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# Language Diversity in Trainings: Analyzing the Use of English in a Writeshop Process

Elis Cardoso Motta

*SIT Graduate Institute*, [elis.motta@mail.sit.edu](mailto:elis.motta@mail.sit.edu)

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**LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IN TRAININGS: ANALYZING THE USE OF  
ENGLISH IN A WRITESHOP PROCESS**

Elis Cardoso Motta

PIM 72

A Course-Linked Capstone Paper in Training Design in Experiential Learning

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Intercultural Service, Leadership and Management at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

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Advisor: Ryland White

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## Abstract

This capstone paper discusses a learning process called “writeshop,” and the role played by language use in a writeshop I co-facilitated in November 2013 in South Africa. A writeshop is a workshop to collectively create a written product for publication. This paper starts with a description of my experience in co-designing and co-facilitating a writeshop as part of my practicum, followed by a reflection on the process and the different roles I played, from a trainer lens. The third part of this capstone paper presents an analysis, based on a survey and individual interviews conducted with the writeshop participants, of the role played by language use and language choice in this specific writeshop process. This capstone paper has two main foci: the description and reflection on my participation as co-designer, co-facilitator and co-writer in the writeshop during my practicum, and the analysis of the language element in this process, based on the perception of the participants of the writeshop. It was structured in a way to reflect the Experiential Learning cycle created by David Kolb (1984): starting with the Concrete Experience (the description of my experience in the BFG4 writeshop); then going into Reflective Observation (the reflection on such experience); then into Abstract Conceptualization (data collection and analysis, where generalizations are be made); and closing with Active Experimentation (suggestions on how to apply the learning in future writeshops). This research aims at being a contribution to the training field on writeshop design and delivery, and the issue of language use in trainings with multilingual groups.

**Key words:** Writeshop, language use, training, multilingual groups

## Introduction

This capstone paper will discuss a learning process called “writeshop,” and the role played by language use in a writeshop I co-facilitated in November 2013 in South Africa. A writeshop is a workshop to collectively create a written product for publication. The idea for approaching this topic came from my practicum with the Barefoot Guide project, which exists under the umbrella of an organization called Community Development Resource Association (CDRA), a South African non-profit development and research organization working to strengthen civil society. The Barefoot Guides are books collectively created by practitioner writers and illustrators that include stories, resources, illustrations, concepts, questions, and analyses related to social change topics. The guides can be downloaded for free, are written in accessible language (i.e., not using academic terms or technical jargon), and focus on a variety of social change practices. They have been translated into eight languages and have been used throughout the world. The books are for “social change leaders and practitioners to individually or collectively study or dip into, to stimulate deeper thinking and conversations about their real work, and to enable them to become more effective” (Barefoot Guide 4 Writeshop Website, n.d.). The first three editions of the Barefoot Guides (BFG1, BFG2, and BFG3) focus on the following themes, respectively: Working with Organisations and Social Change; Learning Practices in Organisations & Social Change; and Mobilizing Religious Health Assets for Transformation.

I found out in the first days of my practicum that the writing process of the Barefoot Guides included one or more writeshops, depending on funding available for each project. The writeshop I participated in aimed at starting a collective writing process for the Barefoot Guide 4 (BFG4) to be published in 2014 with the theme “What

is the Real Work of Social Change?” The writeshop had three facilitators and 25 participants from 16 different countries. It was a five-day process with an experiential learning approach, even if that was not explicitly stated by the designers and facilitators of the writeshop. However, before discussing this particular writeshop in more detail, it is important to have a clear understanding of the specific characteristics of writeshops and how they differ from writing workshops.

In general, writing workshops aim at improving participants' writing skills, and possibly their attitude towards writing. This means that writing workshops tend to have very clear learning objectives that can be easily measured through writing samples from the participants and/or through pre- and post-evaluations. In a writeshop, on the other hand, the main objective is to create a piece of writing to be published. Such pieces can be collectively or individually written, but the writing process during the writeshop usually includes instances of collectivity, such as group brainstorm or group feedback. In writeshops, learning is also part of the process, but the process as a whole focuses more on increasing participants' (self-)awareness and stimulating reflection, rather than improving their writing or communication skills. The latter may, however, become a consequence of the collective process of sharing drafts and giving and receiving peer feedback, as well as the intentional and guided reflection on participants' own writings.

According to Gonsalves and Armonia (2010):

A writeshop is an intensive process aimed at bringing together authors, editors, artists, and desktop publishing specialist to produce a publication in a relatively short time. Writeshops rely on primary or/and secondary sources of information. It is a flexible way of producing various types of information or knowledge products (...) for different audiences and purposes (p. 7).

This reinforces that the main goal of writeshops is to produce a publication, and the learning happens throughout this process, both for facilitators and for participants. The authors point out that flexibility is one of the key elements of writeshops, as their

structure and methodology need to be adapted according to the audience and the publication to be produced. While the writeshops described by Gonsalves and Armonia (2010) involved writing and publishing specialists, the Barefoot Guide writeshops were instead conducted to convey the voices of practitioners and other individuals who are not necessarily writers, authors or editors themselves, but who have stories to tell and lessons to share.

During my experience in co-designing and co-facilitating the BFG4 writeshop, I learned about some of the training components that needed to be given special attention in a writeshop, because they can either stimulate or hinder the facilitation process. The first aspect is trust building and the creation of a safer space. Writing can be a very personal activity for some people, so writeshop facilitators need to pay special attention to building trust and co-creating a *safer space*. The expression *safer space* (instead of *safe space*) is used intentionally here. Given the many factors that influence people feeling safe or not, and the oppressive systems (expressed through racism, classism, sexism and other -isms) present in the larger social contexts of which training environments are part, I do not think any facilitator can fully offset all of these dynamics and create a space that is truly safe for every single participant. As pointed out by Holley and Steiner (2005) in their research on social work classrooms, “it may be unrealistic to expect any classroom to be truly safe for all students (...) Possibly the best that instructors and students can strive for is the creation of *safer space*” (p.61).

The second aspect is working in small collaborative groups. Rao (2007) argues that “by working in pairs or groups, students are closely involved in the writing process and become inspired by their partners” (p.104-105). Having participants work in smaller groups can also help to build trust among the whole group, however Push (1994) warns that “participants can learn from each other, but rarely do so unless this process is



deliberately designed into the program. Simply bringing them together is not enough” (p. 119). And Carson and Nelson (1994) point out that working in groups does not necessarily mean working collaboratively, as often the function of groups is to benefit individuals instead of the collective. Therefore, small group work in writeshops needs to be deliberately designed and facilitated to stimulate collaboration among participants.

Finally, the cross-cultural aspect of training can also be key in writeshops – assuming they involve varied cultural backgrounds, as was the case of the Barefoot Guide 4 writeshop. Rothwell (2008) explains that Andy Gillet “suggests that trainers working cross-culturally should focus attention on five key issues: (1) cultural behavior, (2) participants’ perceptions and expectations, (3) culture, (4) cross-cultural pragmatics, and (5) language” (p.82). In the context of a writeshop, language (and particularly language proficiency) can be an important window into cross-cultural differences that affect facilitation, as writing and language cannot be disassociated. Having studied linguistics, worked as a language teacher and translator, as well as facilitated in multilingual contexts, the language element was what caught my attention the most in the BFG4 writeshop. In this particular case, the whole writeshop was delivered in English and participants’ final draft was also expected to be in English. This happened even though, among the 25 participants, probably less than half considered themselves native speakers of English; on the other hand, among the three facilitators I was the only non-native speaker of English. Such context made me wonder how the use of English as the main language might have affected the writeshop and the writing process as a whole. This is exactly what I will analyze in this paper.

In summary, this capstone paper has two main foci: first, the description and reflection on my participation as co-designer, co-facilitator and co-writer in the writeshop during my practicum, and second, the analysis of the language element in this

process, based on the perception of the participants of the writeshop. This capstone paper is structured in a way to reflect the Experiential Learning cycle created by David Kolb (1984), which has four stages: Concrete Experience (CE), in which learners “must be able to involve themselves fully, openly, and without bias in new experience” (p.30); Reflective Observation (RO), when the experience is observed and reflected upon from different perspectives; Abstract Conceptualization (AC), in which learners “create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories” (p.30); and Active Experimentation (AE), when such theories and lessons from experience are used in practice to solve problems, plan, and make decisions. Kolb’s model is reflected in this capstone as follows: it starts with a description of my experience in the BFG4 writeshop (CE); then it presents my reflections and observations on such experience (RO); then theories on language use in trainings are presented and intertwined with data collection and analysis (AC); and, finally, it ends with suggestions on how to apply the learning in future writeshops (AE).

## Part I

### The Concrete Experience: Designing and Delivering a Writeshop

The history of writeshops is not easily traceable. Academic literature on the topic is rarely found, and non-academic sources indicate that the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), from The Philippines, and its early partners were the first to use this methodology, back in 1987 (Gonsalves and Armonia, 2010). “Writeshops were originally used by IIRR (...) mainly to address the issue of poor engagement of field workers in the process of documentation, learning and sharing of knowledge” (p.vi). From the beginning they have been characterized as a highly participatory approach that brings together a variety of stakeholders for a short period of time, in order to reflect on and write about their experiences in the field.

A couple of decades later, the IIRR looked back at these experiences and how they have impacted participants and organizations. According to Gonsalves and Armonia (2010), for fieldworkers “witnessing how their rough outlines and drafts underwent transformation, and finally seeing their names as "authors" on the last day served as rewards. (...) [They] returned to work with an increased interest to write and share” (p.vi). Milligan and Bongartz (2010) add that besides “creating shared ownership of a publication” (p.209), writeshops also “have very many benefits for building capacity to write in a supportive environment” (p.209).

Gonsalves and Armonia (2010) also point out that writeshops play an important role in documenting the experiential knowledge that comes from the field and from those who are usually not seen as experts. They also make the “expert knowledge” more accessible and relevant by translating it into a less technical and intricate and more jargon-free language. Writeshops have, therefore, been a way to stimulate non-writers to

write, and to repackage knowledge “making it understandable and thus, more easily usable” (Gonsalves and Armonia 2010, p.iii). Baltissen and Oro (2009) agree with such view and add that by producing materials that are easier to use, writeshops also facilitate such materials to be widely shared with different audiences.

### **Before the BFG4 Writeshop**

All of the elements described above have characterized the Barefoot Guides since its first edition, published in 2009. The idea for the BFG4 came from a group of people who, after the third Barefoot Guide was published, wanted to continue developing new editions. The first step was to design and launch a website called Barefoot Guide Connection ([barefootguide.org](http://barefootguide.org)) which served as a global online community. This group of people may be considered what Gonsalves and Armonia (2010) call a steering committee, and we call the BFG Connections Core Team. A steering committee “should include members of the projects or organizations involved. [It] provides guidance to all processes involved in the writeshop whether related to people, content, format, logistics and distribution” (Gonsalves and Armonia 2010, p.9), and this is precisely the role played by the BFG Connections Core Team.

The Core Team wanted the BFG4 to be a collectively written guide, but also felt a need to make it a more inclusive and open process. The theme and title for the BFG4 (*Exploring the Real Work of Social Change*) surfaced during the conversations, and a simple plan of action was developed: 1) Finding out who was interested in participating; 2) Finding ways to fund the project. For the first time in the history of the BFGs, this edition did not have a single major funder, which meant there were more limitations financially, but also that there were possibilities (and need) to be more flexible and creative, particularly regarding participants of the writeshop. The Core Team opened a

call for participants who had stories to tell about social change, and participants (or their organizations) were asked to cover their own costs of participation in the writeshop. The rest of the funding for the BFG4 came from a crowd funding campaign and contributions from different organizations around the world. Applicants were asked to submit a brief summary of the story or concept they wanted to write about, but the group was primarily self-selecting. At the end, there were 28 participants in the writeshop, being three facilitators. The participants came from Belgium, Brazil, England, Finland, France, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa, Tajikistan, Uganda, United States, Vietnam, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Twenty-six of the participants represented 21 different organizations, and two were independent practitioners.

The structure, size, and organization of a writeshop may vary as much as the goals and objectives of each event. According to Gonsalves and Armonia (2010), “a typical writeshop requires a relatively long lead-time for planning and for the arrangement of support services and logistics” (p.5). It usually lasts between five and ten days, and should be held in a place isolated enough to allow people to concentrate on writing without being distracted by work or other unrelated activities. For the BFG4 writeshop, the venue chosen was a quiet and peaceful hotel in the surroundings of Johannesburg, South Africa, and we experienced what Milligan and Bongartz describe: “being surrounded by nature, having quiet spaces away from the group, the option of working in one’s room and flexibility with meal times were all helpful to the writing process” (2010, p.202).

The writeshop lasted five days from participants’ arrival to departure, which meant three full days and two half days of activities. It was important to make the most of this time together because there were no funds available for a second writeshop (as

had been the case for BFG 1 and 2). One of the goals of the writeshop was to create the motivation and energy needed to keep participants engaged and writing afterwards, enabling the guide to be completed. This meant the plan was not to finish the BFG4 in those five days, but rather to have a strong beginning, with drafts and a somewhat clear picture of the guide as a whole.

When I started my practicum in September 2013, the open call for the writeshop had already been launched, the crowd funding campaign was starting to gain momentum, the writeshop was scheduled, and there was a staff member of CDRA in charge of the logistics. The first two months of my practicum were focused on understanding the Barefoot Guide writing process more deeply; doing research on the immense topic of Social Change; writing first drafts and/or creating mind maps that could be serve as a base for the writeshop; and joining the meetings of the BFG Connection Core Team. In October 2013, I was invited to join the writeshop design and facilitation team. We were three in the team and I was the only one with no previous BFG or writeshop experience, so my role was often that of bringing a fresh perspective and new elements to the process.

A few weeks before the writeshop, we started brainstorming ideas for the design and agenda, and the day before the writeshop started we had an overall trajectory for those five days, even though only the first day and a half were fully developed. According to Mundy, Mathias, and Bekalo (2006) that is a common practice in writeshops: “The schedule for only the first one or two days of the writeshop is known beforehand. A schedule for the following day is prepared each evening, and it may even change again several times as the day progresses” (p.27). The “agenda” was presented to participants as a narrative (see Appendix 1 and 2) with a description of each day, but the emphasis was on the goal for the writeshop and for each of the days, i.e.,

participants were aware that the narrative was flexible and could change throughout the week. We wanted to make sure people would have time to write, but we also knew some might need help to feel they could write and be encouraged to go into their stories in-depth.

Gonsalves and Armonia (2010) describe three processes that enhance the quality of the product of a writeshop: “(a) presentations and comments that facilitate information exchange; (b) editing and rewriting that result to information-transformation; and (c) small group discussions that generate additional information or ideas for new articles” (p.6). The design for the BFG4 writeshop included almost all of these elements, except for the editing, which happened after the writeshop. In general lines, we also followed all of the four basic steps to organize a writeshop described by Baltissen and Oro (2009): 1) to create a steering committee to be in charge of conceptualizing and implementing the writeshop; 2) the core team designs the writeshop defining goals, outputs expected, participants selection, and methodology; 3) to develop the theme and identify potential topics and sources of information; and, finally, 4) to identify and invite participants and ask them to submit their initial writings.

### **During the BFG4 Writeshop**

The BFG4 writeshop design had a couple of verbs that summarized the goals for each day: Day 1 – Connecting: Surfacing from the inside-out; Day 2 – Surfacing: Teasing out and Visioning; Day 3 – Deepening: Discovering; Day 4 – Resolving: Committing; and Day 5 – Revisioning: Planning. If compared to the Experiential Learning cycle proposed by Kolb (1984), the structure can be interpreted as follows: the writeshop starts with surfacing the Concrete Experience, that is, the stories participants brought to share with others; as they are encouraged to engage in both telling and

listening to other people's stories, participants are also stimulated to reflect more deeply about the meaning and learning in their own stories (Reflective Observation); the process then starts to combine feedback, mind-mapping and writing with the support from models and theories, as well as short technical sessions by experts (Abstract Conceptualization); and finally, the last two days of the writeshop were dedicated to planning next steps to complete the guide (Active Experimentation).

A few elements were present almost every day during the writeshop, they are: review groups, free writing, and journaling. For the review groups, participants were divided in four groups, and at the end of each day one of the groups would meet with the facilitators for about 20 minutes. The conversation was guided by two prompts: (a) What happened during the day? Participants were invited to describe the day from beginning to end. This helped to not only refresh their memories, but also put them again into contact with how they felt throughout the whole day, as opposed to focusing only on how they were feeling at the end; (b) How do you feel about the day? Starting with their feelings, participants were encouraged to share what had worked or not for them during the day, and to provide suggestions for improvement. The group was then asked to present a short sketch the next morning—this should be creative and should reflect some aspect of the day—to remind the other participants what happened and encourage them to reflect on it too. This allowed us to create a morning ritual in the writeshop: the day would always start with the presentation of the review group on the previous day. For the facilitation team, it was also important to listen to the feedback from the review groups and reflect on how the group was feeling before finalizing the activities for the following day.

Free writing and journaling are among the invention techniques listed by Rosen and Behrens (1997), together with brainstorming and mapping – which were also used



in the BFG4 writeshop, except not on a daily basis. According to the Second Barefoot Guide Collective (2011), free writing involves writing non-stop for a certain amount of time in such a way that the writing becomes part of your thinking process. In short, free writing involves a very simple rule: put your pen in the paper and write until you are told to stop. A free writing session can last from two minutes up to an hour, and it can be done with a prompt, or it can be open. It can be used for different purposes and in different moments of a writeshop, and can also be self-facilitated, i.e., participants may decide to use free writing on their own to improve their writing skills or to reflect on their experiences. The BFG4 writeshop was opened and closed with a short (2-5 minutes) free writing session, and free writing was also incorporated to every day's agenda, always with a prompt, in order to stimulate participants to access their most immediate reactions and feelings.

Journaling is another writeshop method that can be very effective, as it stimulates participants to write on a daily basis and reflect on their experience of writing their pieces and interacting with others. Journaling can be done as a free writing exercise, or it can involve more explicit structure and objective. In the BFG4 writeshop, we decided to use journaling in a different way: we created a collective online document to be written by the whole group throughout the week. This document was aimed at serving as a group journal and as a communication channel with people who had not been able to join the writeshop, but who were still interested in participating in the BFG4. All participants had access to the document and they were encouraged daily to share their impressions, feelings, stories, pictures, burning questions, or comments. This tool helped to stimulate the exercise of writing as well as to open the writeshop process to the "outside world" and expand our conversations.

The first day of the writeshop started after lunch with a brief free writing session that helped to participants starting to get to know each other. This was followed by one of the facilitators presenting an overview of the Barefoot Guide process and previous publications. The next activity involved participants sharing the stories they were planning to write. According to Baltissen and Oro (2009), in writeshops “the sharing of experiences among participants allows the development of networks that continue to be fruitful long after the end of the workshop itself” (p.3). In this first instance, stories were shared orally in groups of 4-5 people, while participants prepared “tablecloths” for a World Café session on Day 2. The “tablecloths” consisted of flipchart sheets on which participants doodled and wrote as they listened and gave feedback to the stories. These served as a visual guidance on Day 2 when, as people circulated among the different tables, one host in each table had to present a summary of that group’s discussion to their guests, who would further discuss the topics.

The second day was mostly spent with the World Café activity: groups first finished preparing their “tablecloths” and then the rotation part of the session started. At the end of each round, each table put their main insights or questions on a flipchart. In the final round, participants went back to their original tables to hear about what others had discussed there. Milligan and Bongartz (2010) point out that the writeshop methodology “allows inputs from all participants to be incorporated, taking advantage of the diverse experience and expertise of all present” (p.3), and this is what was accomplished with the World Café session. After such intense verbal interactions for a day and a half, participants were asked to do a five minutes free drawing activity in order to stimulate other forms of expression and enjoy the silence for a bit. This was followed by another free writing session with the prompt ‘What is the real work of social change?’, aimed at getting participants to start to relate the stories they had

brought to the main theme of the BFG4. To close the day, each participant was invited to write in a couple of sentences what their pieces of writing would be about. One by one they presented it to the rest of the group, and this help them to have an initial idea of what the content of the guide might look like. Participants were then divided into 5 groups and invited to brainstorm a design for the structure of the BFG4.

Day three started with the presentations of the designs the groups had created the day before. Participants also listened to some haiku (short poems with three lines of seven, five and seven syllables in the original Japanese) to help them create poetic titles for their stories, and then they were given the following free writing prompt: Write your story in five minutes. This was a challenging prompt, but also a very effective one, as it allowed them to quickly get to the essence of their stories. Participants were then divided in groups of four according to the themes of their stories, and were asked to listen to each other's stories following the Head, Heart and Feet model (Second Barefoot Guide Collective, 2011): while one person told their story, one would listen with the question 'What does this story make me think?' (Head); another with the question 'How does this story make me feel?' (Heart); and the last person with the question 'What does this story make me want to do?' (Feet). After each story was told, the listeners would share their answers to the questions as feedback. Gonsalves and Armonia (2010) point out that "peer review and feedback is important. This is one of the most appreciated and recognized features of writeshops which ensures quality of the products while at the same time serves as a way for improving (...) writing and analytical skills" (p.24). Until this moment, participants were only sharing their stories orally with each other. The only writing they had done was the free writing exercises, which were never required to be read by other people.

*Figure 1: Head, Heart, and Feet model*

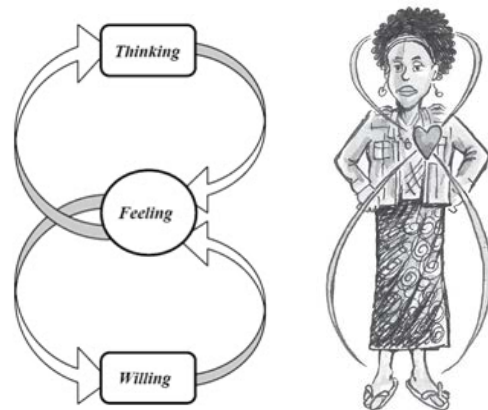


Illustration: Meg Jordi, Second Barefoot Guide Collective, 2011.

After the Head, Heart and Feet feedback groups, we presented a model for writing maps, and participants were asked to develop their own maps, taking into account all the changes their stories had already gone through, and any feedback they had received and considered relevant. In order to give participants enough time to work on their writing maps, we ended the sessions earlier on the third day and start the activities later on the fourth day. Milligan and Bongartz (2010) point out the importance of respecting participants' different needs and paces when it comes to writing: while some people find it easier to write early in the morning, others prefer to do it late at night, and this needs to be taken into account when planning writing times in a writeshop.

The fourth day of the writeshop had two parallel events: the in-person writeshop itself and a 90-minute online session. In the in-person writeshop, participants went back to their Head, Heart, and Feet groups to briefly share and give/receive feedback on their writing maps. The rest of the day was dedicated mainly to writing their first drafts, with three optional 30-minute sessions (Storytelling; Writing your story on a postcard; and Poetry) spread throughout the day for those in need of a break or some technical guidance. These sessions were delivered by experts in each topic and provided very practical writing tips. Having a day with a lot of free time for writing proved to be an

effective strategy, as explained by Milligan and Bongartz (2010): “Some people work for hours on end, others find it easier to write in small chunks and have breaks (...) Giving people the option of writing in the workshop room, or somewhere else (...) is also a good idea” (p.202-203). The fourth day ended with bringing all participants back together to start brainstorming the next steps for the BFG4. A large timeline was built on the wall and everyone was able to add their inputs on flash cards.

The virtual meeting was open to anyone interested, but mainly aimed at being a space for contributions from those who were unable to join the in-person writeshop. The session was conducted by two external facilitators using Adobe Connect and had 12 participants from Brazil, England, Finland and South Africa. Participants were divided in small groups in separated virtual rooms and were asked to choose and discuss one or two questions, out of the seven questions that have been suggested by the in-person writeshop participants. Questions chosen were: What aspects of social change are you struggling with?; In your experience, how can we facilitate change in a group that is divided over social issues?; and Where does resistance to change come from and how do we approach it? The entire discussion was documented and made available to participants of the in-person writeshop, and some of them were able to take the time to read it and write a feedback in the online group journal. The online participants gave very positive feedback on the session, and felt they were able to have meaningful discussions despite not knowing or being able to see each other. The two experienced facilitators played an essential role in enabling this, as they, for example, created space at the beginning of the session for people to connect on a more personal level (sharing the origins of their names or what the weather was like where they were).

The last day of the writeshop ended early in the afternoon. Participants were divided in four groups to work on different topics: one group looked at the five

proposed designs for the BFG4; the second group summarized the suggestions from the brainstorm on the previous day and proposed a timeline for the next steps; group three developed support strategies and tips for the writing process; and group four worked further on one of the ideas that had come up during the week: the creation of a BFG board game. After that each group presented their discussions and participants had a chance to share comments and suggestions. We agreed that people would stay in their Head, Heart and Feet groups, because they were already comfortable with receiving feedback from this group. Deadlines were also agreed upon, even though we knew we would need to be flexible with that and recognize that people work at different paces. We closed the writeshop with a brief free writing session with three prompts: When I first came here, I thought...; During the Writeshop, I felt...; and After the Writeshop, I will... This enabled people to reflect on the week and make a commitment to what they would do after the writeshop. After re-reading their own free writing piece, each participant chose a sentence to say to the whole group. We closed with a circle in which everyone had space to share their sentence and receive what others had to share.

### **After the BFG4 Writeshop**

The writeshop was an important part of the BFG4 process, but not the only one. During the writeshop, we formed an Editorial Team of five people (the three facilitators and two participants who are also part of the Core Team), which met immediately after the writeshop to discuss next steps, deadlines, and suggestions for supporting participants in their writing process. Most participants did not manage to finish their first drafts by the end of the writeshop, so a Googledocs folder was set up for them to share it with the group, and a deadline was established. It was decided that once all first drafts were available, participants would give feedback on the document to those in

their Head, Heart, and Feet groups, and writers would then submit a second draft taking comments and feedback into account. The Editorial Team agreed to meet virtually at least once a month to discuss progress, new deadlines, and other topics such as illustration and funding for completing the guide.

As this capstone paper is being written, the BFG4 writing process is still going on. By late April 2014, the Editorial Team had received most of the first drafts and a few of the second drafts from participants. Some are still very actively engaged in the process, most have shown some level of engagement, and a couple of them have not engaged at all since the writeshop. According to Milliam and Bongartz (2010), this seems to be a common challenge in writeshops: “We should aim to get all the articles finalised by the end of the writeshop, as it’s difficult to maintain momentum once everyone’s back at their normal work” (p.209). In the case of the BFG4, ending the writeshop with all pieces finished would not be realistic, but one of the main conclusions of the facilitators was that we could have advanced significantly more if the writeshop had lasted seven, instead of five days. Based on the feedback received from participants during the review groups and informally after the writeshop, this was the main element to be improved. The Editorial Team has not evaluated the writeshop formally, so there is no official evaluation to be shared as of now. My personal reflections and learning from this process will be presented in the next chapter.

## **Part II**

### **The Reflective Observation: Playing Multiple Roles**

During my undergraduate studies, I took two courses on Theater Improvisation, in which I learned a concept that has stayed with me ever since and strongly influenced my approach to training: the concept of saying ‘yes’. My Improvisation professor used to say that, when entering an improvisation scene, the actor’s natural impulse must be of saying ‘yes’ to whatever situation is presented to them; the actor must be willing to face, interact with, and create based on anything the other actors, the audience, or the context presents to them. During that same period, I became a trainer for AFS Intercultural Programs, and I brought this saying ‘yes’ attitude with me to the training rooms. When I was preparing to start my practicum with the Barefoot Guides, one of my professors at SIT gave me one piece of advice: take all the training opportunities that are presented to you. Once again, I decided to go into my practicum with the saying ‘yes’ mindset, and this is why I accepted to be the one of the designers and facilitators of the BFG4 writeshop, even though I had no previous experience with writeshops.

Being part of the BFG4 writeshop as a co-designer, co-facilitator and one of the writers was a completely new experience for me. First of all because I had never played so many different roles in a learning process, and second because the way the writeshop process was structured and delivered was very different than all my previous training experiences. During this process, I was often taken out of my comfort zone both as a trainer and as a learner, which made me stretch and grow personally and professionally. I had already participated in several training processes in which I was both designing and facilitating, but this was the first time I was expected (as was the case for the other



facilitators as well) to also do what participants were supposed to do, that is, to work on my own piece of writing during the writeshop.

Having to simultaneously play the role of facilitator and participant was one of my main challenges during the BFG4 writeshop. There were instances when I had to facilitate a free writing session (give the instructions, explain the prompt, and time the session), and also do my own free writing while participants were doing theirs. In other moments, someone else would be facilitating and I was expected to participate in brainstorming or sharing ideas of topics or chapters for the BFG4. Both of these situations proved to be a real challenge for me, particularly because I am used to playing exclusively the role of facilitator/trainer, and to be constantly using my trainer lens throughout the entire process. For example, usually when I am facilitating a session that involves participants working on their own for a few minutes, I use that time to take a look at the space and make sure everything is running as planned, or to prepare materials for the next part of the session. Also, when someone else is facilitating a session, my tendency is to observe and stay around, available to support, or to take care of logistics or other preparations, as needed. Having to jump back and forth from facilitator to participant definitely allowed me to plan less and to trust my reflexes more. After the writeshop, I felt that, as a trainer, I was more prepared to deal with unexpected situations and more able to put myself in participants' shoes during the training process.

As mentioned before, in the first two months of my practicum (before the writeshop), one of my tasks was to do research on the history of social change, and to start writing some drafts that could be used to stimulate discussions in the writeshop. After a couple of weeks of intensive reading on the topic, I was being strongly encouraged to start writing... And I got completely stuck. For a few days, I was not able to write a single sentence, and started feeling frustrated and embarrassed for not being

able to do my work. I even started questioning if I was the right person to be in that position, after all that was a writing project and I was not able to write myself. I decided to go deeper into my “stuckness”: I did a few 15-minute free writing sessions about my writing block, and scheduled a meeting with my supervisor to talk about what I had written and what I had been going through. I was trying to get in contact with what was keeping me from writing, why was it that I did not feel comfortable, and what would I feel comfortable to write about. Of course insecurity was playing a role there, and at one point I started doubting that I even had anything to write about.

The conversation with my supervisor helped me to deal with my writing block, and also had a crucial influence on my self-confidence to co-facilitate the writeshop. He was very understanding, supportive, and reinforced that I was aiming at a very first draft, almost a brainstorm, not any kind of final product. Moreover, according to my supervisor, there was something very positive about me going through that experience a month before the writeshop: as he and the other co-facilitator had more experience in writing and did not suffer with such “stuckness” very often anymore, I would be the only co-facilitator able to truly relate to and empathize with participants who also experienced that. In other words, my writing experience and my reflection on it would bring me some new lessons that would add to my trainer toolbox.

Even though I immediately said ‘yes’ when invited to join the writeshop facilitation team, there were some factors that affected my self-confidence in being able to play that role successfully: one was the fact that I am not a particularly experienced writer and did not have any experience in facilitating writeshops; and the other was my lack of experience with the Barefoot Guides processes. Focusing on the role of a facilitator helped deal with both factors. According to Rothwell (2008), “in most cases, a facilitator focuses on group dynamics or group process – that is, what is happening in

the group – rather than focusing on content or solutions” (p.114), and this is exactly what I have experience with. In other words, I made the conscious decision of trusting that the other facilitators would make sure the content of the writeshop was accurate, appropriate and aligned with the Barefoot Guides processes, and that I would focus more on group dynamics and engagement. Being aware of my abilities and the contributions I could bring to the process was crucial to increase my self-confidence as a trainer and for me to feel comfortable in co-facilitating the writeshop, even without being an expert on the content.

During the first two months of my practicum I had also been invited to watch and contribute to other two workshops/conferences designed and facilitated by CDRA (the main organization in charge of the Barefoot Guides and where I was doing my practicum). These two events focused on specific areas (monitoring and evaluation, and early childhood development) and had a South African audience, which was not the case for the BFG4 writeshop. Nevertheless, joining these events made me more familiar with the methodologies and models used at CDRA, and which have strongly influenced the Barefoot Guides processes. In fact, the Head, Heart, and Feet model was one of the concepts I was exposed to through readings and these learning events. My role in both events was not nearly as active as in the BFG4 writeshop, but I did have the opportunity to facilitate a couple of activities, which reduced my anxiety around “stepping on the facilitator’s shoes” for the very first time.

All of these previous experiences and approaches to my role as a facilitator have helped me to increase my self-confidence as a trainer. Because I knew the structure of the Experiential Learning process very clearly and had built a relationship of trust with the other facilitators, I was able to fully trust the process. I felt confident on my ability to facilitate the process, even though I was not particularly knowledgeable of the

content. Having to play the roles of facilitator and learner also allowed me to continuously approach the process from a learner's perspective: I was there to learn even while I was facilitating.

According to Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (LSI), my preferred learning style is Assimilator, which means I am "best at understanding a wide range of information and putting into concise, logical form" (Kolb, Boyatzis, and Mainemelis, 2001, p.5), and that I tend to focus more on abstract concepts and ideas rather than on people, feelings, and relationships. It is interesting, however, how my experience in the BFG4 writeshop allowed me to stretch that, as, by focusing on the process, I was able to learn more from active experience (facilitating) and from reflective observation (actively watching others facilitate), which resulted in a meaningful learning experience to me. I also enjoyed a safer learning environment for myself based on the trust on the facilitation team, my increased self-confidence as a facilitator, and my ability to trust the process. In this sense, I believe I started to "unfreeze" at the very beginning of the writeshop, when I realized the process was going to be different than what I was used to, but I still trusted it. I "moved" as I facilitated and experimented, allowing me to simultaneously be a learner and a facilitator, and putting my increased level of self-confidence into practice. And I started to "refreeze" when one of the other facilitators gave me feedback on my facilitation skills, saying how amazed he was with my ability to "hold the space" while facilitating group discussions. His comment confirmed the trust I had deposited on the process and on my own facilitation skills, and allowed me to consolidate this higher level of self-confidence and realistic self-image.

Joining the BFG4 facilitation team also meant participating in the design of the writeshop, and this was where this experience differed the most from my previous training experiences, which came mainly from being a trainer at AFS Intercultural

Programs. AFS is an international organization and even though most of my training experience took place in South America, I realized during my experience in South Africa that at AFS I learned to have a quite low-context approach to trainings. This was reinforced during my time at SIT, where training processes had to be recorded in written and explained in details. According to Tirmizi (2008), in high-context cultures people tend to pay closer attention to the context around situations, and “it is not necessary to provide explicit information since people already know it through continuous interaction” (p.31). Edward T. Hall (1989) explains that “a low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite, i.e., the mass of information is vested in the explicit code” (p.91). At AFS, I am used to writing Training Session Outlines, with goals and learning objectives clearly stated, and a detailed description of activities step-by-step. What I noticed in the three learning events I participated at in South Africa was that goals, objectives, needs assessments, and training design were discussed and shared in an implicit (and mostly informal) way, and many of these items were never written anywhere. Moreover, in all three cases, the learning events I participated at were part of a longer process that had started a couple of years earlier. This meant that designers and facilitators (and, in some cases, participants) had already been involved in the projects and had been working together for a while, and, therefore, were more able than me to decode the implicit information that was part of the context.

Rothwell (2008) claims that “it is important at the outset of a facilitation event to clarify what is expected of participants. That sometimes takes the form of a facilitated discussion about ground rules for the group or rules of engagement for the group” (p.115). In the BFG4 writeshop, however, there was never the intention of taking time to specifically talk about participants’ expectations and group norms. The only moment in which some kind of rules of engagement was explicitly talked about (although they

were never called “rules”) was in preparation for the feedback groups. In these instances, participants were given a focus for their feedback and some guidelines on how to approach it, such as the Head, Heart, and Feet model. To me, personally, this difference on how to approach norms and expectations was an exercise of flexibility and trust in the process. It allowed me experiment with a different training structure and to consciously work on my anxiety in dealing with the unknown and on handling stress. This was also the case regarding the fact that, when the writeshop started, we only had a detailed plan for the first day and a half. Having a reasonably concrete idea of the product we wanted to create helped me deal with the uncertainty of not knowing what would happen after the second day. Such concrete idea came from the previous versions of the Barefoot Guide (BFG 1, 2, and 3), that is, I knew what a Barefoot Guide usually looks and reads like, even though we still did not have a final design for the BFG4.

One of questions I had before the writeshop related to the Barefoot Guides process as a whole was: can anyone be(come) a writer? In my case, the question was related to the writeshop participants, and also reflected a doubt about my own role as one of the writers of the BFG4. According to the Bench Marks Foundation (2012), “everybody who is able to think can write powerfully (...) With practice the problems of spelling and grammar will improve” (p.14). Kellogg (2008) reinforces that idea, saying that “thinking is so closely linked to writing, at least in mature adults, that the two are practically twins. Individuals who write well are seen as substantive thinkers, for example” (p.2). Rao (2007) also agrees, as according to him “essentially, writing is a way of expressing thinking and good writing comes from good thinking” (p.104). For the sources above, the most important thing for anyone to become a writer is practice, constant practice. Even though I do not think that a single writeshop, or even my

practicum as a whole, would be enough for me to become a writer, I did observe a significant improvement in my attitudes towards writing, as well as my writing skills.

My main change in attitude was that I do not see a writer's block as the end of the writing process anymore. Now I know that using free writing and writing about my own block can help me find my voice and write a piece that feels more true to me and, consequently, that I enjoy writing. The experience of writing during the writeshop, in a moment I felt I should be busy with other things, also showed me that I do not need a special, perfect, idealized moment to write, that is, I do not need to wait for inspiration in order to start writing. This is a significant change in attitude, as I now allow myself to attempt to write at any time. In terms of skills, I feel that my writing flows a lot more easily now (both the writing process and the writing outcomes). I am now able to have a first round of pure writing without worrying about grammar or spelling, a second round of reading through, editing, and correcting grammar, and a third round of polishing. This is all possible because I have managed to reduce the anxiety of wanting to have my first draft be my final draft. Finally, during the writeshop I also exercised writing in one language (Portuguese) and sharing my ideas in another language (English), which means my ability to translate, rephrase, and summarize ideas has also improved. In general, I believe that my experience with the BFG4 writeshop has allowed me to improve as a trainer and a writer, both in terms of attitudes and skills.

### **Part III**

#### **The Analysis and the Application: The Role Played by Language**

Even though the BFG4 writeshop participants were from 16 different countries and spoke a variety of languages, the writeshop was conducted only in English. The majority of participants did not have English as their first language, and participants had different levels of proficiency in English (both in writing and speaking skills). Therefore, two strategies were used to address this potential barrier. Firstly, during the writeshop participants were free to write in their preferred languages, as long as they were able to share their ideas and challenges orally in their small groups in English. Some participants chose to write in English from the beginning, while others opted to write their first drafts in their preferred languages, and then either translate it themselves or get it translated into English by someone else. Secondly, the composition of the group also allowed for the spontaneous creation of informal ‘language support groups,’ since there were two or more speakers of most languages in the room (French, Finnish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Russian, and Afrikaans). Such composition, however, was not planned: in some cases people came from the same country and/or organization, and in others it was mere coincidence.

The linguistic diversity and group configuration caught my attention from the beginning, and, as a non-native speaker of English, I also had to constantly make choices regarding language use. Language use was not part of the pre-writeshop discussions and, being part of the writeshop design team, I do not recall us giving any special attention to it before we met the group. The three strategies described above were decided upon as the writeshop started, and were based on previous experiences the other two designers had with writeshops. Moreover, there was no plan from collecting



participants' impressions and experiences regarding language use. The lack of a more structured approach to language is what led me to investigate the topic in this capstone.

The overarching question for this research is: In the participants' perspective, how has language use influenced the BFG4 writeshop? The sub-questions are: How did participants feel during the writeshop regarding language use? How did the strategies used affect participants' experience? And finally, what other strategies can be used in future writeshops? First, I will present a brief literature review on language, culture, power, and the role of global English in training and writeshop contexts. Second, I will detail the process I used to collect data from the BFG4 writeshop participants regarding language use. And finally, I will present what can be learned from the data, relating it back to the research questions. It is important to emphasize that this research only reflects the experience of the people who participated in the interviews. It does not claim to be using a representative sample of any sort or to be generalizable for this specific writeshop or any writeshops in general.

## **Literature Review**

### **Language and Culture**

The interrelation between language and culture has been approached through the lens of linguistics, anthropology, and intercultural communication, among other fields. According to Fantini (2012), "there can be no doubt that language is an important aspect of every culture. Language is that proverbial two-edged sword – it arises from culture and, conversely, it influences and affects culture" (p.264). This means that language and culture influence and shape each other, and therefore become intrinsically related. Bennett (1997) highlights the cultural dimension of language, arguing that more than

simply being a tool for communication, language is “a ‘system of representation’ for perception and thinking. (...) It directs how we experience reality.”(p.16). Based on the work of Whorf, Bennett also claims that “language largely determines the way in which we understand our reality” (p.17); it is interrelated to thought and perception.

Fantini also explains that the way the human experience is encoded varies a lot from one language to another, since each one divides and classifies people, things and structures differently. Children are socialized into each culture through language, and therefore see and understand the world through a specific cultural lens and express their view through a specific language structure. The author also explains that

because languages all provide a particular way of facilitating thoughts (within their own culture), they also prevent one from grasping possibilities inherent and encoded in other systems. In the end, the specific language (our native tongue), which serves us so well throughout our entire life, becomes the biggest impediment to another view of the same world. (Fantini, 2012, p.265)

In that sense, learning and using a new language entails learning about a new culture, and a new way to view and encode the world. Similarly, when communicating in a language other than our native tongue, we constantly negotiate the perspectives through which we express our thoughts and ideas. Therefore, in a training context that uses one common language for communication among speakers of several different languages, there is an array of world views that become more difficult (if possible at all) to be expressed and understood.

### **Language and Power**

The relation between language and power is often not as evidenced as that between language and culture. More than changing language itself (which it also does), power plays a central role in determining language use in different contexts. When Brock-Utne (2001) claims that “the language question is all about power” (p.117), she

refers less to linguistic characteristics, and more to political, historical, economic, and social aspects that influence language use. For Olshtain, & Nissim-Amitai (2004), “there is no doubt that political, economic and social power are closely linked to the dominant language(s) in society” (p.55), and this also applies to dominant languages in the global context.

Brock-Utne focuses her analysis on how historical and social aspects influence the relation between power and language – particularly regarding colonization and the predominance of colonial languages currently in the global context. She asks: “Who in the developing countries benefits from the continued use of the colonial languages as the languages of instruction? Certainly not the poor” (2001, p.115). One could easily add indigenous people around the world to the group that does not benefit from this. Moreover, the same question can be expanded beyond the educational context – poor and indigenous people (which, in many contexts, often overlap) certainly do not benefit either from the use of colonial language in business or even in the development sector, just to give a few examples. Mazrui (1996) further problematizes the issue:

Can any country approximate first-rank economic development if it relies overwhelmingly on foreign languages for its discourse on development and transformation? Will Africa ever effectively ‘take off’ when it is so tightly held hostage to the languages of the former imperial masters? (p. 3)

Finally, Brock-Utne argues that the use of indigenous languages (i.e., languages people are fluent in and that are part of their cultural heritage) in educational contexts can be one way to “redistribute power from the privileged few to the masses” (2001, p.117).

According to Ammon (2011), “language use has more functions than communication and cognition (...) The attitudes which mainly come into play here are not only related to the identity function of language” (p.120). The author emphasizes how language use reflects unequal relationships both in communication and in

international relations. He analyzes the internationalization of languages and what makes some languages stronger than others. For the author, having a large number of speakers can make a language attractive to foreign learners, but ultimately “the total economic strength of languages is perhaps an even more reliable indicator of their international or global rank than numerical strength” (p.110). According to him, the economic strength of languages can be measure “by total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the speakers, usually native or native and second-language speakers” (p.110-111). The unequal power relationship among different languages from a political, historical, social and economic perspective is part of the elements that allowed English to become the main global language of the present time.

### **English as a Global Language**

Different authors adopt different criteria for considering English a global or an international language. According to Ammon (2003), “English is by far the most useful language for international communication today or, in other words, (...) comprehensive international communication (without the help of translation services) requires the knowledge of English” (p.23). The author here points out that more than simply being useful, the English language has become a requirement for communication in most international settings – particularly if these include people from a variety of continents. In a later article, Ammon (2011) also argues that “English may be the only language connected to (virtually) all other languages *directly*, since every language community contains some multilinguals with English in their repertoires” (p.104). This may be an overstatement, as it is impossible to guarantee that every single language community in the world (and there are many of them) have individuals who can speak some level of English as well. Fantini (2012), on the other hand, agrees that the English language is

prevalent worldwide, but ponders that “certainly not all cross-cultural communication takes place in English. More commonly, it transpires in one, two, or several languages” (p.270). For him, the work that needs to be continuously done is to prepare people to join intercultural interactions using multiple languages.

Olshtain and Nissim-Amitai (2004) seem to approach the topic from a different perspective: they point out that English is “the major language of access to information” (p.54). This can partially explain why English is often the first option for those who learn a foreign language – which leads us back to the relation between power and language. With so many non-native speakers of English spread around the world – possibly exceeding the number of native speakers – and with the status (according to several authors) of global language, it is difficult to determine whom English ‘belongs to’, which English is correct (and which is not), and who should adapt to whom. Most importantly, it becomes less and less clear if the answers to these questions are relevant at all. Mufwene (2011) explains that

typically, speakers of ‘native Englishes’ have spoken their varieties with some arrogance; the burden has been on speakers of ‘non-native Englishes,’ which are generally treated as ‘deviations’ from the metropolitan norms (see Swaan 2007, citing Quirk 1990 ), to ‘improve’ their intelligibility – not the other way around. (p.46)

Such arrogance reflects the power imbalance and the power dispute around the language – which happens at the state and language policy level as well as at level of the interpersonal interactions in different contexts.

### **Language Use in Training**

Language use in trainings is at the level of interpersonal interactions, but is also strongly influenced by political, historical, social and economic factors. Ammon (2011) differentiates types of interlingual communication, i.e., communication among native

speakers of different languages. According to him, interlingual communication can be asymmetrical, if the language is being used by natives and non-native speakers, or symmetrical, when all participants are non-native speakers and use what is called a *lingua franca*. According to Buldioski (2006), the fact that English is increasingly used as the *lingua franca* in international training environments,

frequently results in native speakers and fluent second language speakers gaining a certain power in the group. They are more visible and involved than other participants because they can express themselves in a more differentiated ways. This verbal power allows them to take positions in the group others can't inhabit. (p.86).

The author adds that, in such contexts, translating or speaking for others also influence the power dynamics within the group, creating an imbalance in communication and in interactions among participants in general.

Robinson (2007) reinforces the intrinsic relation between language and culture, and criticizes the approach to language as a purely functional tool in educational contexts. According to the author, "it is the fact that the functional and symbolic aspects of language are inseparable that makes language a key factor in designing any intervention in multilingual contexts" (p.549). He also emphasizes that language plays a role of allowing learners to take control of their own learning, being able to express their identities and have them validated, which consequently raises "the level of confidence to initiate, manage and sustain change" (p.550). Lucas and Katz (1994) make a similar argument in their analysis the use of students' native languages in schools and classrooms. They argue that the use of native languages is not only a pedagogical tool that increases students' access to prior knowledge, but also has psychological benefits, as students are being indirectly valued. Moreover, "the use of students' native languages can also increase their openness to learning by reducing the degree of language and culture shock they are encountering (Auerbach, 1993)" (Lucas

and Katz, 1994, p.539), as well as reducing the imbalanced status between their own language and English.

In their study on multilingual education, Alidou, Glanz, and Nikièma (2011) emphasize the need to foster a more balanced and complementary relation between different languages and cultures as a way to stop minority languages from being constantly suppressed by dominant languages. For them, “learning to live together requires recognising one’s own identity and heritage (language and culture) and feeling accepted by other members of the multilingual community, particularly those coming from dominant language communities” (p.534). This means that by welcoming different languages, an educator is also recognizing and validating different identities, worldviews, and cultures. Their study concludes that “bilingualism and multilingualism foster solidarity, social cohesion and peace within multilingual settings. Bi/multilingual education contributes to empowering language minority populations as it seeks their involvement and ownership of the educational processes” (p.535).

According to Fantini (2012), the shift from monolingualism to bilingualism starts with what he calls ‘incipient bilingualism’, i.e., “an attitude of willingness to engage with other with no common language (not an uncommon situation) and attempting to communicate. In this view, bilingualism begins with attitude, a willingness to engage, even when no skills exist” (p.269). In this sense, in a training context, even if participants and facilitators cannot speak each other’s languages, having such attitude could still make a difference in helping everyone to feel included and valued. In Arnolds’ (1991) words: “when we try to speak in the other’s language, however imperfectly, we communicate powerfully that we accept the other” (p.156).

Based on the above, we can list two strategies for approaching language use in training with multilingual groups: a) to conduct the training in and foster the use of

more than one language; and b) to stimulate participants to engage with each other and try to communicate even if they do not have any language in common. Another, more obvious but also more expensive, strategy is to use interpreters. Mundy, Mathias and Bekalo (2006) argue that it is possible to conduct a writeshop in more than one language with the help of interpreters, and report having achieved powerful results with that in different occasions, but they acknowledge the increase in cost as a factor to be taken into account. Buldioski (2006) also emphasizes the high costs of both simultaneous and consecutive interpretation, adding that the use of audio equipment for simultaneous interpretation may also create an official environment and limit spontaneity, whereas having an interpreter for consecutive translate may double or even triple activities time, drastically reducing the groups' energy level.

Finally, the strategy suggested by both Buldioski (2006) and Robinson (2007) would likely not cost as much as hiring interpreters, but may demand more time and reflection from designers and facilitators. For Buldioski, trainers need to take linguistic aspects into consideration not only as they deliver a training, but also when they plan the methodology. Robinson makes a similar point of saying that

a key issue will be how far language questions were factored in from the start, as part of the design of the programme and, if so, on what basis and what difference this made to the way the programme was structured. (p.544)

In short, what both authors defend is that no matter what strategies trainers employ, these need to be discussed and analyzed according to each context and each group during the methodological planning phase.

### **Data Collection**

In order to start to understand how language use affected the BFG4 writeshop process, I decided to collect data from participants themselves. The design and



facilitation team was purposely not included in the data collection process, because the goal of this research was not to analyze how the approach to language had been planned, but rather to focus on how it had affected participants' experience. Data collection was planned to have two stages: an online survey followed by an individual phone interview. The entire process will be described in details in this sub-section.

### **Sampling**

Ideally, the research would include all participants of the writeshop, given that it was a relatively small group (25 people). However, as part of the BFG4 Editorial Team, I was aware that the writeshop follow-up had already proved to be a challenge: communication was carried out via e-mail and phone, but a few of the participants never replied to our contacts, while a few others would take weeks or months to reply. With that in mind, I decided that it was more realistic to plan for collecting data from a sample of the participants, instead of aiming for the entire group.

The online survey was send via e-mail to all 25 participants, and 14 replies were received. For the individual interviews, the aim was to have at least six out of the 14 participants who answered the survey, i.e., nearly 25% of the writeshop participants. For the interviews, I used a non-randomized sample to guarantee I would include people with different perspectives and experiences regarding language. The criteria used for sampling were based on participants' answers to the survey: a) to have native speakers of as many different languages as possible; b) to include participants with different levels of perceived proficiency in English; c) to have people with different comfort levels when speaking and writing in English. A total of eight participants were selected and contacted for the individual interview, but only six of them replied accepting to be

interviewed. However, one of the six was not available for a phone interview and requested to answer the questions in written, via e-mail.

### **Methods**

As mentioned, the research methods chosen for this study were an online survey and individual interviews. Given the fact that participants are spread around several regions of the world, it was not feasible to include any in-person data collection method, unless it had been applied immediately after the writeshop itself. This, however, was not a possibility due to schedule limitations (most participants left immediately after the closing), and was also not ideal, as people would not have had the time to take some distance and reflect upon their experience. Since the preparatory process for the writeshop (submission of applications, logistics, and pre-event communication) as well as the follow-up had been mostly conducted via e-mail, it seemed reasonable to assume that all participants had enough internet access to receive e-mails and answer the survey.

The main goal of the online survey was to collect data to support the non-randomized sampling for the individual interviews. It was designed (see Appendix 3) to identify what language(s) participants felt they could best communicate in, how many languages participants were able to use to read, speak and write, and their level of comfort in speaking and writing in English. The survey included two open questions and six multiple choice questions. The first two questions were purposely phrased to ask on what languages participants felt they could best communicate in, instead of asking them what their native languages were. This decision was due to the fact that, for some people, the native language may not be the language they feel they can best communicate in (for example, if they have not used their native languages very often for several years). The main advantage of the online survey was its accessibility and user-

friendliness. As explained by Mann and Stewart (2013), “web-page-based surveys are also easy for respondents to complete, typically by selecting responses from predefined lists or entering text in boxes and then simply clicking a ‘submit’ button when finished” (p.89). Still, 56% of the writeshop participants answered the survey, and that percentage was only reached after two reminders were sent out.

The individual interview (see Appendix 4) aimed to investigate participants’ feelings and perceptions about language use and the strategies employed during the BFG4, as well as collect possible suggestions they might have for future writeshops. The interview had five open questions and was designed to last between 20 and 30 minutes, based on the assumption that the longer it took, the smaller the chance of participants being available and agreeing to be interviewed. As mentioned, five of the interviews were conducted by phone, and one of them was done via e-mail, due to the participant’s lack of availability. Phone interviews were scheduled within a period of two weeks, according to participants’ availability and time zone differences. Participants were informed about the objective of the research and the topic of the interview ahead of time, but the questions were not made available to them prior to the interview. All phone interviews were recorded after participants gave their consent, and notes were also taken during the interviews.

### **Limitations to Data Collection**

As with most research, this one was limited by a few of factors. Firstly, as mentioned, not all participants were interviewed using the same means (phone vs. e-mail). This may certainly have caused a difference in the way participants responded to the questions: those interviewed over the phone had to be more spontaneous and had

less time to think and change their answers than the participant interviewed via e-mail. Perhaps the most apparent limitation in this work was the fact that the survey was only available in English, and that only half of the participants had the possibility of being interviewed in their preferred language (English or Portuguese). This means they may have been able to express themselves better than those who had to be interviewed in their second or third language (English). There is certainly a level of contradiction in the fact that the survey and most of the interviews were in English, even though part of what they approached was participants' comfort level in using English. Another limitation was the fact that participants were being interviewed by a member of the design and facilitation team. There may have been an element of face saving in participants' answers, as they may have reduced or softened their criticism about the approach to language diversity in the writeshop due to who they were being interviewed by. These two limitations could have been minimized by translating the survey to all languages and by hiring external people to conduct the interviews in participants' preferred languages. These options, however, were not feasible due to lack of financial resources.

### **Ethical considerations**

The use of the data collection methods described above could potentially lead to some ethical issues that had to be addressed and minimized as much as possible. Firstly, the research was only started after the approval of the Human Subject Review application for exemption. Secondly, formal consent was asked from all research participants. It was explained in written in the survey, and in written and orally before the interviews started, that their names would not be disclosed or directly related to the data collected. Finally, participants were informed prior to the interview that they could

decline to answer any of the questions, and indicate if they would like any answers not to be recorded. This way, participants were explicitly given room to withdraw from the interview at any time.

## Data Analysis

### Participant Profile

#### *Online survey*

Number of participants	14
Language they can best communicate in speaking	6 English, 3 Finnish, 2 Russian, 1 French, 1 Portuguese, 1 Vietnamese, 1 Setswana, 1 Afrikaans, 1 isiZulu
Language they can best communicate in writing	7 English, 3 Finnish, 2 Russian, 1 French, 1 Portuguese, 1 Setswana, 1 Afrikaans,
Perceived level of proficiency in English	7 Fluent, 3 Native, 3 Intermediate, 1 Advanced
Comfort level to speak English	5 Very Comfortable, 4 Comfortable, 3 Depends on the Situation, 2 Somewhat uncomfortable
Comfort level to write in English	5 Very Comfortable, 5 Comfortable, 2 Depends on the Situation, 2 Somewhat uncomfortable

#### *Individual Interview*

Number of participants	6
Language more comfortable in speaking	2 English, 1 Finnish, 1 French, 1 Portuguese, 1 Vietnamese,
Language more comfortable in writing	3 English, 1 Finnish, 1 French, 1 Portuguese
Perceived level of proficiency in English	1 Fluent, 1 Advanced, 2 Intermediate, 2 Native

Comfort level to speak English	2 Very Comfortable, 1 Comfortable, 2 Depends on the Situation, 1 Somewhat uncomfortable
Comfort level to write in English	2 Very Comfortable, 2 Comfortable, 1 Depends on the Situation, 1 Somewhat uncomfortable

### **Presentation of lessons learned**

Once interview data was collected, the recordings and notes were carefully analyzed in order to draw the main common themes in participants' perspectives. The interviews were transcribed and quotes were selected and grouped according to the research sub-questions. Participants' quotes were divided into six theme tables (see Appendix 5), in which table 1 corresponds to sub-question 'How did participants feel during the writeshop regarding language use?' Tables 2 and 3 are related to sub-question 'How did the strategies used affect participants' experience?' And finally, tables 4 to 6 correspond to sub-question 'What other strategies can be used in future writeshops?' Each theme is presented in more details below focusing on what lessons can be learnt from these six participants' experience in the BFG4 writeshop. As mentioned earlier, the data collected in this research does not claim to be representative of writeshop participants in general and, therefore, is not generalizable.

#### ***Linguistic abilities can affect participants' emotional state***

Four out of the six participants interviewed could easily recall the feelings they experienced during the writeshop regarding language use. In most cases, the same participant reported having experienced both positive and negative feelings, such as the frustration for not being able to express oneself as one would like, but also the feeling of achievement in being able to understand what others were saying. An example from an English native speaker was the frustration with the slower pace of things, but also feeling intrigued and being stimulated by the language diversity present in the room.

One of the participants also commented on the emotional insecurity that the perceived lack of fluency can cause on people. The other English native speaker acknowledged their privilege in the context of the writeshop, which relates to Buldioski's (2006) comment on the power native speakers gain in multilingual groups as they can better express themselves, understand what others say, and potentially play the role of translators. Fantini (2012) makes a similar point in saying that native speakers of languages more widely used "must recognize their languages as both asset and liability. We cannot allow our languages of influence and power to prevent us from engaging in the dramatic experience that results when we attempt to communicate through other systems" (p.277).

***Writing in one's preferred language allows for the creation of a richer text***

Most non-native speakers of English emphasized the fact that they are able to develop their ideas more fully in their preferred language. Even those who did their writing in English during the entire writeshop acknowledged that they could have written more complex and rich pieces if they had used their preferred languages in the individual writing activities. All participants, including native speakers of English, agreed that the fact that people could write in their preferred language was a positive strategy, allowing them to express their ideas in a flexible and comfortable manner. However, two participants questioned peoples' ability to express their ideas orally in English in the small feedback groups, and also the kind of support the facilitation team was able to offer on that. These two comments relate to what Buldioski (2006) and Robinson (2007) say regarding the need to take linguistic aspects into account during the planning phase of a training, and to discuss how to approach and support language diversity in a group.

***Spontaneous creation of language subgroups is beneficial, but can affect social spaces and group dynamics***

Three out of six participants observed a spontaneous clustering by language in the group, particularly in the informal moments. This was possible due to the fact that there were two or more native speakers of most languages in the group. All participants mentioned positive aspects related to that, and two participants also mentioned challenges it might have created regarding the group dynamics. Among the advantages of having language subgroups, people mentioned: a) the possibility of having breaks to speak your own language, since speaking a second language (i.e. English) during the entire day can be tiring; b) the fact that it allows speakers of the same language to help one another whenever they have difficulties to communicate in English; c) in some situations, people were able to have parallel conversations in their preferred language, going further on the discussion than they would have been able to in English, and feeding it back into the large group; and d) that it helps people to feel less alone or isolated. Among the disadvantages mentioned was the fact that it can affect the integration of the group, creating isolated groups that do not interact with each other as much, which limits particularly interactions in the social spaces. Both participants that raised the negative aspects mentioned that such grouping did not have any negative impact in the work spaces.

***Linguistic diversity should be approached as an asset***

Three participants emphasized that multiculturalism and language diversity in groups like the one at the BFG4 workshop are significant assets, and should be further explored to add value to the process. One participant mentioned that people tend to share and learn from language diversity in social spaces, but that it could be beneficial



to also include a space for learning words and expressions in different languages in the writeshop agenda itself. Another participant added that the discussions in the writeshop could be enriched by creating space to talk about terms and expressions used to talk about social change in different languages. This could help expand our notions and concepts, and include ideas and worldviews that are only (or better) communicated through certain languages. Such suggestions relate to one of the strategies for dealing with multilingual groups mentioned in the literature review: to use and conduct the training in more than one language. Fantini (2012) also emphasizes the importance of fostering language diversity in cross-cultural contexts. According to him, “when speaking about the abilities needed for effective and appropriate cross-cultural interactions, the languages of both parties must form part of the equation. Where both are not included, an imbalance results” (p.277). Such imbalance relates back to the idea of linguistic privilege mentioned above.

#### *Use of translation in writeshops has advantages and disadvantages*

When asked about suggestions for how to better deal with language diversity in future writeshops, most participants mentioned the use of translation as one of the options. However, they acknowledged that the high costs are a limitation to that, as discussed in the literature review. One participant also mentioned the distance that the use of translation creates among participants as another limitation of it. According to this participant, the use of interpreters (doing either simultaneous or consecutive translation) means that participants are not able to talk directly with each other and, therefore, it becomes more difficult to build interpersonal relationships. Another participant reported that, in their previous experiences using whispered translation in workshops, the strategy worked well during the meeting, but did not support group

integration in the social spaces, causing people to divide into language sub-groups. Another participant mentioned the possible use of translation in the post-writing phase, i.e., having participants write everything in their preferred language and then have it translated. The problem with that, according to the participant, is that it defeats the purpose of having people exchange, comment, and give feedback on each other's pieces during the writeshop – and if that step is skipped, could we still call it a collectively written guide? This participant suggests that an alternative would be to have facilitators offer more structured and individualized support for non-natives to write in English.

### ***Creating an inclusive and collaborative environment is important***

Four out of six participants commented on the importance of cultivating an inclusive, supportive, and collaborative environment to deal with language diversity in the group. According to them, many of the language difficulties participants faced were significantly offset by the fact that they felt supported and respected by the rest of the group. Participants also reinforced the relevance of gestures of solidarity and empathy in the group, and how that made them feel included and confident to express their ideas. This aspect seems to have affected the group positively and supported the other strategies used during the writeshop. However, further investigation would be needed to identify what exactly in the facilitation and the group dynamics made it possible for such an environment to be created, i.e., what would be concrete strategies to be repeated in future writeshops in order to foster this kind of environment.

### **Reflections on Research Questions**

The research conducted was able to generate reflection and collect comments, opinions, and experiences regarding language use from six participants of the BFG4 writeshop. This way, the main research question and the three sub-questions were

answered based on the perspective of the participants interviewed. The main reflections for each question are presented below.

*Sub-Question 1: How did participants feel regarding language use during the writeshop?*

Participants interviewed reported having experienced positive and negative feelings, as well as lack of feelings, regarding language use. Frustration with the inability to fully communicate and with the pace of things was the main negative feelings mentioned. However, people also felt supported by the group, stimulated and intrigued by language diversity, and experienced a sense of accomplishment when able to communicate successfully (express themselves and understand what others said).

*Sub-Question 2: How did the strategies used affect participants' experience?*

The two strategies used were: allowing participants to do their individual writing in their preferred language; and having two or more speakers of each language in the group. Most participants reported that the first strategy had a positive impact in the group, allowing people to develop richer and more complex ideas in their writings. Nevertheless, for some participants it was not always clear if people were able to express orally in English what they had written, and how much support people would have to eventually translate their pieces into English. Regarding the second strategy, participants observed the spontaneous creation of language sub-groups, which was mostly seen as a positive consequence as it allowed speakers of the same language to support one another. Such sub-groups, however, may have limited social interactions and the integration of the group as a whole.

*Sub-Question 3: What other strategies can be used in future writeshops?*

Participants mentioned three main strategies for future use, but also acknowledged the limitations of one of them. The first strategy was to continue to create an inclusive

and supportive environment that fosters solidarity and empathy among participants, allowing them to use different languages and help each other as needed. The second strategy was to use language diversity more intentionally as an asset, stimulating language exchange among participants during the writeshop and relating it to social change to enrich and expand discussions. Finally, the third strategy was to use translation either during the writeshop or in the post-writing phase. All of these have their limitations, added costs being the main one. Participants also mentioned that the use of interpreters in the writeshop could create a distance in interpersonal interactions, and that translating people's writings only after they are ready would not allow for group feedback during the writing process. Thus, the use of translation seemed to be a controversial strategy, but one that can be considered depending on the circumstances.

*Main Research Question: In the participants' perspective, how has language use influenced the BFG4 writeshop?*

The answers to the sub-questions show that, in the perspective of the participants interviewed, language use significantly impacted the BFG4 writeshop, positively and negatively, and this could potentially be improved with the implementation of a few strategies. None of the participants felt that the negative impact was strong enough to compromise the writeshop, but two of them mentioned that language might have been one of the causes for some people's lack of response and engagement in the writeshop follow-up. Even though this hypothesis is a mere speculation (as those who did not engage in the follow-up were not interviewed themselves), it would be worth to further investigate it.

## Conclusion

This capstone paper had two main objectives: to describe and reflect on my participation as a co-designer, co-facilitator, and co-writer in the BFG4 writeshop; and to investigate and analyze participants' perception of the impacts of language use in the writeshop. The first objective was discussed in Parts I and II of this paper, and the second objective was detailed in Part III. Even though the research presented in Part III does not represent the opinions of all participants of the writeshop and is not generalizable, it certainly allowed me to learn more about the BFG4 writeshop process as well as about training design and training process.

I conclude this capstone paper having gained new insights and learned a few lessons regarding language use in trainings. First, I have learned that linguistic diversity in a group can affect a training process positively and negatively, and the way it is approached by the facilitators and the group plays an important role in determining that – or at least in offsetting the negative impacts. Therefore, whenever designing and conducting trainings in multilingual contexts, language use must be part of training design, and must be taken into account in the methodological planning and during the facilitation.

Second, I have realized that it can be beneficial to be upfront with participants regarding language use and linguistic diversity, and address both topics openly and collectively at the beginning of the training. This would allow trainers to remind the group of the constant effort made by non-native speakers of the language of instruction in order to communicate. Moreover, it could serve to stimulate native speakers to also engage in and commit to a constant effort during the training to a) have a patient and

understanding attitude towards the potential slower pace of things, and b) reduce their own pace in speaking, checking for understanding and/or rephrasing their contributions whenever possible and appropriate. By doing this, the trainer would be sharing with the group—equally among natives and non-native speakers—the responsibility for making communication flow well.

Third, the fact that the BFG4 writeshop was both conducted in English and took place in an English speaking environment reinforced the power imbalance between natives and non-native speakers of English. That is, native speakers were privileged both during the sessions and during the breaks or social spaces in interactions within group or with hotel staff. Perhaps if the writeshop had taken place in a non-English speaking context, the power dynamics in the group regarding language use could have been slightly inverted outside of the training room. Such a shift could make it easier and more spontaneous for native speakers of both the language of instruction and the language spoken in the surroundings to empathize with non-native speakers of either languages. The impacts of using this strategy, however, would need to be further investigated in future research.

Fourth, I have learned that, as with most things in life, there is no single right answer or one perfect solution for how to approach language diversity in trainings. There are several strategies that can be used, combined, and adapted to different contexts, needs, and goals. Moreover, not all participants (natives or not) experience language diversity the same way or need the same level of support. As trainers, what we can do is consider language as one of the essential training aspects to be taken into account; use the tools available to the best of our ability; and to keep our minds open to constantly learn new strategies, receive feedback, and reflect on the strategies we use.

Besides the lessons and insights mentioned above, writing this capstone paper has also contributed to my growth as a trainer and as a professional in general. I now have an increased awareness of the language aspect in trainings and the importance of intentionally addressing it since the planning phase. I improved my knowledge of theories on language use in multilingual contexts and on language and power, particularly regarding English as a global language. My research skills were also enhanced, as was my ability to deeply reflect on my training experiences, relating them to theories, and creating strategies to apply what I learned in future trainings. Finally, this capstone paper was an opportunity to relate the two fields in which I have professional experience – training and linguistics – and to discover that they influence each other more than I initially thought.

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## Appendix 1

### Barefoot Guide 4 Draft Agenda

	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
	<b>Connecting – surfacing from the inside-out</b>	<b>Surfacing – teasing out - visioning</b>	<b>Deepening - discovering</b>	<b>Resolving - Committing</b>	<b>Revisioning - planning</b>
Morning	Arrival / registration/ settling in	<p><b>Morning Ritual</b> Review group creative presentation Journalling</p> <p><b>World Cafe</b> Final prep 4 Iterations</p> <p><b>Open forum – what are we all seeing</b></p>	<p><b>Morning Ritual</b> Review group creative presentation Journalling</p> <p><b>Case studies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free-writing my story</li> <li>• Intro to action learning</li> <li>• Story-telling, listening, observing</li> <li>• Reflecting</li> <li>• Drawing learnings and insights</li> <li>• Questions for further inquiry</li> </ul>	<p><b>Morning Ritual</b> Review group creative presentation Journalling</p> <p><b>Writing</b> First drafts</p> <p><b>Feedback</b></p>	<p><b>Morning Ritual</b> Review group creative presentation Journalling</p> <p>Big Feedback – back to the big picture.</p> <p>Planning the completion of the writing.</p>
Afternoon	<p><b>Introductions</b> – warming up</p> <p><b>Personal change stories</b> Free-writing, 3 levels of listening groups</p>	<p><b>Visioning and Designing the BFG4 – Take 1</b></p> <p><b>Case studies and concept pieces – initial prep</b> Prepping brief descriptions of what</p>	<p><b>Writing</b> Developing a story-board and main messages</p> <p><b>Feedback</b></p>	<p><b>Writing</b> Second drafts</p>	Departure

	<p><b>World Café Prep – 5 groups prep for Tuesday morning</b></p> <p><b>3 case study groups</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where have I experienced / participated in social change?</li> <li>• What happened?</li> <li>• What really happened?</li> </ul> <p><b>1 Context group</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where is the world experiencing social change?</li> <li>• What is happening?</li> <li>• What is really happening?</li> </ul> <p><b>1 History and Theory group</b></p> <p>How has the world changed over the ages?          What theories and concepts have been used?          What theories and concepts are most useful?</p>	<p>people have brought (like in the EOIs)</p> <p>Mapping all the contributions</p> <p>Brainstorming what the BFG4 could be, for who, how etc.</p>	<p>(?? Field trip to some inspiring programmes in Joburg – but could be very time-consuming though it might shift some paradigms)</p>		
Evening	Review group	Review Group Writing?	Review Group Writing	Review Group Writing and developing word pictures for illustrations	

## Appendix 2

### The BFG4 Writeshop – “Exploring the real work of social change” The Story of the Week Ahead

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What could we take away from this writeshop?

- Why we are writing the BFG4, the audience and the design
- Writing Maps of our contribution (stories, insights, messages, practical considerations, images and questions)
- First drafts
- Ideas for other pieces to include
- New insights, ideas and questions for our own practices
- New friends and collaborators

#### Monday

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We will all have arrived, settled in and begin to meet each other... lunch together on Monday before heading into the Writeshop. We will get to know each other and something of the history of the Barefoot Guide, share and discuss the purpose and programme and hear about the plans for the online process, review groups, the evening out etc.

After this we launch ourselves into telling our stories and sharing our concepts of social change. As with most of our exercises we begin with individual preparation and free-writing and then into group sharing and conversations. This will be our first telling, to surface and share some what we have experienced and know, and then to distil these onto a “tablecloth” in preparation for the World Café on Tuesday.

At the end of the day a small Review Group will meet to review the day and look at the next.

We will be invited to “take a BFG to bed”, to see what kind of things in the first BFGs we would like to see (or not) in the fourth.

#### Tuesday

---

A surprise beginning... followed by some reflective journaling to capture overnight thoughts (daily ritual)

After this each group will finalise their tablecloths and then we launch into four sessions of the World Café where we all get to interact with all the stories, ideas, insights and images from each group. This is followed by an open conversation to reflect on what we saw

Just before lunch we will re-connect back to own story and see what the World Café says to it.

After lunch for the whole afternoon we will start “Visioning and Designing the BFG4 – Take 1”, what the BFG4 will look like when completed, who will read it and how they might use it.

At the end of the day a (different) small Review Group will meet to review the day and look at the next.

That evening we take a bus to the city to have supper and watch a play called “Rainbow Scars” a contemporary play about life in a changing South Africa.

## Wednesday

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Another surprise beginning... followed by some reflective journaling to capture overnight thoughts (daily ritual)

The morning will be a deep focus on your case studies and concepts. We will provide some easy frameworks (like Action Learning and three levels of listening) to guide your story-telling you're your explorations and discoveries, in groups. This will surface and develop some of the key insights and messages for your writing contributions to the BFG4.

Before lunch each group will share their biggest insights and questions.

After lunch we will begin work on our Writing Maps – tracing the case studies, the key insights, messages, practical considerations and images that will or could be in our writing contribution to the BFG4. We could choose to work in small groups or pairs or even individually. We will seek inspiration, ideas and feedback from each other.

We will gather at the end of the day to help the preparation for the Online Writeshop on Thursday morning.

At the end of the day a (different) small Review Group will meet to review the day and look at the next.

## Thursday

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Another surprise beginning... followed by some reflective journaling to capture overnight thoughts (daily ritual)

[There will be an online workshop with over 50 people from all over the world – some of us may want to attend]

We will have a gallery of all the Writing Maps, drawing ideas, inspiration and connections.

Most of the day for most people will then be spent refining the Maps and beginning the first drafts

After lunch we will get some feedback from the online workshop and have a poetry session to create poems and images for the BFG4.

Then people will continue to work on the Maps and drafts. We will end the day briefly sharing our progress

At the end of the day a (different) small Review Group will meet to review the day and look at the next.

## Friday

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Another surprise beginning... followed by some reflective journaling to capture overnight thoughts (daily ritual)

We could bring all we have produced together and assess what we have, see what it says to the BFG4 Vision and Design, and look for more ideas.

We will end by planning how we will continue and finish the writing, editing and illustrating of the BFG4.

And then parting words before lunch and departures...

## Appendix 3

### Survey to BFG4 Writeshop participants

Dear all,

As some of you may know, I'm doing a Masters on non-formal education and social justice, and I'm currently writing my thesis on the role language played in our Writeshop process last November.

I'm conducting this research as a SIT Graduate Institute ([www.sit.edu](http://www.sit.edu)) student, under the supervision of Professor Ryland White ([ryland.white@sit.edu](mailto:ryland.white@sit.edu)). The research has been approved by the Human Subjects Research Committee.

The following survey is part of my research. Your participation is a very valuable contribution, and I really appreciate if you can take a couple of minutes to answer this survey.

A next step in my research will be to carry out individual interviews with some of you, to be chosen based on your answers to the survey. This is the only reason I'm asking you to put your names here. I am the only person who will have access to your names, and your names or will not be disclosed in my thesis. Moreover, any information you prefer not to be included in the research will be removed as soon as you let me know.

Thank you so much for your help!

Best,

Elis

- 1) Name:
- 2) In what language do you feel that you can best communicate orally? (open)
- 3) In what language do you feel that you can best communicate in writing? (open)
- 4) How many languages do you speak?
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5 or more

5) In how many languages are able to read?

1

2

3

4

5 or more

6) In how many languages are you able to write?

1

2

3

4

5 or more

7) What do **you** consider to be your level of proficiency in English?

Please answer based on your own perception of your proficiency and on how you interpret the different levels.

Native

Fluent

Advanced

Intermediate

Beginner

8) How comfortable do you feel when speaking in English?

Very comfortable

Comfortable

Somewhat comfortable

Neither comfortable or uncomfortable

Somewhat uncomfortable

Uncomfortable

Very uncomfortable

Depends on the situation



9) How comfortable do you feel when writing in English?

Very comfortable

Comfortable

Somewhat comfortable

Neither comfortable or uncomfortable

Somewhat uncomfortable

Uncomfortable

Very uncomfortable

Depends on the situation

## Appendix 4

### Individual interviews

#### Invitation e-mail:

Dear XXX,

First of all, thank you very much for participating in the online survey I sent you as part of my research! Your contribution was very important!

As I explained earlier, I'm doing a Masters on non-formal education and social justice at SIT Graduate Institute ([www.sit.edu](http://www.sit.edu)) under the supervision of Professor Ryland White ([ryland.white@sit.edu](mailto:ryland.white@sit.edu)). The research has been approved by the Human Subjects Research Committee.

The next step in my research is to carry out individual interviews with part of the group, and based on your answers to the survey, you are one of the participants I would like to interview.

I will be conducting the interviews (by phone or Skype) between **April 27<sup>th</sup> and May 10<sup>th</sup>** at a time that is convenient for you. The interview will be about language use during the BFG4 Writeshop and it should last **about 30 minutes**.

If you agree to be interviewed, I will observe the follow guidelines:

- I will not disclose your name in my paper, and will only note your country of origin and language preferences when listing people interviewed;
- You may decline to answer any of my questions, and you can indicate if you would like any answers not to be recorded.

If you are willing to be interviewed, please let me know at your earliest convenience, indicating the times of your availability.

Thank you in advance!

Warm regards,

**Interview guidelines:**

All questions relate to your experience in the BFG4 writeshop.

Your answers will not be connected to your name and they will be reported in a manner that the information cannot be traced directly to you.

- 1) What feelings did you experience regarding language use during the writeshop?
- 2) What did you observe in the group regarding language use?
- 3) During the writeshop, participants had the option of writing in their preferred language. What did you think of that and why?
- 4) In the group of participants, there were two or more speakers of most languages (Finnish, French, Portuguese, Russian, Vietnamese). How do you think this affected the writeshop?
- 5) For future writeshops, what suggestions do you have for working in multilingual groups in a more effective way?

## Appendix 5

### Theme Tables from Data Collection

*Table 1 – Linguistic abilities can affect participants' emotional state*

Quote	Perceived level of proficiency in English	Comfort level to speak English	Comfort level to write in English
<p>“Sometimes I didn’t feel anything special, but then there were these moments, maybe I was more tired, or tired of using a language which is not my own, when I felt like I can’t express myself. I didn’t have so much challenges in understanding other people...”</p>	Intermediate	Depends on the situation	Depends on the situation
<p>“I don’t recall feeling feelings during the writeshop about language. I’m permanently aware that in a context like that I’m in a situation of privilege (...) In these contexts where most people are second language speakers and you are a native speaker, you need to take some care in your language use and also in the pace that you respond to things, because other people are doing double the translations in their minds. So it’s a question of managing privilege.”</p>	Native	Very comfortable	Very comfortable
<p>“The linguistic issue can cause an emotional insecurity in a person. You can almost have a different personality if you don’t master the language. (...) There were people who had difficulties and I observed that it caused a certain shyness, particularly in interpersonal relations.”</p>	Intermediate	Somewhat uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable
<p>“Since it was my native language, I’m sure I took that for granted quite a lot. (...) There were moments when I might have been a bit frustrated, that it goes a bit slow, or that we don’t have the full capacity to really express what we are trying to say. But often times I also find that sort of intriguing. So it can be frustrating, but it can also be really insightful and useful.”</p>	Native	Very comfortable	Very comfortable

*Table 2 – Writing in one’s preferred language allows for the creation of a richer text*

Quote	Perceived level of proficiency in English	Comfort level to speak English	Comfort level to write in English
“It was good to be able to write in [person’s language], of course, because my ideas are clearer in [person’s language] and also because they are more complex, I think. Using my vocabulary I can add some complexity to my purpose. While when I’m talking in English directly, I simplify it.”	Advanced	Depends on the situation	Comfortable
“I think I should have written in [person’s language] – it is my language, it is the language in which I feel better, in which I am able to better develop my ideas.”	Intermediate	Somewhat uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable
“We were all the time discussing and changing ideas in English, I needed to write in English. Even that I knew that I can’t... That I’m not so rich in English as I would be in [person’s language].”	Intermediate	Depends on the situation	Depends on the situation

*Table 3 – Spontaneous creation of language subgroups is beneficial, but can affect social spaces and group dynamics*

Quote	Perceived level of proficiency in English	Comfort level to speak English	Comfort level to write in English
“I think it is an added value, because when I was talking to [other participant] we were going further together, so we can reinject on the discussion in the purpose. I’m sure that people in the other language did the same. (...) Otherwise we would feel very lonely. And it would have been a shame, because maybe a person, even if she is able, she would not feel like expressing herself. Maybe she would have been more shy.”	Advanced	Depends on the situation	Comfortable
“I think it breaks a bit the dynamics. I think we could have established a stronger relationship which could have lasted after the writeshop. (...) I think it was a good strategy to support those who	Intermediate	Somewhat uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable

had more difficulties. And I saw that in my subgroup. (...) On the other hand, I think it may have affected in the sense of growth regarding English and the effort people make when they have a support, a crutch.”			
“I think that it is a benefit because you have these breaks that you can say something in your own language. It is quite stressing to use a language that you don’t speak fluently and at least for me it was quite nice that I happened to be close to [other participant] and be able to discuss in [person’s language]”	Intermediate	Depends on the situation	Depends on the situation
“I think it affected the social spaces a lot. (...) I understand it, because having to operate in English when it is your second or third language is exhausting. So from that point of view I could understand it, but it limits the social dimensions, and therefore the ideas that might be generated in that social space. (...) It didn’t seem an issue to me [during the work part].”	Native	Very comfortable	Very comfortable

*Table 4 – Linguistic diversity should be approached as an asset*

Quote	Perceived level of proficiency in English	Comfort level to speak English	Comfort level to write in English
“It was quite nice being in a space where sometimes French was also going on.”	Native	Very comfortable	Very comfortable
“I think that this richness, this diversity exists, so it has to be used. We can create moments there to share words, greetings, celebrations, that is, the current things in language. (...) If that exists, let’s make this existence clear and bring this as an added value to the writeshop.”	Intermediate	Somewhat uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable
“It might be a really interesting exercise to say ‘in your native language, what are the top 3 to 5 ideas that make up social change to you’. (...) It might be a really interesting exercise just to uncover our little definitional self. (...) How do you use it as an	Native	Very comfortable	Very comfortable

asset more? That would have been fun to see.”			
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*Table 5 – Use of translation in writeshops has advantages and disadvantages*

Quote	Perceived level of proficiency in English	Comfort level to speak English	Comfort level to write in English
“Other solution could be, for example, translation. But if you add translation you also add a lot of distance between people.”	Advanced	Depends on the situation	Comfortable
“Give more support to those who don’t feel confident. Even if you say that you can write in your own language, but then you have this challenge of who will translate – is there money to translate? (...) I think the translation is so expensive, that you can also facilitate somebody [non-native] to write in English. You can get an idea of what the person wants to say and someone else to put that into words. More like personal support from the facilitators, not just from other participants.”	Intermediate	Depends on the situation	Depends on the situation
“Either you limit the number of people that you can bring, and you make language your criteria. Or you use translation, which costs money. (...) We did incredibly well in a meeting with the [whispering] translation. But in the social spaces the Spanish speakers separated off, and how could they not have? (...) So I think that is just the reality of this type of situation. It is not ideal, but it is how it is.”	Native	Very comfortable	Very comfortable

*Table 6 – Creating an inclusive and collaborative environment is important*

Quote	Perceived level of proficiency in English	Comfort level to speak English	Comfort level to write in English
“I was very afraid for myself not to be able to understand everything, and I didn’t feel at all excluded, when I had some problems of expression	Advanced	Depends on the situation	Comfortable

<p>everybody helped me (...) Maintain this inclusiveness and this solidarity between people. There was a lot of solidarity. When somebody didn't understand something, you always found somebody to help you. (...) The essential is to have the ears ready for it [understanding people] and the mind as well. So open your mind."</p>			
<p>"During the writeshop I felt so confident, and trusted the other people. The atmosphere was so good, and the people were so great, so it wasn't so disturbing. Everybody wanted to understand what other people wanted to say, which is great."</p>	Intermediate	Somewhat uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable
<p>"The environment that was cultivated overall is also gonna be a huge aspect of how comfortable people feel going back and forth from their own language to the shared language, and I think that was handled really well. If it wasn't an inclusive space, people wouldn't bring both languages to the table in the same way."</p>	Native	Very comfortable	Very comfortable