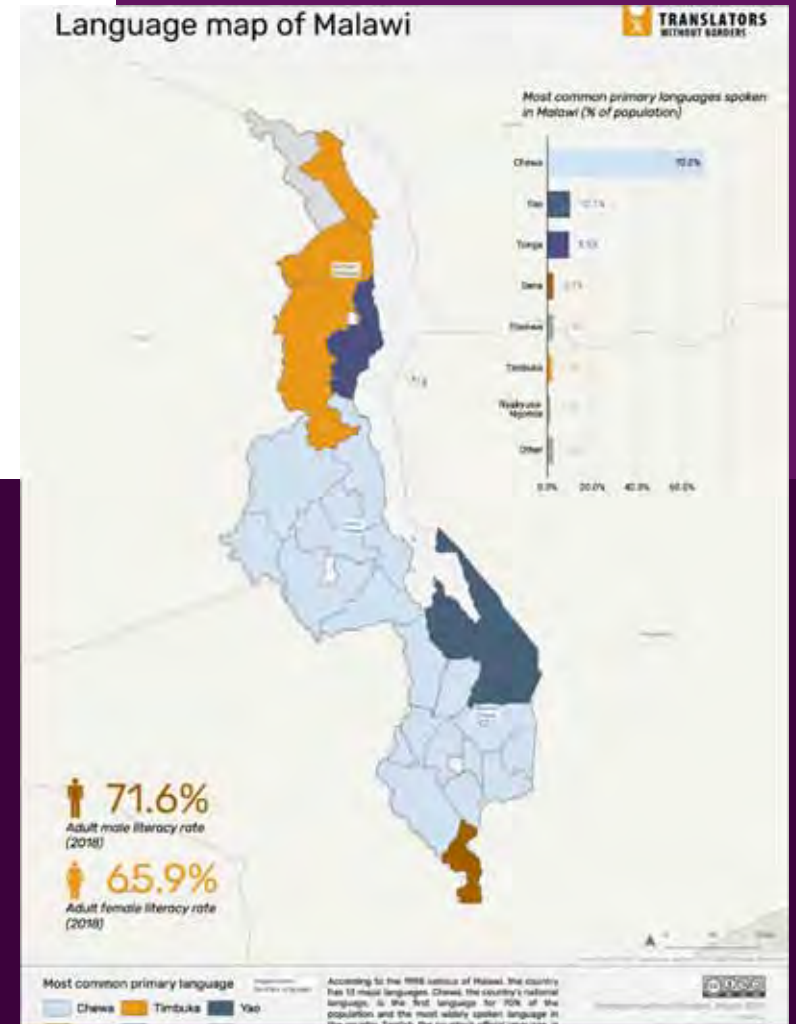


'Crowd-sourcing' meaning: A community-sourced translation glossary for navigating semantic complexity

Dr Angela Crack, Dr Michael Chasukwa



Ecolinguistics and Participatory Translation

- The fields of international development and academia have been Anglocentric for several decades, which has produced hegemonic norms, concepts and understandings that are inextricably related to an Anglo worldview. Ecolinguistics has helped to make the case for embracing linguistic diversity to address key ecological issues, but is there enough focus on **practical questions of how researchers and practitioners could build bridges between different language groups to develop solidarities and a platform for change?**
- This paper discusses the **early development of an innovative research tool that may help achieve this goal.** It describes how we co-produced a Chichewa-English two-way translation glossary of development terminology with communities in Malawi through participatory workshops. It will explain how the participants used the translation exercises to critically engage with key development terms, and it will reflect on the potential of the tool for ecolinguistic research and environmental activism.

Underpinning research project: *Development NGOs and Languages*

- AHRC-funded project with Crack, Footitt and Tesseur:
- Language policies are often not in place, and there is little funding for translation support.
- Local staff have to create their own *ad hoc* translations for communities, with varying degrees of success.
- Language and translation problems often lead to project failure.
- Translation issues negatively impact relationships of trust between NGOs and communities.
- Our respondents said that a free translation glossary could help them with their work.

Case studies:

*Malawi, Kyrgyzstan,
Peru.*

Development NGOs
and Languages

Listening, Power and Inclusion

Hilary Footitt · Angela M. Crack · Wini Tesseur

Follow-on funding: *Translation Glossary Project*

- The departure point for our research was how to design a sustainable means to help researchers and practitioners to embrace inclusive communication and translation in a way that was not reliant on machine translation (= inappropriate for context/locally-specific translation; low-resource language pairings; poor electricity/internet infrastructure).
- The Translation Glossary Project was an AHRC-funded collaboration between Crack and Chasukwa. The aim was to promote good communication between development stakeholders in Malawi.
- We designed a participatory approach to constructing the glossary in order to promote the active involvement of the local community, who are best placed to provide relevant and nuanced insights into the meanings of development-related concepts. Through this exercise, the development discourse can be contextualised, and the homogenising tendencies of development discourse can be challenged.

Potential of the 'glossary method' for ecolinguistics

- **Important!** We did not design the glossary method with an ecolinguistic framework in mind. But now that we have 'proof-of-concept', we believe that the method is useful in several ways:
- **Linguistic empowerment and diversity:** The participatory approach empowers local communities to actively engage in the construction of their own glossary, allowing them to define and articulate their ecological knowledge and experiences in their own language. Promotes 'discursive heterogeneity' (Venuti 2008). Promotes language diversity, which is important because of the link between language/biodiversity (Nettle & Romaine 2000).
- **Community collaboration:** By involving community members in the glossary creation process, the method fosters collaboration and co-creation. It recognises the collective expertise and knowledge held by community members, including indigenous and local knowledge about ecological concepts and relationships. It could help to tap into new, more eco-beneficial 'stories to live by' (Stibbe 2015).

Potential of the 'glossary method' for ecolinguistics

- **Contextualisation of ecological discourse:** The glossary method allows for the incorporation of local ecological terms, expressions, and cultural nuances that may not be adequately captured in mainstream or hegemonic discourses (Cronin 2017, 2021). Thus enhancing the accuracy and relevance of the glossary in reflecting the local ecological realities and challenges faced by the community.
- **Bridging language barriers:** It enables the translation and mutual understanding of ecological terms and concepts between different languages and cultures. This could promote a deeper understanding of the natural world and lay the groundwork for activism in support of environment justice, given the interlinkage between nature's values and language (Inglis & Pascual 2023).
- **Critical dialogue:** The participatory approach encourages critical reflection on the power dynamics inherent in language. It opens up discussions about the hegemonic discourses and dominant knowledge systems that may marginalise or exclude certain voices and perspectives in research and practice.

Translation Glossary Project

- This is the first comprehensive translation glossary in international development produced through participatory methods.
- The participants in the workshop produced a translation glossary in Chichewa-English containing dozens of words not available in commercial dictionaries.
- We produced a training handbook so that practitioners can produce their own glossaries in different languages.

<https://translationglossary.org>



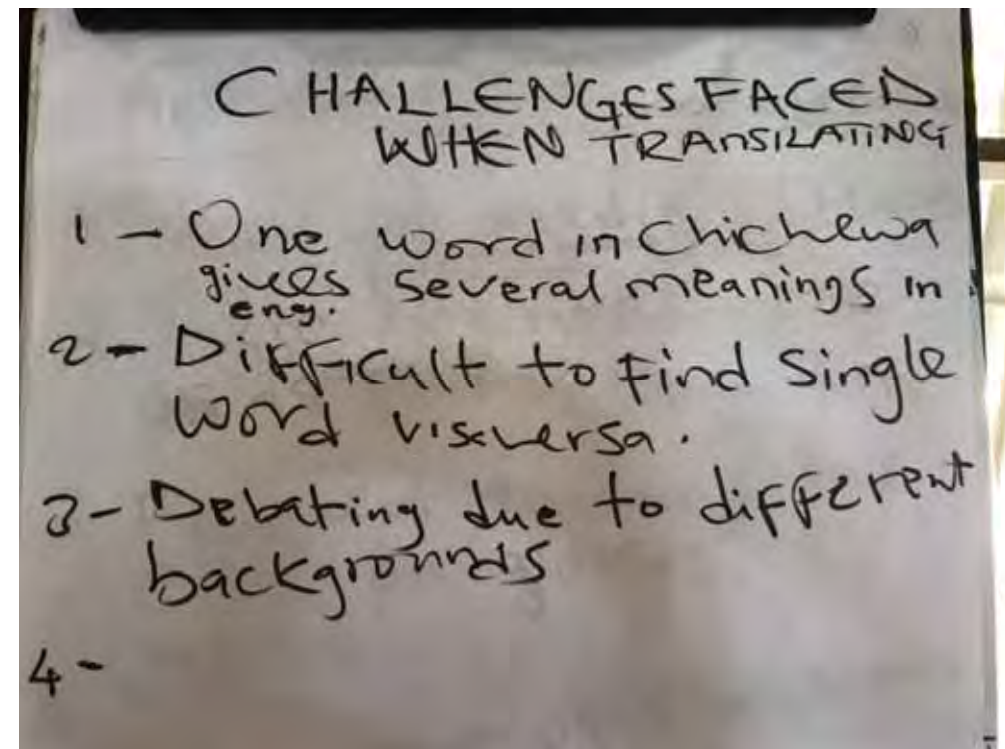
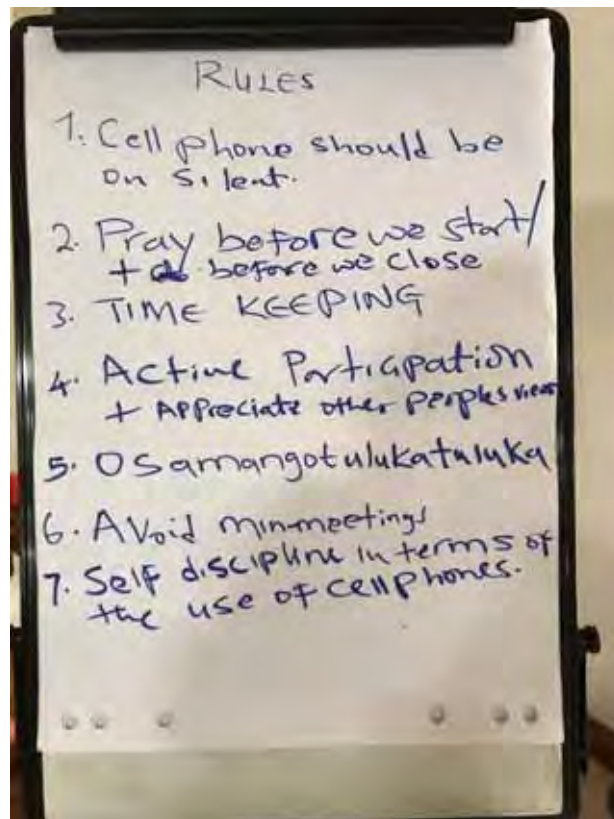
Participatory Workshops

- Workshops in Lilongwe and Zomba, Malawi
- C.20 in each, gender-balanced.
- All were fluent in Chichewa. Competence in English was varied, for some quite limited.
- All had been involved in development initiatives.
- Some were part of community-based organisations.

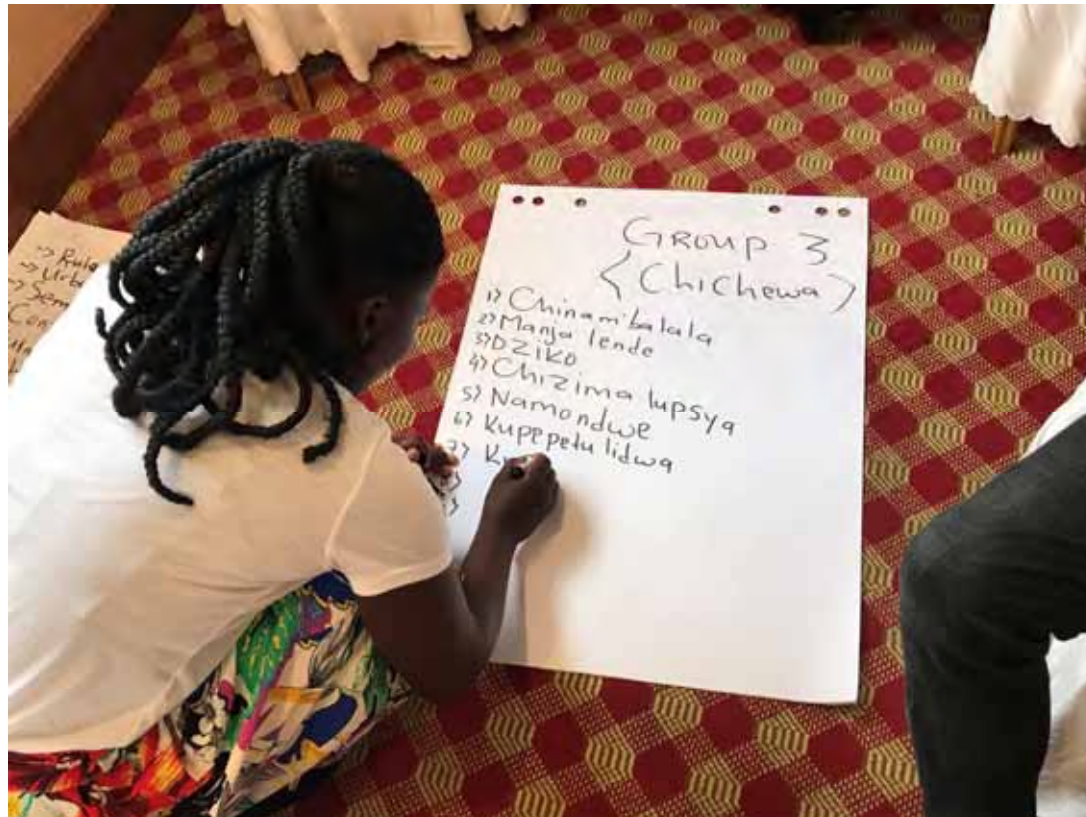
Workshop participants



Zomba



Lilongwe



Zomba



2. AMtUKula pakhomo
 3. Zachilengedwe
 4. Za malimidwe
 5. Kusintha kwa nyengo 2
 6. Ngozi Zokugwa mwa 2
 deidziti
 7. Ma bungwe

Lilongwe



- Toxic Masculinity
- Gender equality
- Gender equity
- Gender mainstreaming



In conclusion

- Ecolinguistics seeks to explore the interplay between language, discourse, and ecological understanding, while recognising the importance of diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives in environmental sustainability.
- We have argued that the glossary method could be adopted by ecolinguistic researchers to promote:
 - Linguistic empowerment and diversity,
 - Community collaboration,
 - Contextualisation of ecological discourse,
 - Bridge language barriers,
 - Critical discourse.
- However, this is a post-hoc reflection, so we welcome your comments on whether you think that the method would have practical application in the field.

References

- Cronin, M. (2017). *Eco-translation: Translation and Ecology in the Age of the Anthropocene*. Routledge.
- Cronin, M. (2021). Ecology of translation. *Handbook of Translation Studies: Volume 5*.
- Inglis, D., & Pascual, U. (2023). On the links between nature's values and language. *People and Nature*, 5(2), 326-342.
- Nettle, D., & Romaine, S. (2000). *Vanishing voices: The extinction of the world's languages*. Oxford University Press.
- Stibbe, A. (2015). *Ecolinguistics: Language, ecology and the stories we live by*. Routledge.
- Venuti, L. (2008). Translation, simulacra, resistance. *Translation Studies*, 1(1), 18-33.