target language
- creating a translation that does not follow the original too closely
- translating meaning in context instead of words or sentences
- producing a translation that is natural and does not sound foreign because of the way sentences and paragraphs are structured. (Lafeber 2012: 118).

All of these result from a lack of discourse level awareness of the source text and comparative knowledge about the discourse features of the two languages involved.

In order to assist translators in honing these important skills, linguists from the Cameroon branch of SIL have developed a training workshop in the analysis of narrative texts in the target language and its application to translation, based on participatory methods. Eight such workshops were held in Cameroon and nearby countries from 2016 to 2021. This paper provides an overview of an initial assessment of the effectiveness of such workshops and suggestions for how this program may be improved.

The paper begins with a summary of the background principles which underpin our approach to training (§2). A brief history of the development of the participatory approach to discourse analysis training is then given (§3). The next section (§4) provides a description of the method applied in a workshop setting. An overview is then presented of the qualitative research which was conducted into the impact of these workshops, the methodology used and a summary of the results (§5). The final section (§6) provides an evaluation of the method and some suggestions for addressing the weaknesses of the current approach.

2 Background principles

The sub-sections that follow provide a theoretical background to our philosophy and approach to learning. These are the principles which will be used later in our evaluation of the participatory approach to discourse analysis training for Bible translators.

2.1 The participatory approach to linguistic work

Many African languages have had little in-depth linguistic research, and most speakers have only learned the grammar of a Western language such as French or English in school. In addition, many potential translators do not have advanced training in linguistics and have little understanding of the grammatical structures of their own language. Unfortunately, many linguistic workshops aimed at potential translators end up being too abstract, and the material presented is often not retained in the long term nor applied in the work of Bible translation. Having observed these challenges in training translators, Virginia (Ginger) Boyd (SIL Cameroon) began reflecting on how linguistic material could be presented in a more effective and retainable manner. A quote by Kutsch Lojenga (1996: 2) influenced her thinking and ultimately her workshop design: “A field linguist can work with them, proceeding along a *path of discovery* in the development of their language, *raising their awareness of linguistic features* of their language in phonology, orthography, grammar, developing a good style of writing, and so forth” (emphasis added).

Benedicto, et al. (2007: 29–30) identify three basic principles as a foundation to participatory linguistic work which is the basis of our workshops. These three principles are:

- “the self-empowerment of the speaking community,”
- “the existence of an egalitarian relationship between external and internal researchers,” and
- “the recognition of the existence of knowledge systems of equal value among the external and internal linguists.”

In our workshops, we had two main goals. One is to train up translators from within the speech community who are capable of understanding the linguistic structures of their language and are able to apply that understanding to produce quality translations. Ideally, this training will be so mastered as to allow for the transfer of knowledge to pass between individuals in the speech community and from generation to generation. Secondly, we wanted solid linguistic research done both quickly and well. Our experience has been that external linguists often minimise native-speaker intuition to the detriment of their research, while participatory research, which acknowledges its importance and treats language speakers as equal members in research, provides a better understanding of the language studied. “Collaborative work can ultimately lead to better linguistic work, and often to new linguistic questions” (Rice 2011: 196).

2.2 The transfer of training model

When we set out to do this research, we wanted to find out whether the knowledge and skills gained by the participants are effectively applied after the workshop. Baldwin and Ford (1988: 65) identified three key areas that influence the impact of a training event:

1. trainee characteristics (ability, personality, motivation)
2. instructional design (principles of learning, learning environment, sequencing, content)
3. transfer climate (managerial and peer support, opportunities to use new skills, organisational culture)

This model can be helpful as a framework to reflect on how to address the weaknesses of the current approach and enhance the impact of participatory discourse analysis workshops.

2.2.1 Trainee characteristics: While it is difficult to determine which abilities and personality characteristics are most critical in learning and the transfer of skills, according to Baldwin and Ford (1988: 90–91) empirical evidence suggests that the need for achievement, the locus of control in the process and general intelligence are key factors in acquiring and applying skills in the workplace. Participatory approaches favour these factors. Practical tasks during the workshop result in tangible outputs that advance the development of the languages represented and therefore promote a sense of achievement. The collaborative discovery processes allow the participants to be in control of their learning. Participating language teams also learn from each other through sharing their discoveries while building on each other’s strengths and ideas.

2.2.2 Instructional design: The methodology used in participatory discourse analysis workshops is rooted in collaborative and experiential learning (see §4 for more details of the method used).

This kind of approach lends itself to be used in collectivist, oral cultures where learning usually takes place within a social setting through participation in context-specific, real-life activities (Stringer 1985: 10, Ernst-Kurdi 2017: 14–17). In a participatory workshop, the leader, the facilitators and the participants become co-learners while working on activities that lead to helpful discoveries. Workshop leaders, based on their extensive experience in several

languages, ask questions that can guide the trainees in their research and analysis. Facilitators take an active part in the discovery process and they may make tentative suggestions to stimulate the thinking of the language speakers, but they do not unilaterally provide the final solutions.

While one advantage of such a methodology is flexibility, it does introduce an element of unpredictability and a lack of clear direction. However, in such a participatory-style workshop, this “chaos [...] – at least initially [is a] welcome and in fact [an] essential ingredient for learning to deal with complexity” (Kiraly 2012: 92). Kiraly (2012: 85) believes that what he calls “an authentic project setting” is essential to translator education. He describes his approach to translation pedagogy as “holistic-experiential, emphasising the proactive role of learners in coming to know through (inter-)personal experience” (emphasis added).

The great value of Kiraly’s methodology lies in acknowledging the extreme complexities of the translators’ work and creating space for the learners to discover for themselves how to deal with translation problems creatively and effectively. “Rarely do we have one-to-one equivalences that we plug mechanically into texts to replace even source language words – much less phrases, clauses, sentences – or sense.” Therefore, given these “problems and challenges, adaptable heuristics are far more useful for their work than rigidly applied rules” (Kiraly 2012: 86-87).

In a similar vein, Wendland (2008: 272) underscores that in the context of Bible translator training, pedagogy should be interactive, inductive, indigenised, communal, developmental, comparative, and applied.

2.2.3 Transfer climate: Transfer climate is a part of organisational culture that encompasses the factors that encourage and hinder the application of learning in the workplace. Nevertheless, trainers often have very little influence on these factors. Managers’ attention should be drawn to these factors in order to highlight the influence of organisational frameworks on the impact of training efforts. Studies in learning and development (Foxon 1993: 134–138; Gyimah 2015: 143; Weinbauer-Heidel & Ibeschitz-Manderbach 2018; Connolly 2020) show that the following dynamics are the most critical in improving the transfer of learning in the workplace:

1. immediate manager support
2. peer support and social networks in the workplace
3. budget availability for follow-up
4. opportunities to apply new knowledge, skills and attitudes

Learning transfer is not a product but rather an ongoing process with different stages as shown in Figure 1. After a learning event, participants are usually committed to transferring their learning in the workplace (Intention to Transfer) but, for personal or organisational reasons, their attempts might quickly fade away (Initiation). Partial Transfer occurs when new skills are being used on the job sporadically or inconsistently. However, a more successful transfer can be achieved by ensuring that the above-mentioned four critical factors are in place. These factors can help learners to consciously apply their newly learned skills over time (Conscious Maintenance). Full transfer occurs when all the skills acquired in the learning event have been fully integrated into the workflow and are applied without a special effort (Unconscious Maintenance). “When transfer maintenance or partial transfer is not achieved, transfer has failed” (Foxon 1993: 134).

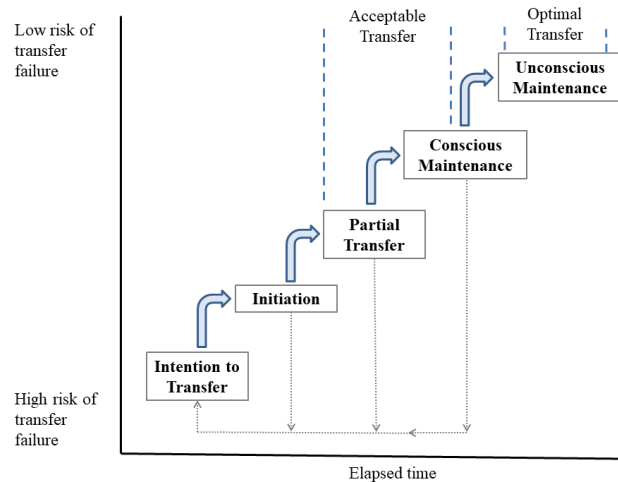


Figure 1. Stages of transfer process (Foxon 1993: 133)

Keeping this process in mind should help managers and funders to better plan for follow-up activities after the workshops that will support the participants' effort towards optimal transfer and consistent application.

3 History of the development of the participatory approach to discourse analysis training

From 2003–2014, Boyd applied Kutsch Lojenga's research method (Kutsch Lojenga 1996; Chapter 9 this volume) in all areas of linguistic research she was involved in; in the beginning, to phonology and orthography development and later to morphosyntax. She found that by using a hands-on practical and participatory approach, everyone learned something worthwhile according to their capacity.

By 2016, participatory methods, inspired by Kutsch Lojenga's method for phonology and morphosyntax, were being applied to narrative text analysis. Further adaptations were made to the methodology according to the various structures of the languages involved, as well as to the personalities of those leading such workshops. The method was also expanded to include a workbook and has been adapted to languages in other countries, and it continues to be used today. An initial workshop on non-narrative discourse has also been conducted.

In the eight narrative discourse workshops referred to in this article, a total of 35 languages from five Central African countries were involved. Generally, each language had an average of three or four participants per language and one or two facilitators. A total of 44 facilitators and directors were involved, due to very little overlap from workshop to workshop. This lack of overlap was in part due to a preference on drawing upon local or African facilitators in various locations. As a result, there were 24 African facilitators and 17 expatriate facilitators; two expatriate directors and one African director. See the Appendix for a full list of the workshops that were included in the evaluation and their dates.

4 Description of the participatory workshop method for discourse analysis

The primary goal of the participatory workshop for narrative discourse analysis is to provide a framework for teams of mother tongue translators to discover the linguistic structures of narrative texts in their language, to understand how these differ from the source language, and

to then apply this knowledge in the improvement of translated texts, so that they are expressed more clearly and naturally. A secondary goal is the development of team facilitators, who may be linguists or translation consultants² (in training), in the methods of narrative text analysis and in the facilitation of such workshops with a view to their being able to lead one in the future. The translation consultants (or consultants in training) are involved so that they can become aware of the implications for translation of the discoveries made and provide more effective follow-up in the future.

Topics covered in a narrative discourse workshop include:³

- text charting
- the division of texts into episodes and paragraphs by identifying linguistic markers of discontinuity
- the linguistic markers of peaks and significant events
- how foreground and background information are indicated, particularly focusing on verb forms and the use of connectors
- participant reference: how participants are introduced and tracked throughout a narrative
- speech reports: how direct, indirect and semi-direct speech reports are marked and used throughout a text
- restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses
- the textual function of determiners (articles and demonstratives)
- information load

Workshops are conducted over a two- or three-week period. The number of topics covered depends on the time available. A follow-up workshop is sometimes needed in order to complete the material.

While the teams are asked to come prepared with interlinearised third person narratives based on real-life events, they tend to come with folktales or legendary tales presented as real-life. Depending on the quality and the number of texts prepared in advance, time is given to record, transcribe and interlinearise at least one or two texts at the beginning of the workshop.

Each workshop has a leader, at times with an assistant, who gives a brief explanation of each topic and demonstrates how the analysis is done using a narrative text in one of the languages present, a related language or an African language of wider communication, such as Lingala or Swahili. Participants then practise the analysis using a biblical narrative in the source language. The results of this analysis can then be compared with what is found in the target language.

Translation teams are then assigned the task of doing the same analysis on text(s) in their own language with the guidance and help of the team facilitator. This is done in a very participatory way, with all members of the team working together, at times on a large piece of paper attached to the wall, and at times on ordinary A4 paper at their tables or on a computer. The leader circulates among the teams to provide further assistance as needed. Finally, at the end of each day, results are discussed as a large group, with different teams presenting their results to the others.

The final step is to apply what has been discovered to translation. The teams are asked to draft one or two narratives from the Bible beforehand and bring them to the workshop. The

² A translation consultant works with and trains mother tongue translators, helping them with exegesis, linguistic understanding of the source and target language structures, and checking Scripture for intended meaning.

³ The content of this training is largely based on the materials developed by Dooley and Levinsohn (2001) and Levinsohn (2012). Some ideas were also drawn from Nicolle (2017).

passages which have often been used are the healing of the ten lepers in Luke 17: 11–19 and the healing of the demoniac in Luke 8: 26–39. Teams work to improve their drafts so that they better conform to the textual structures that they have discovered in natural narratives in the target language. The facilitator is encouraged to write up (if possible, with the collaboration of the team) each day’s discoveries. This allows for a record to be made of these discoveries for future reference.

The foundational activity of the workshop is the charting of one or two texts onto large paper which can be attached to a wall so that everyone can refer to it easily. Each line contains one clause, with subordinate clauses appearing on a separate line. Clause structure is shown through a number of columns divided into pre-core, core (subject, verb, object in whichever order is appropriate for the language) and post-core. In order to do this well, some basic instruction in clause structure is first given. The chart is then referred to throughout the rest of the workshop as different topics are addressed. It allows the various linguistic structures and devices to be easily seen and identified. Texts may be printed out in large type and words pasted into the various columns (see Figure 2), but it is also possible to just write the words using pens or sharpie markers.

N°	PRE-NOYAU	NOYAU			POST NOYAU	NOTES
		SUJET	VERBE	COMPLEMENT		
4	Ungö a mbuul mwey, Après de année une,	un'tö umwey wäpätan, jeune homme un lettré	laa kun'faul a lui demandé	nde bor il mariage	syé aussi.	PP Ep2
5	Kusà mukyà akà nde, Avant d'aller chez elle,	un'tö awà jeune homme ce	käyäm parlé	a andweer avec grands.		AP
6a		Baa b'answà Eux tous	b'asi mirent	b'kyän espoir	naa que	AP
6b	mbalà ayi fois cette	nde elle	akyer akyer doit accepter			AP
7a	Wee Mais	Käyong Kayong	laa kun'bög a lui chassé	nde, elle		PP
7b		→	laa kun'tö a lui insulté	nde il	u mli a baar : aux yeux de personnes :	PP
8	Waa, Waa,	insil ki stupide ce	ayor joue	a ná ? avec qui ?		AP
9	Upool angye, Imbécilité de toi,	ngye tu	asa mets	mee ? moi ?		AP
10a		Ngye Tu	ayöb sais	anki pas		AP
10b	naa que	mee je	in'sabaal marierai	unde ? blanc ?		AP
11	Apanà, Maintenant,	—	lawem écoutez	iban a ndaa, d'ôte de parole		Ep3
12a		Mbul Années	yälyän passèrent	mboon, beaucoup,		AP
12b	akà ocun	unde umwey blanc un	kun'faul lui demandé	anki bögé pas mariage.		AP
3a	Abà Lorsque	→	kämön vit	nde elle	naa que	AP

Figure 2. Iyansi [yns] chart from the workshop in Kinshasa in 2020

One important aim of the workshop is that simple write-ups summarising the results of the workshop be done and provided to the communities in question and translation consultants working with the teams, as well as archived for future reference. These are done by the team

facilitators in collaboration with the team, and are sometimes worked on throughout the workshop as discoveries are made to save time later. A write-up template has been developed which just needs to be filled in.

Different facilitation styles may be used, depending on who is leading the workshop. Some prefer a more structured approach while others like to be flexible. For example, to provide more structure, a workbook has been developed which summarises the lecture content of the various topics with examples from other languages as well as providing a place where teams can record their initial rough results. The advantage of the workbook is that it provides the participants with a record of the workshop that they can take away and refer to in the future. Teams often appreciate such materials. One disadvantage of the workbook, however, is that oral learners often prefer to turn to a person rather than to a book, when faced with a question. This underlines the need for developing effective channels for ongoing dialogue between the teams, the facilitators and the leaders.

Furthermore, the advantage of a more flexible approach is that the workshop can be more finely tuned to both the participants' capacities and the specifics of their language. It more easily permits deviating from the "programme" as needed, if something novel is discovered in the study of the language or if the participants could benefit from further clarification or practice. Finally, what is produced in the write-up reflects only what was actually covered by the team in the study of their language. However, this flexibility can, and most often does, lead to a rather chaotic learning environment where the workshop leader is not always in control. This may create stress for teachers who have been used to being in charge of every minute of their class time.

5 Qualitative research into the impact of these workshops

As we have seen, experts in the field of translator training such as Kiraly and Wendland have repeatedly affirmed the usefulness of participatory workshops in the training of translators. Even so, since we were aware there may be weaknesses in our own participatory workshops, we wanted to conduct a small-scale research project to assess their effectiveness. By gathering feedback from participants and staff through questionnaires, we hoped to find any such weaknesses as well as ways to improve the method.

5.1 Methodology

Feedback was sought from those who had been involved in at least one of the eight workshops which had taken place over the period from 2016 to 2021 in various countries. Three groups of people were targeted for feedback: the participating translation teams, the team facilitators, and the workshop leaders.

Representatives of each translation team and team facilitators were asked to fill in a questionnaire which covered such topics as what they liked or did not like about the workshop, what new skills or knowledge they gained, if and how these competencies have been applied to their ongoing work, whether follow-up had happened and the nature of this, and an overall assessment of such workshops. Completed questionnaires were received from nine translation teams. Five represented the opinion of one member of the team, while the rest were the results of a group discussion of the team as a whole. Since the number of questionnaires received was small, thirty-seven evaluation forms filled in by participants at the end of two of the workshops led by Boyd⁴ were also examined. While these forms do not give an assessment of the ongoing

⁴ See the list of workshops in the Appendix for the number of workshops led by Boyd and others.

impact or application of such training, they do give initial impressions of the training and which topics the participants found particularly useful. Completed questionnaires were also received from fourteen facilitators who participated in seven different workshops. Workshop leaders did not complete questionnaires, but gave their feedback during a focus group discussion which was held to further explore the topics covered in the questionnaires.

5.2 Summary of feedback

A summary of the feedback received from the questionnaires and evaluation forms is given below. The opinions of the translation teams are outlined in §5.2.1 and of the facilitators in §5.2.2.⁵ Results of the focus group discussion with workshop leaders will be included in the discussion of how the approach may be improved (§6).

5.2.1 Experience of the translation teams: Overall, the participants of the research appreciated the flexible and practical, hands-on nature of these workshops. They felt that the information and skills gained would be useful for their translation work.

This workshop was an asset for us because it allowed us to discover new notions that are needed in the translation of the Bible. In short, we benefited from this workshop with a lot of skills in the field of both translation and linguistics.

Furthermore, setting aside some time each day to discuss ideas and discoveries in a collaborative way and to hear from participants from other languages enriched the workshop experience and helped to create an atmosphere of mutual learning which was valued by the respondents. Participants also appreciated the workbook when it was provided, and when it was not, a number of people communicated their desire for written materials.

In terms of challenges during the workshops, it was noted that the education level of the various translation teams varied, and as a result, some experienced difficulty in understanding the concepts, what was required for the practical exercises and how they applied to translation. Some participants felt that too many topics were covered in one workshop. They would have liked a slower pace and extra exercises, even if it meant that the workshop needed to be longer or more workshops added to the schedule. However, a number of participants said three weeks at a stretch was too long and they became fatigued. Furthermore, the number of topics covered made ongoing application to translation more difficult.

The participants identified a number of newly acquired competencies as significant for translation work. Which topics covered were considered the most significant depended on the participant or the team in question, although the majority of them were mentioned by one team or another. However, the competencies which were identified by different teams as being applied in an ongoing way to translation include:

- The introduction of speech markers
- The correct placement of paragraph divisions
- The use of connectors
- The introduction of participants
- More attention paid to the use of nouns and pronouns to refer to participants

⁵ Raw data is not provided since it takes the form of short written answers to questions, which vary greatly and is impressionistic in nature. Therefore, it is difficult to present this data in a way that would be easily digestible by the reader.

Overall, some participants in the survey said that the takeaways from the workshops helped them to improve the quality of their translations.

The community has better appreciated the form of the translated text since the time of the workshop.

The quality of our work has changed a lot, for example the text has become fluid, clear and understandable.

Certain translation teams are taking more care to apply a more natural structure in the target language rather than just following the structure of French, the source language.

Before, we were used to texts in French, now we have acquired the freedom to reformulate and adapt them in our language.

However, more than one team mentioned that it is easy to fall back into bad habits and therefore follow-up is important. Unfortunately, follow-up has not always been treated as an integral part of the training. In several cases, there was no follow-up. In other cases, efforts to follow up with teams were hampered by distance and difficulties in communication. However, where follow-up did take place, participants reported that it had an ongoing impact both on the quality of the translations and also on the interactions during checking sessions with consultants and exegetes.⁶ The most effective follow-up was conducted by translation consultants who, having been involved in the training, reminded the translators of what was learnt and how it should be applied during checking sessions. However, some teams have found that not all translation consultants are supportive of this process. For example, after one workshop, certain translation consultants, who had not been involved in the training, were questioning how far the linguistic traits of oral texts could be applied to written ones. This is perhaps a pertinent question, but when a language does not have a written tradition, we can only depend on oral texts in order to determine the natural textual structures of the language.

Another challenge identified by the participants concerns the situation when a translation team comes to the workshop having already drafted many biblical texts. The discoveries made during the workshop will very likely oblige them to revise many parts of their translation which will slow the pace of the translation project, a concern for funders.

Other suggestions in the feedback to improve the learning experience of the translation teams and ongoing application to translation included:

- assessing the competencies of participants beforehand and aiming the content at that level
- better preparing the teams before the workshop, such as by making course materials like the manual available for them to review beforehand, and by ensuring that appropriate texts are recorded, transcribed, corrected for spelling and translated in advance.
- examining more texts in order to draw firmer conclusions.
- ensuring the presence at the workshop of a linguist with knowledge of local languages.
- scheduling the workshops early on in the life of a translation project.
- making the training be cyclical, once a year or every two years, with a linguistics or translation consultant occasionally following-up with each team.

⁶ An exegete assists a translation team in improving their understanding of the original meaning of a Biblical text with a view to rendering it accurately in the target language.

- extending the training beyond translators to other members of the team such as revisers and back translators.
- appointing a member of each translation team to check for the naturalness of the translated text, rather than relying on follow-up from outside.

5.2.2 Experience of the facilitators: A number of facilitators expressed that they appreciated the opportunity to experience how participatory methods can be used in the teaching of discourse and that it gave them confidence to use such methods in the future. Some facilitators even stated that they felt they could lead such a workshop themselves after being involved in two or three, although so far this has only happened with one person. They also enjoyed the opportunity to extend their knowledge of narrative discourse in general as well as of the discourse features of the languages involved. For those who are translation consultants or consultants in training, there is value in being able to learn alongside the teams and so incorporate this knowledge into the process of translation checking. Unfortunately, not all the facilitators have had the opportunity to apply what they have learnt in an ongoing way since they have been assigned to other responsibilities after the workshop.

Some facilitators did not have the required competencies to effectively assist their teams, especially in producing the write-up of the results of the workshop. Even those facilitators who are capable of producing a write-up have generally not been able to complete it during the workshop and struggle to find time to do so later, due to many other responsibilities. The completion of this task also requires an investment of time from the workshop leader to give encouragement and input on drafts. There have been instances when the process has stalled after feedback has been given on initial drafts and nothing has been heard back. However, those who were able to complete a write-up reported that they found the process very useful.

I found this document to be very educational. It helped us (my team and me) to understand the main points or ideas of each lesson studied.

It was helpful to work on this throughout the workshop as each discovery was made.

The final write-ups were usually included in the workshop leader's report to the organisers of the workshop. They were, when possible, shared with the translation teams and the consultants who work with them or archived for future reference. In one case, Boyd ensured that the teams had at least an initial version of the write-up before leaving the workshop.

Overall, it was noted by certain respondents that such workshops are an effective way to train consultants in training and that they should be included in the professional development plans used in internship programs.⁷ Furthermore, any write-ups produced could potentially contribute towards fulfilling the requirements for consultant certification.

6 Evaluation and suggestions for addressing the weaknesses of the current approach

In this section, we evaluate the participatory approach for training in discourse analysis and give suggestions for its improvement. The discussion is structured according to the key areas for impactful training identified by Baldwin and Ford, as mentioned in §1.2.

⁷ Some funders offer internships of 2–3 years and provide financial help to build capacity in local staff who are committed to working in the Bible translation and language development movement in their context. These internships are built around professional development plans that cover training events, collaborative work as well as intentional mentoring.

6.1 Trainee characteristics

Being intentional about the selection of participating teams and group facilitators is important to ensure the most useful and effective results. However, the selection of both teams and facilitators is not solely in the hands of the workshop leader. For example, workshop leaders may not have a great deal of control over which participants are included, or have the knowledge of the local context to be able to make an informed choice. In these situations, the local partner is essential in choosing the participating teams well. Furthermore, the local or other partners may have preferences regarding group facilitators which likewise need to be taken into account.

It is valuable to have a wide range of participants in these workshops as their strengths and weaknesses often complement each other. Often participants have a variety of backgrounds, motivations and levels of education and experience. While in one sense this variation may be seen as a strength, the higher the level of education and experience, the easier it is for the participants to grasp the complex abstract concepts involved in discourse analysis and the greater the possibility for independent reflection and application of what has been learnt. The attitude of the participants is also key. In order to benefit from the training, it is important that they be interested, engaged and willing to work hard. Emphasising the application of the knowledge gained can greatly assist in augmenting the motivation of the participants.

Ideally, group facilitators should have some background in linguistics and/or translation in order to be able to effectively assist the language teams. In reality, particularly for workshops with a large number of language teams involved, it can be difficult to find an adequate number of suitably qualified facilitators. This means that the workshop leader will need to be more involved in helping certain groups during the workshop. Having clear written materials may assist here, so that both facilitators and participants are able to refer to them when unsure about how to proceed at times when the workshop leader is unavailable.⁸ Furthermore, a daily debrief between the workshop leader and the group facilitators is indispensable. A solution to the challenges of completing the write-up in a timely fashion may be for the leader to spend a few additional days after the workshop, training and coaching the facilitators in this write-up, and to assign a local consultant or mentor, if available, to assist each facilitator in completing this task.

It is beneficial that linguistics and translation consultants or consultants in training help facilitate these workshops together to underscore the interdependence between the domains. Translation consultants have a role in modelling to the translators an appreciation of the importance of discourse analysis for translation. They can help the translators to make connections between the workshop topics and the translation challenges they are faced with during the regular translation process.

6.2 Instructional design

Overall, it was found that collaborative and participatory principles of learning work well for the context of training Bible translators. The learning cycle of concepts explained, language structures analysed, and discoveries applied, assists translators in ascertaining the discourse

⁸ Although not included in the evaluation in this paper, more than one participant in the Togo workshop held in September 2022 mentioned in their feedback the usefulness of being able to refer to the instructions and other information in the workbook while working on the various exercises.

features of their languages for themselves and the relevance of this information in improving the translation.

However, such an approach means that the instructional design requires a certain amount of flexibility and adjustment depending on the abilities and needs of the participants. For those with a lower level of education, more time will need to be devoted to the presentation of various concepts and more opportunities given for the practice of skills in order for deeper and lasting learning to take place. As a means of preliminary training needs analysis, a well-designed questionnaire should be sent to teams before the event. Such a questionnaire can provide a clearer picture of the teams' abilities and needs and help leaders to adjust the materials ahead of time.

It was also noted that in the workshop setting some teams were slower at completing assigned tasks than others. Therefore, additional activities need to be planned in advance in order for the stronger teams to best take advantage of the time available.

6.3 Transfer climate

Follow-up is key to ensure that what has been learnt during the workshop is applied to translation in an ongoing way. This application has to become consistent over time and integrated into the repertoire of skills of the participants and the facilitators.

We have observed that there was a lack of adequate follow-up and support by administrators and project funders which hampered the ongoing application of skills learnt during training. Often one of the biggest constraints to adequate follow-up activities is the lack of financial planning ahead of time. If a follow-up strategy is not included in the budget, the impact of the workshop will suffer greatly. Unfortunately, project funders' priorities do not always align with the goals related to transfer climate and sometimes organisational pressures override the intention to apply newly learned skills. We therefore make the following recommendations related to transfer climate:

- Before the workshop, workshop leaders should dialogue with supervisors and language committee leaders, in collaboration with the translation consultant and outside funder managers, about the desired outcomes of the workshop. Ideally, they will agree together upon a concrete plan to maximise the transfer of skills learnt to translation, and this will clearly show the responsibilities of all stakeholders (Foxon 1994).
- A key element of this transfer plan will be a follow-up meeting with each translation team soon after the workshop (Foxon 1993: 135–137, Connolly 2020). Managers, in collaboration with the translation team and their assigned consultant, will together agree upon a plan to apply the skills learnt to the translation process in an ongoing way.
- If possible, workshop leaders, together with the facilitator's supervisor, should support each facilitator in producing a write-up within a reasonable timeframe after the workshop. They will agree upon a plan for who will make this write-up available – as a work in progress – to the translation team and the revisers, to the translation consultant working with the team and to the wider community.
- Decision makers should ideally devise and implement a strategy that includes an adequate budget for ongoing mentoring after the workshop and at least one refresher training, where the content previously covered is reviewed, both for language teams and facilitators.
- It would also be potentially beneficial to add a step to the translation process for the checking of the naturalness of translated texts by a local translator or reviser based on the discourse characteristics discovered in the workshop.

7 Conclusion

Overall, the impact of participatory discourse analysis workshops has been found to be positive, although there are ways to improve their effectiveness. Their primary aim is to provide a framework for translators to discover the linguistic structures of narrative texts in the target language, to understand how these differ from the source language, and to then apply this knowledge in the improvement of translated texts. It was found that the participants engaged well with the practical hands-on approach to learning, and the exchanges with members of other related language groups enhanced the learning experience. They were able to gain new competencies which helped them to noticeably improve their Scripture drafts both in the workshop and going forward. However, some participants struggled with the technical nature of the material and it would therefore be helpful to assess the educational levels and needs of the teams beforehand as well as take more time for the more technical concepts and activities and their application to translation. Participants found that three weeks of such intensive work was tiring. It would be better to break up this training into a number of two-week workshops over a period of two or three years. This would allow enough time to cover each topic thoroughly as well as to revise previously introduced material.

The integration of what is learnt into the ongoing translation process depends on the quality of the follow-up. This is more likely if there is a linguistics or translation consultant who has taken part in the same training providing regular support to the team going forward. The need for follow-up and refresher training would ideally be included by project administrators in their planning. Time also needs to be allowed in the translation process for the checking of the naturalness of translated texts based on discourse characteristics.

A secondary goal of the workshops is the development of the team facilitators. Those who were involved with the teams in an ongoing way found the knowledge and skills gained very helpful in their interactions. The process of working on a write-up of the results of the workshop was also beneficial and could potentially contribute to their certification as consultants. However, some facilitators have not had the ability to complete a write-up or effectively help their team. More effort should be made to assess the background of facilitators ahead of time, and provide intentional mentoring by pairing less experienced ones with those with greater knowledge and skills.

Appendix: Workshops held between 2016-2021

- Gbaya languages, Central African Republic (4 languages) + 1 Chadic language (Cameroon): Yaounde, 13 June – 1 July 2016. Led by Boyd.
- Coastal Bantu cluster, Cameroon (3 languages): Campo, 16 – 26 August and Kribi, 12 – 23 September 2016. Led by Boyd.
- No input for this article was received from participants or facilitators of this workshop.
- Northern Cameroon (4 languages): Ngaoundéré, 5 – 16 March 2018. Led by Viljoen.
- Gabon (8 languages): Libreville, June 2018 and Bongolo, 6 – 22 February 2019. Led by Boyd.
- Central Chadic South languages, Cameroon (4 languages): Maroua, 3 – 21 February 2020. Led by Viljoen.
- The Democratic Republic of Congo (4 languages): Kinshasa, 10 – 28 February 2020. Led by Boyd.

- The Republic of Congo (7 languages): Brazzaville, 26 January – 12 February 2021. Led by Boyd.
- Central Chadic South languages follow-up, Cameroon (4 languages): Maroua, 22 November – 3 December 2021. Led by Ndokobai Dadak.

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