

WORD *Alive*

Wycliffe Bible Translators of Canada • Spring 2009



ONE COOL COORDINATOR

Nothing thrills—or frightens—a fun-loving Danny Foster like coordinating Bible translation for clusters of languages in Tanzania.

World
Translation
Update

Wycliffe
Launches
Children's
Ministry

After All's
Said and
Done....

Word Alive, which takes its name from Hebrews 4:12a, is the official publication of Wycliffe Bible Translators of Canada. Its mission is to inform, inspire and involve the Christian public as partners in the worldwide Bible translation movement.

Editor: Dwayne Janke

Designer: Laird Salkeld

Senior Staff Writer: Doug Lockhart

Staff Writers: Janet Seever, Deborah Crough

Staff Photographer: Alan Hood

Director of Communications: Dave Crough

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For additional copies: media_resources@wycliffe.ca

To contact the editor: editor_wam@wycliffe.ca

For address updates: circulation@wycliffe.ca

Note to readers: References to "SIL" are occasionally made in *Word Alive*. SIL is a key partner organization, dedicated to training, language development and research, translation and literacy.



Partners in Bible Translation

Wycliffe Canada Vision Statement: A world where translated Scriptures lead to transformed lives among people of all languages.

Translating Scripture, Transforming Lives

Together with partners worldwide, we serve indigenous people through language-related ministries, especially Bible translation and literacy. Our goal is to empower local communities to express God's love in Word and deed—for personal, social and spiritual transformation. Wycliffe personnel currently serve globally in nearly 1,500 language projects for more than a half billion people. However, about 2,400 minority groups still wait for the power of God working through their own languages. Wycliffe invites you to participate in this effort through prayer, service and funding.

Canadian Head Office: 4316 10 St NE, Calgary, AB T2E 6K3. Phone: (403) 250-5411 or toll free 1-800-463-1143, 8:30 a.m.—4:30 p.m. mountain time. Fax: (403) 250-2623. Email: info@wycliffe.ca

Cover: Wycliffe Canada's Danny Foster relaxes during a visit to Tanzania's Serengeti National Park (see story, pg. 6). Photograph by Alan Hood

In Others' Words

"The Bible appeals to me strongly . . . because it is such excellent medicine; it has never failed to cure a single patient if only he took his prescription honestly. . . ."

—Dr. Howard A. Kelly (1858-1943),
renowned surgeon and scientist,
in *A Scientific Man and the Bible*.

[foɹ wɔɹd] Foreword

Magazine Makeover

Dwayne Janke



You don't have to click far through today's "reality"-obsessed, multi-channel TV universe to realize that "makeover" programs are popular with viewers. It can be interesting, informative and, of course, entertaining to see the change from the "before" to the "after."

In such makeovers, canine handlers and super nannies stop the chaos created by misbehaving dogs and out-of-control children. Interior decorators and hyperactive construction crews work their magic to spruce up single rooms or rebuild entire homes for families that want face-lifts to their living conditions. Fashion experts, cosmeticians and hairstylists transform poorly dressed women with bad self-images into confident, diva-like dazzlers who impress families and friends.

Though it will never be featured on TV, magazines need makeovers too. Occasionally, periodicals must be given careful improvements, new looks and altered content to keep them fresh, and to better communicate their message to readers. We at *Word Alive* have been doing some redesign thinking over the past year, led by our busy designer Laird Salkeld. The results of that process can be seen starting in this issue.

Our magazine cover nameplate ("Word Alive") has a new look. The lettering reflects the solid, foundational and ancient character, but also the dynamic, modern relevance of the Scriptures (and the Hebrews 4:12a basis for *Word Alive's* name).

Departments, including this column, have been renamed for continuity ("word" is in every one of them). Some sections are relocated and enlarged (such as the news-oriented "Watchword" on pages 4-5). All have been refocused or even created anew (e.g. "Beyond Words" on pg. 34). Behind every department name (look at the top of this page, for example) you will notice

a light, supporting graphic, with ties to our translation work on the field. The strange-looking symbols are actually how each department name is written with the international phonetic alphabet that is used by Bible translators to record unwritten languages.

The layout grid and lettering of this magazine have been reworked too. Overall, we have made *Word Alive* visually cleaner and more contemporary. We hope you like the changes.

Speaking of makeovers and redesign, the face of Bible translation has been changing for centuries—and chronicled in this magazine for 25 years. In this particular issue, we take you to Africa, for stories about Canadian Wycliffe personnel working in something new called "language cluster projects." In these, Wycliffe workers serve a group of languages that may be linguistically related and/or are from similar geographic regions or cultural backgrounds. Language cluster projects are part of a strategy to do work smarter, not harder, to accelerate the Bible translation effort worldwide.

Who can argue with that kind of makeover? 🌟

We have made *Word Alive* visually cleaner and more contemporary. We hope you like the changes.

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A Show of Unity



In Tanzania's Mara region, church denominations are putting their differences aside to focus on Bible translation for nine related languages.

Just a few years ago, many of the church leaders now involved in the Mara Cluster Project rarely worked together for a common cause.

But since its formation in 2005, the advisory committee of the Mara Vernacular Bible Translation Ministry has demonstrated an unprecedented show of unity. Twenty-seven church denominations and three non-government organizations—including the Uganda-Tanzania Branch of SIL, Wycliffe’s key partner organization—are cooperating to further New Testament translation for nine related Bantu languages.

On the advisory committee, Baptists sit with Pentecostals and Lutherans with Catholics. Other groups represented include Mennonites, Methodists and Moravians.

Based in Musoma, a city in Tanzania of more than 100,000 inhabitants located on the eastern shore of Lake Victoria, the committee has chosen to focus on Scripture translation, rather than doctrinal differences.

“Many people thought we’d be talking about the beliefs of our different denominations, but it wasn’t like that at all,” says Jacob Lutubija [loo-too-BEE-ja], a denominational leader who serves as the current chairman of the advisory committee.

That they were meeting together for *any* reason was a surprise to many Tanzanians in the area.

“Before this ministry started here in the Mara region, we weren’t together like this as denominations,” adds Lutubija. “We didn’t have meetings together with the other churches . . . but after SIL came, they brought us together because of the languages we share here.”

Focus on Essentials Church leaders in the Mara region are strongly motivated to see the New Testament translation program succeed. First, several of the languages have not yet been written. They will benefit from the development of alphabets and a writing system, and all will eventually benefit from Scripture use and literacy programs.

Second, Scripture in their mother tongues will help individual believers grow spiritually and strengthen the entire Church. Although English and Swahili are Tanzania’s official languages, most speakers of minority languages find English and Swahili Bible translations difficult to comprehend.

“The Church in Mara is struggling,” says Chris Kateti, a former teacher and evangelist who now serves as partnership officer for the Mara Cluster Project. He believes that in rural churches especially, being limited to only Swahili would be problematic.

“If they receive teaching in Swahili only, they can’t understand fully.”

The veteran educator and leader has done an outstanding job as partnership officer, says Danny Foster, team leader for the cluster project (see related story, pg. 6).

“Kateti has played a key role in bringing all of these denominations together. He visits, he talks to the bishops, the pastors; he really communicates well the work SIL is doing. He’s able to focus on what’s important and doesn’t get sidetracked from the goal of facilitating Bible translation.”



In his role as training coordinator for the Mara Cluster Project, Danny joins in a prayer session (opposite) following a computer workshop for potential mother tongue translators. Above, candidate translators Rachel Manyori (left) and Diana Kitaboka begin translating the first-ever verses of Scripture into their language, Ikuzu, from Luke’s Gospel.

“Before this ministry . . . we weren’t together like this as denominations. We didn’t have meetings together with the other churches . . . but after SIL came, they brought us together because of the languages we share here.”



The chairman of the advisory committee for the Mara project, Jacob Lutubija (above, centre), emphasizes a point while meeting with Danny and the project's partnership officer, Chris Kateti. The chairman and church leader says the participation of 27 denominations, in any church-related activity, is unprecedented in Musoma.

Thanks in part to Kateti's efforts, members of the advisory committee are sold on the need for mother tongue Scripture. Their chairman, Lutubija, has also helped them stay on course and avoid potentially divisive issues.

"The work we do really is one work," says Lutubija, "and that's to preach Jesus Christ."

Lutubija has been very effective in directing the diverse group of church leaders, says Foster, citing one meeting where some leaders began discussing ideas outside the scope of the committee's true purpose.

"But Rev. Lutubija said, 'Look, you do what you want in your church. Our job here is to get the Word of God into these languages.'"

"He catches even the slightest diversion," adds Foster, "and I think his ability has really helped us to have that unity."

"The work we do really is one work and that's to preach Jesus Christ."

Joint Effort The advisory committee's goals for the Mara Cluster Project include facilitating Bible translation and literacy programs, as well as producing booklets and pamphlets. Future plans include publishing histories of the local language groups and health-related publications to help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, for example.

Currently, the group advises SIL's Musoma team on planning, language development and even the selection of potential translators to attend training workshops. Members of the committee also hope to hold fundraising events for the project.

SIL provides computer training and, of course, training in translation, linguistics and literacy.

Last October, during a historic three-week workshop held



Meet The Bantu Family

By Dwayne Janke

Languages in Tanzania's Mara Cluster Project have brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins, of sorts, living all over the southern half of Africa.

They are part of the far-flung Bantu [BAN-too] family of about 500 languages. About 200 million people, stretching from the equator to South Africa, and from Cameroon to Kenya, speak languages from among this group (see map below). These Bantu tongues share a family resemblance, linguistically speaking, because they developed historically from a common ancestor.

About half of these Bantu languages have something else in common—they are without the translated Scriptures. These languages represent 14 million speakers in 17 countries and about a quarter of the remaining languages that still need Bible translation to begin in Africa. The average population of these groups is 50,000-60,000.

The five countries with the greatest Bible translation need for Bantu languages are: Democratic Republic of Congo (99 of 142 Bantu languages need Scripture); Tanzania (40 of 94); Congo (26 of 34); Gabon (22 of 28); Cameroon (19 of 43).

To address this big need, Wycliffe and its key partner, SIL in Africa, joined the United Bible Societies, Pioneer Bible Translators, and Bible Translation and Literacy-Kenya in 2003 to form the Bantu Initiative. It is a multi-organizational effort to see translation proceed with

greater speed, efficiency and quality so that Bibleless Bantu speakers have access to Scripture.

How? By working together to develop, test and share language program strategies, linguistic tools, computer software and training resources that can be used more broadly because of various similarities among Bantu languages and cultures. Since 2000, for example, SIL personnel have been developing and testing tools for use in working on phonology (language sound systems), grammar, discourse, dictionaries and alphabets to serve many Bantu languages.

"This approach encourages simultaneous linguistic and translation work among the various languages in a cluster," says Ken Boothe, director of SIL's Bantu department, "reducing the time and human resources needed to complete the task without reducing the quality of the materials produced."

Language cluster strategies are a major part of the Bantu Initiative thrust. The Mara Cluster Project will provide valuable experience in joint planning and decision-making with partners, as well as testing the Bantu linguistic and cultural tools that are being developed.

Representatives from the Bantu Initiative agencies, such as Wycliffe and SIL, see great potential in its approach.

Hardly surprising, really—that's what happens when you work together as a family.



Walakini ye yote atakayekunywa maji yale nitakayompa mimi hataona kiu milele" Yohana 4:14

While Scripture is available in Swahili—as seen on the T-shirt above—it's not always clearly understood by people, especially in rural areas. Members of the advisory committee have united around the goal of providing mother tongue Scripture translations for each of the nine languages represented in their ranks.

Africa's Bantu Languages & Their Translation Status



- KEY**
- No adequate Scripture - 270 Languages
 - Translation needs revision - 10
 - Work in progress - 73
 - Has New Testament - 120
 - No project anticipated - 45

Translation status colours on this map are from August 2004. Numbers of languages for each status category (at left) are for 2008. No political statement is intended by any language or international boundaries placed on this map, nor are they necessarily authoritative.

Members of the advisory committee pray together and they hope Canadian believers will join them.

in Musoma, translators from each of the nine language groups began translating Scripture passages from the Gospel of Luke into their languages. Using a specialized computer software program called *Adapt It*, translators can quickly produce a rough draft by translating from a closely-related language that already has the Scriptures.

The advisory committee aims to publish the Christmas story, as related in the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel, by December 2009. In addition, two translators from each language will eventually be hired to begin translating the rest of the New Testament—a task that could take anywhere from five to eight years.

Foster says these translators must be paid competitive salaries to draw quality people and retain them.

"I believe you've got to take care of the people who are coming to do the Lord's work," he says. "If we pay well, we're going to get the best people; we're going to keep them and the work is going to be strong."

Chris Kateti agrees.

"Some of the translators have been employed as teachers," he says, "so it is very difficult for them to give up teaching to join this project. They have had good salaries, so when they come to join us, we need also to offer a good salary so they can continue with us."

Furthermore, SIL leaders in the country want to assist promising Tanzanian translators by helping them access further education in linguistics and translation.



Leaders of the translation workshop (including Canadian Rachel Workentine, centre) debrief after a day's work. The team's chemistry is one reason Danny so enjoys his work in the Mara Cluster Project. "There are no 'cowboys,'" he says, "nobody trying to run the whole thing or take credit for it. Everybody's just trying to do their part."



Prayer Needed

Good planning, training and competitive salaries will go a long way to reach the goals set by the committee. But Lutubija believes prayer is even more vital. Members of the advisory committee pray together and they hope Canadian believers will join them.

“Pray for success,” pleads the chairman of the advisory committee. “We haven’t gotten very far yet, so we really want to see success in this work . . . and that the unity we have between all these churches would continue.”

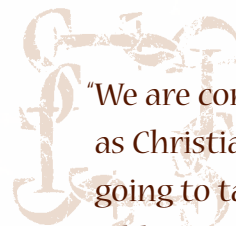
The committee’s remarkable unity has surprised many—including some of its members.

“Before the cluster project began,” Kateti recalls, “some of them asked, ‘How can we try to be together, because we have different doctrines, different practices, different faith? How are we going to come together and what are we going to talk about?’

“But we said, ‘We are coming together as Christians. We are going to talk about the Bible; we are not going to talk about your doctrine, your liturgy, or how you conduct your service.’

“And they agreed. We thank God for that.” 🍀

Pastor Albinus Chokera (foreground) leads a lively song of spiritual warfare during a morning session at the translation workshop.



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