

Negotiating Relationship Through Translation: How American Development Practitioners Exploit the Gap between Languages

Liz Boner (eboner@sfsu.edu), San Francisco State Communication Studies

Participants

Eco-Preneur: “international” American NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) that seeks to work “in partnership” with “local communities” to promote environmental enterprise as a solution to environmental degradation and poverty. Although they are a small NGO, they have extensive experience and are well respected for their work developing sustainable green businesses with communities throughout the world.

Melissa: 25 year old American, college graduate. She had been working for Eco-Preneur for six months (mostly in the U.S. office); previous four-month visit to Tanzania as part of college experience; elementary Swahili;

David: 24 year old American college graduate, new employee of Eco-Preneur, first time to Tanzania; prior experience working for social entrepreneur organization; no Swahili;

Maria: 25 year old Tanzanian “local entrepreneur” selling used clothing with Maria in the informal sector, vice president of Saccos a Women’s Savings and Credit Group and member of an underemployed youth group. Member of Mlimani Community Partnership representing her women’s and youth group. Completed elementary school. Speaks Swahili and local language, but does not speak English

Terisita: 28 year old Tanzanina woman, also sells used clothes with Maria. She is the president of the Saccos and also a member of the local youth group for underemployed youth. She is also a representative of the community wide entrepreneurship partnership women and youth groups in Mlimani. She speaks Swahili, the local language, but does not speak English.

Adam Mkarafu: newly employed research assistant, eleventh grade education, worked as tour guide at national forest reserve and is a subsistence farmer, born and raised in Mlimani, speaks English, Swahili, and local language of Mlimani

Liz Boner: Researcher and PhD student. Spent 4 consecutive summers studying Swahili and working with tour guide group in Amani (where she met Adam). Met Melissa and David just before this first meeting, but met Maria and Terisita during a previous summer visit. Advanced proficiency in Swahili.

Transcription convention:(.) indicates pause of less than a second, (2) indicates 2 second pause, **bold** indicates stress; [] indicates overlapping talk, = indicates continuous talk; ↑↓ indicates rising or falling intonation; - indicates hesitation or rephrase; italics highlight Swahili words that are the focus of analysis. Dashes mark mis-starts and rephrasing; colon marks extended vowel sound; CAPS indicates increase volume

Excerpt 1: This transcript comes from the first meeting between Maria and Terisita of Saccos and Melissa and David of Eco-Preneur. We have just arrived at a small hotel outside of the town in an area in which the other members of the community partnership would likely not see us. After exchanging greetings and small talk and ordering food Terisita turns to Adam and I and asks:

Excerpt 1

Line#	Speaker	Utterance	Translation
1	Terisita	Anapenda kujua tunaendelea	Does she want to know what
2		na nini?= = au tuna [shida gani	we are doing?= Or we have [which problems
3	Maria		
4	Terisita	[shida gani	[which problems

(Liz Turning to Melissa and David)

Excerpt 2

Line#	Speaker	Utterance
5	Liz	they wanna know (1) are you asking them how they’re ↑doing (1)
6		or are you asking them what kind of problem (1) they have (3)
7		cause I think a lot of times (2) when people come (1) they ask (.)
8		what kind of problems you have (3) this I’m adding
9	Melissa	Oh
10	Liz	So she’s wondering (.) whether or not you’re asking how they’re
11		↑ doing in their ↑project (1) or are you coming to ask what kind of
12		problems they might have (2)

Excerpt 3

Line#	Speaker	Utterance
13	David	How are they distinct? (2) can we start with one (.) and move to
14		the other?
15	Liz	Well (.) Vipi (1) (<i>beginning to translate</i>)
16	Melissa	Well [wait (1)
17	Liz	Oh
18	Melissa	I don't know what is the appropriate thing-like I don't-like I don't
19		think it's appropriate to be like (2) ↑so (1) what are your problems
20		(1) you know?
21	Liz	Yeah
22	Melissa	You know (.) like (.) it's not- it doesn't feel right (1) but (2) if-it's sort
23		of like what are their expectations (.) if that's what they're used to
24		talking about (.) and that's what they're interested to talk about (.)
25		then that's fine with me (.) but like (1) you know (.) I don't know
26		what's really going on (.) you know? (<i>nervous laughter</i>)

Liz explains: *Melissa is willing to discuss questions if this is what they are used to, but they are not typical questions. Melissa adds, "we were invited here, so I thought there was something you wanted to talk about." Maria and Terisita ask each other did we invite her?*

Excerpt 4

Line#	Speaker	Utterance	Translation
45	Adam	Kwa nyie mngезungumza nao	For you (pl) you should speak
46		tu (1) shughuli zote	with them just (1) about how all
47		zinaendeleaje=	the projects are progressing=
48	Terisita	= [ndiyo	= [yes]
49	Maria	[ndiyiyo hivyo]	[yes this]
50	Adam	Mlivyo ↑anza (.)	How you ↑started (.) how you
51		mnavyoendelea	have continued

Excerpt 5

Line#	Speaker	Utterance	Translation
52	Terisita	Tulivyoanza (.) wanajua (.) kwa	How we started (2) they know (.)
53		sababu tulikuwa pamoja (.)	because we were together (.) at
54		workshop Dar es Salaam (.)	the workshop in Dar es Salaam (.)
55		Wanafahamu jinsi tunavyoanza	They know how we started (.)
56		(.) (all talking) Labda ki-yaani	maybe-if-I mean maybe for now (2)
57		labda kwa sasa hiivi (2) Tangu	since the time (.) we left Dar es
58		(.) tulitoka (pounding) Dar es	Salaam (.) when we came (.) when
59		Salaam tulipokuja (.) tulipopata	we got that money (.) to continue to
60		vile pesa (.) kuendelea	make loans (<i>with savings and</i>
61		kukopeshana	<i>credit group</i>)

Excerpt 6

Line#	Speaker	Utterance
62	Liz	she was thinking (.) maybe since the time that she was (1)- ↑They
63		got money (1)
64	Melissa	Right
65	Liz	And I think it had something to do with (1) you guys
66	Melissa	Yeah
67	Liz	so she's also thinking that maybe you'd want to know (.) what
68		they've done (.) since this time (.) that they ↑received this money=
69	Melissa	[yes (.) of course
70	Liz	[and I think they're even confused about why they got the
		money (.)
71	Melissa	Ah
72	Liz	And a separate thing (.) what do they have to do with the money
		(.) who are they responsible to with the money (.) I mean all these
		types of questions=

