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ABSTRACT

Language used in capacity development programmes is usually that of the donor country, often English. However, research shows that the language used can be detrimental to the success of the programme. Little attention has been given to the issue of language, yet it is important that programme participants fully understand the capacity development programme's concepts to ensure that the programme achieves its full potential. This article explores an accessible language approach to a Papua New Guinea development programme. Arguments are based on an in-country research project designed to provide women and men with deeper understanding of gender equity.

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Introduction

This article explores and tests an approach to ensuring development programmes meet the needs of participants by using English that is accessible to participants, which can then be used consistently across capacity development programmes. We report a case study based on an in-country research project designed to provide women and men with deeper understandings of a particular Papua New Guinea (PNG) agricultural capacity development programme while building gender equity. The authors developed and tested an approach and worked with project collaborators to develop clear definitions of key agricultural and training terms, and to avoid the use of *expensive English*. We then tested the results with a wider set of participants to determine whether this built a more shared understanding of terms used in capacity building programmes in PNG. The intent was that this would help capacity building and development projects achieve their learning outcomes, and build sustainable practices and shared understandings; that is, reach their full potential or intended outcomes.

Using the right language when building capacity in agricultural settings is vital for the transference of agricultural concepts, and for development in general (Khan 2014). However, while language is acknowledged as “an important element in the development of agriculture” (Lonyangapuo 2015, 27), little attention has been given to how it is deployed (Abbott 2000; Lonyangapuo 2015). A dominant (world) language usually forms the basis of written materials for capacity building programmes in the Pacific, even though it is recognised that there is an “urgent need to include [local] language at the planning, implementation, and assessment stages” (Marinotti 2016).

Literature on training more generally is clear that use of the relevant mother tongue provides the most successful outcomes for both the participants and the donor country. Using the mother tongue reduces “lost in translation” issues; provides a sense of identity; allows speakers of minority languages to keep and develop their traditions; enables intergenerational communication; provides cognitive advantages; and contributes to general well-being (see Abbott 2000; UNESCO 2003; Simpson,

Caffery, and McConvell 2011; Caffery, Coronado, and Hodge 2016). We strongly support the use of the mother tongue in development programmes but also recognise that many donor countries need to use a dominant language (e.g. English) in capacity building workshops and training materials. This is due to the language skills of the facilitators, the diversity of languages spoken by participants, and, at times, lack of good language documentation to support linguistically and culturally appropriate agricultural training resources.

In PNG many agricultural development programmes are delivered in English due to the number of languages spoken in the country. The English used in agricultural training programmes is often both academic and idiomatic. Rural and remote PNG people who participated in this study say the English is often too hard to understand and interpret into their own language so they are left confused. They describe such language as *expensive English*, a term which we adopt to refer to jargon, idiomatic phrases, academic language, and words or phrases that are not easily understood by speakers of PNG English.

Background

The research discussed in this paper was undertaken in PNG, by the authors, as a sub-project of the “Improving opportunities for economic development for women smallholders in rural Papua New Guinea” research project.¹ This gender equity project is commonly known as “The Family Farm Teams” (FFT) project. The FFT project aims to improve the uptake and impact of training and small business development for women smallholder food crop producers across PNG. The authors are researchers in this project.

PNG’s mainland and its 600 islands have a total land area of 452,860 square kilometres. It has a population of approximately 7.9 million and over 800 known languages. English, Tok Pisin (Pidgin), and Hiri Motu (the lingua franca of the Papuan region) are the official languages (DFAT 2017). Tok Pisin, an English-based creole, is the de facto national language. As a creole language, it is the first language of some people, especially in urban areas, and it is used as a lingua franca between speakers of different languages (Simons and Fennig 2017).

Over 85% of PNG’s population live in rural or remote fertile communities and are subsistence or small cash-crop farmers (DFAT 2017). The country’s farmers produce much of PNG’s food supply (Bourke 2009) and provide up to 18% (27.9% gross domestic product) of PNG’s agricultural export products (New Agriculturist 2013; World Bank 2014). Much attention is given to PNG’s agricultural industry; Australia in particular invests approximately AU\$546 million in aid funding, much of which aims to improve PNG’s agricultural practices (DFAT 2017). Such investments include agricultural training, which is vital for building farmer capacity in agricultural practices and tools resulting in increased agricultural production, education standards, and alleviating poverty. According to Bertini (2014), agricultural production is up to four times more effective than any other activity at alleviating poverty.

The FFT PNG agricultural training programme was part of this effort, and was taught and written in English. The project had a bilingual (English and Tok Pisin) FFT village community educators’ (VCE) manual, but concern that the English needed to be more accessible to rural and remote PNG female and male farmers resulted in the adaptation of the existing manual by the present authors, who have linguistics backgrounds and extensive experience working with indigenous peoples in low-income countries.

Previous in-country capacity building workshops indicated that the English used in the manual did not reflect the variety of the English used in communities and in PNG schools. In addition, the English used in the manual did not match the literacy levels of many of the people using the manual. Language is essential for effective communication and the solving of complex issues and problems. Our findings show that using the accessible language principles outlined in this paper helps to build quality, scalable, agricultural training and development, which relies significantly on clear, shared language.

Developing the approach

The research approach used in this study was developed, trialled, and revised by the authors. It included the assessment and revision of the English used in the FFT agricultural training manual, the VCE manual. It included the development of a supporting glossary that incorporated the vocabulary of Minimal English (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2018), principles of Plain English, and specific project-designed accessible language principles. The revised manual was then assessed and edited by FFT project team leaders and the glossary was assessed and edited by FFT project participants across four PNG provinces.

The 40-page bilingual PNG FFT “Village Community Educators (VCE) Manual” included English instructions and guides with Tok Pisin translations, often incorporating images and diagrams as well as space for note-taking. Furthermore, although the manual included Tok Pisin translations, Tok Pisin is largely a spoken language with dialect variation throughout the country; as a consequence, some participants said they found the Tok Pisin confusing and relied more on the English rather than the Tok Pisin translations. The manual was designed to be used by village community educators (VCEs) as a reference and a tool to support and scale out the development of their own FFT capacity building workshops, rather than as something suitable for academic, non-government or government workers using English. Therefore, the English needed to be more accessible for local users.

The language adjustments drew on principles from two English language models – “Minimal English” and “Plain English” – which are briefly outlined below, then combined with the experience of this project to create the accessible language principles used in the final version of the manual and glossary.

Minimal English is a restricted vocabulary of terms, consisting of words that are considered to have translation equivalents in all languages, known as semantic primes (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2018). There are 65 semantic primes, including action words such as “do”, “know”, “want” and “say”, time words such as “before” and “after”, and words that describe qualities such as “good” and “bad”. These words cannot be further simplified by using other words to define them. In addition, there are semantically complex words that appear to have translations in many languages, but may not be universal, such as “men”, “women”, “know somebody”, “sky”, “teeth”, “hard”, and “hands”. Minimal English also includes words that are important in a local context and refer to concrete things (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2018). Examples of these words that are important in PNG could include village, farm, coffee, yams, and sweet potato. This project has taken the concept and vocabulary of Minimal English and applied it to the specific needs of PNG farmers and agricultural extension workers within the FFT project to help simplify the English used in the project materials. We did not write exclusively in Minimal English, which is a practical approach that can be adapted rather than a rule book to be followed:

“Minimal English is intended for use by non-specialists, and for a wide and open-ended range of functions ... Minimal English is a tool that can help people put their thoughts into words in a way that makes it easier to discuss them across a language barrier.” (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2018, 6)

By using more universal terms in agricultural training programmes, where the language used is not the first language of the participants, programmes can more effectively communicate the ideas of the capacity building/development project. By doing so, it helps to reduce the use of *expensive English*, and words that form part of the language of aid (Alfini and Chambers 2007) or express meanings that are more relevant to the donor country’s own culture rather than the participants’ culture.

In addition to drawing on the vocabulary of Minimal English, this project followed principles of Plain English. Plain English is “*essentially a style guide, intended to counteract pompous, verbose, and unclear writing*” (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2018, 21). Plain English includes the use of everyday words, but as Wierzbicka (2016) and Goddard and Wierzbicka (2018) have shown, everyday words are not necessarily semantically simple or easily translatable into other languages. Plain English is also concerned with document design and some of these principles were adopted to help simplify

the reading of the manual, such as the use of dot (bullet) points, and laying out fewer words on a page.

Furthermore, some English language features were avoided even though they may be markers of good writing to English speakers. These included avoiding the use of synonyms and instead repeating the same word; avoiding the development of cohesion through use of pronouns and instead developing cohesion through the repetition of noun phrases; and repeating the same sentence structure (e.g. imperative clauses when providing instructions about how to do something) rather than using a range of structures. Simple sentences were also prioritised over complex sentences (see Table 1).

Additional project-specific principles were included. These included using existing Tok Pisin translations as a guide to the use of particular English words. This had two benefits: (1) the English translation could draw on similar Tok Pisin words; and (2) knowing the Tok Pisin translations helped the researchers' in-country discussions when comparing Tok Pisin and English translations. Thus, for some English words that were difficult to simplify, such as "attitudes", a more familiar word used in PNG, "mindset", could be used instead (Ling 2017). These words were then verified by project collaborators.

Table 1 summarises the approach developed for this accessible language project. It outlines the language principles to use and avoid when developing training materials used to build men and women's agricultural capacity in PNG.

Once the manual was revised, a closely aligned glossary was developed for the purpose of providing richer definitions of the agricultural and training terms than those provided in the VCE manual. Therefore, the same accessible language principles were used to develop an accompanying glossary, which was also tested by over 250 project participants.

Implementing and testing the approach

Once the accessible language approach was developed, the VCE manual was adapted and the glossary was developed using the principles of the approach, then both were tested with project participants, in a three-stage process:

Stage 1. Revise VCE training manual

Stage 2. Develop VCE training manual glossary

Stage 3. PNG VCEs pilot evaluation of manual and glossary.

Stage 1. Revise VCE training manual

Stage 1 explored the English language used in the FFT bilingual manual. The manual was written in English and included a Tok Pisin translation. The English was revised using the principles of the accessible language methodology (Table 1), which included drawing on the Tok Pisin translations.

Table 1. Accessible language approach for agricultural development materials/resources.

Use	Avoid	Verify
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easily translatable verbs, such as "know", "think" "want" • Noun phrases • Repetition • Shared human concepts • Short sentences • Simple sentences/clauses • Simple, clear, paragraphs • Dot (bullet) points rather than complex sentences • Existing Tok Pisin translations to replace complex English words • Tok Pisin counterparts, e.g. tingting "think", "thinking" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English culture specific words that are complex in meaning • English culture specific words that not easily translatable • Pronouns • Synonyms • Nominalisation • Complex clauses/sentences • English idioms and metaphors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with Tok Pisin collaborators

Table 2 shows an example of how one training instruction was changed from the more complex but familiar English, to English that is more accessible and easily translatable into Tok Pisin. Simplification occurred at both word and sentence level. The original instruction included semantically complex words such as “decide”, “achieve”, “creating” and “explains”, but also the semantically simpler words “do” and “know”. Thus, the first sentence, “Before we start training people we must decide what it is we want to achieve in the course” was edited to: “Before we start training people we must think about what we want people to know, do and why we want to do it (course aim).”

The decision to replace “decide” with “think” came from the Tok Pisin translation of “decide”, “tingting” (from English “think”). The word “think” is also a semantic prime, so the decision to change “decide” to “think” was supported by both Minimal English and the Tok Pisin translation. However, not every example was as straightforward. Changing “achieve” to “people to know, do, and why we want to do it” is more cumbersome but breaks down the complex meaning with the easily translatable, universal and semantically simple words “know”, “do”, and “want”.

The term “course aim” was added to the end of the sentence for two reasons: (1) this is what the topic was about, and (2) to clarify and reinforce its meaning. The second sentence of the instruction in the original text, “Writing a course aim involves creating a simple and broad statement that explains the overall purpose of the training”, assumes that the term “course aim” is already understood by the reader. The phrase is included in the title (“How to write a course aim”), but the sentence tells the reader what is “involved in” a course aim, rather than what it is. Therefore, this sentence was revised so that it described a course aim and what may be included in it. This resulted in two simple sentences. The revised version also changed a question into a statement, and “involves creating” to “says”. The repetition of full noun phrases was used so that the reader would be clear about what was being referred to (e.g. course aim). The revised text reads:

“A course aim is a clear message to tell people what the training is about (course purpose). The course aim says what we want the people to know and do at the end of the training.”

As the terms “course aim” and “course purpose” may be new for readers of the manual, and are common agricultural training terms, they were added to the glossary (see below) with more detailed definitions. The glossary is intended to be used as an independent document as many of the terms are necessary for extension workers or participants to understand for the purposes of the agricultural training and extension work.

Presentation and ease of reading

Revising the manual involved assessing the presentation and ease of reading of the manual, such as using dot (bullet) points as well as the accessible language principles.

Table 3 illustrates revisions that included the repetition of similar words and sentence patterns, as well as the use of Minimal English words. For example, in the sentence “A course is divided into sessions”, the word “part” was used instead of “session”, and then the word “session” was introduced. Words such as “part”, “called”, “know”, “think”, “good” are all part of Minimal English. Where more

Table 2. How to write a course aim – showing how the original text from the VCE manual was modified using accessible language principles.

Original text	Accessible language text
Before we start training people we must decide what it is we want to achieve in the course. Writing a course aim involves creating a simple and broad statement that explains the overall purpose of the training. What do we want the learners to be able to do or know at the end of the training? It also helps you as the trainer to work out how best to deliver the course, support the learners and evaluate the success of the training. You can have more than one course aim.	Before we start training people we must think about what we want people to learn about, do and why we want to do it (course aim). A course aim is a clear message to tell people what the training is about (course purpose). The course aim says what we want the people to know and do at the end of the training. The course aim also helps you, as the trainer, to know what to teach in the course and how to teach the course, support the people in the course and know if the training is completed well. You can have more than one course aim in the course.

Table 3. How to decide each session topic – showing how the original text from the VCE manual was modified using accessible language principles in the document design.

Original text	Accessible language text
<p>A course is divided into sessions. Each session should focus on a particular area that you want people to learn. For example: learning how to identify places to sell produce (see below), or how to describe your produce to buyers. This becomes a session topic.</p> <p>A good way to decide each session topic is by “brainstorming ideas”. On a piece of paper draw a circle in the middle with the word “Topics”. Then, imagine yourself going through the course and what you would need to know. As each idea comes to you, write it in a bubble on the page. Keep on going until you have no more ideas. You might even get other people to brainstorm with you.</p>	<p>A course has different parts. Each part is called a <i>session</i>. Each session has one main point that you want people to learn. Examples of session topics are learning how to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • know good places to sell things grown on the farm (<i>produce</i>), or • know how to talk about the produce to people who will buy it from you. <p>A good way to think about each session topic is by putting ideas together (<i>brainstorming</i>). You can brainstorm ideas by yourself or with other people. This is how you do it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On a piece of paper draw a circle in the middle and write the word “Topics” in the middle of the circle. • Think about each session in the course and what you need to know. • If you think of something, write it on the page and draw a circle around it. • Keep on writing like this until you have no more ideas. • You now have a plenty of ideas for each session.

complex words were introduced, such as “session” and “brainstorming”, additional information was provided to support readers’ understanding of them in context, then they were italicised to indicate that the word was listed in the glossary with a more detailed accessible definition. Semantically complex words, such as “divided”, “particular”, “imagine”, “identify” and “logical”, were replaced with semantically simpler words. Idiomatic expressions were also avoided: for example, expressions such as “as each idea comes to you” (where the concept of “ideas” as something that “comes to someone” is not necessarily shared cross-linguistically), or “write it in a bubble on a page” (where the reader needs to be familiar with the way cartoons are presented in comics). Structures such as the imperative were repeated: for example, “Think about each session ...”, and “Keep on writing”. Some English words were included because of their similarity to Tok Pisin words; for example, the English word “plenty” is similar to “planti” in Tok Pisin. Additional information that was not part of the original text was added to aid comprehension, for example “This is how you do it”. Following the Plain English principles for presentation, the format of some of the sentences was also changed to provide a shorter paragraph followed by dot (bullet) points, whilst retaining the meaning.

Stage 2. Develop VCE training manual glossary

Next, we developed a glossary to support the training and to introduce unfamiliar agricultural and training terminology. A glossary of 34 terms was developed in conjunction with the manual as:

- (1) glossary terms are often specific to training and could be used in other training manuals and resources
- (2) the manual did not include a glossary, yet the manual assumed that participants would be familiar with terms such as “course aim”
- (3) it is important to define complex and unfamiliar terminology in accessible English to ensure participants, who scale out the training to other farmers, clearly understand the concepts they are expected to teach, and
- (4) developing a glossary was a good way to ensure that facilitators and participants agreed on the meaning and use of the terms.

Many of these terms formed part of the training “language”, which meant that good definitions have the potential to be transferable, not just across the FFT research project but across other non-government and government agencies delivering training programmes in PNG. Consistent use of training language and definitions across aid agencies can help to develop deeper understanding of such terms. A similar point has been made about the use of the term “gender”, and related terms, in development programmes (Smyth 2007).

The accessible English approach was used to develop clear, accessible definitions for each glossary term. Table 4 provides some examples, and also shows the use of accessible document design in the entry “observing”, which uses two examples to ensure clarity of meaning.

Stage 3. PNG VCEs pilot evaluation of manual and glossary

The third stage of the process was to invite participants and lead VCEs to evaluate and provide feedback on the revised manual and glossary. The manual was initially developed to contribute to the capacity building of VCEs as they scaled out the FFT programme. Therefore, it was important to ensure that VCEs and project participants assessed the adapted manual and the newly created glossary to ensure it was appropriate to their language needs in terms of comprehension and usability. Such collaboration helped to ensure that: (1) the approach and changes were in fact improvements; (2) the changes suited the needs of participants who spoke PNG English, and Tok Pisin; (3) participants were further engaged in, valued and vital to the FFT project; and (4) pride and ownership of the manual and glossary accrued to the participants.

Evaluation method and responses

Manual evaluation

Six experienced PNG lead VCEs, across two provinces (Bougainville and New Ireland), were invited to assess the English in the adapted bilingual training manual for ease of use by PNG participants and for clarity of meaning. They provided positive feedback stating that the manual was easier to read and understand. They also suggested a few changes (either in the English or Tok Pisin). For example, the revised sentence, “*A course aim is a simple statement to tell people what the training is about (course purpose)*”, was further revised to read “*A course aim is a clear message to tell people what the training is about (course purpose)*”. The PNG lead VCEs suggested that the word “message” was better in this context. Although it was not the most semantically simple or Minimal English term, it was more familiar and therefore preferred.

The lead VCEs’ feedback supported the researchers’ prior hypothesis that the manual needed to be simplified for participants to benefit from the training and to help them scale it out. In general, the accessible language revisions were overwhelmingly accepted. However, further corrections and adjustments were recommended. This highlights that improving the materials in the PNG agricultural context should be done collaboratively to ensure it is done in a linguistically and culturally appropriate manner for the people whose capacity is being further developed.

Table 4. Glossary entry examples.

Aim	What we want to learn about, do and why we want to do it.
Learning activities	Doing, looking and making things to help learn something.
Observing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Looking at what other people are doing to learn from them. 2) Looking at the people you train to see that they know what you are teaching them and that they can do an activity.

Glossary evaluation

The glossary was assessed by over 250 FFT participants during the delivery of the FFT programme in July and October 2017. The participants included women and men farmers, VCEs, agricultural extension workers and community observers in four sites across PNG: Eastern Highlands (Gembogl and Goroka), Bougainville, and New Ireland. This activity was not a fundamental activity for the FFT programme, so it was not compulsory for participants; however, almost all participants chose to do it. In each region, participants were asked to work in small groups. Groups were diverse and self-selected, and consisted of just women, just men, just widows, younger and older gendered groups, or mixed groups. Small groups were suggested rather than participants assessing the glossary individually as English literacy skills can be very low in some PNG regions. The groups varied between two and six people, and participants were provided with between half an hour and an hour and a half to review the glossary.

In sessions where time was tight, each group was allocated four or five terms to consider rather than all 34 terms. PNG lead VCEs translated the task into Tok Pisin or Tok Ples (the local language) in each region. The lead VCEs and the researchers then walked around the groups ensuring participants understood the task, and to answer any questions they had.

In regions where there were large groups of participants at least two groups of participants were assigned the same group of words to evaluate. Participants were asked to look at each word allocated to them and:

- edit the glossary definition or provide an alternative definition
- tick the glossary word if it was an appropriate definition
- add new agricultural or training words they thought should be included in the glossary, or
- translate the word to Tok Pisin or Tok Ples.

Participants were advised that they could provide their responses in either English or Tok Pisin. Participants were provided with a copy of the glossary that included adequate space for them to edit the definitions and to add new words and definitions.

There were a range of responses. Some participants edited, commented or translated every word in the glossary, others only commented on the four or five words allocated to the group. Some participants took the glossary list home, completed it overnight, and returned it. In these cases, many participants addressed every word in the glossary. In general, participants found the majority of definitions to be useful and understandable. Most did not suggest changes but ticked the definitions as acceptable: only 15 responses included suggestions and all of these came from just one region; however, these suggested edits were minor and were relevant to that particular region. We did not assume that the few suggested edits meant the definitions could not be improved, but that the participants understood the term the way we had described the term.

While our glossary definitions were generally accepted as “good” by participants, one key piece of feedback was that we needed to add concrete examples to the definition. That is, while a training term can be described using simpler and more easily translatable language, and may be understood by people familiar with training, participants wanted explicit links between the glossary description and the training they were doing. For example, one participant suggested that the term “produce” (defined in the glossary as “things grown on the farm”) should be “things grown on the farm: fruits, garden food, greens, cocoa, coconuts, pigs, chickens”. Another participant suggested listing the parts of a course guideline, as well as describing the term in a general way. The glossary definition for “course guideline” was “list of session topics that you think must be taught in the course”. The participant added to this: “family goals, family balance, kina in our community”, as well as others. These additions were activities that were part of the course being undertaken.

The most significant lesson learnt from testing the glossary was that participants saw the need for context-specific examples to be added to definitions. One way of adding examples suggested by

participants was to use Tok Bokis (parables) or Tok Piksa (metaphors, idioms, examples) in the manual and glossary (see Schieffelin 2008 for a discussion of the role of Tok Bokis and Tok Piksa in Bosavi, a language of PNG, and for a discussion of the range of ways in which these terms have been used in the past). Tok Bokis and Tok Piksa were described as being common in some parts of PNG (e.g. Sepik) but not widely used in other parts. Nevertheless, where they are used they were described as an important way to convey messages, including in agricultural training. Participants recommended several Tok Bokis “parables” that they considered relevant to specific activities in the FFT programme and which could be included in a manual. For example, a parable that reflects equitable family responsibilities includes:

“When you light a single firewood it doesn’t burn for long, it dies quickly. But if two wood (pieces of wood) are burned together, the fire lights for longer. When other smaller woods are added, the fire lights bigger, brighter and longer.”

For glossary terms, the “metaphor, picture” concept of Tok Piksa was useful to convey the meaning of English terms. For example, the definition of “brainstorm” could include the phrase, “a bilum of ideas”, providing a culturally appropriate metaphor. A bilum is a PNG bag that is usually filled with produce by farmers; in addition, most people carry a bilum as a handbag, shopping bag or backpack. The inclusion of examples, especially ones suggested by participants, helps to develop a glossary that is on the one hand something that can be shared between different trainers and training projects, but also something that reflects the PNG context in which it has been developed.

Discussion

Simplifying the English used in materials for capacity building and development projects must be based on an understanding of what kind of English to use. Terms used for the training concepts that are part of training programmes are not universally translatable – as PNG participants say, many of them are *expensive English*. Wierzbicka (2016) distinguishes two different kinds of words, resulting in two levels of communication: universal and culture-specific:

“Universal words have simple meanings with precise counterparts in all, or nearly all languages. Culture-specific words are words whose meanings are complex and shaped by a particular culture and which do not have counterparts outside the circle of that culture.” (Wierzbicka 2016, 448)

The challenge for facilitators delivering capacity building programmes is to develop a better understanding of the barriers that are created through the use of expensive English. Using more accessible English will lead to better outcomes, as:

“development is not possible without [accessible] language ... development is about people, the contribution that they are called upon to make by way of participation will require communication, dissemination of information, sharing of knowledge, feedback and acquisition of skills. None of these activities can be achieved without language.” (Bamgbose 2014, 650)

This research project demonstrated that there are already tools that can be used to this end, in particular, Minimal English, and guidelines for Plain English. In addition, it highlights the point that the conventions of good writing for native English speakers in academic and professional contexts are not necessarily useful as the basis of clear writing for users of non-native English whose literacy levels are low. This approach to improving the language used in the FFT programme manual for village community educators is a step towards integrating these approaches. The feedback received on both the revised manual and the glossary was positive. At the same time, improvements were suggested. In improving the language used for PNG participants, their collaboration and feedback was an important component of the project and helped us to develop an understanding of words that were used in a similar way in English and Tok Pisin and that were appropriate for use in an agricultural training context.

Tok Piksa “example” or Tok Bokis “parable” are useful adjuncts to issues related to communication in another way. Some participants, typically those with less experience as trainers, found it hard to simply translate what they had learnt in English into Tok Pisin (or Tok Ples). They did not have the language to explain concepts that were sometimes abstract English concepts into Tok Pisin because, to use Wierzbicka’s (2016, 448) words, these words did “not have counterparts outside the circle of that culture”. Tok Bokis and Tok Piksa provide a way of explaining the message in terms that are culturally familiar.

Participants stressed the importance of using simpler language for farmers, but also for themselves as trainers, so that they could more easily grasp some of the new concepts. The project demonstrated that Minimal English was an appropriate and useful tool to apply to the task of developing a glossary and improving the accessibility of the language used in an agricultural training manual. However, Minimal English principles alone were not enough. First, it was not the goal of the project to work only within Minimal English. Second, through discussion with participants, it was found that they sometimes preferred to include terms that may not be semantically simple, but were familiar and understood in the PNG context. An example of this is the word “communication”, which is not part of Minimal English. Nevertheless, participants said that the term “communication” was commonly used in training and that many farmers would understand it. Similarly, “mindset” is commonly used in PNG and is part of Tok Pisin as well as PNG English, and so was a useful term to use instead of “attitude”. As researchers and trainers, it was important to learn which words were expensive English, and which were common to agricultural workers in the PNG context. These were not always obvious: for example, while some technical agricultural terms, such as the English word “pesticide”, are expensive English words, others such as “fertiliser” are not. Using Minimal and Plain English did not mean that every term needed to be defined using simpler, more easily translatable language, but it provided the tool to do so when needed.

Collaborating with participants who use the training materials in a context where English is not their first language, and where literacy levels in English are relatively low, highlighted the support by participants for the development of more accessible/simpler written materials. Training materials in PNG will continue to be written in English, with some translated into Tok Pisin. Ensuring that the English materials are more accessible to participants has two benefits: (1) the English materials are useful to a larger number of people, and (2) the Tok Pisin translations may be better suited to the needs of the participants and make the transfer of agricultural concepts more likely.

Conclusion

Unless donor countries pay attention to the kind of language that is used, then their capacity development programmes are not likely to achieve their full potential. From the perspective of providing aid through capacity building, using expensive English is also expensive in financial terms. The results of this research suggest that donors and NGOs should finance workshops to support researchers and trainers to develop skills in using a more accessible language and to develop materials that more effectively communicate their messages. Such workshops should be offered prior to the start of the project and, early in the delivery of the project, in collaboration with in-country project participants.

There was strong support among PNG participants to provide training materials that were written in simpler English. In undertaking this research, the researchers were introduced to the phrase, *expensive English*, English that is not easily accessible. Words and phrases such as “course aim”, “brainstorming” or “session” are not everyday words and need to be explained. It is important that there is a shared understanding of the meaning and use of these terms between trainers and participants, but it is also important to encourage this between trainers across different programmes. Developing methods that lead to more accessible language, and using a restricted and easily translatable vocabulary to do this, is one way to support capacity building and the transfer of knowledge.

Note

1. For more details on the project see <http://pngwomen.estem-uc.edu.au>.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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