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The opportunities of multilingualism

**SUMMER
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Editorial from the CEO

For many people around the world, the ability to switch between two or more languages is a normal fact of life. People like Elsi (photo on front cover), who speaks six languages, chooses the language she uses depending on the context. In this edition, we focus on the impact of multilingualism and what this means for Bible translation and language development programs amongst our partner minority language communities. We ask the question 'What does it mean that God speaks my language if I use six?' And we dig a little deeper behind the phenomenon of language shift and loss occurring in many places around the world.



Wycliffe's ethos has always been about serving people - the speakers, writers and users of language. Whether through supporting diaspora and refugee communities to do translation (page 5), publishing Scriptures in diglot form (page 7), or facilitating language preservation for speakers of languages of an uncertain future, the changing linguistic and social landscape of today presents us with a fresh invitation to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit and respond in creative and compassionate ways.

Barry Borneman

Keen to find out more about Wycliffe?

Join us at an event or ring the nearest office to organise a time for a cuppa.

INFO

Go online to www.wycliffe.org.au/events/ or contact our closest office (details are below).



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Serving the forgotten language communities in a time of change

PHOTO: ZEKE DU PLESSIS

by Barry Borneman

In the world of Bible translation, the linguistic and social landscape looks very different from the situation 64 years ago when the Australian mission community started Wycliffe in Australia as a specialist mission to support Bible translation and training in linguistics.

PART ONE: Surveying the language landscape

How many languages?

According to SIL International's Ethnologue, current estimates indicate there are 7,099 languages spoken today, and this number is constantly in flux¹.

Multilingualism

These numbers however are not able to represent the many people in the world who speak two or more languages, and who are choosing to adopt national and international languages as part of their speech repertoire. Urbanisation, mass movement of people through chosen or forced migration, and the growing place of international languages in education and commerce as part and parcel of globalisation, all contribute to the complex multilingual world we live in today. While some isolated and predominantly monolingual communities do still remain, they are now the exception rather than the rule.

Language loss

A related factor impacting the number of active languages in the world today is language loss, which is happening at a faster rate than ever before in the history of humankind. According to the Ethnologue, 2,467 of the existing languages are endangered².

What does this mean for Bible translation?

According to <http://progress.Bible>, there are 3,324 languages with some Scripture as of December 2017³. Simple maths might suggest that this means the remainder of the languages need Bible translation. However, multilingualism and reduced number of speakers as language communities undergo language shift are major contributing factors in this discussion. Wycliffe's estimates suggest that there are over 114 million people, speaking 1,636 languages, likely to need some form of Bible translation to begin⁴.



PHOTO: MARC EWELL

¹ Simons, Gary F. and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). 2017. Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Twentieth edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <https://www.ethnologue.com/guides/how-many-languages>. ² <https://www.ethnologue.com/endangered-languages>. ³ <http://progress.Bible>. Online version 25 Jan 2018. ⁴ Statistics dated October 2017. <http://www.wycliffe.net/en/statistics>

Serving the forgotten language communities

PHOTO: MARC EWELL

PART TWO: The opportunities of multilingualism

God's mission to restore his kingdom on earth is a 'here and now' event. We may look back to the past at what God has done and into the future to what we hope for, but it is in the present that we are called to be God's people and to make God's name known. Wycliffe is called to embrace and respond to the linguistic reality of today.

More Bible translation programs now

Traditionally translation strategies considered language communities from a monolingual perspective. Increasing multilingualism, however, is not cause for despair. Local multilingual speakers are well equipped to contribute and

take the lead in translating their own Scriptures. In fact, there has never been more Bible translation occurring than now. Currently there are 2,584 active language programs across 170 countries involving the Wycliffe Global Alliance organisations and personnel and many other churches and missions⁵. This is a massive movement.

Serving language communities unbounded by location

Through Bible translation, we also now forge relationships with language communities that are no longer bound to one location. Speakers may be living on traditional land as they have done for centuries, but some speakers are also in enclaves in cities or refugee camps. The Farsi Bible translation (page 5) is one example of this modern day scenario.

⁵ <http://www.wycliffe.net/en/statistics>

Why do I work in a 'dying' language?

Where I work, the youth don't speak their heritage language - they've 'shifted' to using a regional dialect of the national language. But for the middle and older generations who are bilingual, their perspective on life is still best expressed through their heritage language. So for deeper discipleship, for the gospel to 'dialogue' with their values and beliefs, it is important that these generations can engage with the gospel in their heritage language - a language that may look like it is 'dying', yes, but one that is still very much alive in their mouths, minds and hearts. Philip Swan



Meet Elsi

Elsi, from Kalimantan, Indonesia, speaks six languages. Last year Elsi came to the Wycliffe National Centre at Kangaroo Ground to improve her English.

For Elsi, knowing what language to use in which context is the art of good communication. She adapts her speech to different settings. She uses her Dayak language with her family, Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian) with colleagues, and other relevant local Dayak languages in central Kalimantan. And of course English with foreign visitors, or in Australia.

Using the wrong language in a particular context can be awkward and bring suspicion. For example, using Bahasa Indonesia with her parents is too distant and lacks intimacy,

ELSI FACILITATES BIBLE STORYTELLING AND PRODUCING NEW SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR THE DAYAK SPEAKING CHURCH IN KALIMANTAN.



but using it in a group that includes a non-Dayak speaker is respectful and inclusive.

The right language, in the right context brings acceptance and opportunity for deeper communication.



Elsi and others describe why they are involved in Bible translation <https://vimeo.com/252455477>

in a time of change (...continued)

Being present in times of stress

Bible translation today also takes us into language communities who are struggling with identity and an uncertain future as older people see their more mobile grandsons and granddaughters begin to shift away from their heritage language⁶ for a national or international one. With this comes a loss of unique cultural stories and values that have defined a people for generations. The gospel in the heart language of these older people is critical at a time like this. We do not abandon them without hope. The good news may come as an audio Scripture reading of a Gospel, or the Jesus Film, rather than a full New Testament, but it still needs to come in the language that speaks best to them and it is our privilege to serve for that purpose.

⁶ Definition: A heritage language is a minority language learnt by its speakers at home as children, but never fully developed, because speakers grow up with a dominant language, in which they become more competent. Polinsky & Kagan label it as a continuum that ranges from fluent speakers to barely speaking individuals of the home language. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heritage_language#

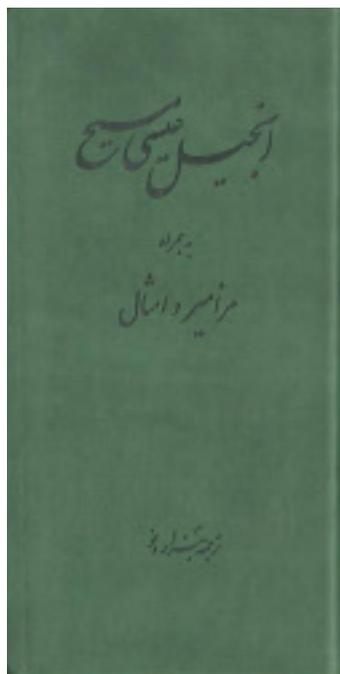
PRAY

Ask God for vision to embrace new opportunities, courage to attempt new ideas, and faithfulness to remain true to God's calling.

GO

Want to experience first hand what might be involved in Bible translation ministry? Join our short-term trip, [Go Mad Vanuatu \(June/July\)](#). Go to wycliffe.org.au/events/go-mad-vanuatu/

Iranian Christian diaspora serves Farsi speakers worldwide



It is in the context of the Ayatollah's Iranian revolution of 1982, and the subsequent persecution of Christians that the translation of the modern Farsi Bible was birthed. As Christians fled as refugees and added to the multilingual Persian diaspora in the UK, a new opportunity presented itself. Refugee Christians from Iran formed Elam Ministries UK. In cooperation with Bible agencies, the long journey began to translate the Bible for a new generation of Farsi speakers. The full Bible was dedicated in the UK in September 2014 with great joy.

The Farsi Bible now has a worldwide reach. In Iran, the Scripture is being received with gratitude by a growing Iranian church. Amongst the Persian diaspora, it is foundational to a surge in interest amongst Iranians wanting to know more about Jesus and Christianity. Dislocation, multilingualism, and great faith under persecution are factors in this significant story.

BUY

Farsi New Testaments are available from Wycliffe for ministry purposes. Contact info@wycliffe.org.au

PHOTO: PHILLIP MULLEN FROM PEXELS



PHOTO: MARC EWELL

God speaks my language in the 21st Century

What language does God speak to a multilingual person?

by Barry Borneman

In the world of Wycliffe we have used the term 'language of the heart' to describe someone's mother tongue, the language they learnt in their homes and community of birth.

We translate the Word of God into the heart language of the people because it communicates the Scriptures in a deep and clear way. For many communities, a single 'heart language' is the norm just as English is for many of us (even if multiple languages are used). However, people displacement, migration and the drift to urban centres mean that people are needing to learn and engage with multiple languages in complex environments. In such situations, the language of the heart metaphor is more ambiguous.

So what does it mean for a multilingual person to say 'God speaks my language'?

For many, it may mean God speaks clearly and powerfully in the appropriate language for the right context. This may be in more than one language, and may change depending on whether the Holy Spirit is communicating through a written, oral, or artistic form.

Some multilingual speakers prefer to read the Bible in a national language they were educated in even though the

Scriptures have been translated into their 'mother tongue'. The national language they learnt to read in is more familiar to them than learning a new alphabet.

For those living in urban areas away from their language community, their reading choice may be influenced by their desire to connect closely with their church community which uses the national language. This does not mean they cannot or do not read from their mother-tongue translation, only that when God speaks to them through the written text, it is more often from the national language used by the church, with the mother-tongue translation as an insightful commentary.

However when it comes to listening to the Scriptures, for the same multilingual urban dweller, it is often the local language that impacts the most. It has an intimacy and the ring of the familiar flow of thought not replicated by the national language.

For Wycliffe, the reality of multilingualism does not lessen the importance of translation into the mother tongue but it does invite us to listen to the communities we partner with and understand how language is being used by the old, young, villagers, urban dwellers, educated, uneducated. It is about recognising that when God speaks to the heart it may be in more than one language.



Badi tells us what it means to her that God speaks her language. Go to vimeo.com/251917854

Meeting the multilingual needs of the Mussau

PHOTO: JOEL

Mussau New Testament published in Mussau and English

Mussau Island is one of the most northern and remote islands of Papua New Guinea, situated out from New Ireland.

Wycliffe members John & Marjo Brownie working as translation facilitators with SIL International are responding to the multilingual needs of the Mussau people and the church.

The New Testament is being printed in diglot form with both Mussau and English on the same page. (English is usually their third language after Mussau and Tok Pisin, the trade language of that part of PNG.) John said the diglot form meets the needs of both the Mussau who live in villages on the island and those who now live away on the mainland. He said:

Those who feel uncomfortable with one language can use the other. In the village, it helps people to understand the English better, when they see it in their church study materials. In town, or other places outside the traditional language area, it helps people to remember their heritage language.

John added that for some, the English Bible is also viewed as the 'true Bible' even though they struggle to understand it. By having the translations on the same page it allows them to compare, and to see that the translation is just as faithful as the English, while speaking clearly in their own language.

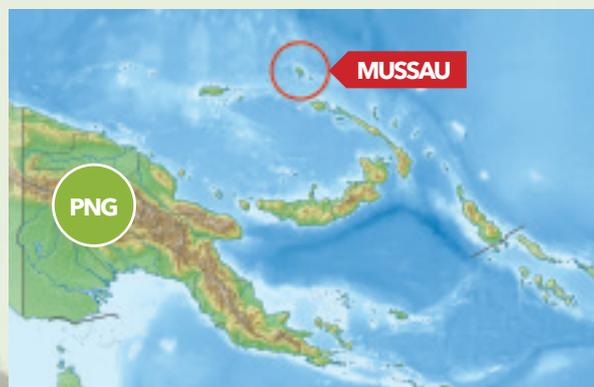
The Mussau New Testament will also be available on YouVersion and in ePub form (for Android and iOS devices), and a Bible App integrated with audio recordings is also being planned.

MORE

To connect, pray or support the Brownies, go to <https://wycliffe.org.au/member/john-marjo/>

MORE

John Brownie has published an article on 'Multilingualism and Identity on Mussau' in the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* Vol 2012, Issue 214. <https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/ijsl.2012.2012.issue-214/ijsl-2012-0021/ijsl-2012-0021.xml>



THE BROWNIE FAMILY (FROM LEFT): JOHN, KAROLIINA, TIMO, MARJO

Introducing our newest members

Michael and Liz*

As singles, Michael and Liz were challenged that there are many people in the world with less opportunity to hear the gospel. As Liz explained, 'There are lots of things I could get involved in that would help people - but they will only help people temporarily, not eternally. It seems unfair that many people don't have access to God's Word, while I've had it my whole life'. As a response, Liz served with SIL in PNG for a few years. Then she met Michael and found out that he also hoped to work overseas long-term. They married, joined Wycliffe and, with their two children, are now looking at a Scripture engagement and ethno-arts role in Asia. This is partly because of Michael's experience in media but also as he says, 'We're passionate about the gospel being communicated in ways which are meaningful for people, and for that to support the growth of God's Kingdom'.

Debbie Asamaphan



At the age of 15 Debbie first heard that many people do not have the opportunity to read the Bible in their own language and was inspired to become involved in Bible translation. She finished her education and went on to complete training in General Nursing, Midwifery and Infectious Diseases Nursing. During this time she married and had three children but after the death of her husband was able to follow through on the call she'd first felt as a teenager. After completing literacy training, she joined Wycliffe and is hoping to work in a combined literacy and nursing role, perhaps in PNG. She will be accompanied by her son, Maitri.

Greg and Rachel*

Greg and Rachel want to use their gifts in God's service to help make his Word available to all people of all cultures. Even before hearing about Wycliffe, Rachel had developed a keen interest in social research. Greg's understanding of God's plan had been deepened by a Wycliffe trip to the Philippines and a short introduction course to language learning and culture. They joined Wycliffe in 2017 and hope to be located somewhere in the Asia region with their two daughters after they've completed SIL training in 2019.

Emily Willetts

With a background in events management, Emily was the perfect fit for a Retreats Manager role. She has assisted in the planning and execution of a number of Christian conferences and evangelistic events. She completed her Certificate IV in Ministry and later went on to study a Bachelor in Business and Event Management. After working in the secular events industry for a time, Emily realised a growing desire to contribute to the work of the kingdom of God. He provided a way for her to use her gifts and abilities by taking on the role of Retreats@Wycliffe Leader and Head Manager at the Wycliffe Australia National Centre in Kangaroo Ground. Emily's role is to provide spiritual oversight for retreat participants and coordinate a small team to look after the on-site housing for staff and students, events and accommodation bookings. Emily is excited to use her expertise for a greater purpose.



*photos omitted for security reasons

Jesus was multilingual

Jesus of Nazareth functioned in a multilingual environment. He most likely spoke Aramaic, the language of his home and neighbourhood, and appears to have had good command of biblical Hebrew when reading the Scriptures. At the same time, he was familiar with Greek, the language of government and of wider communication. Jesus, the great communicator, would have chosen the most fitting language for the context in order to make

his truth known. Following Jesus' example, today the Scriptures may speak profoundly to someone seeking the Master in more than one language.

MORE

Read more about the multilingual world Jesus was born into. Go to <https://www.ethnologue.com/ethnblog/m-paul-lewis/unto-you-multilingual-son-born>