Preparedness in diverse communities: Citizen translation for community engagement

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ABSTRACT

Emergency preparedness for CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) communities has been identified as a significant gap in DRM (disaster risk management) research and practice. Using a community engagement approach, a practitioner in Wellington, New Zealand implemented a citizen translation project to have 45 volunteers from 15 communities facilitate translations for a new local Earthquake Preparedness Guide, in partnership with local Civil Defence and an international crisis translation team, INTERACT. Initial findings have shown that consultation with community members over the translation of their language has been a powerful way to establish initial links into the community and instigate discussion and feedback about emergency preparedness. It has led to further projects including emergency messaging translations. This work in progress raises an important and often overlooked discourse on inclusiveness in DRM activities and the potential for community engagement to play a role in CALD community preparedness.

Keywords

Citizen Translation, Community Engagement, Preparedness, CALD, Diversity

INTRODUCTION

Local government and Civil Defence groups are recognising the need to establish better means for communication and coordination with community groups during a response. This imperative was confirmed by an official review of the emergency response to the February 2011 Canterbury earthquake in the South Island of New Zealand (Zorn et al., 2016). International studies have also confirmed that building trust with communities is a key element of ensuring successful response and recovery outcomes (Paton, 2007). Furthermore, the positive impact from community-led initiatives during the Canterbury response, such as the Student Volunteer Army and Christchurch City Council's Share an Idea Project, highlighted that communities can be and need to be included as part of the solution to the aftermath of a major disaster instead of simply being recipients of an official response (Zorn et al., 2016).

The long-term recovery experience in Canterbury has highlighted the significant psychological impact of a major disaster. International research has identified 'Five Essential Elements' that promote a better recovery from traumatic events: safety, calm, connectedness, self and group efficacy, and hope (Hobfoll et al, 2007). Community development approaches promote connectedness and a sense of self and group efficacy- all of which, when combined with a sense of calm and safety, lead to having hope. It is not surprising that there was a high importance and level of involvement in community-led activities during the response and recovery of communities in Canterbury, and there remains an ongoing huge investment in the region to developing community leadership and partnerships between community groups and local government during the response and now recovery.

There is considerable value in adopting a community engagement approach as an organisation to promote preparedness in conjunction with supporting connectedness and efficacy. As opposed to community-led development which has a focus on the priorities determined by the community and is community driven, a community engagement approach can be utilised by staff when there are predetermined priorities driven by the organisation (such as preparedness). A community engagement approach uses community development principles of acknowledging the expertise and relying on the assets and talents that exist within a community.

By 'handing over the reigns' of decision-making as much as possible, community members that do engage with an interest in preparedness feel a sense of ownership over the plans that they help develop, and they work together (promoting connectedness) to develop the plans and build on their self and group efficacy. This builds confidence and relationships that may someday be called upon in the event of an emergency. International studies on using a community engagement approach in preparedness have shown considerable success among different cultures (Paton, 2013).

Within CALD communities in Canterbury, there were examples of community-led initiatives that benefitted the wider community as a whole. Some examples of support are widely known, such as the Somali women who had organised to cook and deliver meals to the National Guard when the troops first arrived to guard the Red Zone, and a group of Afghan men who had participated in the digging out of liquefaction wherever it was needed (Wylie, 2012). The local iwi (New Zealand indigenous tribe or extended kinship grouping), Ngai Tahu, played such an integral part in the response and recovery that a partnership for response work between the iwi and Christchurch City Council was written into legislation (Zorn et al., 2016).

However in many cases within CALD communities, this cohort of potentially resilient community members was left particularly vulnerable because they did not have access to information in their language. This included critical health messaging such as the instructions for everyone to boil their water, or to avoid swimming in the river due to pollution from the event- let alone messages about the response and where they can access or contribute to resources and supports (Wylie, 2012). A study looking at refugee background community members' response to the 2011 earthquake in Canterbury highlighted the need to consult with community leaders before an event happens and engage with them to develop their own plan for response (Marlowe, 2013).

The Christchurch Language Information Network Group (CLING) formed after the 2011 earthquake as a collaboration of major stakeholders who work together to improve DRM-related information-sharing and connections to CALD communities. They published the internationally-recognised 'Best Practice Guidelines: Engaging with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities in Times of Disaster' in 2012. The group summarised their findings with one core message:

"If you want to communicate well with CALD communities following a disaster, don't wait until something really bad happens. Get to know them now – build a relationship with CALD communities based on mutual trust, respect and understanding," (Wylie, 2012, p 37).

THE WELLINGTON CONTEXT

Wellington, the capital of New Zealand, is known in the DRM community as the home of the Joint Centre for Disaster Research (JCDR) based at Massey University; additionally Wellington is also one of the world's 100 Resilient Cities (Wellington City Council, 2017). It is a hub of local innovation and expertise in the DRM field, chosen in 2013 to be an International Centre of Excellence in Community Resilience with the United Nations Integrated Research on Disaster Risk Programme (Neely et al, 2014). It is also a city that is well-known for its high risk of having a strong earthquake or tsunami (Wellington City Council, n.d.).

It is within this context that our local Civil Defence organisation, WREMO (Wellington Region Emergency Management Office) engages communities through their Community Resilience Team. The community engagement approach used by their team uses best practice, cutting-edge methods for supporting local neighbourhoods to organise their own Community Response Plan for how they will support each other and respond in the event of an emergency. Through this work they promote the importance of community connectedness for a more positive recovery, and they actively seek partnerships with local organisations and groups who can support everyone to grow stronger relationships where they live. Some community-driven initiatives, such as painting tsunami blue lines on the streets to show people where it would be safe to evacuate, were a result of community engagement and support by the Community Resilience Team (Neely et al, 2014).

The Kaikoura earthquake in November 2016 significantly affected Wellington residents and businesses. It served as a wake-up call for local government and the wider community to realise how much additional work is needed to prepare Wellington for the likely event of an even-more severe earthquake. Among many issues that were identified, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working with diverse groups and CALD community members noticed the obvious lack in awareness about preparedness especially in these community groups as well as access to important messaging in their own languages.

In August 2017, WREMO initiated a new project in partnership with New Zealand Red Cross, who has established connections into CALD communities as well as a prominent role in DRM activities. WREMO's Community Resilience Team Manager proposed to engage community volunteers to facilitate 15 community-based translations for their new Earthquake Preparedness Guide. The aim of this Community Translation Project was not only to reach the end goal of having WREMO's new guide available in 15 languages, but importantly to

engage with CALD communities in a consultative process that uses their expertise in language and cross-cultural factors to enable the opportunity for a discussion about preparedness.

THE PROJECT PROPOSAL AND DEVELOPMENT

The proposal included brief guidelines for the Community Development Worker (CDW) at New Zealand Red Cross to design and coordinate the Community Translation Project: 15 different languages are to be translated, with each language having 3 volunteers on a team, and each volunteer to receive a $150 gift card at the end of their involvement (funded by WREMO). Additional funding was allocated for training and catering. The translations were anticipated to be completed in about six weeks, but as neither the Community Resilience Team nor the Community Development Worker had experience in coordinating translations, the timing was initially an unknown factor.

Table 1. List of Languages selected for the Community Translation Project

1. Arabic
2. Spanish
3. Traditional Chinese
4. Simplified Chinese
5. Burmese
6. Assyrian
7. Tamil
8. Khmer
9. Amharic
10. Russian
11. Samoan
12. Korean
13. Vietnamese
14. Somali
15. Hindi
16. Farsi

Notes:　1) Te reo Māori is one of the three official languages of New Zealand (along with Sign Language and English); a separate process is underway to develop an appropriate guide in te reo.

2) The Assyrian translation was not completed due to the inability to identify appropriate and available translation volunteers.

3) Languages were selected according to data that identified the languages used in the Wellington Region that have the highest numbers of people who are not literate in English.

INTERACT: International Network on Crisis Translation

During the initial design phase of the project, the CDW linked in with the INTERACT team, a group of internationally-based researchers with a background in crisis translation work. It was through this incredibly fortunate third partnership that a robust process and training for citizen translation was designed specifically for the project, by researchers with translation expertise and international experience in mobilising citizen translators. The CDW has ongoing contact and advice from the team, and they have been able to use the local project to look at implications for crisis translation to be used in other parts of the world. Members of the INTERACT Team have published a case study about the WREMO/ New Zealand Red Cross translation project that goes into further detail about translation pedagogy and the training that they developed for this project (Federici & Cadwell, 2018). [More information about the INTERACT team can be found at https://sites.google.com/view/crisistranslation/home Part of the INTERACT project received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 734211.]

Process and Training Design

The researchers from the INTERACT team developed a process for each three-person team of volunteers to divide up the work, as well as a detailed training to provide a baseline of understanding about translation techniques that would promote relative consistency across the translation teams. They recommended to give volunteers four weeks' time to complete the work, and suggested how much time should be allocated for each step. The process was much more complicated than simply dividing the 2500-word guide into three parts; instead there would be three separate roles: a reviewer, a translator and a community liaison.

The reviewer volunteer would start the work by picking out all the 'rich points' (the words or phrases that are hard to translate in their particular language; common examples are a 'grab bag' or a 'community emergency hub'). Their first job was to find 'solutions' to each of these challenging words or phrases. The translator would then have to translate the entire guide so as to keep a consistent tone, dialect, and phrasing for the translation, incorporating the already-translated rich points. Then the reviewer would use a specific process to review the translation. When the three volunteers agreed on a final draft, the third volunteer, the community liaison, would take the translation out to the community, preferably 10 community members who do not speak English. They would review only the translation (not the English version), and answer four key questions about the guide in their own language to make sure they understood the most important messages from the translation.

From a translation perspective, this process means that the text would have a *bilingual* review when the three volunteers ensure that all of the content from the original English guide is effectively translated into the target language, and then the *monolingual* review by community members ensures that the key messages are clearly articulated in their language. From a community engagement perspective, this process means that both the volunteers and community members get to have a sense of ownership over the translation- that they are consulted as the experts for their own language for their community in Wellington.

It is important to note that we did not expect or imagine that a 'perfect' translation would result from this process. The INTERACT team stressed that a translation will never be perfect for any one person if it is going to be a translation that can be read and understood by the largest number of people- who all come from very different backgrounds and speak very differently within the same language group. The volunteers were challenged with the task of determining the best 'solution' for a translation that will reach the most people in Wellington who are not literate in English.

Translation volunteers were given the freedom to change expressions in the guide that would not translate well from a cultural perspective. For example, in the guide, there is advice for families to "try camping at home" for a weekend- meaning to try living in your house for a weekend without power. This activity would help you to see what would be involved and if you need to buy additional torches, cooking or other equipment to get you through the first few days in the event of an actual emergency. Camping is a very culturally-relevant Kiwi/ New Zealander activity that most families from New Zealand would be familiar with. However this is not the case in some cultures for community members now living in New Zealand, and so volunteers could come up with alternative phrases that translated the meaning of the phrase in a culturally-appropriate way, rather than a straight-forward literal translation.

Similarly, the phrase 'Drop, Cover, Hold' that is commonly used in English to teach people what to do during an earthquake, can be taken to be too commanding or authoritative if translated literally into some languages. Sometimes, to translate this three-word command, volunteers used longer phrases or ways of explaining the same advice in a culturally-appropriate way, with the aim that if an earthquake happened, the same behaviour would result from someone who read their translation as from someone who understood the English version. By recognising the volunteers' own expertise in how messages should be culturally translated as well, the process that INTERACT developed served to increase the sense of ownership that volunteers could have over their translations.

The feedback from volunteers about INTERACT's contribution to the training was consistently positive and that it was highly valued: for example a qualified translator and interpreter who attended the training remarked that he learned new techniques that he will use in his work; another linguistics lecturer gave feedback that the training was excellent and she learned from the training as well. Other volunteers who were new to the translation sector felt that they had learned very practical skills that would be a significant step towards developing their qualifications, potentially leading to new job possibilities. Overall the significant input from INTERACT not only ensured that the quality of translations would be as high as possible, but also they offered an opportunity to be upskilled and to gain valuable translation experience- volunteers were getting something out of the experience as they gave their contribution.

Recruitment and Training

The CDW used existing networks and their extended networks- universities, embassies, community groups and existing staff and volunteers- to find suitable volunteers to be Citizen Translators. To our surprise, professional translators, linguistics professors, interpreters and other bilingual professionals were eager to join as volunteers for some of the languages. A recent project by the New Zealand Society of Translators and Interpreters (NZSTI) had translators from 30 different languages volunteer to translate the Treaty of Waitangi, called the 'Treaty Times Thirty' project, and we found several highly-qualified volunteers through that network (NZSTI, 2016). For two of the language groups, it was very difficult to find anyone who could write fluently in their language as well as read fluently enough in English.

The training was delivered to most of the volunteers on 15 August, 2017 (three teams began after the training and underwent the training informally when they met with the CDW). The first part of the two-hour session was facilitated by a member of the Community Resilience Team from Civil Defence, who went over the content of the guide and made sure everyone was very clear about the key messages and had a chance to clarify any questions. Then the second part covered the technical translation training that was designed by the INTERACT team. This included translation techniques, how to use translation technology, and how to do background research. The session ended with everyone making a clear choice of their role for each team (reviewer, translator, or community liaison), with a role description and role agreement form that they signed agreeing to a basic code of conduct for their participation in the project.

IMPLEMENTATION: CHALLENGES AND LEARNINGS

There were challenges with certain characteristics of individual languages, cultural dynamics, interactions between volunteers, and unexpected events that arose throughout the initiative that resembled managing 15 different, loosely linked projects, rather than following one universal progression of tasks. For example, in Vietnamese, apparently there is a written and spoken language used by the older generation that is starkly different from the younger version. Both were represented on the team, and as there was no middle ground for this particular division in the language and not enough resources to do both, they were tasked with choosing which version would benefit the most Vietnamese speakers in Wellington who cannot read in English. In the Somali community, who can be tasked with translation is a very culturally-sensitive issue and this presented significant challenges with finding the right volunteers who fit both the desired skills required in the role description as well as meeting the acceptance of the community. The Somali community consultation was provided by the local library where the librarian has connections to the community; this provided a neutral space where community members could come regardless of tribal background to be able to read the guide and provide input.

Nevertheless, a majority of the teams were able to complete their process and have a final version ready for typesetting within the four-week period. Conflict management skills, volunteer management, and a significant background in cross-cultural work and community development were essential skills for the CDW to manage relationships and facilitate problem-solving with teams and on an individual basis. By having the role descriptions and agreements signed at the initial training which included a basic code of conduct, the ground rules and expectations were clearly set from the beginning and much easier to reinforce when needed.

Citizen translators came back from the community consultations with the consistent feedback that community members were eager to be consulted and provide feedback about their language, as it is an integral part of their culture. Many of the volunteers reported their plans for different ways to distribute the guides and promote the information within their community.

Some groups also reported significant concerns coming out of the discussions that were held: for example while community members were understanding what the guide meant by 'Drop, Cover, Hold,' some were not agreeing to follow that advice because, where they are from, buildings collapse, and they know that running outside is their best chance of survival in that context. Other apprehensions from the volunteers revolved around emergency messaging and how communities access information if they cannot find a bilingual community member during an emergency. From the 15 teams that completed the community translations, at least one member from each group expressed an interest in volunteering further to work on these concerns that they had brought to our attention.

No font is created equal: we were taken aback by the exceptional difficulty in typesetting each translation, which was submitted in Word format, into the graphic design tool that was used for the guide, InDesign. Characters for some languages would get distorted when they were transferred over, and for other languages a font didn't even exist for the graphic design software. Volunteers for many of the language groups had to come in to the office to sit with the staff at WREMO to ensure that the text was not distorted and was placed in the

right position on the guide. This process took months of additional time, and we had to readjust the volunteers' expectations of when they would be able to have a printed copy of their guides to distribute.

After almost a year of coordinating the project, the 15 translations are complete. The official community translation launch took place on 4 August 2018. In attendance were many of the volunteers, representatives from WREMO, New Zealand Red Cross, and INTERACT, as well as the Minister for Civil Defence and Emergency Management. The guides are available online at getprepared.nz/guides.

IMPLICATIONS

Volunteers who wished to continue with further work are now in the process of translating 13 pre-prepared emergency messages (about 800 words total) chosen by Civil Defence, and edited for easy translation through the INTERACT team. Local community radio and videographer colleagues are recording the volunteers saying the messages in order to have the messages ready to use on the radio and in video format on social media in the event of an emergency anywhere in New Zealand. The skills and relationships that the volunteers have gained through the initial guide translation are now being utilised in this new capacity, with the expectation that the work will continue to evolve after the emergency messaging. Additionally, our team members from WREMO, New Zealand Red Cross, and INTERACT are linked in to coordinate alongside ongoing work in Christchurch regarding preparedness messaging in other languages.

Involvement in the Community Translation Project has also led to many translation volunteers helping out with invitations in other languages to social activities that do not require a high level of English, such as women's swim groups, community barbeques, sewing and other opportunities- with a few volunteers even taking part in some of the activities to help guests navigate the language barrier. This focus on connectedness has helped bilingual community members play an increasingly important role in the wider lens of community resilience work, establishing their role and relationships with both organisations as well as community members.

CONCLUSION

The project is still officially a work in progress as the guides are just now getting promoted out in communities, and the CDW is currently completing the initial evaluation report and feedback that will inform future initiatives. The Community Translation Project in Wellington has achieved its initial aims to engage in preparedness discussions with CALD communities, and produce translated earthquake guides for distribution in the region. Despite not having prior examples and 'roadmaps' to work from, the guidance from crisis translation experts from INTERACT as well as the combined experience of community engagement and established community relationships played a large role in the successful outcomes. Further work is recommended to explore if this model could be adapted for other places, and if the community engagement model can be used to facilitate preparedness for CALD communities in more ways beyond translations. The CDW is specifically interested to explore the potential for building on these newly-established relationships in diverse communities that are based on preparedness, to be able to facilitate the much-needed connection between CALD community members and the place-based Community Response Plans initiated by WREMO's Community Resilience Team.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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