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Title: AN AUSTRALIAN HYBRID EXPERIMENT IN TRAINING AND EDUCATING TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS

BIO DATA:

Name: J. CHRYS CHRYSTELLO (Dr. BSc MA major in Applied Social and Communication Studies)

Member of AUSIT (FIT), NAATI, AJA/MEEA (IFJ) (Australia), CATS/ACT (Canada), ITA, SLP & ALFE (Portugal)

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chryschrystello@journalist.com

Chrys Chrystello started his interest in languages in the early 70's when confronted with more than 30 dialects in East Timor. In Australia, he found traces of an Aboriginal Tribe speaking a Portuguese Creole inherited five centuries earlier when the early Portuguese Discoverers landed there in 1521-1525. A founder of AUSIT (Australian Institute for Translators and Interpreters) Chrys has been teaching Linguistics, to prospective interpreters and translators, in Australian universities as a member of NAATI (National Accreditation Authority of Australia).

With more than twenty years' experience in translation and interpreting services, being a freelancer Translator, Chrys specialised in medicine, literature, linguistics, legal, engineering, Internet and computer science, politics, and international relations, Chrys has in the past decades presented his sociolinguistic themes to conferences in countries such as Australia, Portugal, Spain, Brazil, US and Canada.

(134 WORDS - 10 LINES)

ABSTRACT by

CHRYSTELLO, j. chrys,

2. Educating translators in Oz

In Australia, NAATI accreditation is the only accepted official professional qualification for 90 languages and their practising interpreters and translators.. Individuals may obtain such accreditation by completing an approved course. We often see T&I delivery by scores of unqualified, unprofessional practitioners, without proper accreditation. Most of them are immigrants who happen to know a few words and attempt to interpret for their families. These unaccredited practitioners should be encouraged to get proper qualifications.

3. Proposals for future testing of T&I practitioners

My proposal for NAATI testing in Australia and elsewhere, is very simple:

Include new tests for web page translation, localisation projects, and other internet-type translations, for which most of us were unprepared until recently. To reflect market changes have a yearly update. Include technical translations tests for accreditation at the PROFESSIONAL LEVEL, such as excerpts from a manual for rolling door installation or a recipe book, a newspaper for online edition, a medical report, a finance/annual report, or other real life situations that professionally accredited translators encounter on a daily basis and for which they are unprepared

4. I/T AND THE LAW

In Australian courts, little information is protected by professional privilege. Situations may arise in which the law requires should be communicated to the appropriate authorities

5. LANGUAGE GENOCIDE

*420 languages are 'nearly extinct.'*¹ *"The extinction of languages is part of the near total collapse of the worldwide ecosystem"* .

Psychological damage surfaces when use of one's language identity is denied.

*In 1788 in Australia, there were 250 languages: only 250 survive. 10% of the aboriginal population speak one of those dialects. ½ count on 10-100 people to articulate them.*²

*30% of Australians speak LOTE*³. *Community languages grow, whereas native languages die. The threat to language diversity is bigger than the threat to biodiversity*⁴. *Languages do not divide or unite a country, intolerance does.*

¹ 160 in Oceania, 103 in North America, 53 in South America, 59 in Asia, 39 in Africa, 8 in Central America and 4 in Europe.

² In Aboriginal Australian Encyclopaedia

³ A language other than English

⁴ SKUTNABB-KANGAS, Tove, (2000) *Linguistic Genocide in Education or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights*, Mahwah, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 785 pages, paperback

TITLE OF PRESENTATION: AN AUSTRALIAN HYBRID EXPERIMENT IN TRAINING AND EDUCATING TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS

1. Introduction

The purpose of this presentation is to update previous strategy papers on multicultural communication, within a very multiethnic environment (such as Australia) in a globalising market. Drawing on previous Australian experiences, we will try to show how one has to mend cultural barriers/prejudices, and develop skills to address specific needs of clients.

The overriding concern was the common lack of consultation, co-ordination, and dissemination of previous attempts, and a strong need to educate service providers and the communities, as a whole, for the very specific needs of NESB⁵ groups in this ever-changing era of global intercultural communication.

From 1950 onwards⁶ when the police arrested a “wog” as they were called those days, it had to rely on a friendly “wog” who just lived across the road selling fruit. The more “wogs” that were arrested the less time the fruit seller had to work, so the police force decided to pay him a small fee for his “translating” services. Eventually this Sicilian Luigi discovered that was more money to be made in interpreting than selling fruit and was joined by Nick the Greek, Abdul the Lebanese, José the Spanish or Portuguese, Milan the Yugoslav and many more. They became important figures in the neighbourhood always accompanying police officers and soon became socially relevant.

During the 70's many important changes took place in Australia and we witnessed the creation of the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS), Anti-Discrimination Board, EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity), Ethic Affairs Commissions, etc...

Bilingual officers started being recruited in the early 80's to serve as interpreters/translators. They had to pass a test and show their involvement with their language communities and a sympathetic attitude toward ethnic minorities.

The Commonwealth Government set up NAATI (National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters) in 1977 to establish and monitor professional standards for translators and Interpreters in Australia, and to support the development of the profession, later leading to the establishment of AUSIT.

AUSIT (The Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators Inc.) the national professional association, whose members are practising interpreters, translators, as well as individuals and organizations, was founded in 1987. It is primarily involved in promoting high standards of T&I, raising the profile and recognition of translators and interpreters in the community, setting and maintaining high ethical standards, and encouraging continuing professional development.

⁵ NESB- non English speaking background

⁶ NASIR, Mike (January 2001), The future of the interpreting and translation professions, Sydney language Centre

In Australia, NAATI accreditation is the only accepted official professional qualification for 90 languages and their practising interpreters and translators. Apart sitting for testing, another method by which individuals may obtain such accreditation is by successfully completing an approved course, in accordance with NAATI guidelines, for content, duration, assessment procedures, staffing, and resources.

For most of these years, there was little distinction between the profession of interpreting and translation and ethnic and welfare issues, with a strong link between government and professionals. Helping the “poor migrants” became the motto. Overnight, ethnicity became a beautiful word; everyone in the business had his/hers own interpretation of the official government policies, and cared for his/hers own community interests.

Most of those affiliated to authorities had guaranteed employment and some prospered, not because they were good or bad, but because they were continuously being used by official instrumentalities such as the courts, the police, legal aid, health workers, social workers, schools, etc. They saw themselves (myself included, for a while) as an extension of government agencies instead of a true blue professional.

Demand increased substantially during the 80’s. Government departments supplying interpreters were placed in an almost impossible position of catering for an ever-increasing demand, and were simultaneously dealing with accreditation issues. There were no international policy examples we could follow, so we had to develop ours, learning with our own mistakes. People were simply translating into their languages whatever the government decided to transmit without any proper study of the best methodology to do so. Such was the state of affairs when we were offered one of these tasks of “helping the poor migrants understand government funding for child care facilities”.

Proper funding/research/follow-up programmes are essential for the success of any initiative in this area but mainstream providers⁷ are often unaware of the problem adopting tokenistic attitudes, or merely trying to avoid it.

In Australia, the major hurdles that overseas-born people traditionally encounter are lack of communication and of active participation in the community at large. They will have to be heard first if we want to pass them any message. Only then, once the target audience is set, can one define what is to be emphasized to reach a basic message that can be safely transferred into various cultures and languages.

The best-translated message is quite often lost on people. This is often due to small particulars pertaining to race, creed, cultural background, or regional differences in the country of origin. Other times it may fail, merely because it is so generalist and jargoistic that in order to achieve a basic linguistic standard, ends up merely localised to the elite, instead of reaching out to the most disadvantaged minorities/majorities that are the real target of the message in the first instance.

⁷ Communicators, translators and interpreters

I remember spending endless and sometimes fruitless meetings to find a common wording acceptable to all levels of Greek speakers⁸ for an Australian Government Department project. Only after that, were we able to proceed to the next stage of pre-production of the final governmental message.

Some common western society ideas and attitudes, that none of us would ever dispute (such as government-sponsored child care), can irrevocably be against beliefs or mores in certain communities. No matter how much multicultural, multilingual, or aware I may be there is no replacement for a fully researched exercise, face-to-face or polled, with those communities. The English version to be translated/communicated has to be concise, non-jingoistic, non-jingoistic, and in Plain English to be properly transmitted to each community. It sounds hard, but it has been done and it is good fun.

2. CASE STUDY

Knowing the difficulties faced by the almost 200 different ethnic and linguistic communities in Australia, we opted for a thorough and widespread dissemination of information, in order to establish channels of communication capable of reducing language barriers and cultural differences.

Almost 30% (thirty per cent) of the Australian population is overseas-born, with a fifth speaking LOTE (a language other than English) at home. There are vast pockets of the population, mainly most recent arrivals (under family reunion, humanitarian, or refugee programmes) that speak no English at all, and are at a loss in a very different cultural and linguistic environment.

Although we can explain the different socio-cultural backgrounds, political organisation and lack of welfare-based societies, it is hard to aim at such a varied group and expect to reap rewarding results when one is talking about child care, non-existent, and alien notion in many countries.

We moved on limited by budgetary constraints to establish how many community languages would become targeted. Immediately after, we researched their ethnic networks, organizations and individuals, who if not totally representative, at least were capable of bridging the gap with their group members. This lengthy part of the project was aimed at increasing, through thorough research, our subject-specific project input.

For this project to be successful not only by the number of written/audiovisual mediums or of languages covered, we had to strive to get as much effective coverage as possible by ethnic organizations, welfare groups, lobbies, and all sorts of ethnic media, because ultimately they would define and decide the fate of such mega project.

After months of personal contacts, follow-ups, etc., we thought we had it cobbled together to achieve a long-term result as only the best-prepared campaigns can achieve.

From a seller's point of view, we had meetings with all departmental people who would, at some stage, be

⁸ Not one of my languages

involved or linked with the project, brainstorming what they thought was appropriate from their favoured positions to spread the Government's point of view. This was followed by an update of the info to be transmitted into the community, setting up immediate targets for all the next steps of the project, again limited by budgetary constraints and the enormous size of Australia.

How far could we go: only into major metropolitan areas, cities at state level, or deep country level? After that decision, we had to target which languages would go into what areas, before we could organise a team of translators and proofreaders, capable of delivering the final product within relatively tight deadlines for printing and production.

We collected and analysed myriad statistical and formal data to identify the needs of each NESB group, creating patterns of client profiles, data collection mechanisms for future exercises, level of knowledge within each group of the departmental functions. All the while, we kept communicating with other government departments and agencies on a regular basis for interaction within their boundaries, finding out that although there were numerous EEO (Equal Employment Opportunities) recommendations they had never been fully implemented, monitored, or established, thus lacking statistical data to help us define our target groups. We had to rely on vague National Guidelines for Collection of Ethnicity Data, to try to understand the high disparity of participation rates of NESB people and English speaking ones.

The work had hardly begun and it looked like we had been doing it for most of our lives. Only then, did we start those countless meetings with ethnic workers, media, and local individuals. This had to be done in stages, since people were physically located hundreds or thousand of miles away. We discussed ad nauseam the various meanings, tonalities, and shades of many a word, so that when it was rendered into one of the selected 18 community languages, they had the most appropriate tonality or were less prone to offend the sensibilities of older generations.

We took into consideration the various levels of register in languages as complex and alien to me as Greek or the Persian Farsi...so that we could pass on the message across into a culturally appropriate form, to be politically correct and capable of being well received and understood.

We had by this time defined what were the high need groups in terms of date of arrival in the country, lack, or level of English skills, different cultural/welfare background, age, immigration status (i.e. refugee, family reunion, professionally qualified immigrants, qualified but not recognised professional people, unemployed, unemployable, etc.).

In the end, we got support together with constructive and strong opinions from the members of the community that made possible such project.

We were still collating data before defining what languages would be selected and were already obtaining very different results to what was perceived as the real needs of the community, from urban to country, from capital cities to small towns. We had to keep revising the number of leaflets, languages, and other mediums in

accordance with our budget. It was a nightmare, since never before had it been attempted such a large-scale communication exercise in so many languages for so many people.

Once we defined the major 20 languages⁹, we had to decide which additional ones could be included later between Armenian, Singhalese, Khmer, Thai, Russian, Hungarian, or Maltese.

Then we moved on to a major media blitz in order to get maximum exposure and coverage, whilst setting assessment values for the campaign, making sure all possible feedback would be treated and analysed with constant follow-ups.

Translation/interpreting and communicating had suddenly acquired new dimensions unbeknown to all of us

“Of all the language behaviours that the human brain is capable, translating and interpreting must be the most demanding”¹⁰ Steven Pinker said just a couple of years ago.

Here we were confronted with problems that no training, formal or otherwise, had prepared us to, there were no books to consult, no other colleagues who had experienced what nobody has ever done, no professional association capable of giving us some guidance. Before printing and production, we had to consider

- *In languages such as Arabic, where the writing is from left to right, the need to invert logotypes, drawings and other graphic forms*
- *The need to identify the three brochures through three different colours at the top: BLUE, RED, and ORANGE, and at the bottom: GREEN, BLUE, and LILAC.*
- *The need to consider dialectal differences and regionalisms (such as Portuguese and Brazilian, islander and mainland Greek, European Spanish and South American varieties, etc). Words such as CHILD CARE WE HELP (Nosotros podemos ayudarle con: el cuidado de sus hijos); WE HELP WITH FEE RELIEF; WORK AT HOME AS A FAMILY DAY CARER, which in some cases were all but impossible to translate...*
- *The need to create a visual identification of each language on the top right corner, so that the administrative staff could identify the leaflets and brochures that they had to distribute.*
- *In some sentences such as Fee Relief needed some creative work (Reducción de precios/ propinas)*
- *The need for brochures to open from the “other” side in languages such as Arabic and Farsi, which resulted in extra print run and a different folding orientation.*

In the end the support came from all corners, community groups, local municipalities, ethnic groups and

⁹ Chinese	Arabic	Spanish	Vietnamese	Portuguese
Italian	Greek	Polish	Croatian	Turkish
Tagalog (Filipino)	Hindi	Macedonian	Korean	Bahasa Indonesia
Tongan***	Farsi Afghan/Persian)	Fijian***	Lao	Samoan***

*** *These three were excluded from the first print out.*

¹⁰ PINKER, Steven (1998) in Language International, vol. 10.6

individuals who were enthused by the novel approach undertaken, and were wondering why it was never done before, to achieve cultural acceptance of the alien child care concept we were dealing with.

We smiled hoping for a pat on the back. Instead, we got admonished because our campaign which started at [Australian] State level had moved on to become a Federal issue covering most States and Territories. This, of course was the fief of the Federal Planners in Canberra... that never undertook or even considered similar plans.

The widespread process of research and consultation that appeared extensive and time-consuming was actually vital to explore all avenues of information to properly gauge community feelings and misconceptions, to produce material that was both culturally and grammatically 'user-friendly' laying the foundations for subsequent productions.

The levels of consultation were so warmly received and acclaimed within the NESB¹¹ community that we were inundated with letters of support and praise. The entire credibility of the government department (at rock bottom before this project) was restored to certain heights. New commitments raised the expectations of the normally cynical communities, seeing an interdepartmental collaboration seldom observed before.

The pamphlets ended up being distributed at national level in all States and Territories, according to the concentration of specific ethnic groups, and in tandem with information agencies, resource centres, ethnic groups representatives and even consulates.

In the end after all praise was lavished and the project was nominated for the final "Yearly Media Ethnic Awards", the bureaucrats killed the cat, cutting all funding for future follow-up projects.

I became a much richer person in cultural terms, capable of understanding disparagingly different cultures and linguistic backgrounds in areas where before I could not even suspect that cultural bias or ignorance existed. Ever since then I have been following a similar approach to any and every intercultural information project that I can lay my hands on, and believe me, it can be done in all areas of information from Internet localisation projects to mere translations aimed at far and distant countries sharing a common linguistic background.

Umberto Eco once¹² said that "translators are the major artisans for cultural and information transference, and the only ones capable of stopping the supremacy of the English language responsible for more than a century advance in the North American economy."

Let us only hope that we are able artisans for such cultural and information transference, in order to preserve all languages and cultures in this age of global standardisation, always capable of following the example of those navigators of yore who faced Brave New Worlds never before visited...

¹¹ NESB non English speaking background people

¹² Undocumented quote.
