

Summer Institute of Linguistics

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Training for facilitating a language programme

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0. Why is this presentation necessary?

A challenge from John Bendor-Samuel concerning Bible translation into the next 1000 languages (from his 10 December 1991 letter to the membership):

Can we train new members as facilitators as well as doers? Those who are going to serve as trainers and facilitators must have language and translation experience to be effective but they can multiply their ministry by investing themselves in the lives of others.

A comment from a Branch director (Creson letter to Robinson of 20 February 1992):

I believe ... that we, at least here in Cameroon, are being encouraged more and more to adopt a facilitating rather than a doing role. (...) The old concept of the self-sufficient SIL team is really nonexistent here in Cameroon. We are moving more and more in the direction of national involvement...

A concern from an Area director (Pence in *Intercom* Jan/Feb 1992 pp.2-4):

I would like to see our recruitment and our SIL training revised to reflect a new orientation: the expectation of doing field work *with* the community rather than by ourselves. (...) What we need is a total recasting of these programs to bring about the needed revolution in orientation to field work.

One of the principles for SIL work in the former Soviet Union (February 1992), which is applicable also to many other parts of the world:

In view of the high level of education in the FSU, and hence the availability of educated mother-tongue speakers, our primary aim is to serve as trainers and facilitators of others.

So why is this a topic in this forum? The reason is that current SIL training sends different message. By majoring on the mastery of specific language-related skills the signal is sent that the exercise of such skills on the field is largely what SIL work entails. There is a feeling among some SIL leaders and students that preparation to work with people - facilitating a language programme which is theirs - may be more important than ensuring that a specific range of skills be assimilated. Such an assertion should cause serious debate and will certainly have serious implications in a curriculum committee.

In order to understand what kind of training is appropriate for

facilitation, it is necessary first to understand what facilitation is, how it is implemented and what qualities a facilitator requires.

1. What is facilitating?

Facilitating a language programme, rather than merely doing the tasks involved, means looking to the community for the needed resources, particularly human resources. People are the most important and the best resource there is for a language programme. Facilitating puts the emphasis on the community rather than on the SIL worker.

In what follows I will draw a contrast between "merely doing" and "facilitating" in order to emphasise the differences in approach. In practice, there is probably no SIL language programme which might be characterised as "merely doing" - facilitating the community's involvement has always been a part. At this point, however, the contrast needs to be made so that we can consciously promote facilitation. For the sake of training, we must isolate those factors which make it possible and effective. I am not seeking to assess the past, but to look to the present and the future and see how we might better prepare members for facilitation.

Facilitating is an approach to a language programme. It asks the basic question: how can the local community take responsibility for the programme? It asks that before and during the decisions on what to do (activities). Every activity is examined in the light of questions such as:

How can this activity be organised so as to involve the maximum number of people?

What new capacity will the community possess by undertaking this activity?

What decision-making processes can be instituted so that maximum local ownership of the activity is achieved?

What messages are communicated by engaging in this activity?

In what way will the activity and its consequences facilitate better relationships in the community? with other communities? with the change agent?

Facilitating is a people-centred approach, contrasting with a task- or production-centred approach; it is a community-based approach, contrasting with a focus on the SIL worker and their programme. Therefore, relationships are the key element in facilitating - relationships between the community and the SIL worker, between members of the community, with other agencies and departments working in the area (church, government administration, development agencies, NGOs, etc.).

What kind of relationships?

- of trust between the SIL worker and the community; this means vulnerability, openness, personal sharing, ... One important aspect of this for the SIL worker this is a readiness to welcome the community's input into personal plans.

- respectful: of the identity, needs, concerns, hopes, fears, ... of both community and SIL worker.

- supportive: building confidence in community and SIL worker, understanding and promoting mutual goals, giving credit where it is due, making allowances for mistakes, delays, ...

- productive: as relationships grow, positive, beneficial. visible cooperation should result in language-related areas.

Facilitation requires a process approach to a language programme: it is not a matter of merely producing certain products or of executing certain projects, but of initiating, by modelling, certain processes which the community buys into and can (and wants to) sustain.

Facilitating requires flexibility in planning: planning is an iterative process which is always joint. Flexibility of short-term goals enables the programme to follow community priorities and move at the community's speed.

Identify and nurture local capacity: what capacity exists? what does not exist? why does it not exist? what needs to be done to build capacity? This means a focus on training - of the kind where the process of training is at least as much in focus as the content. The same parameters of the training process may be applied to training locally as to international SIL training programmes. These parameters are presented at 4b below.

Identify or stimulate some form of organisation to take responsibility for planning, decisions, coordinating, evaluating. Work with this organisation to share the vision and explain its various aspects.

Stimulate the creation of wider linkages: with other language programmes, with specialist agencies, with government departments, between churches, with funding bodies.

2. Implementing facilitation = negotiating a joint agenda

A key element in facilitating a programme is the negotiation of a joint agenda. An 'agenda' in this sense is the plans, goals and hopes which a person or community pursues, consciously or unconsciously.

A. It is recognised that both the community and the SIL team have an agenda, and these need to be shared and creatively confronted with each other. Such sharing is a delicate process which starts at first contact, but may in certain circumstances be phased over years. In other circumstances detailed and open sharing of agendas may start at the beginning of the programme.

B. Each side will bring their own identity into the negotiation. For SIL, our Christian motivation, our language-related role and expertise, and our commitment to Bible translation are irreducible elements of our identity. Respective identities should be acknowledged by each side to the other side in such a way that each knows how they see themselves and how they are seen by the other. This will be ongoing and will determine what is 'on offer' for negotiation. Though identities remain fairly static, agendas are negotiated, since there are many ways in which identity can be expressed.

C. Within the parameters set by the sharing of identities, the negotiation of a joint agenda will address two aspects of the programme:

- the content of the programme: the relative importance of the different aspects and their timing, particularly in relation to the community's perspective on other related aspects of their life;
- the execution of the programme: the sharing of responsibility for manpower, finances, PR, etc.

Since communication and language touch most areas of life, the community

may have needs which seem less than central to the SIL team's agenda. At this point the SIL team must show a willingness to flex with the community; this will be best done (and understood) as identity is preserved.

D. As well as the two basic agendas of the community and the SIL team, there are in fact multiple other agendas, whose perspectives need to be integrated into the negotiation process. Such further agendas are those of: local institutions (traditional groupings/associations, churches, development agencies, government departments...), national government, international agencies, the SIL branch, SIL international.

The SIL team needs therefore to relate to these different bodies. Liaison with other agencies in the local community is particularly important, since they also impact the local community's perspective.

E. Negotiating a joint agenda is a process of involving local people from the start, so that transfer of programme ownership is a built-in parameter and occurs progressively. In this way there will not be an identifiable point of handover.

F. Negotiating a joint agenda is a process of mutual learning. The SIL team will constantly be cast in the role of learner as they struggle to discover more of the community's perspective. Such a posture will send a message of respect for the community's ways and capabilities, thus promoting further local self-confidence and the capacity to initiate, manage and sustain change/development. A facilitator will integrate what she learns from a variety of sources and will use it to form an expanding vision of the potential of the community and of the impact of language-related work.

G. The process will include constant re-evaluation of the SIL team's role, by the team and the community.

H. Negotiating a joint agenda will also include activities which demonstrate the viability of the programme, such as publishing the first few books, initial translation or literacy. As some initial work is done, the process of negotiation will continue in order to discover what use such innovation is, whether people want it, who wants it, what the next step is, who should be involved in the next step, etc.

Note: facilitation will take different forms in different communities, but the approach and above all the attitude of the SIL worker will be similar, i.e. that the programme, whatever point it starts at, should be community based. Some communities start much farther back than others, because of educational levels, etc.

Examples from Cameroon and Chad:

Kom: a community ready to move ahead with the written development of their language, aware of the social, educational and spiritual benefits, already taking steps, understanding what is involved (trained linguists), motivated and organised.

Kera: a community eager for the NT to appear, ready to commit themselves to take part in the work, but low in understanding what is involved in language development, literacy, translation.

Konzime: little or no eagerness for a language programme at all, no understanding of why such a programme should be of benefit or of what might be involved.

3. What qualities are important in a facilitator?

It is interesting to note that the following characteristics listed by

secular writers so closely parallel Christian values. A quote from a book on rural development agents:

...unless an agent possesses certain necessary characteristics, he or she would be inappropriate to the work involved. If characteristics such as humility, commitment, sensitivity and self-confidence are attributes considered vital to most rural development workers it is difficult to see how such characteristics can be transmitted through training;
skills: In terms of the processes involved, the agent needs the ability to communicate, both verbally and non-verbally, and also to analyse and diagnose the context of his work with the rural poor.

(Peter Oakley and David Marsden, 1984, *Approaches to participation in rural development*. Geneva: ILO. p.76)

From S. Tilakaratna, 1987, *The animator in participatory rural development*. Geneva: ILO. pp.45ff:

- "commitment to the people"
- "organic cooperator with the people"
- "ability to analyse and understand the dynamics of a given social reality"
- "critical reflections on his own actions"
- "genuine dialogue and learning"
- "two-way (horizontal) communication skill"
- "assist the people to build up capacities to cope with practical barriers"
- "adjust to the life and work styles of rural populations"
- "ability to cope with tensions and conflict situations"

Note that all these characteristics are in some way part of SIL's approach to involvement in a language project. SIL's approach is therefore already oriented towards facilitation in some ways and goes beyond many other agencies' ways of working in development. We need to become more aware of our own approach, consciously develop its strengths and articulate it to others. By doing so we can make a statement about Christian concern to respect, love and serve the disadvantaged.

4. How might SIL training be modified to bring facilitating into focus?

As Pence remarked in his *Intercom* article, it is not a question of adding further courses, but of radically re-orienting the training process towards a facilitating approach. Much of the content of the courses may well remain, but the way it is taught and the reasons why it is taught need to be modified. The question we face at this point is not how to re-organise courses, but whether a radical re-orientation is necessary and what principles and concerns should underpin such a re-orientation. What follows are some ideas intended to stimulate debate.

a - how do things look now?

A small survey was conducted at Horsleys Green amongst the students currently doing the full yearly cycle of courses. Seven questions were asked on how far the content and process of SIL training had focussed on training others and motivating SIL students to do so.

There was general agreement that ICT was the only course which gave emphasis to training others, but that the topic also formed a part of Literacy Principles and Probe. It had been mentioned as a goal in the Field Linguistics project, but space was not given to make it a training

experience. In ICT students were conscious that the training process was in part a model for future training elsewhere. Other courses did not make this link.

The SIL training experience: many felt that inadequate attention was given to explaining the training process as it happens, though the learning styles test was seen as useful in this regard. Observing the methods and styles of teachers was one way of assessing the training process, though this was not always positive.

Staff example and experiences were high on the list as motivating factors in being ready to train others. Learning valuable skills and realising how much they have learnt also motivated students to want to pass their skills and knowledge on. Negative factors in the training process were particularly the emphasis on grades with the individualism and competitiveness which this engendered. Sharing the vision with others through involvement in non-course activities (eg Simulator weekend) was also a motivating factor.

Students suggested:

- more group work with less emphasis on individual achievement
- training modules in each course
- specific training in training methods
- less emphasis on grades, more on working on strengths and weaknesses, eg with a staff tutor over the whole year
- more involvement of language assistants in the field linguistics project
- field linguistics course to be held on the field, perhaps using the trade language
- more targeted training for specific roles (translation, literacy,...)
- more explanation of the place (how, why) of training in SIL work

Some of these suggestions support those made at the end of this paper, all are worthy of further exploration and thought.

b - possible modifications

1) - priority of process

In training, the message of the way the training is put across is as important, and probably longer-lasting, than the content. It is the process which communicates vision, and signals the place relationships have. At the extreme, it is possible to teach important content well and to see students succeed in assimilating the content, and yet observe them become detached from the main vision and de-motivated in their commitment. Training which recognises the importance of the process will give attention to four areas:

- vision, values and attitudes
- relationships
- learner orientation
- role of trainers

*these apply to
SIL courses
not training
courses*

Attention to process is important in any training, but particularly where

- the trainees are adults with experience
- the training is part of larger community goals or programmes
- models of learning may emphasise rote learning and 'top-down' teaching techniques
- participation in training is voluntary

- trainees are looking for useful and practical training.

Vision, values and attitudes

Vision, values and attitudes are necessarily passed on through any training, but they are crucial in training for working with people, and in training to train.

What kind of vision is being communicated?
What attitudes come across?
What underlying positive and negative values can be identified?

Aims: pass on vision, strengthen positive values, stimulate collective reflection, questioning and analysis, develop appropriate values and behaviour.

Relationships

In training which addresses some aspect of communication, the emphasis must constantly be on relationships - as a focus for our future work, and as part of the process of training.

What kind of relationships are modelled by the facilitators?
What opportunities are given for building relationships in the group (= everyone involved in the training)?

Aims: build two-way relationships, avoid hierarchical relationships, build joint commitment to vision, promote trust, believe in people's potential, encourage the process of group interaction, promote acquisition of social skills, build friendships.

Learner orientation

Training is only worthwhile if the process is centred on learners, building on their existing experience and meeting them at their point of growth or need.

How effective is communication in the training?
How much does the training use the learner's experience and build on it?
How sensitive is the training to the learner's needs?
How much is the training helping the learner to grow as a person?
What parts of the training does the learner find it easiest to remember?

Aims: build self-confidence, show support, respect learner's knowledge, encourage discovery of knowledge by learners, involve learners in setting the programme, let reality as experienced set the agenda, make learning challenging personally and intellectually, make it fun and joy.

Role of trainers

In training of a participatory or interactional nature the trainers are not those who know it all, teaching it to those who don't, but

they are there to facilitate the interaction and to bring new perspectives.

How do the trainers facilitate the interaction on the course?

What do the trainers' perspectives bring to the course?

How sensitive are the trainers to trainees' experience and needs?

Aims: raise questions, bring wider perspective, promote participation of all, maximise learners' contributions, Col. 3:14.

ii) - staff orientation

Training for facilitation requires a conscious emphasis on the training process by staff; staff will need to give attention to their training methods and their relationships with other staff and with students. The suggestions that follow put increased demands on staff and will require time and space during training.

Staff must consciously model the kind of relationships which should characterise the role of a facilitator in field work. Relationships with students will be based on the elements outlined under the previous section (priority of process).

Relationships with other staff will demonstrate teamwork. This will take time and effort and greater interdepartmental contact. Staff need to be aware of what the other departments are teaching, to share in each other's lessons (by giving appropriate examples from their experience, for instance), to give input into subject planning from the perspective of each department, to share personally with each other and with the students. This will all take time away from other activities.

The staff will encourage a climate of debate - questioning what we are doing, always putting daily activities in the larger context, always returning to the central importance of relationships, Godward and otherward. Throughout the training there needs to be ongoing debate about training objectives and methods, how to make the training more people-centred, etc.

Part of facilitating on the field is flexible planning to suit community needs. This needs to be built into SIL training so that the training (process and content) is seen to respond to genuine concerns of the students or other members of the local community.

iii) - course implementation

As staff give increased attention to the process of training, student consciousness of the pedagogical (or better: andragogical) approach will be raised. Implicit and explicit references to how and why a subject is being taught will punctuate lessons and be the subject of student-teacher interaction, inside and outside the classroom.

A further development would be to put training modules into each course. This could be done in several ways. For a certain number of sessions of a given subject, students might be divided into two groups and taught different topics, then be asked to teach that material to members of the other group on a one-to-one basis. Another approach would be to give each student the chance once

during each term (semester) to prepare and teach new material to the students. Staff would need to invest time in helping prepare. Further, students can share their findings (exercises, field methods project, anthropology, ...) with the class, reporting back on what they have done and discovered.

Since facilitating a language programme on the field is a team effort, consideration should be given to having students work in teams and groups during the training. The language project would be a good candidate for this approach; staff member and language helper(s) would also participate in the team. To increase the cross-cultural element, it would be helpful to have two language helpers (same language) per group who can participate in planning objectives and themselves have training goals. Although the purposes of the field linguistics course are not currently to foster a facilitating approach (see Assumptions and Goals...), such a focus would be possible. In this and other courses, it is important that responsibility for planning and setting priorities be passed to the students as much as possible. The group processes involved need to receive some conscious attention and debate and to be evaluated by the group members.

Facilitating will probably include helping look for extended resources outside the community. If this leads to project proposals which are presented to international funding agencies, it may be useful to offer training in the commonly used planning framework for such proposals.

SIL courses are intensive and ability to work through assignments quickly can be an important factor. Such ability is much less in focus in a facilitating approach to a language programme. Rather than requiring every student to do every assignment regardless of their speed of working, focus on building confidence in what they can do, thus fostering motivation.

There are some major implications in the foregoing:

- evaluation and grading: currently grades are very much in focus in SIL training. In some countries this is because students want to 'pass' courses which contribute to an external academic qualification, in others simply because of the emphasis given to graded assignments by staff. The message sent is that training inevitably involves being graded and that it is a most important consideration. In a language programme, there is rarely such a focus (though there may be in university-linked national training courses). A better form of assessment would be a joint one by staff and student detailing strengths and weaknesses and signalling them to the field in a brief description.
- will all students learn the same thing? Up to now most students at a given SIL are presented with the same core subject matter and asked to do the same assignments. A team approach would mean that some might do assignments on one aspect of the language (in field linguistics, for instance), some on another. Does this matter? Probably not, as SIL workers can ask for (and often get!) help in specific analytical problems.
- will there be a need to cut out some material? Yes, if attention is given to the process. This is not so detrimental if fieldwork is seen in the context of a team approach. Where teams need to build on their basic training, or recall what they have forgotten, help can be given through consultants, reading, workshops, further studies. There is

already a general acceptance of a philosophy of ongoing learning and training. In any case, the notion of facilitating means that we work with people at whatever level they are and help them go further. We need to adopt the same approach for our own training, so that the student knows at the end of the training that he is a part of a team where help may be found to go further.

