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Translating the Test of Academic Literacy Levels into Sesotho

Abstract

This article reports on an initiative at the Vaal Triangle Campus (VTC) of North-West University (NWU) towards the active encouragement of functional multilingualism in tertiary education. More specifically, in an effort to support the potential use of Sesotho (Southern Sotho) and isiZulu in the teaching-learning environment at this campus, it was decided that an important first step should be an accurate and reliable determination of students' levels of academic literacy (AL) in these two languages. Such a measurement would provide an indication of student readiness to make productive use of any extra learning support offered in these languages.

Since there are no measuring instruments available to assess students' academic literacy levels in Sesotho and isiZulu at tertiary level, it was decided that translating an existing test may be the most productive option in this case. The test selected for translation into Sesotho and isiZulu was the Test of Academic Literacy Levels (TALL), a test that has consistently shown high reliability measures in the assessment of students' academic literacy levels in English. Because Sesotho is the home language used by the majority of students (other than English and Afrikaans) at the VTC, it was decided that Sesotho would be treated as priority in terms of the completion of the project. The article therefore documents the translation process for Sesotho, and discusses primarily positive findings regarding the creation of a conceptually and functionally adequate Sesotho version of the TALL through a process of translation.

Keywords: Academic literacy levels; academic literacy test; test translation; multilingualism; learning support

1.   Introduction

With the official demise of apartheid in South Africa in 1994, the country witnessed the institution of its first democratic constitution that recognizes the rights of all its people. With regard to language rights, the apartheid policy of recognizing only two official languages (viz. English and Afrikaans) was abolished in favour of the recognition of eleven official languages in its constitution. It is against this background that one would expect the multilingual nature of South Africans to be nurtured, celebrated and developed as a rich resource in all spheres of life, especially in education.

However, in the context of higher education specifically, there is scant evidence of an acknowledgment (let alone the active encouragement) of the multilingual character of our students who are users of home languages other than English and Afrikaans. Although some positive initiatives do exist, these are few and far between. For example, at the University of Cape Town a research project documents the use of isiXhosa as active learning support for the learning of new concepts (Paxton, 2009) and Ramani, Kekana, Modiba and Joseph (2007) report on a dual medium BA degree (being taught in Sesotho sa leboa [Northern Sotho] and English) at the University of Limpopo. In essence, it seems as if English has retained its position of power, especially in the South African education sector, mainly because of being regarded as an instrument of socio-economic advancement (Banda, 2007) or 'upward mobility'. Therefore, apart from having little opportunity to be educated through their mother tongues at university level, many additional language users of English (with the obvious exception of Afrikaans mother tongue users who do have the option of studying in Afrikaans) prefer to study through medium English because of the potential advantages associated with the use of the language.

Although a recent press report on the institutional language policy of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) that now makes the learning of isiZulu obligatory is promising, this is surely not an unproblematic issue. The University has recently made a working knowledge of isiZulu compulsory for all staff and students at this institution (Madiba, 2013) and it has plans for the implementation of bilingual (isiZulu and English) programmes in future. However, according to Madiba (2013:1):

> Implementing language policy in higher education is faced with theoretical and practical challenges. Theoretically, although all people can learn additional languages at any age, functional language learning cannot be achieved through force.

> The target speakers have to see the value of learning an additional language. A major challenge facing UKZN, therefore, is to get both students and staff to see the value of learning Zulu.

Although it presents challenges in a number of respects, the initiative at UKZN hopefully signals the start of similar initiatives at other universities in South Africa.

As mentioned above, the studies by Paxton (2009) and Ramani *et al.* (2007) report positive findings for students making productive use of isiXhosa and Sesotho sa leboa respectively in a tertiary context. However, an essential first step towards embarking on such initiatives would be to accurately determine students' academic literacy levels in home languages other than English and Afrikaans before initiating projects aimed at using the languages in a tertiary context. Though one should typically be able to use the Grade 12 results of the home language subjects to provide some indication of such levels, our suspicions about the reliability of these results are supported by recent investigations by the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training (UMALUSI) of strategies to equalise the results of the Grade 12 home language examination across languages in the face of a rumoured inflated nature of Grade 12 results in home languages other than English and Afrikaans (cf. ICELDA [preliminary report], 2013). In addition, the incessant negative research findings on the reading ability of South African school learners in their home languages (as well as additional languages) do not instil much confidence regarding the productive use of these languages in higher education (cf. Howie, Venter & Van Staden, 2008; Pretorius, 2002; Pretorius, 2007; Pretorius & Ribbens, 2005; and Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007).

In light of the preceding discussion, it is not surprising that increasingly more students who are at risk of not succeeding with their tertiary studies as a result of low academic literacy levels in English or Afrikaans are admitted at South African universities. The administration of two academic literacy tests (the English TALL and the Afrikaans *Toets van Akademiese Geletterheidsvlakke* [TAG]) to new first year students over a number of years at three universities (the University of Pretoria, North-West University and Stellenbosch University) has consistently shown that many students arrive at these universities with academic literacy levels in English and Afrikaans that place them at risk of failure (Weideman, 2006). This is supported by evidence from the National Benchmark Tests (NBTs) Project indicating that the majority of a substantial group (12 202) of first entering students who took part in the NBTs initiative between 2008 and 2009 showed serious difficulties with key academic literacy abilities required for success at tertiary institutions (HESA, 2009:9).

At present, we have reliable academic literacy assessment instruments available to assess entering students' levels of academic literacy in English and Afrikaans. However, an important limitation in this regard is that we have no such instruments available for the other official South African languages. The remainder of this article elaborates on a specific initiative at the Vaal Triangle Campus of North-West University to make available a Sesotho AL test that could be used for the assessment of the AL levels of first year students who are home language users of Sesotho. First, it describes the specific context of the project. It then elaborates on the reason for deciding to translate the English TALL into Sesotho. The translation model/approach that was employed is subsequently discussed, followed by a description of the translation methodology and the process of translation in terms of specific difficulties that were encountered with the translation.

2. The multilingual context at the Vaal Triangle Campus of North-West University

At the Vaal Triangle Campus of North-West University, we wish to support functional multilingualism by investigating the possibility of employing the primary home languages used on our campus (other than English and Afrikaans) to provide additional learning support for students. We argue in essence that the promotion of multilingualism cannot only depend on proposals from management and government bodies, but that tangible efforts should be made at a university- and campus-specific level to accentuate the importance of utilising other home languages for tertiary education. With regard to the primary home languages used at the VTC, Coetzee-Van Rooy (2012) points out that 46% of first year students at the VTC indicated that they were home language users of Afrikaans (35%) and English (11%) respectively. The remaining 54% used a variety of other languages as home languages, the most prominent being Sesotho (26%) and isiZulu (8%). As the most prominent African home language of learners at the VTC, Sesotho has also been awarded the status of a 'working language' in the NWU's institutional language policy (NWU Language Policy, 2013). The language policy (2013:3) further states that:

> Although English and Afrikaans are used as primary languages of tuition at the NWU, concerted efforts are made at each of the NWU campuses to (i) implement Setswana and Sesotho for teaching-learning purposes; (ii) to monitor the effectiveness hereof and (iii) to report annually … on the progress and outcomes of these projects.

It is therefore clear that, institutionally, the NWU supports and encourages the utilisation of home languages such as Sesotho and Setswana in the context of teaching and learning activities at its three campuses.

It is within this context that the current study proposes to make a contribution to the practical acknowledgement and application of functional multilingualism (cf. Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2012) in the domain of tertiary education in South Africa. At the VTC, students have a choice whether they wish to pursue their studies in either English or Afrikaans. The academic literacy levels (in English or Afrikaans) of all new first year students are determined at the beginning of the academic year in order to decide about possible AL support for 'at risk' students. Both the TALL and TAG instruments that are used for the assessment have consistently shown high reliability measures with an average Cronbach's alpha of above 0.9 (a higher alpha value than what is typically required of a medium-stakes measuring instrument) over a number of years that they have been in use (Weideman, 2006; Weideman & Van der Slik, 2008). Various other aspects (e.g. the construct) of the TALL and TAG have been the subject of numerous scholarly publications to date (ICELDA, 2016).

A very small percentage of the students who choose to study in English at the VTC are mother tongue users of English (apart from Afrikaans, the majority of these students use either Sesotho or isiZulu as home languages). With regard to students' academic

literacy levels in English, the majority of first year students tested have shown some level of risk in these assessments over the past four years (cf. Senate Committee Report on AL, 2016).

Although academic literacy support programmes are offered in both English and Afrikaans at the VTC, the situation described above prompted us to explore avenues of how we could offer additional learning support to our students. In this regard, a number of studies on subtitling report positive findings for making use of subtitled material as learning support (for same-language subtitling at tertiary level see Ayonghe, 2009 and Lacroix, 2012; and for the use of subtitled Sesotho material at secondary school level, Mahlasela, 2012). The use of subtitled material could, for example, provide us with a potentially productive strategy for the utilization of home languages as learning support.

We therefore wish to acknowledge and utilise the academic potential of the multilingual minds of our students, i.e. explore the potential use of, initially, the two most prominent African languages used as home languages by the majority of our students as resources for learning in a tertiary context. As referred to earlier, the study by Paxton (2009) has shown the benefits of students being able to use their home language (in this case isiXhosa) in order to come to a better understanding of new economics concepts at the University of Cape Town. In the on-going project at the University of the North, Ramani *et al.* (2007) describe the benefits of a dual medium (English and Sesotho sa leboa) BA degree. They further criticise the delaying effects of the enduring view that African languages cannot be used as mediums of instruction (MOI) at universities, because sufficient terminology needs to be developed before these languages could be used as MOIs at tertiary level. The promising results reported by these two studies suggest that similar results may be possible for the use of other African languages at tertiary level.

As mentioned previously, the preparedness of our students to make productive use of extra learning support in their home languages prompted an investigation into an appropriate strategy for determining students' functional levels of academic literacy in Sesotho (and isiZulu at a later stage). It was concluded that such an assessment instrument should be comparable to the TALL with relation to its reliability in accurately determining students' academic literacy abilities at first-year level. We therefore had to decide what would be the most productive way for establishing this measure of comparability between the English TALL and a potential Sesotho TALL, an issue which is explored further below.

3.   The translation project

In this section, the rationale for making use of a functionalist approach in translating the TALL into Sesotho is provided. Salient functionalist principles and how these relate to the translation methodology employed are emphasised, followed by a discussion of the process of translation and prominent issues that emerged during this process.

3.1   Translation approach

When one wants to make a testing instrument that already exists in some languages available in additional languages, one of the primary questions is whether it should be developed anew in the additional languages or whether it could be translated into such languages.

Van de Vijver and Leung (1997) contend that three options could generally be used in the development of tests that are available in more than one language; namely, to translate tests directly (using the well-known back-translation method), to adapt tests, or to develop tests specifically with cross-cultural and cross-linguistic uses in mind (also called simultaneous development). A preference for option three would have one develop an assessment instrument simultaneously in a number of preferred languages. In the case of the English TALL that forms the focus of this research, the English TALL and Afrikaans TAG were developed simultaneously. These two tests were developed using the same construct as point of departure and therefore test the same academic literacy abilities. The high reliability measures of these tests (cf. Section 2) was an important determinant in selecting translation rather than test development as a strategy for producing a Sesotho TALL. Although one could have opted to follow the same process of test development that was employed in the development of the TALL and TAG for the development of a Sesotho version, the purpose of this project was therefore to investigate the possibility of translating adequately the English version into Sesotho (using either of the other two options mentioned by Van de Vijver and Leung), and by so doing replicating an already highly reliable testing instrument in Sesotho.

In addition, recent research that focused on determining equivalence between the TAG and TALL has shown that the successful translation of an academic literacy test was possible. In this project, one version of the Afrikaans TAG was successfully translated into English (see Van Dyk, Van Rensburg & Marais, 2011). Although we are aware that African languages may not yet display the linguistic repertoires (e.g. technical vocabulary) to be fully functional languages of science (see Wildsmith-Cromarty, 2008), we decided that because the TALL tests functional academic literacy abilities, and not the technical vocabulary of specific scientific disciplines, test translation was a viable strategy to explore for producing such a testing instrument in Sesotho.

In this context, a major focus of the investigation was therefore an issue of translatability. In essence, it was important to see whether it would in the first instance be possible to translate the source text (ST) – the English TALL – into Sesotho, taken into account the linguistic resources available in Sesotho (cf. Van Eeden & Mantsha, 2007 for the problematic translation of a personality survey into Tshivenda). Although the ST is not 'highly academic' in the same sense as an academic or scientific article, it was written in a typical 'testing' genre (more specifically, multiple choice assessment). In many respects, a test could be considered to be part of a distinct genre of written texts (cf. Lee, 2001) that is regularly used in an academic context. A multiple-choice academic literacy test may be considered to be a specific sub-category of such a genre.

Secondly, it was important to determine if it would be possible to produce, through translation, a target text (TT) – a Sesotho TALL – that was an adequate version of the ST in terms of function. It was therefore essential that the TT tested the same functional academic literacy abilities as those tested by the source text. Also, the aim was to produce a 'natural' TT, or as Nord (1997) contends, a TT that was read by its receivers as if it was a ST written in their own language. This form of translation where the target text function is the same as the source text is referred to as an 'equifunctional translation' (Nord, 1997:50).

The primary purpose of this project was, therefore, to determine if a functionally adequate TT could be produced with regard to the main function(s) and genre of the ST. In a context where retaining the function of a translated text is paramount, the use of a functionalist approach to translation would seem to be a judicious choice. According to Gentzler (2001:71), the flexible nature of functionalist theory addresses the age-old debate between 'faithful' and 'free' translation in that:

> Functionalist approaches can be one or the other and still be true to the theory, as long as the approach chosen is adequate to the aim of the communication.

In other words, a functional approach emphasises the aim/goal/purpose of a translation that will determine the translation strategy used in order for a translator to stay faithful to the aim of the communication.

Probably the most comprehensive functionalist model for translation is Nord's (1997) translation-oriented text analysis. Her model incorporates the ideas of a number of other functionalist approaches, most notably Vermeer's (1989) Skopos theory as well as Reiss's (1977) work on text type and genre (cf. Gentzler, 2001; Munday, 2012).

Vermeer (1989) awards prominence to the purpose (Skopos) of a translation. The most important issue in Skopos theory is that a TT must suit its purpose – in other words, the target text must be 'functionally adequate'. However, according to Munday (2012:125), Vermeer overemphasises the purpose of a translation and neglects the linguistic nature of the ST. Nord (1997) shares a focus on the significance of the intended purpose (communicative goal) of translations with Vermeer, but does not elevate the purpose of the translation to such a level that a linguistic description of the features of the ST becomes less important. Following Nord, the importance of the communicative goal or purpose of the translation was also a key feature of this translation project, in the sense that the translation methodology had to enable one to stay true to the purpose of the translation, i.e. producing a TT that tested the same functional AL abilities as those tested by the ST.

With regard to the work of Reiss (1977), Nord (1997:37-40) incorporates her notion on three communicative language functions (which include an informative, expressive and operative [appellative] function), but adds a fourth, a phatic function. Nord (1997:45) contends that the identification of the communicative functions of texts serves as a guideline in terms of which particular translation strategies should be used for specific

texts. Reiss further proposed 'text varieties' (genres) that could typically be linked to the different text types (or functions). According to Nord (1997:53), such genres result from communication practices that are standardised in that:

> … certain kinds of texts are used repeatedly in certain situations with more or less the same function or functions, [and therefore] these texts acquire conventional forms …

Nord (1997:53,54) further notes that Reiss distinguishes between simple, complex and complementary genres where in a simple genre, the whole text consists of only one text variety (such as a recipe). In complex genres, other text varieties may be included (e.g. a novel that includes a business letter). Complementary genres are based on primary texts and could have a metatextual function (e.g. reviews, summaries or abstracts). This distinction (with specific reference to complex genres) is of particular relevance to the current study and is discussed in more detail in the section on translation methodology below.

Although Reiss's work has been criticized on the basis of, for example, restricting language functions to the three she identified, she provided a crucial focus on the identification of the communicative function(s) of a text that should be retained in the process of translation (Munday, 2012:115).

Another important principle emphasised by Nord (1997) which was employed in the current study is the necessity of providing a translator with a 'translation brief' that would offer guidance with regard to the purpose and function of both the ST and TT in their respective contexts. The information contained in such a document should provide important guidelines as to how a text should be translated. According to her, a translation brief should contain:

- The (intended) text function(s);
- The target-text addressee(s);
- The (prospective) time and place of text reception;
- The medium over which the text will be transmitted; and
- The motive for the production or reception of the text (Nord, 1997:60).

Important functionalist concepts such as purpose, text function and genre will be revisited below in a discussion of the translation methodology employed in this study. The remainder of this section focuses on two studies in the South African context that also preferred to make use of an existing test that was translated (and adapted) into specific target languages.

A study by Koch (2009) reports on the adaptation of an American test of cognitive academic language proficiency (the Woodcock Muñoz Language Survey [WMLS]) into isiXhosa. According to her, the most appropriate translation strategy in their context was that of

test adaptation. As a result of the strong focus that was awarded to the psychological and linguistic processes that were measured by the WMLS, these processes were best accounted for using a strategy of adaptation of the test. Therefore, since the study focused on the processes and not the literal translation of the test, various items were rewritten instead of only translating them (Koch, 2009:305).

For the translation of the TAG into English, the Van Dyk, *et al.* (2011) study preferred to make use of Nord's Functionalist model, mainly because this model provided them with a comprehensive theoretical framework that enabled them to create conceptually equivalent texts with a strong focus on adaptation used as a strategy of translation. More specifically, they chose to use Nord's model because no methodological distinction is made between translation and adaptation (in this model, adaptation is regarded as one of the strategies in the concept of translation). These authors further preferred not to make use of back-translation mainly because they believe that a strategy of back-translation is not sufficient for validating a translated test.

3.2 Translation methodology

In functionalist terms, the translation methodology of this project was primarily guided by the purpose (or communicative aim) of the translation. Therefore, similar to the ST, the TT in our context would be used to test the academic literacy levels of Sesotho home language students at the start of their first year of university education. Through translation, we therefore wanted to achieve a TT that was functionally adequate in testing the same AL abilities as those tested by the ST.

With regard to specific text functions, a multiple-choice AL test such as the TALL belongs to a complex genre that would typically include a combination of any number of informative (and to some extent, argumentative) texts (such as an original, mainly informative text from *The Economist* used in the TALL) to which students need to respond in evaluative sections, i.e. those that contain questions set on the informative texts. Therefore, a combination of text types that are typical of an academic environment is being used to achieve the purpose of testing AL levels. Most important for the TT was that the informative/argumentative texts had to retain their function of providing information to the reader (and arguing specific points), while the test instructions had to be unambiguous and clearly communicate to the reader how the questions should be answered. For example, in the case where a test item required of students to find evidence supporting a specific claim in the ST, the same ability had to be tested by the TT.

The main translation strategy was therefore to attempt a literal translation of the source text as far as possible, and in cases where literal translation was not feasible, ensure that the conceptual meaning of the ST was retained in the TT. Furthermore, it was anticipated that certain design criteria in the development of specific question types in multiple choice assessments might make such questions difficult to translate. An example of this would be the question type on vocabulary assessment where, in test development, one

made use of distractors that all started with the same letter. In cases such as these, one had to translate the test section by adapting certain aspects thereof (cf. Koch, 2009; Van Dyk, *et al.*, 2011) in order to still be true to the specific design criteria.

Despite the concerns raised in the study by Van Dyk, *et al.* (2011), this study preferred to make use of back-translation as a measure of determining translation adequacy (cf. Wildsmith-Cromarty, 2008). As Stansfield (2003) notes, back-translation is viewed as a method of drafting, reviewing and revising a translation in order to identify and correct errors in the TT. He further mentions that one problematic issue in the use of back-translation is that a back-translation could, similar to the initial literal translation, contain translation errors. This problem (as well as those mentioned in the study by Van Dyk, *et al*., 2011) could, however, be alleviated by the inclusion of a consultative process with the back-translators in order to clarify problematic aspects identified in a comparative analysis between the source text and the back-translated version. In this study, translation adequacy was therefore determined by conducting a three-way comparative analysis between two back-translations (completed by different back-translators) and the source text. Both back-translations were compared with the source text and then compared with one another. In addition, apart from the fact that back-translation is a prominent translation strategy used in the translation of tests (cf. Stansfield, 2003), another reason for employing this strategy is that it is regularly used in cases where the target language is not known to researchers. In our case, the primary researcher is fully bilingual in English and Afrikaans, but does not have adequate knowledge of Sesotho. Although all three translators (the primary translator as well as the two back-translators) used in this project are competent Sesotho/English bilinguals, the use of back-translation enabled the primary researcher to make crucial judgements (in consultation with the back-translators) about the conceptual accuracy of the Sesotho translation.

The remainder of the article documents the process and strategies used in translating the TALL into Sesotho with specific reference to ensuring an acceptable degree of functional adequacy of the TT. 'Acceptable' in this context refers to the fact that the AL abilities tested by specific items in the English TALL had to be assessed by the same items in the Sesotho version of the test.

3.3   Project design

The project team initially consisted of three applied linguists, one person working in the field of academic literacy (with experience in test design), one specialising in multilingualism and one in language practice (with specific reference to editing and translation) in the conceptualization phase. The research methodology comprised three different phases. Phase 1 focused on the planning of the project and identification of translators, the completion of the primary translation of the TALL into Sesotho, having two back-translations into English done from the Sesotho version and doing a textual analysis and comparison of the different back-translations and the original test, as well as correcting (and to some extent, adapting) the Sesotho version regarding inaccuracies in translation. During phase 2 (focusing on the readability of the test), the translated

test was refined as a result of the feedback received from students who participated in a small-scale piloting phase. This phase involved 10 students who wrote the test but who also had to indicate its level of readability by completing a short questionnaire afterwards. In Phase 3, the test will be administered to a more substantial group of first year students and the results compared to that of the English version of the same test in order to determine the degree of statistical equivalence between the two tests.

3.4   The translation process

3.4.1 Choice of test version to be used

Various versions of the TALL and TAG have been developed over a period of approximately 10 years. Although we could have used any version of the TALL for translation because all such versions show very high reliability measures (cf. Section 2), we decided to use the most recent version of the test at the time (the 2011 version) with a reliability measure of 0.9 (Cronbach's alpha). An acceptable reliability measure for a test that is primarily used as a placement instrument is an alpha of 0.8 (Van Dyk, 2010).

3.4.2 Choice of translators

The project team decided that a total of three translators would be used. One of these translators had to function as the primary translator of the English TALL into Sesotho. A very specific requirement for this translator was that he/she needed to be familiar with the conventions of Sesotho as it is used in a university environment (in this case, he/she needed to have experience of teaching the language at university level). In addition, the primary translator needed to be an experienced translator from English into the target language (Sesotho). One specific translator was identified on the basis of his background and experience. This person taught Sesotho at university until retirement and was actively involved in educational translation projects of various sorts from English into Sesotho.

The two remaining translators were to do back-translations into English of the translated Sesotho text of the primary translator. It was decided that two back-translators would be used to add an extra means of verifying the accuracy of the primary translation. For the first back-translation, a reputable professional translator was used who did translation from Sesotho into English on a regular basis for the Centre for Translation Studies (CTrans) at the VTC. An important requirement for the second back-translator was that the person needed to be a home language user of Sesotho and also be familiar with English academic literacy support offered to students at university. One of the English academic literacy (AL) lecturers at the VTC fitted this profile. The person is a home language user of Sesotho, holds a post graduate qualification in English, taught both Sesotho and English at secondary school level and was busy with a master's degree in applied linguistics. Although one of the back-translators (the AL lecturer) had some

previous exposure to the TALL (all AL lecturers are involved in administering the test at the beginning of the academic year at the VTC), neither of the back-translators had had any exposure to the 2011 TALL used in this study.

3.4.3 Translator's brief

The primary translator was provided with a comprehensive translator's brief, a document that was discussed with him in detail. The document emphasized the following issues:

- A detailed explanation of the purpose for which the ST was used, and that the TT would have the same purpose in the same context (that of assessing the Sesotho AL levels of first year university students who use Sesotho as home language);

- A description of the different text functions of the ST (informative, argumentative and evaluative);

- The importance of the avoidance of colloquial or regional varieties of the target language was emphasized. The translator therefore had to translate the TALL into as standard a variety of Sesotho as possible;

- A complete description of the test sections and what AL abilities were tested in each section. The translator was provided with explanatory notes made on the hard copy of the English TALL as to what specific academic literacy abilities were tested in each section and question. He was also provided with a memorandum with correct answers to the questions; and

- The time frame in which the translation had to be completed.

3.4.4 TALL contextualised

Both the English (TALL) and Afrikaans (TAG) versions of the academic literacy test are based on the same construct that is grounded in Weideman's (2007:xi) definition of academic literacy. According to this definition, being academically literate in a language requires of students to:

- understand a range of academic vocabulary in context;

- interpret the use of metaphor and idiom in academic usage, and perceive connotation, word play and ambiguity;

- understand relations between different parts of a text, via introductions to conclusions, and know how to use language that serves to make the different parts of a text hang together;

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- interpret different kinds of text type (genre), and have a sensitivity for the meaning they convey, as well as the audience they are aimed at;

- interpret, use and produce information presented in graphic or visual format;

- distinguish between essential and non-essential information, fact and opinion, propositions and arguments, cause and effect, and classify, categorise and handle data that make comparisons;

- see sequence and order, and do simple numerical estimations and computations that are relevant to academic information, that allow comparisons to be made, and can be applied for the purposes of an argument;

- know what counts as evidence for an argument, extrapolate from information by making inferences, and apply the information or its implications to other cases than the one at hand;

- understand the communicative function of various ways of expression in academic language (such as defining, providing examples, arguing); and

- make meaning (e.g. of an academic text) beyond the level of the sentence.

The test consists of six different subsections or question types (cf. Butler, 2007) that measure the above construct:

Section 1 is a **scrambled text** in which sentences in a paragraph have been scrambled, and students have to rearrange the sentences so that the paragraph forms a cohesive whole. It therefore tests not only students' ability in recognising text relations, drawing on their interpretative abilities regarding the context, but also their ability to recognise lexical clues contained in the sentences. Put differently: it assesses students' command of various grammatical features of the text.

Section 2 deals with **visual and graphic literacy**. Students are asked to interpret graphic information augmented by a short text discussion. This section mainly involves simple numerical computations and making inferences based on such calculations.

Section 3 includes a longer text (or texts) that students have to read and subsequently answer **comprehension** type questions on the content of the text(s). Questions focus on students' abilities to classify and compare information, make inferences, recognise metaphorical language, recognise text relations and distinguish between essential and non-essential information.

Section 4 tests whether students are able to recognise different **written text types**. Students are requested to match two groups of sentences with regard to similarity in text type.

In **Section 5** students' knowledge of **general academic vocabulary** is assessed. The context created for this section is specifically that of the tertiary academic environment,

and the words tested are a selection of items from the different frequency levels of the Coxhead academic word list (Coxhead, 2000).

Section 6 of the test assesses students' functional knowledge of sentence construction, word order, vocabulary, punctuation and at times communicative function (cf. Van Dyk & Weideman, 2004), with the main focus on the former, i.e. on grammatical or structural features of the language by means of a typical cloze-procedure type question. Students are firstly provided with a text they have to read where specific words have been omitted and then have to choose between four options regarding where these words have been left out in the sentences. The second part of the question requires that students choose between four possible options as to what the correct word is.

3.4.5 Analysis and comparison of the Sesotho back-translations and the English source text (TALL 2011)

In the data analysis that forms the focus of this part of the article, the test sections described in 3.4.4 are discussed separately regarding salient problematic aspects that emerged in the comparative analysis of the two back translations and the source text.

3.4.5.1   Initial test information and instructions

Every version of the TALL (and TAG) contains the same general information and instructions to the test takers on the first page of the test. It also serves as a consent form that gives the test developers permission to use the results for further research. It is, therefore, important that the information and instructions are translated accurately in order to provide the necessary background about the purpose of the test as well as to inform students how to answer the test.

A comparison of both back-translations with the original test showed that, without exception, all general information and instructions were translated accurately.

3.4.5.2   Section 1 – Scrambled text

As explained above, the first section in the test contains five sentences that were originally taken from an authentic English text. In the original English text these sentences formed part of a coherent paragraph that, in turn, formed part of a longer text. These sentences are then presented to students as a list of separate sentences where the order of the sentences has been altered from that of the original paragraph. In the test development stage, important requirements for this section are that:

- There should be a clearly distinguishable topic sentence in the paragraph; and

- There must be clear linking devices in sentences (preferably in every sentence) to show the logical progression of the flow of information in the paragraph.

It is, therefore, essential for this section that the back-translations are accurate with regard to the minimum requirements mentioned above, viz. the topic sentence should still be clearly discernible and the linking devices must retain their function in the translated text. Additionally, the rest of the information in the sentences should not be conceptually different from that in the original English text. An analysis of both back-translations [BT 1 and BT 2] showed a sufficiently accurate similarity in conceptual meaning to the original text [Eng. orig.]. Additionally, in the Sesotho translation [Ses. tr.] the topic sentence retained its general and topical nature and the linking devices were almost without exception similar in function to those in the English original. Where necessary, some minor changes were effected [Ses. alt.].

The example of Section 1 of the original TALL presented below shows all the linking devices as well as the topic sentence. Please note that, as a result of the importance of the security of the TALL, complete sections of the test could not be copied in this article, but the examples should suffice for the specific points made.

Section 1: Scrambled text
The sequence of the sentences in the following has been altered. Say what the correct order is by marking your choice on the loose answer sheet. An alternative …

A. **Naturally, this …**

B. **First of all, …**

C. **The reasons for this …**

D. **There is no doubt among transport researchers and environmentalists that alternatives to today's cars must be found.** (topic sentence)

E. **One possible solution …**

1.	Which sentence did you put **first**?
2.	Which sentence did you put **second**?
3.	Which sentence did you put **third**?
4.	Which sentence did you put **fourth**?
5.	Which sentence did you put **fifth**?

Figure 1: *Topic sentence and linking devices in Section 1: Scrambled text*

The back-translations (see below) of the **initial instruction** for this section did, however, show important inaccuracies with regard to how students should answer the question.

[Eng. orig.] *The **sequence of the sentences** in the following has been altered. Say what the correct order is by marking your choice on the loose answer sheet.*

[Ses. tr.] *Tatelano ya **mantswe dipolelong** tse latelang e fetotswe. Bolela hore na tatelano e nepahetseng ke efe ka ho tshwaya kgetho ya hao leqepheng la dikarabo.*

[BT 1] *The **order of words** in the following sentences has been changed. Say which order is correct by marking your choice on the answer page.*

[BT 2] ***Word order** in the following sentences has been changed. State the correct order by marking your choice on your answer sheet.*

[Ses. alt.] *Tatelano ya **dipolelo** tse latelang e fetotswe. Bolela hore na tatelano e nepahetseng ke efe ka ho tshwaya kgetho ya hao leqepheng la dikarabo.*

From the two back-translations of the instruction it is clear that because the translated Sesotho version requires of potential test takers to rectify **word order** and not **the order of sentences**, this would be potentially confusing as they would not be able to determine how exactly the question should be answered. The similarity of the two back-translations regarding where they deviated from the original English test suggested that the problem might be located in the original Sesotho translation [Ses. tr.] of the test. In discussions with the back-translators after the contrastive textual analysis of the different back-translations and the original English test was completed, they indicated that what they translated ('word order') was exactly what was stated in the Sesotho translation ('*mantswe dipolelong*'). After they read the instruction in the original English text (for the first time) and the correct meaning of the instruction was explained to them, they indicated that the problem was easily rectifiable by replacing '*mantswe dipolelong*' with *'dipolelo'* [cf. Ses. alt. above].

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The back-translators translated the linking devices and topic sentence as follows:

A.   [BT 1]   *There is no doubt that this …*

A.   [BT 2]   *No doubt, this …*

B.   [BT 1]   *Before everything …*

B.   [BT 2]   *First of all …*

C.   [BT 1]   *Reasons for this …*

C.   [BT 2]   *Reasons for this …*

D.   [BT 1]   *There is no doubt among transport researchers and environmentalists that remedy for current vehicles must be found.*

D.   [BT 2]   *There is no doubt to transport researchers and environmental experts that solution for modern cars should be found.*

E.   [BT 1]   *The one solution …*

E.   [BT 2]   *One solution …*

As shown above, apart from the linking device in sentence A (which is 'Naturally, this …' in the original English), both back-translations showed a conceptually accurate translation of the topic sentence as well as the other linking devices. Interestingly, both back-translations also showed inaccuracies in the translation of the remainder of sentence A (see below).

A.   [Eng. orig.]   *Naturally, this severely limits the range of the car.*

A.   [Ses. tr.]   *Ha ho potang, hona ho sitisa koloi haholo koloing tse ngata.*

A.   [BT 1]   **There is no doubt that this impairs the vehicle very much among many vehicles.**

A.   [BT 2]   **No doubt,** *this* **is problem to many cars.**

A.   [Ses. alt.]   *Ka tlhaho, sena se fokatsa sebaka seo koloi e ka se fihlelang.*

Again, the similarity of the two back-translations in not specifying the particular problem (that of limiting the range of the car) indicates that the problem might be located in

the original Sesotho translation. In discussions with the back-translators afterwards they indicated that it was actually possible to translate sentence A (including the linking device) into Sesotho so that it more accurately resembled the original English sentence. This was then again rectified in the original Sesotho translation [Ses. alt.].

A final problem in Section 1 relates to the instructional part (at the end of the section) where students have to indicate the correct sequence for the sentences. The back-translators translated number 1 as:

1.   [Eng. orig.]   *Which **sentence** did you put first?*

1.   [Ses. tr.]   ***Karabo** eo o itseng ke ya pele ke efe?*

1.   [BT 1]   *What **answer** did you say is the first?*

1.   [BT 2]   *What did you say your first **answer** was?*

1.   [Ses. alt.]   ***Polelo** eo o itseng ke ya pele ke efe?*

Both back-translators translated numbers 2 – 5 in the same way as they did number 1. Although there is a slight possibility that students may be able to work out themselves what to do in this part of the question, it is not adequate regarding level of accuracy. Test instructions should not present an obstacle to students when answering the question (there is also a very strict time limit for completing the test, and it would be unfair if students had to waste time trying to determine how to answer questions). It is further again clear that, because of the similarity in both back-translations, the problem may be found in the original Sesotho translation. This was indeed the case when this problem was discussed with the back-translators. They again indicated that it could be rectified in the Sesotho translation by simply replacing the word *'karabo'* with *'polelo'* (cf. [Ses. alt.] above).

As could be seen in the analysis of Section 1, this section of the test presented only minor difficulties in translation, all of which were satisfactorily rectifiable.

All other sections of the test were analysed similar to the analysis presented for Section 1 of the test. The remainder of the article will focus on salient issues that emerged in the other sections that influenced the accuracy of the translation.

3.4.5.3   Section 2 – Interpreting graphs and visual information

In this section, students are required to calculate quantities, portions, ratios and percentages based on their interpretation of graphic information contained in a bar graph (they are not allowed to make use of calculators in doing this). An analysis of the back-translations showed that apart from two specific questions in the section, the

instruction to students, the language contained in the bar-graph and all other questions were translated accurately.

For question 7 in this section (see the copy of the question below), only the leading phrase did not translate accurately. Although all distracters were accurately translated, the leading phrase obviously has a crucial function in an understanding of the question. Students are supposed to make use of this phrase in order to complete the sentence by selecting the correct option from the list. An inaccurate translation of the leading phrase will be highly confusing for students because of the format of the questions in the section.

Study the graph on the previous page, and answer the following questions:

7.   It is clear that all of the other regions and countries together

        A.   produce about a third …

        B.   produce more than half …

        C.   produce only a quarter …

        D.   will be behind …

In the back-translations, the leading phrase of question 7 was translated as follows:

7.   [Eng. orig.]   *It is clear that all of the other regions and countries together…*

7.   [Ses. tr.]   *Ho hlakile hore ke dibaka tse ding le dinaha kaofela …*

7.   [BT 1]   *It is clear that it is other places and all countries …*

7.   [BT 2]   *It is obvious that it is all countries and other areas …*

7.   [Ses. alt.]   *Ho hlakile hore dibaka tse ding tsohle* **mmoho** *le dinaha kaofela …*

An obvious crucial omission in both back-translations is the concept 'together'. The omission of this concept makes it impossible to understand that the production totals of all other regions and countries must be added up and then compared to that of one specific country. The back-translators indicated that the Sesotho translation could be corrected (cf. Ses. alt. above) to include this concept after they viewed the original English version, and the word *'mmoho'* was included in the corrected version in order to denote the concept 'together'.

Similar to Question 7, the leading phrase of Question 10 (shown below) contained a potential conceptual inaccuracy.

10.   The ratio of 13:1 applies to production in the Middle East compared with

      A.   joint … and … output.

      B   and … production.

      C   and the output of the rest.

      D   production in … and the ….

The leading phrase of Question 10 was translated as follows:

10.   [Eng. Orig.]   *The ratio of 13:1* applies to production in the Middle East compared with …

10.   [Ses. tr.]   ***Kabo ya** 13:1 ke ya tlhahiso ya Botjhabela bo Hare ha ho bapiswa le* …

10.   [BT 1]   ***The ratio** of 13:1 is for the production of the Middle East when compared with* …

10.   [BT 2]   ***Distribution** of 13:1 belongs to Middle East production when compared to* …

10.   [Ses. alt.]   ***Kabo ya** 13:1 ke ya tlhahiso ya Botjhabela bo Hare ha ho bapiswa le* …

Although the concept 'ratio' was translated correctly in BT 1, the fact that in BT 2 it was translated as 'distribution' and not 'ratio' points to a possible conceptual inaccuracy in the original Sesotho translation. There is, therefore, the possibility that back-translator one could have been influenced by the numerical format in which 13:1 was written in the question to infer that it must be translated as 'ratio'. Discussions with the back-translators as well as comparing different dictionary entries confirmed that the Sesotho word *'kabo'* refers to the concept 'ratio', and that back-translator two translated *'kabo'* incorrectly as 'distribution'. *'Kabo'* was therefore retained in the corrected Sesotho version.

Similar to Section 1 of the test, no major translation difficulties occurred in Section 2 that could not be corrected.

3.4.5.4 Section 3 – Understanding texts

This section of the TALL is paramount in the context of the test since it assesses students' ability to understand a longer English text and it contributes approximately 50% of the total marks for the test (51 out of a total of 100 marks). As mentioned in 3.4.4, it tests students' ability to classify and compare information, make inferences, recognise text relations and distinguish between essential and non-essential information. A number of inaccuracies occurred in the translation of the text, all of which could be corrected in the Sesotho version. In order to explain the process followed in this section, it should suffice to discuss the instruction and first paragraph of the text.

The instruction for Section 3 showed an interesting inaccuracy in one of the back-translations.

[Eng. orig.]   *Read the two **texts** below ("…" [text 1] and "…" [text 2]) thoroughly, then answer the questions that follow.*

[Ses. tr.]   *Bala **dingolwa** tse pedi …*

[BT 1]   *Read the two **paragraphs** below fully …*

[BT 2]   *Read the **texts** below in full …*

When discussing the translation of *'texts'* from the original English with *'paragraphs'* in BT 1 with the back-translators, it was clear that in the Sesotho translation, the word *'dingolwa'* actually refers to written *'genres'* and not *'texts'* specifically. The second back-translator explained that he used his knowledge of the academic literacy context in which he worked and more specifically, his general familiarity with the TALL in order to infer the word 'texts' in his back-translation into English. In Sesotho, two words exist for 'paragraphs': both *'dirapa'* and *'ditema'* can be used. Neither of these two words was used in the original Sesotho translation, and if they had been, it could have been a potential source of confusion for students. It was therefore agreed that the first back-translator translated *'dingolwa'* incorrectly as 'paragraphs'. It was thus decided to retain the original translation in this case, since *'dingolwa'* was the closest Sesotho word for 'texts'.

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Translation inaccuracies that occurred in the first paragraph of the text are indicated in bold in the example of the original English text below.

Section 3: Understanding texts
The sequence of the sentences in the following has been altered. Say what the correct order is by marking your choice on the loose answer sheet. **An alternative …**
Read the two texts below ("…" [text 1] and "…" [text 2]) thoroughly, then answer the questions that follow. Coal-fired … The future … Coal is costly … **MORE** OF THE WORLD'S ELECTRIC power comes from coal than from oil and gas together: a third of Britain**'s**, half of Germany**'s** or America**'s**, three-quarters of India**'s** or China**'s**. And the fuel has one huge advantage: it does not come from the Middle East. **But, thanks not least to China's rapid economic growth, the price of coal has doubled since January.** No wonder the governments of coal-rich countries are content, the firms that dig it up are rubbing their hands, while the users are looking hard for more efficient ways of burning the stuff.

Figure 2: *Positions of translation inaccuracies in Section 3: Understanding texts*

With regard to paragraph 1, important inaccuracies in both back-translations include the following:

1) The word *'More'* was translated as *'Most'*;

2) No possession was indicated for the different countries mentioned in the paragraph;

3) The word *'fuel'* was translated as *'petrol'* while in the original text the word *'fuel'* is used to refer to coal; and

4) The third sentence in the original paragraph starting with 'But, thanks …' (see above) was separated into two different sentences in the Sesotho translation and, as a result, lost the relationship of cause and effect between China's rapid economic growth and the higher price for coal.

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The first inaccuracy mentioned above relates to the manner in which English inflects for grade, i.e. it displays plain (stative), comparative and superlative forms as in 'many', 'more' and 'most' (Huddleston and Pullum, 2005). In the case of Sesotho, however, Doke and Mofokeng (1985:118) mention that there are four qualificatives: the adjective, the relative, the enumerative and the possessive, all of which qualify the substantive. Importantly, they state that there is no inflection of qualificatives to express comparison, and that ways of expressing inferiority, superiority and equality are matters of syntactical construction. Because it was impossible to find a one-word alternative in Sesotho for the word 'more' (it was confirmed that the Sesotho word *'boholo'* used in the original translation does refer to 'most'), it was decided to rewrite the original English sentence so that the word 'most' could be included without changing the meaning of the sentence. The sentence was, therefore, rewritten as:

> Coal produces the most electricity in the world, even if we compare it with the combined production of oil and gas: …

This sentence was then easier to translate into Sesotho:

> *Mashala a hlahisa boholo ba motlakase wa lefatshe ho feta oli le kgase di kopane: …*

In the second case, both back-translations suggested that the indication of possession in the English text (in connection to the different countries mentioned) was omitted in the Sesotho translation. Sesotho does allow for the indication of possession by making use of a system of possessive concord, and the absence thereof in the Sesotho translation was probably an oversight on the part of the original Sesotho translator. In order to indicate possession in Sesotho, possessive concord must be in concordial agreement with whomever or whatever is possessed. In this case, the possessive concord 'ya' (singular) and 'tsa' (plural) were included in the Sesotho translation in order to indicate possession for the different countries mentioned in the paragraph.

In the third inaccuracy, it is apparent that the English word 'fuel' was translated out of context to refer to 'petrol' (*'peterole'*), while the word clearly refers to 'coal' if understood within context. The word *'peterole'* in the Sesotho translation was, therefore, replaced by *'mashala'* (coal).

In the fourth case, the sentence that was separated into two sentences in the original Sesotho translation was joined in the corrected Sesotho translation and rewritten (see Ses. alt. below) so that it created the cause and effect relationship necessary for an accurate understanding of the sentence. In the rewritten version, the word *'lehloohonolo'* (which means 'luckily' in English) was replaced by the word *'diteboho'* ('thanks to'), so that it became clear that, as a result of the growing economy of China, something else happened (the price of coal doubled).

[Ses. tr.] *Empa, ka **lehloohonolo** re lokela ho leboha ekonomi ya China e holang ka potlako. Theko ya mashala e menahane habedi ho tloha ka Pherekgong.*

[Ses. alt.]	*Empa, **diteboho** ho ekonomi ya China e holang ka potlako, theko ya mashala e imenne habedi ho tloha ka Pherekgong.*
[Eng. Transl.]	*But, thanks to the economy of China which is growing at a fast pace, the price of coal has doubled since January.*

The rest of the text (as well as the second text) in this section was analysed in the same manner and the inaccuracies rectified. In all instances, it was possible to correct the Sesotho translation so that the conceptual understanding of the texts was accurate compared to the English source text.

Out of the total of 23 questions in Section 3, all could be used either without any change or with minor changes to the Sesotho translation to make them a conceptually accurate reflection of the source text.

Although Section 5 of the test, where students need to match sentences from different text types (and registers) with each other, did not present any serious translation difficulties, Sections 4 and 6 presented major translation problems. These problems were not unforeseen though, since both sections deal with very specific vocabulary and grammatical issues in English.

3.4.5.5 Section 4 – Academic vocabulary

In the TALL, Section 4 (containing 10 questions) focuses on academic vocabulary based on the Coxhead (2000) academic word list with regard to frequency of use of English academic words. Furthermore, in the development of the TALL, distracters are usually selected on the principle of words starting with the same letter as the correct option, as well as the principle of word length. Although we knew that this section had the potential to be problematic, we nonetheless asked the primary translator to also translate this section as accurately as possible. The analysis of the back-translations showed that none of the questions (nor their distracters) in this section could be translated at an acceptable level of accuracy, mostly because Sesotho equivalents did not exist for the formal academic English words tested in the question. In addition, the principles according to which distracters were chosen in the development of this section in the English test were nearly impossible to apply in the translated version for obvious reasons.

It was therefore decided that the specific section could be approached in two potentially productive ways. The first was that new items could be developed for the whole section. This strategy, however, proved to be problematic since, where the Coxhead (2000) word list has been developed from a written corpus of academic English (containing 3.5 million words) on the basis of the frequency of use of academic words taken from actual academic texts, no such academic frequency list exists for Sesotho. Although some word lists are available, none of these has

extrapolated words according to frequency of use in an academic register (there is, for example, an online wordlist for 'education-related terms' in Sesotho, but without any frequencies added [see Olivier, 2011a]). Other general word lists (some compiled from corpora) and dictionaries are also available (cf. word lists: Prinsloo, 2013; CTexT - NWU, 2013; and dictionaries: Mabille & Dieterlen, 1974; Hartshorne, Swart & Posselt, 1985; Department of Education and Training, 1992; Olivier, 2011b), but again, none of these provide for an academic register specifically and they do not show word frequencies.

It was therefore decided that because it would be extremely difficult to make a selection of academic words to test in Sesotho, the second strategy might be more productive. This strategy focused on finding English synonyms for the academic words tested in the English test, and then to determine whether Sesotho words existed for these. This strategy proved helpful, since synonyms existed for all the English words and equivalents could be found in Sesotho. This strategy further ensured that the academic concepts tested by the English words could be retained in the Sesotho version. So, although the vocabulary section in the Sesotho version does not test the knowledge of **academic vocabulary** in Sesotho *per se*, it does correlate with the English version in the sense that it relates with the conceptual understanding of synonymous terms in the context of an academic sentence (in this section, all academic words are presented within the context of an academic sentence in the English version of the test and that specific context was also translated accurately in the Sesotho version). The example below should suffice to explain the process followed in this section.

The original item in the English test reads as follows:

42.   Research into modern combustion techniques has improved the _____ of future regeneration in the coal mining industry.

    A.   premise

    B.   promise

    C.   prospect

    D.   provision

Since no equivalent word exists in Sesotho for the word 'prospect' (which is the correct answer in this case), it was decided to make use of the synonym 'expectation' since a word does exist in Sesotho (*'tebello'*) for 'expectation'. Sesotho distracters for this question were then chosen making use of the same principles used in the English version of the test, i.e. all distracters had to start with the letter 't' and an attempt was made to keep word length the same as is illustrated in the Sesotho version of this question below.

42.	*Phuputso ya mawa a sejwalejwale ya ho tukisa mashala e ntjhafaditse*
	_____ *ya meloko e tlang tshebetsong ya mashala.*

	A.	*tebelo*

	B.	*tebetebe*

	C.	*tebello*

	D.	*tema*

All items in this section of the test were approached in a similar way.

3.4.5.6   Section 5 – Text types

In Section 5, students are required to match two sets of sentences in terms of similarity in text type and register. A potential difficulty that emerged in this section was that in some instances, typical registers used in English were not available in Sesotho. For example, one pair of sentences contained the typical register used to write job advertisements. This register is, however, unavailable in Sesotho as a result of the general absence of job advertisements being written in Sesotho. A similar example is the often staccato nature of the language used in instruction manuals (which are also not generally available in Sesotho). However, in a similar way that one would recognise instructions in English for example, one should also be able to recognise the differences between this type of writing and that of other sentences in Sesotho. An analysis of the back-translations showed that without exception, the typical features of sentences that allowed one to distinguish the different text types were retained in the translated Sesotho version.

3.4.5.7   Section 6 – Grammar and text relations

Section 6 of the test also proved difficult to translate. This section is a typical cloze-procedure question where specific words have been omitted from a text and students need to complete the text by selecting the position where words have been left out as well as the correct word that would complete a grammatically correct sentence. A well-known strategy that is often used in setting a cloze-procedure question is that, for example, every 5th or 7th word is omitted. This is also the strategy used for setting the specific section in the TALL. For this section, the primary translator was provided with the complete English text that forms part of the section (with the correct words included) and asked to provide a translation of the text. Although the translator also had to translate the rest of the section, only the instructions in this part of the section were translated with an acceptable degree of accuracy.

Sesotho follows the same word order pattern for basic sentence construction as that of English (Subject Verb Object [SVO]). However, other morphological differences such as the manner in which, for example, both verbs and adjectives are realised differently in Sesotho (see Kline & Demuth, 2010) make it impossible to translate the words omitted in the English text and maintain the principle for word omission discussed above. It was therefore decided to develop this question anew, leaving out every 7th Sesotho word in the already translated text for the section. New distracters were also created for these words, keeping in mind the grammatical structure of Sesotho and what productive distracters would be in each case. The example below shows how the Sesotho text was systematically mutilated in terms of omitted words and the options available to complete the sentences in a grammatically correct way.

*Dingolweng tse latelang, o tshwanetse ho bontsha **tulo** moo e ka bang lentswe le siilwe mme ke **lentswe** lefeng le hlokahalang moo. Mehlala e mmedi ke ena:*

In the following texts, you have to indicate the possible **place** where a word may have been deleted, and which **word** belongs there. Here are two examples:

_____

Kgase ya tlhaho e tla ba mafura a bohlokwa bo phahameng ka ho fetisisa a dilemokgolo tsa 21, ho latela tebello e akaretsang lefatshe. Ka nnete, kgase e bolokilweng ᵢ e ᵢᵢ diphesenteng ᵢᵢᵢ tse ᵢᵥ 87 tsa poloko ya oli bolokilweng ho latela se fuperweng ke eneji.

Natural gas will become the pre-eminent fuel of the 21st century, according to widespread expectation. Indeed, reserves of gas already stand at 87 percent of oil reserves in terms of energy content.

_____

Lentswe le siilwe kae?

    A. *Tulong ya (i)*

    B. *Tulong ya (ii)*

    C. *Tulong ya (iii)*

    D. *Tulong ya (iv)*

Lentswe le siilweng ke lefe?

    A. **eme**

    B. *hlahile*

    C. *kene*

    D. *theohile*

Where has the word been deleted?	**Which word has been left out here?**
A. At *position (i)*	A. ***standing***
B. ***At position (ii)***	B. *coming*
C. *At position (iii)*	C. *entering*
D. *At position (iv)*	D. *gone down*

In summary, an analysis of the back-translations compared with the original English text as well as with one another showed an acceptable degree of accuracy between the Sesotho translation and the English text. It was possible to correct all inaccuracies that occurred, and in only one instance (Section 6) it was necessary to develop part of the section anew (the same text was used but different words omitted than for the section in the English test) for the Sesotho version.

4.   Conclusion

Overall, the findings reported here for the first phase of the project are encouraging with regard to the reliable measurement of academic literacy levels in Sesotho. The comparison between the back-translations and the source text and the subsequent correction and adaptation of the target text enabled us to create a conceptually accurate Sesotho translation where the abilities tested by the source text were not compromised in the Sesotho translation. Although inaccuracies occurred in the primary translation as well as in the back-translations, none was of such a serious nature that they could not be rectified satisfactorily. It was further necessary to make more substantial changes to only two sections of the test that proved difficult to translate. For one of these sections it was necessary to develop new items for part of the section.

The results of phase 2 of the project that investigates the readability of the test to home language users of Sesotho as well as phase 3 that focuses on determining statistical equivalence between the English and Sesotho versions will be reported in subsequent publications.

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