

# **Making the Transition**

**A description of the 2004 Maroua transition-course  
workshop**

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# Making the Transition

## Introduction

This course was first taught in the Far North Province of Cameroon. It is designed for national workers that have already completed basic linguistic workshops and have identified a set of orthographical rules for their language. The pilot training programme was in two parts. Firstly, there was a residential transition workshop, held over five days. Participants worked from 8am to 5pm with a half hour mid-morning break and a two and a half hour lunch break (see figure 1). Workshop staff also worked in the evenings, formatting and compiling the primers and other materials. At the end of the course, the participants were presented with these materials, which they then took back to the village for testing. Following the testing, when the materials were checked and approved, each participating language group underwent teacher training, both to learn how to use the materials and to train others to do so.

## Part One: Transition Course Workshop

The workshop is modular and participants work collaboratively within their language groups; therefore at least two members of each language group are required. Story writing may be a collaborative activity across language groups, if the participants wish. The primer produced during the workshop is a Multi-Strategy one, based on those designed by Mary Stringer. Owing to the level of poverty in this area of Cameroon, it was decided not to produce individual primers for each student to purchase but to create one that can be used as a teacher's book, with the relevant sections being copied on to the blackboard for the students' benefit.

In the area of Cameroon where this workshop and primer were piloted, literacy skills in a dominant language did not necessarily indicate a familiarity with Western-style educational methods and so familiarity with such has not been presumed. The transition course that is produced during this workshop was also specifically designed to meet the needs of people who have minimal experience of Western-style education, as regards both students and potential teachers. The transition primer follows a consistent daily pattern, as this has proven instrumental both in streamlining teacher training and also in equipping those without formal teaching experience to teach well. This latter consideration was of great importance in the area the course was piloted, as it greatly increased the pool of potential teachers.

The transition course produced during the workshop is a monolingual one. Rather than rely on another language to describe grammatical terms, when there is no guarantee that either the teachers or the students speak that language, let alone have a familiarity with technical aspects of it, it was thought to be more valuable to describe grammatical features in the target language itself. Although the descriptions are usually far less succinct, they have the advantage of being more easily understood. Monolingual courses have further benefits for multilingual environments. In addition to the plethora of local languages in the Far North Province of Cameroon, there are two dominant languages of wider communication and students may have acquired their literacy skills in either one of these, while remaining ignorant of the other. Therefore, in order to address the needs of all, there would either have

to be two transitions courses, one for each language medium, or one monolingual one in the target language.

There are political as well as practical reasons for the choice of a monolingual primer. A great deal has been written on the subject of the hegemony of colonial languages and the inferior place of local languages within government and education in multilingual countries. It has also been argued that this situation detrimentally impacts upon the perceived value of the cultures those local languages belong to and even threatens their survival. Using a colonial or dominant language as the educational medium through which the local language is taught in its written form would serve to perpetuate this situation, whereas creating a monolingual primer challenges it.

Figure 1: Transition workshop timetable 2004

	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
8:00-8:10	<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Prayer</i>	<i>Prayer</i>
8:10-10:00	Introduction  Identification of graphemes to be taught  Choose key words and pictures	Translate orthography rules into MT  Create dictation exercise for each rule	Continue orthography rule work	Translate reading plan  Translate instructions	Continue translation work if necessary
10:00-10:30	<i>Break</i>	<i>Break</i>	<i>Break</i>	<i>Break</i>	<i>Break</i>
10:30-12:00	Divide graphemes into lessons  Write key sentences  Identification of other words using key grapheme  Compile big boxes	Continue orthography rule work	Divide rules into lessons  Identify writing topics	Translate instructions	Continue translation work if necessary
12:00-2:30	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>
2:30-5:00	Continue big box work	Story writing	Story writing	Story writing	Closing ceremony

## Prerequisites

There are several desired prerequisites for this course but only one mandatory one. It is essential that each participating language group have an *orthography statement*, or set of orthography rules, relating to their language. Time will be saved during the course if they also have:

- Several stories that have been checked for clarity and accuracy
- An alphabet chart
- Several identified topics for writing exercises
- A lexicon.

## Workshop activities

### *Module one*

The object of this module is to identify all the graphemes that need to be taught in the primer and to create the lessons in which they are taught. As the number of lessons in the primer is largely dependent on the number of graphemes that require teaching, it is most practical to complete this module first.

French and Fulfulde are the dominant languages in the Far North of Cameroon and the original course participants all came from regions where it could safely be assumed that anyone already possessing literacy skills had acquired them in one of those two languages. Therefore, as the course was designed to address the needs of both sets of students, identification of graphemes to be taught consisted of noting all the graphemes in the target language that either did not appear in *both* the French and Fulfulde alphabets, or that were used to represent different phonemes.

For each of the graphemes to be taught, key words must be chosen. These words ideally begin with the target grapheme and are picturable, multisyllabic nouns such as ‘ladder’. Having identified the key words, accompanying images must either be chosen from clipart or drawn. If an alphabet chart exists in the language, many of these words and images can be taken directly from it. As the materials in the pilot course were produced on computer, we found a scanner essential for transferring drawn images from the page to the computer.

It is at this point that the number of lessons and therefore the duration of the course is established. Unless a plethora of orthographical rules dictates otherwise (see section below), four graphemes per lesson is recommended. There is no set order in which graphemes should be taught, however key words should not contain any previously untaught graphemes. Therefore, in the Cuvok primer, *u* could not be taught until *w* and *z* had already been taught, as the keyword for *u* (*wudez*) contains both of these graphemes.

In addition to the keyword, it is necessary to identify other words containing the target grapheme so that exercises can be completed. These words do not need to be illustratable nouns but should be multisyllabic and it is here that a lexicon can save much time. The exercises for this section are completed using a table that contains twelve syllables. These syllables include all those needed to form the lesson’s keywords plus sufficient others to create further words containing the target graphemes. Again, the selected syllables should

not contain any previously untaught graphemes. A table from the Mbuko transition primer is reproduced in Figure 2, below. The target graphemes are w, k, ə and y; the key words awak, adak, kəla and alay, and the other words that can be constructed include kəlawā, mamay, awa and ləkam.

Figure 2: Big box; Mbuko transition primer 2004

wak	ɑ	kə	lay
dak	wɑ	lə	may
kam	ma	la	way

### ***Module two***

The object of this module is to create the lesson elements in which the orthography rules are taught during the transition course. Although the number of lessons in the course is largely determined by the number of graphemes to be taught, some languages have an extensive set of rules that may impact upon the number of lessons and so this module is best completed directly after module one. It is usual to teach two rules per lesson, however this number can vary according to the complexity of the rules involved. After this module has been completed, the lesson elements created should be combined with those produced during module one, to form daily lessons.

Much of the information necessary to complete this module will be found in the orthography statement. However, this document is invariably written in an official language so that it is accessible to a wider readership, whereas the transition primer should be in the vernacular, to ensure local comprehension. It is therefore necessary for the orthography rules to be translated into the local language that they refer to. A difficulty here is finding a way of describing grammatical features in the target language, when parallel terms do not already exist. We overcame this problem by describing the function of the feature. For instance, verbs were called ‘words for doing things’ or ‘action words’.

Each orthography rule to be taught requires examples to illustrate its application and an exercise to verify that students have learnt the rule and can apply it themselves. Examples for each grammatical feature are included in the orthography statement and some of these could be reserved for use in student exercises but it is sometimes necessary to supplement them with further examples in order to create a more thorough test of the students’ comprehension.

### ***Module three***

Modules three and four can be completed in any order. The object of module three is to identify a suitable topic for the daily writing exercises. It is obviously necessary to establish the duration of the course before one can stipulate how many writing exercises will be needed.

The topics for the writing exercises are in the form of essay titles and examples of some that have been used are; ‘When I Was Young’, ‘Working With Stone’ and ‘In the Time of My

Grandfather'. The content of the story or essay is immaterial; the important issue is that the title provokes sufficient ideas for the student to be able to complete the writing exercise easily and for this reason it is best that the language representatives themselves suggest the topics.

### ***Module four***

Module four is concerned with the creation of stories for reading practice. As for the writing exercises, one story per day is required. This can be time consuming if the participants are not used to creative writing and it would therefore be of benefit to use stories that have already been written and checked for suitability, accuracy and clarity. However, in the pilot workshop, none of the four participating language groups had previously written material that they could use, yet they were each able to produce a transition primer and related materials in just five days.

It is more interesting for students if the stories cover a number of genres and topics. It is also helpful to have stories of varying lengths, so that shorter pieces can be used at the beginning of the courses and longer ones later, when students have gained confidence. The stories typically range from one hundred to five hundred words in length.

In addition to creating the stories, this module includes the translation of a reading plan. Mary Stringer advocates the use of a simple reading plan to ensure that stories are satisfactorily taught yet without unnecessary repetition. We included the translated instructions for this reading plan in each primer (see appendix A).

### ***Module five***

This module is concerned with the construction of the primer and accompanying materials. It is not necessary that the language participants themselves create the final booklets; indeed, time and resources may not permit this, especially if the participants are not already computer literate. On the pilot course, two literacy specialists with experience in desktop publishing created the finished materials for the language groups using a paradigm format, however the content of the booklets was entirely the work of the participants.

Having completed each of the above modules, it is necessary to provide teaching instructions to go with them. These instructions should be given to the participants in a majority language with which they are familiar, so that they can translate them for inclusion in the finished primer. As the instructions for the writing exercise and story are concise, they are included in the daily lesson plan with the relevant exercise (see Figure 3). The reading plan and instructions for teaching the key words and syllable chart are included at the beginning of the primer, as these are somewhat lengthy (see appendix A). Even though these instructions are unlikely to be used by the teachers during their lessons, as this practice does not conform to a traditional teaching model, it is still useful to include them so that the trainers can refresh their memories before training the following year's teachers.

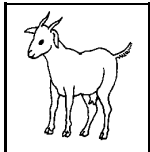
The primer does not contain the stories created during module four, only the title of each day's story and the relevant instructions are given (see figure 3). The stories are published

separately in a compilation storybook, which is used by the transition course students for reading practice.

Figure 3: Translated sample page from Mbuko transition primer

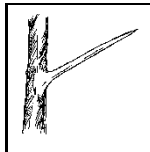
**Lesson 1**

**Key word:** Awak kà nak.



awak

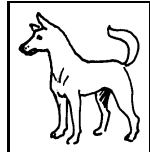
a	wak
---	-----



adak

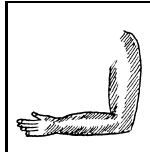
a	dak
---	-----

**Key word:** Alay a kèla.



kèla

kè	la
----	----



alay

a	lay
---	-----

**Big box:**

wak	a	kè	lay
dak	wa	lè	may
kam	ma	la	way

**Story:** The Woman, the Rat and the Ant  
Give each student a copy of the storybook. Read the story paragraph by paragraph, according to the reading plan.

**Lesson 1 Action words**

The word indicating who performs an action is written separately.  
Examples: ni zla, ki njahay, me njadak.

**Exercise: 1**

ni la	dí haw	ti slène	a jalay	ki men
ki pa	mi slahay	na rac	dè ndakay	ta mak
i vinde	ki viren	kè ndaha	ma sla	

**Future events**  
Words that indicate that events will happen in the future are written separately.  
Examples: ni i nay, i sa sukom, ki naa njad.

**Exercise: 2**

ki i zla à kibe	ti sa ndakay doh
i naa nay	ni taa tam way

**Direction, ahay, awan**  
Words that show direction are written separately.  
Examples: na mak ahay.

**Exercise: 3**

a sléray ahay	a taran ayak líber
nè temak ahay iken	a ngaman ayak

Ahay and awan are also written as separate words.  
Examples: awak ahay, bayak awan.

**Exercise: 4**

gwaslay ahay	teman ahay	sla ahay
cedew awan	zabor awan	maced awan

**Writing exercise:** A Folk Tale  
Write the story title, 'A Folk Tale', on the blackboard. Ask the students to write a story based on the title.

**Story:** The Woman, the Rat and the Ant  
Give each student a storybook. Read the entire story using the reading plan.

In addition to the storybook, there is a writing guide. This contains a copy of the alphabet plus all the translated orthography rules with relevant examples. A word list could also be included if desired. This final booklet is a useful reference guide that can be sold to transition course students at the end of a transition course. If students can afford one book, this guide will be of more use to them than a primer.

## **Part Two: Teacher Training**

### **Apprenticeship model**

As mentioned earlier, the primer follows a consistent daily pattern. There are two main benefits of this approach. Firstly, trainers need only demonstrate how to teach one lesson for trainee teachers to be able to teach the whole course. This greatly reduces the training time usually required of a Multi-Strategy course, thereby allowing time for more trainees' practical sessions. Secondly, it is possible to adopt an apprenticeship model when training. In this area of Cameroon, skills are usually acquired through apprenticeship, in a cycle of observation, trial and error. In order to make the training conform to local cultural norms, the method of training trainers and teachers alike also conforms to an apprenticeship model.

The two most pertinent features of the apprenticeship model observed among the Mbuko are repetition and lack of verbal instruction. There must be an element of repetition in order for apprentices to learn through observation and this is why the daily pattern was devised. Multi-Strategy typically uses a variety of teaching methods in addition to the variety of approaches, with the big box being taught in one way on days one and three, for example and in another way on days two and four. However, this proved unnecessarily complicated in training and teachers typically used the same teaching method every day once they had their own classes. Therefore, reducing the teaching approaches to one had very little impact upon the teachers' performance but saved much time during training sessions.

The lack of verbal instruction in the observed apprenticeship model contrasts with a typical Western academic training session, where the ethos of an approach is described and verbal instructions and explanations are given at every stage. It was noticeable that these verbal instructions to trainees were unhelpful and caused confusion. In practical sessions, when a trainee had to demonstrate how to teach a lesson, they typically included all the verbal explanations that they had been given by the trainer. In effect, they were not teaching literacy but were reproducing a teacher-training session. Removing the verbal element and reducing the training to an apprenticeship model where trainees observed a trainer teaching a real class, removed this confusion and greatly improved the trainees' performance in practical sessions.

The benefits of a culturally appropriate training method go beyond the immediate impact on the trainee, however. The academic wrapping that is often inadvertently applied to literacy training prevents many national trainers and teachers with limited exposure to modern Western teaching methods from realising their potential. It is not teaching or training that is problematic for them but the manner in which they are expected to learn and perform it. If the task of training is to be handed over to national workers, then it needs to be in a form that they are familiar with.

Obviously there are many national workers with a great deal of exposure to Western teaching methods and for whom the academic approach to literacy poses no problems. I do not advocate an apprenticeship approach in every situation but only where culturally appropriate.

### ***Prerequisites***

There are several requirements for the training sessions and these are detailed below.



- Classroom
- Blackboard and board eraser
- Chalk
- Primer and related materials
- Students with their own writing materials

Students are absolutely essential for the apprenticeship method, as it is not possible to demonstrate teaching practice without them. Earlier experiments using the trainee teachers themselves as proxy students proved unsatisfactory, as their attention was divided, which had a detrimental effect upon their learning. Using real students allows trainees to focus fully on the demonstration. It also gives a good idea of how long each lesson element will take, what students will find easy and what they will struggle with.

### *Training sessions*

Teacher training was carried out in each participating language area in a one-day session led by an ex-patriate literacy specialist. The apprenticeship method is best applied to a limited number of apprentices; therefore three trainees were selected at each venue to be apprentices and they were charged with training the other trainees at a later date.

The trainer taught the first part of the day's lesson to the students; from the day's graphemes to the second of the day's key words (see figure 3). An apprentice was then invited to repeat this part of the lesson. When this had satisfactorily been completed, a second apprentice was invited to teach the second key phrase and the third key word. Finally, the third apprentice was invited to teach the fourth key word.

Having completed the teaching of the key word, the trainer then taught the class the big box. Again, this was immediately followed by a repeat performance from an apprentice and all the apprentices gained experience of encouraging students to find words within the box and write them on the blackboard.

After the big box had been taught, the trainer read the first part of the story to the students, paragraph by paragraph, according to the reading plan, as instructed in the primer. An apprentice then continued in the same way and read the rest of the story to and with the students.

The same pattern was followed for each of the lesson elements, with the trainer's demonstration being immediately followed by an apprentice's practical session. When correcting the students' writing exercise, it was stressed that only those mistakes relating to grammar rules that had already been taught would be remarked upon.

When the entire day's lesson had been taught, there was a break during which the trainees could ask questions relating to the demonstration. After this, the three apprentices divided up the lesson between themselves, ensuring that they did not teach the same element that they had done during the earlier demonstration. They then taught the entire day's lesson by themselves while the trainer observed. This exercise illustrated that the apprentices had learned how to teach the course, which served three purposes. Firstly, it showed that the trainer had completed his or her job. Secondly, the apprentices gained confidence by

demonstrating their ability to themselves and thirdly, the remaining trainees gained confidence in their future trainers by observing them correctly demonstrating the teaching method.

### *Autonomy*

The participants in the pilot workshop all represented languages where there was no resident SIL team and so it was important that the resultant transition course should not require outside help. However, I would advocate the same approach for all projects regardless of SIL status, as I firmly believe that no literacy course should be dependant on personnel or materials that cannot be found within the local community. Such dependence would render a course unsustainable should the SIL personnel leave, as they ultimately will. It is undeniably easier to stick to methods and materials with which we are familiar but the best way of serving the local community is to use that which is familiar to the target population, hence my use of an apprenticeship model for training.

In spite of my wish for local autonomy, there is often a desire for outside help on the part of the target community. After the class had been dismissed at the conclusion of each teacher training session, another opportunity for questions was given to the trainees. At each venue, a request for the trainer to return and complete the training was given. This indicates that, in spite of the apprentices' competent demonstration, there remained either a lack of confidence in their ability to complete the training or a lack of desire to do so. It is therefore of paramount importance that the trainer encourages and supports the apprentices while refusing to supplant them. If local control is essential for a sustainable literacy initiative, as has been posited, then it is of vital importance that this aspect is not ignored.

## **Appendix A: Instructions**

(To be translated into the target languages)

### **Reading Plan**

1. The teacher reads the text to the students.
2. The teacher reads the text with all the students together.
3. The teacher reads the text with one student, then with another and with another.
4. Two or three students take turns to read the text alone.
5. The teacher reads the text with all the students together.

### **Key Words**

1. Write the key sentence on the blackboard and read it together with all the students.
2. Draw the picture on the blackboard and tell the students what it is.
3. Write the key word underneath its picture. Read the key word according to the reading plan.
4. Draw small boxes underneath the word and enter the key word's syllables into these boxes. Read the key word slowly, clapping once for each syllable.
5. Explain to students how to divide words into syllables.

### **Big Box**

1. Copy the big box, with the syllables in it, on to the blackboard.
2. Read the syllables according to the reading plan.
3. Show the students how one of the key words can be created by combining syllables from the big box.
4. Ask the students to find the other key words in the big box. Ask individual students to indicate the constituent syllables from the big box and write the whole word on the blackboard.
5. Ask the students to find other words in the big box. Ask individual students to indicate the constituent syllables of their word and write it on the blackboard.

## **Appendix B: Workshop Materials**

### **Alphabet handouts**

There is an alphabet visual aid and an alphabet handout. The visual aid shows how the handout should be used and has been completed for the Mbuko language, although any language would serve the same purpose and it would be best to use a language from the area in which you are working, if possible.

The handout first shows the alphabets of the official and trade language(s) and then gives a space in which the graphemes of the target language that do not appear in both or all of the official and trade languages can be noted. Graphemes from the target language that represent different phonemes should also be noted here, even if they represent a different phoneme in only one of the official or trade languages.

The graphemes from the target language that are noted here represent those that must be taught during the transition course.

## L'alphabet français

A a B b C c D d E e F f G g H h I i  
J j K k L l M m N n O o P p Q q R r  
S s T t U u V v W w X x Y y Z z

## L'alphabet fulfulde

A a B b B̂ b̂ C c D d D̂ d̂ E e F f  
G g H h I i J j K k L l M m Mb  
mb N n Nd nd Ng ng Nj nj Ny ny  
ŋ ŋ O o P p R r S s T t U u W w  
X x Y y Ŷ ŷ

**Les lettres de votre langue qui ne sont pas incluses dans  
tous les deux alphabets, français et fulfulde**

B̂ b̂ C c D̂ d̂ E e Ə ə  
Gw gw H h Hw hw J j  
K k Kw kw Mb mb N n  
Nd nd Ng ng Ngw ngw

Nj nj  Œ œ  Sl sl  U u  W  
w  Y y  Zl zl  ‘

## **L'alphabet français**

A a B b C c D d E e F f G g H h I i  
J j K k L l M m N n O o P p Q q R r  
S s T t U u V v W w X x Y y Z z

## **L'alphabet fulfulde**

A a B b B̂ b̂ C c D d Ḑ ḑ E e F f  
G g H h I i J j K k L l M m Mb  
mb N n Nd nd Ng ng Nj nj Ny ny  
Ŋ ŋ O o P p R r S s T t U u W w  
X x Y y Ỵ ỵ

**Les lettres de votre langue qui ne sont pas incluses dans  
tous les deux alphabets, français et fulfulde**

## **Big Box Examples**

The first visual aid shows the keywords for the lessons and their constituent syllables randomly inserted into a big box. The second visual aid shows the other words that can be made with the focus graphemes. Their constituent syllables that do not already feature in the Big Box have been randomly inserted. Please note, if a word has repeated syllables, such as 'mama', then the syllable 'ma' should appear twice in the big box.

The third visual aid shows how the finished Big Box should appear in the primer. The keywords and other words were included on the first two visual aids so that the participants could verify that the constituent syllables were included in the Big Box. These visual aids use examples from Mbuko but there is no reason why another, local language could not be used and indeed, participants would probably prefer to see a visual aid that used words with which they were familiar to some extent.

The handout is merely empty Big Boxes for the participants to complete according to the instructions given.