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**Editor's Note**

The April 2005 issue of *The Bible Translator, Practical Papers* (Vol. 56, No.2) contained a number of articles focused on the training of Bible translators in the European, Latin American, and Asia-Pacific Regions. The present issue completes this brief survey on **translator training** in the UBS with four articles from Africa.

The natural linguistic complexity of Africa has a further overlay provided by the European languages of former colonial powers. This overlay has resulted in historical and organisational differences between regions often referred to as Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone Africa: countries where English, French, and Portuguese respectively are either official languages or are widely used, especially in higher education.

Wendland's introductory essay deals with issues which are important for translator training not only throughout Africa but in the Bible translation community worldwide. The three essays which follow it then concentrate on Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone Africa.

The completion of this overview does not mean that all that needs to be said on translator training has been said. Far from it. We welcome further contributions on this key issue, whether as responses to what has been written, or as independent presentations.

S.W.P.

ERNST R. WENDLAND

## **TRANSLATOR TRAINING IN AFRICA: Is There a Better Way of Teaching and Learning?**

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### **Introduction**

The three area reports that follow are indeed a cause for rejoicing with regard to the outlook for translator training in Africa. As a result of the ongoing cooperation between the UBS, SIL, and other translation agencies, full university-level as well as post-graduate courses are now available in each of the three major language-administrative areas of the continent: Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone. Participating institutions in each of these regions offer comprehensive biblical language and linguistics courses along with a variety of translation-related subjects, including research and writing projects that focus on the individual student's mother tongue. Furthermore, these programs are international in scope since they welcome and train students from other countries where English, French, and Portuguese are used as languages of wider communication. We look forward to yet more cooperation in developing and enriching these educational initiatives. At the same time, we search for ways of more fully integrating our future planning and the sharing (via translation, where necessary) of resources such as theses and dissertations of wider relevance that are produced at these schools.

Translator training occurs not only at university level, however. The following reports also indicate that periodic, more informal courses are being organized and presented by every translation consultant working in Africa. Such grassroots training programs tend to be much shorter, usually 1-2 weeks, and are often limited to a single country or region for logistical reasons. Instruction can therefore be made more language- and subject-specific, and translators with a wide range of educational backgrounds can be accommodated. In this respect as well, much progress has been made in cooperation between translation agencies. More often than not these national workshops and training sessions include instructors and translation teams from all the different organizations that work in that area.

The future of translator training is not so bright, however, in certain other respects. Indeed, there are several notable causes for concern in some countries. Chief among these at the moment are the current UBS budgetary restrictions, as well as shortfalls in the contributions of local churches, which have resulted in the cutting back of a number of previously scheduled courses, workshops, and checking sessions during each of the past two years. The postponement—or worse, the elimination—of planned training programs, represents an intellectual setback for the teams and projects which are affected. But it also brings a psychological blow, for translators depend on these intensive sessions to encourage one another as well as to grow in their

knowledge of the theory and, especially, the practice of translation into their mother tongues.

Other significant problems brought on by recurring budget deficits include the comparatively low salaries that are offered to translators (which often approximate the *minimum* wage for people with similar education and expertise), the relative lack of training materials and other translation resources in French, Portuguese, and the major African languages of wider communication, and the inability to put into effect the comprehensive translation testing procedures which are necessary before, during, and after a project is being carried out. And what does translation testing have to do with translator training? A well-organized testing program makes it possible for members of the target group to “educate” a translation team as to what their priorities are with regard to the version being prepared for them, and also the general or specific problems that they have found with the drafts and trial publications that they have already critically examined.

It should also be mentioned that in some cases, translator training is further hampered by the fact that participating churches do not always sponsor or second the very best people available to serve in the Bible translation effort, whether as translators, reviewers, or associated technical advisers (e.g., target language orthography specialists, computer experts, research planners and surveyors). This holding back of human resources seems to reflect the widespread popular opinion that Bible translation is a less important activity that does not seriously affect the heart and core of every church’s essential ministry and mission.

In the present article, which is merely an introduction to those that follow, I wish to briefly point out one other potentially major problem that is not always given the attention it deserves when questions of quality or consistency of translator training are being discussed. This problem has to do with the *teaching practice*, or methodology, which translation officers use to instruct translators in any given program of study, whether formal or informal. We might assume that our training techniques are appropriate just because they seem to have worked well in the past, but it never hurts to reevaluate our normal routine in the light of the current setting in order to determine whether certain improvements or modifications can (or must!) be made. It is often easiest simply to follow the approach that was used in our own schooling or which is applied in the published training materials that we have readily available. Usually, however, this will involve a typical Western “logical,” information-heavy, instructor-dominated lesson plan and set of classroom procedures.

In the following notes I propose some alternative teaching strategies that translation trainers might keep in mind when preparing and presenting their materials in an African setting. Most consultants and advisers already incorporate such methods as a normal part of their teaching, so I list them here simply to provide a convenient source for future reference.

### **Seven suggestions for improving our training technique**

I am certainly no expert in this field, but based on my own teaching experience over the years and some reading on the subject, there are several characteristics that I would like to see applied more consistently in *my own* courses of translation instruction in Africa. It may be that as I urge myself to think through these methods more seriously and to actually put them into practice, others will pick up some ideas that they might be able to use or adapt to their own situations. Or better perhaps, others more expert in the field of education—including African translator-students who have been through a training program of one kind or another—will be able to shed a brighter light on the subject and contribute more precise advice, specific to context, on what needs to be done to improve our translation teaching. In any case, all instructors need to pay careful attention to this practical matter and then get together to advise one another on how to become more effective, context-sensitive teachers—and learners. In the process of education, the prevailing teaching or learning *style* frequently becomes just as important for efficiency and effectiveness as the course content.

The following seven guidelines are simply starting points for what will hopefully develop into a more extended discussion of this crucial topic on the part of all trainers and trainees concerned:

**1. Interactive:** Teaching and learning is more effective when the course instructor and students are able to frequently interact with each other as a class is being taught. This is made possible by a question-and-answer or dialogue style of teaching that encourages students to respond either with answers, their own questions, or additional information that would benefit the group. Most people have become used to the formal lecture type of instruction from their school education, church indoctrination and sermons, and political speeches, but the interpersonal, participatory method is more natural and often much appreciated once students get used to it. As anyone who has tried this approach knows, however, this is a more difficult style of instruction to implement because one cannot predict which direction the discussion will follow or where it will end up. But an interactive procedure can be very helpful for teachers, allowing them to tailor or adapt course content on the spot to better serve special student needs, whether the topic happens to be establishing an efficient orthography in the target language or analyzing the various source language genres of discourse. Furthermore, instruction is then carried out more fully from the perspective of the students—where they “are at” in terms of their current knowledge, perception, values, and personal opinions relating to Bible translation as they have experienced it.

**2. Inductive:** Closely related to an interactive style of teaching is the inductive method, which places emphasis upon students discovering for themselves basic exegetical or translation guidelines and analysis procedures by actually working through a number of illustrative biblical texts and local cultural case studies. Starting from the study of a variety of Bible passages and examples within their own context, they are thus trained to identify and describe the underlying principles, which can then be further clarified by means of additional relevant examples. The inductive method also favors a

more holistic, experiential, intuitive approach that moves from larger, complete texts to the various parts that they are composed of. Students thus learn detailed points of Source Language (SL) analysis and Target Language (TL) composition—for example, how to handle the many genitive “of” constructions—within the framework of meaningful text units, always proceeding, where possible, from the known to the unknown. This enables them to immediately apply what they have learned both to the Scripture passage at hand as well as to some aspect of the overall translation process. Some instructors may prefer to begin with a more deductive introduction that briefly outlines a particular principle, problem, or procedure, but this proceeds quickly then into concrete examples which students must analyze, classify, and evaluate for themselves. Student assessments too are better made on the basis of meaningful, goal-oriented exercises that require a number of analytical or compositional skills working together, rather than by means of standardized exams that measure only one’s ability to remember, restate or re-arrange information.

**3. Indigenized:** The inductive method is made more effective when it is “Africanized” through the use of indigenous proverbs, riddles, stories, myths, ancient and modern songs, well-known royal or funeral poetry, and other genres (including the local news) in order to illustrate or to practice translation principles and procedures. Students are able to grasp points of instruction much more quickly if the important issues can be related in some way to their own sociocultural setting, oral or written tradition, and the contemporary communication situation. In this facet of the learning process, the students often become teachers as they educate their instructors concerning the broad range of intellectual and artistic resources that are available in their language-culture and advise them with regard to the delicate nuances and intricate details that are necessary for proper usage. If suitable local-language materials are not immediately available, then this can be made the special focus of research for an entire workshop early on in the training schedule. Such indigenized, contextualized instruction is especially helpful when functional “matches” are being sought to represent either problematic SL concepts or the artistic and rhetorical features of the major biblical literary forms, e.g., the poetry of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. An indigenized style of instruction also prefers apprenticeship training whereby a student attaches him/herself to an expert or authority in the field who then educates the person on-the-job, so to speak, over a more extended period. This distinctly inductive method too can be made a part of specialized translator training workshops and if possible, also afterwards by inviting recognized African experts in the biblical languages or in the local vernaculars to introduce student-translators to their own professional procedures of text analysis and/or expression (in the case of TLs).

**4. Communal:** In my African experience, team-based learning is best, that is, when students are encouraged to work together as a cohesive, collaborative group that ideally approximates their experience in a normal translation project environment. This enables the team to identify and use the differing gifts of the individuals that comprise it—for example, one person acting as the source text “exegete” and technical resource person; another, the target text

specialist, as an initial composer (“translator”) or stylist; and yet another as the computer text processor and/or translation draft tester. The individual members thus learn to appreciate and complement each other while they jointly focus their intellectual energy on the various aspects of the complete translation process more effectively. In a workshop setting, the promotion of communal working procedures also stimulates intergroup interaction, where one team both learns from and instructs another. The translators also encourage one another to persevere on their respective paths, and such mutual reinforcement is one of the most appreciated aspects of joint workshops and checking-training sessions. This “community” of colleagues in Scripture communication naturally includes the course instructor(s), who must always view themselves as “learners” too. What can they discover from their students with regard to the biblical subject at hand as viewed from the perspective of the TL culture, the theory and practice of Bible translation itself (students always bring up exegetical and related matters that their teachers never thought of!), and how to teach appropriately in the cultural setting and social situation in which they are all working together?

**5. Developmental:** By this I mean the development of cooperative personal attitudes in working together on a project. Any individualism, egotism, or elitism (e.g., on the part of the resident Hebrew or Greek “expert,” or someone with a university graduate degree) within a team like this usually leads to disaster, or at best delays, during all stages of the translation. Individual weaknesses among team members need to be dealt with as an essential part of their training experience, but this must be done in a Christian, non-confrontational, culturally appropriate manner (especially where “elders” are concerned). Similarly, displays of excellence and hard work ought to be encouraged, but sometimes this is better communicated privately to avoid generating jealousy or suspicions, which may lead to accusations of “favoritism.” One of the most difficult attitudes and interpersonal skills to develop is that of taking—and giving—constructive criticism. But it has to be learned, and practiced. Closely related to this are attributes such as anger management, exercising patience with slower colleagues, endeavoring to bring out the best in each member of the team, and the practice of peace-making and problem-solving. It may be that the public expression of criticism is felt to be inappropriate behavior in the society concerned, but unless this can be somehow incorporated as part of a team’s working procedures, they will undoubtedly fail to accomplish their objectives, to a greater or lesser degree. Perhaps it will be necessary at first to find a more confidential, informal, or indirect (maybe metaphorical!) way of doing this. In any case, honest performance evaluation and suggestions for improvement must include all the course instructors, technical advisers, and translation officers too, especially if they are new and unfamiliar with the culture in which they are serving. Such mutual assessments need to be carried on, annually at least, as part of an ongoing training program that goes beyond the scope of formal courses of instruction.

**6. Comparative:** If the translation or training course cannot be taught in a local or regional African language (which would be the ideal, where possible), then our instruction should be continually illustrated by examples from languages (cultures) related to those of the projects represented. Perhaps it is possible to incorporate or adapt training materials that have been prepared for

use in a national language of wider communication, for example, Swahili materials prepared in Tanzania but used in Kenya or Uganda, where this major language is also widely spoken. In any case, it is helpful to adopt a comparative-contrastive approach that regularly seeks to identify the main similarities and differences between the SL (Hebrew or Greek) and the various TLs involved. This needs to be carried out, even on a very elementary level, with respect to linguistic forms and structures, as well as literary (oral) genres and associated stylistic characteristics. I have found that it helps to teach close text analysis (exegetical) skills, which do not often come easy, by referring students back through comparison to their respective mother tongues and the familiar expressive features and artistic devices to be found there. The goal is to seek to capitalize on the similarities and to compensate for the differences between the two (or more) languages that are being contrasted. For example, the highly differentiated past tense scheme of most Bantu languages must be related to the relatively unmarked aspectual system of Hebrew (“perfect,” suffix tense). On the other hand, many Bantu languages feature a “narrative tense” like the Hebrew *waw-consecutive* (*wayyiktol*) construction that is used to recount an extended sequence of past events.

**7. Applied:** The slogan “each-one-teach-one” may be usefully applied as part of any African translator training program. Through this means, translators consolidate what they have learned and grow in knowledge and confidence by preparing for and actually teaching others on various levels or in different settings. This constituent may be introduced at any point during a workshop, for example, when each team is assigned an exegetical, practical, or technical topic as a special exercise (e.g., to make a detailed text study of a given chapter of Scripture, to point out the potential translation problems in that same chapter, or to prepare a Paratext-tools check-analysis of the passage). They must first investigate or research their subject and then report their findings back to the entire class. Teams can also participate in a mock “open forum” where they present before the group a summary of and rationale for a particular type, or style, of translation (e.g., liturgical version, popular language edition, study Bible, children’s adaptation) and then overview the methodology that they have adopted for accomplishing the project’s principal goals. Such an activity would well prepare a team’s members for actually going out and making such informational, or indeed, persuasive presentations to review committees, supporting churches, influential seminaries and theological schools in the area, or to the administrative-management agency for the translation. One of the *weakest* links that I have noted in projects over the years is that *essential* link between translators and the primary target group, its laity as well as clergy, for whom a translation is being prepared. In most cases, much more community involvement is needed, and one way to stimulate this is through various educative and public relations initiatives. It cannot be assumed, however, that the members of a translation team can automatically go out and do this. They must first be trained as communicators so that they can sell their project to their constituency and thus gain increased local support and participation.

**A concluding question: How do we continue this discussion?**

In this article I have discussed a number of issues that relate to our current methods of training translators. Several suggestions have been put forward regarding the possibility, in Africa at least, of making this crucial endeavor more interactive, inductive, indigenized, communal, developmental, comparative, and applied in nature. I don't have answers for all the questions that may be raised in connection with such efforts, and probably neither do you. But training technique is definitely a topic that needs further consideration in relation to the specific world region in which our various translation courses are being offered: Not only, *What* should we be teaching, but also, *How* can we best be doing it? This subject naturally includes the various published translator training resources that are being used in the field, for example, *Hebrew poetry in the Bible: A guide for understanding and for translating* in the UBS Helps for Translators series. What could be improved in this text, and what needs to be corrected or added? Perhaps some, hopefully many, of you will be in a position to continue this discussion in your own respective areas of Bible translation. It will then be up to the responsible consultants and administrators to write down your ideas and work together to find a way of bringing your advice, suggestions, cautions, experiences, and so forth to a larger forum where they may be shared with the wider Bible translation community. Certainly, there is a lot that we have to teach and to learn from each other in this regard! Or as they say in Chewa: *Madzi achuluka ndi am'njira* "The water [of a major river] is increased by that [which is added] along the way [from its many tributaries]."

"Education is not merely the transfer of information," but it also endeavors to encourage students, as well as their instructors, "to interact with ideas, concepts, tools" (Esteban Voth, *BT* 56.2, 92). This must become an essential component of any translator training program, wherever in the world it is conducted. The vital process of education, in turn, should be carried out in harmony with principles and procedures that are most appropriate for the language, culture, and church bodies concerned. That has been the emphasis of this article, and I would like to close with an appeal to all readers: Translation *trainers*, be sensitive enough to always keep indigenous methods and styles of instruction, informal as well as formal, in mind as you investigate local resources and prepare, conduct, and evaluate your various courses of instruction. Translation *trainees*, be bold enough to constructively advise your teachers as to how to instruct adults in your sociocultural setting and give them some appropriate models and methods to follow. In short, we need to *educate one another* about how to more effectively communicate God's Word both verbally and behaviorally in the situation that we share, whether locally or with reference to our global translation fellowship.