



Translating Development Pre-circulated note

Updates and plans of 'The Listening Zones' research project

As we are starting the third year of the research project 'The Listening Zones of NGOs: Languages and Cultural Knowledge in Development Programmes', we are pleased to share with you details on the work completed so far, and plans for this final year of the project.

NGOs' histories - background research

The Listening Zones project aims to explore the role that languages and cultural knowledge play in the policies and practices of development NGOs. Our work during the first year of the project focused on exploring the histories of some major international NGOs and donors. We read archival material of Oxfam GB (Bodleian Library, Oxford), Christian Aid (SOAS, London), Save the Children UK (University of Birmingham), and of DFID's predecessors (National Archives, Kew).

We were particularly interested in how language features in documents on policy and management decisions, applications for funding, and field reports. We learned more about how approaches to listening, language and culture evolved over time, and we used some of the findings as the basis for a workshop we hosted on 2 November 2016, called 'Listening, power and inclusion: languages in development NGOs'. Some 20 NGO staff participated in this workshop, and we found that many of the problems related to language and listening described in archival documents are still present in development work today. You can read the full report of the workshop on our project website: www.reading.ac.uk/listening-zones-ngos.

Donor and NGO approaches to listening today

During the second year of the project, we have interviewed about 50 NGO and DFID staff on present-day approaches to listening in development work, and the role of languages and culture when listening. We interviewed staff at headquarters as well as in-country over Skype. In early 2017, a research fellow from Geneva, Dr Carmen Delgado Luchner, joined the research team. Carmen is conducting a comparative study on the role of languages in the work of international, Swiss-based NGOs. Her work will allow us to examine to what extent our findings are relevant only to UK-based NGOs.

Case studies: country visits to Peru, Malawi and Kyrgyzstan

This summer we have made a start at transcribing and analysing our interview data, while also preparing the final phase of data collection. In January 2018, we plan to visit three countries to explore in more depth how NGOs listen to, learn from the people with whom they work, and what role languages and cultural knowledge play in supporting relationships in development programmes.

The countries we have selected are Malawi, Peru and Kyrgyzstan, and this is based on three criteria: linguistic (different language contexts for NGO activity, particularly defined by the status of the English language in each country), temporal (different historical periods of sustained NGO intervention), and operational (ease of access to NGO work afforded by the continuing involvement of INTRAC).

Translating Development seminar: guiding questions

Our seminar will bring key translation studies specialists and trainers into dialogue with practitioners. We aim to address the following questions:

Panel 1

For NGO translation managers:

- What role does translation have in your NGO?
- What is your job role in your NGO as a professional translator?
- How are the Translation Services organised?
- What are the problems/challenges?
- Are these changing?
- What sort of additional support would you like to have?

For freelancers:

- How do you communicate with the NGOs you receive work from?
- Do NGOs provide you with translation tools?
- What are the main problems/challenges in translating for NGOs/on development?
- Do you have the opportunity to network with other translators that freelance/work for NGOs?
- What sort of additional support would you like to have?

Panel 2 and 3

In response to what translators have said, these panel discussions will address:

- How does 'Translating development' relate to current research on institutional translation/ translation in 'difficult' contact zones?
- What research questions emerge from the Panel presentations and how might they support practitioners?
- Are there implications for translator training/postgraduate practice?
- How might translation in development be supported/networked in the future?