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In Our Own Tongue

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In Our Own Tongue

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“In our Own Tongue” is produced by Bible Translation and Literacy (E.A.). BTL, under the leadership of General Secretary Mundara Muturi, is at present carrying out research and development in 12 of the language groups in Kenya, with the aim of translating the Bible into these languages and promoting literacy among the people who speak them.

Part of the purpose of this journal is to provide a forum in which the field members of BTL can present their tentative analyses of some of the languages spoken in Kenya and invite interaction from other researchers with a view to perfecting their analyses.

The journal is also a forum for sharing ideas among the language projects, for encouraging one another in the work, and for celebrating success.

Opinions expressed in this journal do not necessarily represent the views or official policy of the editor or of BTL.

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Preface from the Editor

Welcome to the third issue of 'In Our Own Tongue'. Yet again, the articles are varied in their style and scope. It is my hope that they will encourage and inspire us all as they remind us of the multi-faceted nature of our work.

Steve Nicolle's article underlines the fact that godliness and professionalism are at the heart of what we do. Solid academic work must underpin all our activities, but if this work is carried out without reference to our faith as well as the needs of the people we are trying to serve then it will lack impact. *Chemorion Chosefu* contributes another fascinating look at an Old Testament passage from a translator's eyes, while *Edward Jillo* celebrates the wonders of language, in particular the ability of our children to learn any language to which they are exposed.

If we are translating the Bible in order to help the church to grow and develop, what are the particular problems and needs faced by our target audience? *John Magundo* examines the Giryama church situation, highlighting a number of problems that are hindering the expansion of the church today. We also feature a rather unusual workshop report from *Jacob Njagi*, as well as news from a conference in London.

Finally, this issue contains a couple of new features. The first is a slot for staff news. We hope not just to feature staff who are leaving the organisation, but to find space in future issues to appreciate some of the truly talented people we are working with. Do you have an idea of someone who should be featured? Please send your suggestions to the editor.

Lastly, I am throwing down a challenge for everyone in BTL. The discussion forum featured on page 34 is a chance for us all to think hard about how we present and 'sell' ourselves as BTL. Please find a few minutes to contribute to this discussion as I look forward to receiving input from many of you. Contributions of whatever nature should reach the editor by **31 January 2007** (or earlier).

Many thanks and good reading.

Wisdom of the Elders – SIL Proverbs

Steve Nicolle, BTL Linguistics Consultant

Proverbs are important in many cultures, including my own and the Digo culture which I have been privileged to experience over the past seven years. Proverbs summarise the beliefs and morality of a community, and express the wisdom of the elders. Recently I have been challenged to take a fresh look at the proverbs in the Bible. These were written by a human being, King Solomon, but were inspired by and explain the wisdom of God. But the proverbs in this article do not come from the Bible or from Digo elders, but from some of the elders of another community to which I belong – the community of SIL.

The SIL journal *Word&Deed* vol.5 no.1 (2006) contained the testimonies of 27 past and present members of SIL – the *wazee* of the organisation (most joined SIL in the 1950's, 60's or 70's). Each contributor was asked to “outline your cultural and linguistic heritage, your journey into academic settings (studying, teaching etc.), and how your personal faith has sustained and guided you.” What I have done in this article is to select some of the sayings of these *wazee*, including some additional quotes from Kenneth Pike which were included in the volume, and collect them together under different themes, like a collection of proverbs – SIL proverbs.

Proverbs are meant to be thought-provoking, not provide easy answers to life's questions, and so I have not added my own commentary. I also make no apology for reproducing these quotes out of context (you can find out what the context for a particular quote is by reading *Word&Deed*.) As is the case with biblical proverbs and proverbs from many cultures, some of the quotes are apparently contradictory, but this should encourage us to think more deeply about the truth that underlies them, not reject them out of hand.

Motivation

Our WBT and SIL motive ... includes meeting two prime commands: The first to love God with heart, soul, mind; the second, to love neighbour as self.

Kenneth Pike

The commitment of heart and soul draws us to get involved in sharing the message of God throughout the world, especially through... translating it into languages that do not yet have it. The commitment of mind draws us to follow a scholarly approach as we seek to do that work as effectively as possible. And the commitment to neighbour draws us to engage in practical service (especially through literacy) that can foster development in the communities we serve in.

Gary Simons

If we love the Lord only with our hearts, we are heretics.

Kenneth Pike (quoted by Freddy Boswell)

We believe that language is one of God's most important gifts to man... Without language, culture and civilisation would be impossible. We also believe that any language is capable of being a vehicle for complicated human interaction and complex thought, and can be the basis for a complex culture and civilisation. Therefore, all languages deserve respect and study.

Benjamin Elson (from SIL's linguistic creed, cited by John Roberts)

I would get stressed about not being able to do everything when I hadn't initially considered whether or not God wanted me to be involved in all these things in the first place. They all sounded like good things to do and I assumed God wanted me to do them so I didn't really ask Him.

Sheryl Takagi Silzer

The value of theory

A threefold cord is not quickly broken. – Ecc1 4:12b

Through the genius of our founders, we were crafted as a threefold cord. We must remain diligent today to give proper emphasis to all three strands, [Bible translation, language-based development, and the scientific research that supports both,] lest one weaken and the whole cord break.

Gary Simons

The role of linguistic research and scholarship appears to have diminished in SIL and it now seems more difficult to encourage SIL members to engage in this activity.

John Roberts

We should not be using a spiritual motivation to insulate ourselves from legitimate professional standards – our God is not ashamed to carry out His purposes in an ‘excellent’ way!

David Ross

No single theoretical framework can ever be expected to have the full answer, even in the limited domain it carves out for itself. ...no single theory is anywhere close to dealing with all the factors involved in translation.

Robert A. Dooley

You cannot know what research is relevant to the Bible translation project until you have done it.

John Roberts

Commitment to rigorous, inspired research and its communication ensures the integrity of our ministries in SIL. It also puts us in touch with people whose ideas enrich ours, and whose lives need contact with the Living Truth.

Brian Schrag

He who uses linguistics is wise, but he who trusts in it is a fool.

Kenneth Pike

Training and mentoring others

Multiplying our linguistic, translation and literacy skills through training and mentoring others is crucial to the task God has given us.

John Bendor-Samuel

From a biblical perspective, I see productivity largely in terms of people trained rather than articles published. The name of the game is “Train and gain” not “Publish or perish”.

Bob Litteral

During the years that I worked in Columbia, I had the privilege of serving as a linguistics consultant to a number of my colleagues. They always knew more than I did about the languages they were studying, but sometimes I could see things that they had not yet seen or, more often, ask questions that would point them in the right direction.

Paul Frank

Not only were all of those assigned to language projects expected to write up the results of their analyses, it was also assumed that these would be submitted for publication. [Consultants] were always available to consult with us, and they took the responsibility to recommend and actually submit these articles to publications.

Carolyn Miller

Sharing our data

Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh. – Eccl 12:12

This sounds like a cynical warning against scholarship, and many commentators take it as such. However, the preceding verses talk about the value of collected wise sayings in guiding everyday life. Thus I prefer to take the view of the UBS translation handbook ... “Writing proverbs involves endless hard work; the search for wisdom is totally demanding.”

Gary Simons

If we are in the unique position of being able to make a particular language known to the rest of the world, then we should consider ourselves obligated to do so.

Gilles Gravelle

Joe Grimes ... stated that a linguist would be remembered most for a collection of texts, and second, for a dictionary. A grammar counted as a rather poor third, and articles counted for hardly anything at all.

Barbara Hollenbach

When I took the SIL training, the state of the art was descriptive linguistics which describes a language by producing a phonology, a grammar, a lexicon, and an analyzed text corpus. Today, the state of the art is “documentary linguistics” which documents a language by archiving digital recordings of the language being used in a variety of communicative situations.

Gary Simons

Karl Franklin, amongst others, encouraged me to persevere and pointed out that if I did not get my research published it would have been a wasted effort and would not benefit anyone.

John Roberts

A nice little book in the hand is better than a magnum opus that is still in the works.

Gary Simons

Number of (hard) copies of the Ethnologue distributed per year: 500.

Number of visits *per month* to the Ethnologue website: 500,000.

Gary Simons

A young anthropologist in Mexico ... said how happy he was to finally meet us and that he regularly went to the Mexico [SIL] Branch website to see if we had published anything more. ... it is reported that various complete dictionaries of minority languages are downloaded from the Mexico Branch website several *thousands* of times each month.

Stephen Marlett

Earlier this year I spoke to a linguistic consultant from one of the African SIL entities and he said it might be difficult to get language descriptions written for the language projects in his entity. The SIL teams were not motivated to do such documentation and the national translators did not see a need for them. I have heard this about other African SIL entities too. But this does not appear to be the case for all African SIL entities. For example, if you look at SIL Cameroon’s bibliography you will see many recent publications and even SIL Sudan has many post-2000 publications listed.

John Roberts

Academic degrees

God isn't interested in what is on my CV. He is interested in what is in my heart.

Sheryl Takagi Silzer

...short of an emergency, our PhDs should first try to finish their New Testament. ... Translating the New Testament is a job more than worthy of any of us with PhDs.

Kenneth Pike

...there are many good thinkers and scholars who have no degree at all, and there are many PhDs in the world who are mediocre scholars at best.

Barbara Hollenbach

I don't put too much weight on the importance of degrees, because I know that there are more important things.

Ken Olson

SIL currently has more people in PhD programmes than at any time in its history.

John Roberts

Important Features of the Old Testament Narratives:

The story of the two harlots in 1 Kings 3:16-28.

Chemorion Chosefu

1. Introduction

A large part of the Old Testament consists of narratives, with the primary narrative stretching from Genesis to 2 Kings (Gunn & Fewell 1993:42). One of the communicative functions of the narratives was to shape the character of the audience. The Hebrew narratives were an integral part of the divine message, which was passed to the Israelites through the narrators. In order to be effective in communicating the message, the Hebrew narrators employed a number of characterization techniques, which informed the reader about behaviour that was either acceptable or unacceptable before God.

According to Bar-Efrat (1989), characters in narrative usually constitute the focal point of interest and can therefore convey the significance and values of the narrative to the reader. The personalities and histories of characters attract the reader's attention and they generate considerable emotional involvement. Many readers try to identify with the heroes of the narrative. Indeed most of what we know about godliness or the lack of it has been revealed to us through our understanding of the heroes and villains in the biblical narratives. Specific characterization techniques in biblical Hebrew narratives were carefully selected and used not only to capture the attention of the reader but also to influence good character-formation.

In African society today, narratives constitute part of the extensive oral literature, which contains deep theological and philosophical meaning¹. Narratives were used as a means of imparting moral education to young people. According to Mugambi, (1989:157), traditional stories served as cases for ethical analysis, which helped young people to attain social responsibility, personal discipline, and to understand the inherited wisdom of the community.

Just as it was in biblical times, narratives continue to play an instrumental role in the shaping of character. The aim of this article is to illustrate some of the techniques applied in the construction of the Old Testament narratives. It is hoped that translators and other readers of the Old Testament narratives will find this article valuable as they analyze Old Testament texts.

2. Hebrew Narrative Features

2.1 *What is a Narrative Genre?*

A narrative is a type of genre consisting of an agent who tells an audience about events involving human characters (or their personification) by means of a plot structure. The agent who tells the narrative is technically known as the narrator while the audience is known as the narratee². According to Bal (1985:3), a narrative is delivered through a text consisting of language signs and it may be literary or not. Therefore, a narrative may be understood as a written or spoken story.³

2.2 *The Narrator's Voice*

The voice of the narrator in the narrative is the guiding force, informing the narratee what is happening at every stage of the story. As Bar-Efrat (1989) observes, the narrator is the sole means by which we can understand reality in a narrative. Most of the Old Testament narratives are stated in the third person, which is an indication that the narrator did not participate directly in the events of the narrative. For this reason, a narrator who communicates in the third person may be seen as distinct character that reports the story while others enact it (Gunn & Fewell 1993:53). The creation accounts in Genesis 1-2 are examples of third person narratives. In these creation accounts the narrator reports as an eyewitness but not an active participant in the creation. What is

¹ Cf. Wasike (1996:28). Wasike states that the oral literature of the African people is their unwritten Bible. This religious wisdom is found in African idioms, wise sayings, legends, myths, stories, proverbs and oral history.

² Cf. Ska, S.J (1999:39-40). Ska explains that the term "narratee" was coined by G. Prince to refer to recipients of a narrative.

³ The term "story" is used interchangeably with the term "narrative" in this paper but experts might use them differently. See the explanation of Gunn and Fewell, 2.

interesting, though, is the portrayal of the narrator as being omnipresent and omniscient, able to read the minds of all the characters including the mind of God. Bar-Efrat (1989:43) argues that limitations in human language force the author to describe events consecutively, thus creating the impression that the narrator is everywhere. Whereas this explains the apparent omnipresence of the narrator, it does not account for his/her omniscience.

It is important to note that in the Old Testament the narrator controls the participation of characters and makes comments whenever this is necessary. The narrator constantly mediates between the world of the narrative and the world of the audience. A common narrative technique in both Old Testament and African narratives is the use of direct speech, where the narrator allows the characters to engage in dialogue in turns marked with the narrator's explanation of who is speaking. This technique makes the reader to assume a tonal variation as the characters speak in turns. For example, in Sabaot narratives, idiophones are used to create an emotional impact on the readers.

2.3 Participants in Narrative

Participants in narratives are the people or things, which take part in the story (Larson 1984:192). The terms "participant" and "character" are used interchangeably. Usually narratives have major participants, minor participants, and local participants. Major participants are the key players in the narrative. Their presence is felt in virtually all parts of the narrative. They are the heroes in the story. They are also described as round characters because they manifest various characteristics as the story proceeds to different episodes.

In 1 Kings 3:16-28, the major participant around whom events revolve is the king. The contending harlots bring their case before him. He hears both sides of the dispute and moves to make a skilful decision which makes all Israel fear him. The two harlots also are also central in the story but their role is secondary to that of the king. Minor participants are also present throughout the story but their main role is to carry the plot forward. The living child and the dead child are both minor participants. They do not play an active role in the events. The people ordered by the king to bring the sword and to execute the living child are local participants. They only appear once at their appropriate scene. All Israel are also local participants appearing at the very end of the story. But they are major local participants in the sense that they bring the theme of the narrative into fulfilment. Their confirmation of the king as having the wisdom of God gives meaning to the entire narrative.

2.4 The nature of narrative plot

According to Longacre (1996:33-35), an ideal narrative plot would have seven progressive stages in the following manner⁴. The first stage is the *exposition* or layout. Here crucial information of time, place, local colour, and participants is given⁵. After the exposition, the narrative moves to the second stage known as the *inciting moment*, whereby the story gains some momentum. The story line is clearly marked and the reader may predict what follows. However the story enters into a third stage of uncertainty, which is known as the *conflict* stage. According to Longacre, this stage involves the development of conflicts as the story forges ahead. The situation intensifies or deteriorates depending on one's viewpoint.

Next, the story moves to the fourth stage, which is the *peak* or climax. At this point the author gets untidy, brings in contradictions, and adds all sorts of tangles until confrontation is inevitable. Routine features get distorted at the peak of the narrative. The peak is also indicated by the presence of all characters, a situation that may be referred to as the "crowded" stage. After the climax, we descend to the fifth stage, which Longacre refers to as *denouement*. In this stage, things in the story loosen up. A crucial event might happen to bring a solution. We see a way out even if it is not a happy ending. This stage leads to a sixth stage which Longacre calls the *final suspense*. The details of the final resolution are revealed, and the end can be predicted. The seventh and last stage is the *conclusion*. The narrator wraps up the story, bringing it some sort of decent or indecent end.

3. Narrative Plot Structure of 1 KINGS 3:16-28

3.1 Exposition (v. 16)

This verse serves as the opening for the narrative. The verse begins with the connective word **וְ** (then/later) as an indication that the new scene follows a preceding scene (3:4-15). Kings 3:16-28 is therefore a new episode and

⁴ We shall follow Longacre's model in analyzing the plot structure in the story of the two harlots in 1Kings 3:16-28

⁵ Although introductory and background information is usually given in the exposition, Bar-Efrat has observed that some expositional material could be delayed for introduction at the right stage of the narrative.

the narrator makes a brief introduction of the major participants. These are “two harlots” and the king. This exposition does not have all the information that is often given at this stage. The narrator does not give the proper names of the participants. The major participants are presented as character types, namely; “kings” and “harlots” but not individuals.

According to Walsh (1996), the narrator directs the attention of the readers to the inner life of the characters by naming none. While considering harlots to be symbols of the lowly within a community, Walsh (1996: 78-80) argues that the scenario we have here is about a king’s response to a perplexing case brought by members of the lowest group. The setting is before the king. This suggests the palace or a designated place where public lawsuits could be heard by the king. The case before the king is very important, not only for the contending harlots but also to the king and the people of Israel as a community. This was the first case for the then very young King Solomon to preside over. It was his first public task and his decision would determine whether or not he had adequate wisdom to be judge over the nation.

3.2 *Incitement and Conflict (Vv. 17-23)*

In these verses, the narrator lets the story take off by introducing direct speech from one of the disputing women. The narrator says nothing about the speaker. We are not even told whether the first speaker is the mother of the living child. In this case the reader of the narrative is made to hear the story of the first woman just as the king heard it. As Walsh (1996:80) comments, the reader is put in the same position as the king; hearing what he hears, and having exactly the same basis for judgment as the king had. In a prolonged speech, the first woman states that she lived in the same house with her colleague, they both gave birth at almost the same time and there was no one else living with them. However, she has no substantial evidence to support her case because she was apparently asleep when the event took place.

In vv.22-23 the accused harlot denies the allegations made against her. But the first woman insists on her case. The two women exchange denials and accusations in front of the king. This scenario brings the narrative to a point of deterioration. There is an increasing uncertainty as to what will happen next. The king summarizes the case by repeating the words of each litigant, but appears to be helpless in trying to make a decision. The case then appears to be headed for a stalemate and the narrative might end. This creates a moment of excitement to the reader. Something has to be done so that the story gets new life. As Walsh (1996:82) points out, “Unless something unforeseen occurs, the plot has miscarried and the story is over”.

3.3 *The Climax and Denouement of the Story (Vv. 24-26)*

In this part of the narrative, the stage is crowded with strange happenings. The story is at its peak and there is turbulence in the flow of discourse⁶. The major participant is at the core of activity. But there are more active participants, unlike in the previous stages where the contending women dominated the stage. Here the king takes action by sending unnamed people for the sword. Everybody, (including the reader of the story) is left wondering about the intentions of the king. The harlots too must have been surprised with the king’s reaction. Then the king, strangely, orders that the living child be divided into two.

Then in a reversal of events, the first woman who was eager for the king’s judgment pleads against it and gives up the child to the accused because “her heart yearned for her son”. On the other hand, the accused, who had equally argued that the living child was hers agrees with the king’s decision to have the child divided into two. At this point the narrative reaches its apex and both the king and the reader of the story make a breakthrough in deciding the case of the harlots. It worth noting that the king’s threat caused the harlots to react differently thus making it easy for the king to interpret the truth from the inner behaviour shown by each of them.

3.4 *Resolution and Conclusion (Vv. 3:27-28)*

The king finally makes the verdict in these verses. He speaks authoritatively and orders the child to be given to the rightful mother. With this verdict the king demonstrates that he can deliver fair judgment. The story comes to a conclusion confirming the theme of the narrative, namely that King Solomon was endowed with wisdom to render justice. When the people heard about it they were convinced that he was endowed with God’s wisdom to render justice. The people’s evaluation of Solomon echoes God’s promise to give him wisdom.

⁶ Cf. Longacre (1996:38). The peak of narrative is a zone of turbulence in regard to the flow of discourse. This is the stage in which many characters appear on stage and several activities take place.

4. Characterization in Old Testament Narratives

4.1 *The Meaning of Characterization*

Characterization refers to the manner in which the character of participants in a narrative is presented. Like a painter, a narrator paints and displays selected behavioural aspects of participants in the narrative. The audience perceives the displayed qualities in the painting and transfers them to the real persons represented (Berlin 1983:13). By means of perceived characterization, today's reader may have many ideas about a participant who lived thousands of years ago. In other words characterization enables one to create a mental picture of someone he/she has never seen before. As Berlin (1983:35) points out, the reader of a narrative reconstructs the character of a participant using the information provided in the discourse: by analyzing the statements and evaluations made by the narrator and other participants, and by drawing inferences from the speech and actions of participants themselves.

Characterization in narrative may also be understood as a form of communication, by which the narrator uses the narrative world to reflect on human behaviour in the real world. Licht (1986:9) refers to *mimesis* in narrative.⁷ According to Licht, narratives reproduce reality and create images of it. In fact he argues that the ultimate theme of narratives is often set in the background. Similarly, Gunn & Fewell argue that narrative constructs a verbal world that imitates and centres on human characters (or their personifications), their speech and actions, their relations and desires, their ideas and institutions (Gunn & Fewell 1993:2). It is probably for this reason that the majority of African narratives are about animals.

According to Chesaina (1991:9), the use of animal characters in Kalenjin narratives enables the narrator to satirize society without identifying particular individuals in a community. Chesaina also observes that oral narratives are usually derived from the day-to-day experiences of a community and therefore the thematic content reflects the worldview of that community. We can therefore say that characterization of participants in narrative has mimetic implication on human society. However, Berlin (1983:35) cautions against the danger of mistaking mimesis for reality, arguing that we should not take as real that which is only a representation of reality.

4.2 *Characterization Techniques*

Alter (1981:116) gives an ascending scale of techniques by which characterization is done in narratives. He lists these techniques as report of actions, appearance, and comments by other characters, direct speech, inward speech, and direct statements made by the narrator. Bar-Efrat (1989:48-92) provides two categories of characterization techniques. He refers to the first category of characterization techniques as direct shaping which includes the description of appearance and inner personality of a character. He names the second category as indirect shaping which includes speech, actions, and the contrast provided by the minor characters. We should however note that these techniques are not necessarily used in all narratives. We should also remember that the narrator chooses the appropriate technique to use for characterization.

5. Characterization Techniques in 1 KINGS 3:16-28

5.1 *Indirect Characterization through Minor Characters*

As we have already seen, the most central participant in this narrative is the king. The theme of the narrative revolves around the king. The minor characters are used to highlight on the character of the most central participant. In exposition the narrator tells us that two harlots came to the king, and stood before him (3:16). The Hebrew text says *והעמדנה לפניו* which is translated in the Tanakh as "and stood before him". To stand before the king in this context has a sense of presenting oneself before the king for judgment. This act in itself is a positive characterization of the king. This is because the presence of the harlots before the king also means that the king is accessible. In the ancient Near East, accessibility to the king was one of the ways by which the goodness of the king was measured. For example, Gray (1970:128) refers to the royal justice in the sagas of Krt and Aqht in Ras Shamra texts, where the king sits in an open public venue to judge the case of the poor and the oppressed. In this case therefore, the narrator is out to show us that King Solomon is an accessible king.

According to Walsh (1996:80), the identification of the women as prostitutes is not intended to cast them as sinful. Rather the intention is to cast them as amongst the lowest and most disadvantaged members of society.

⁷ Mimesis may be defined as the desire to imitate, to describe events, people, situations, and objects with such very verisimilitude that others can share your experience. Cf. Hume (1984:20).

This positively depicts the king as one who attends to justice even in a case involving the least important of his people. This point fits well with what Bar-Efrat refers to as indirect shaping by use of minor characters (Bar-Efrat 1989:86). Bar-Efrat observes that minor characters serve as a background against which the personalities of the main characters stand out. In this case we can clearly see that the narrator highlights the character of the king by using the two prostitutes as ploys.

5.2 Direct Shaping/labelling

Although the two harlots are used as ploys with which to characterize the king, the narrator directly labels them. The Hebrew word for harlots is זְנוּיָהּ (plural). The singular form of this word is זְנוּיָהּ which means prostitute or whore. This is direct shaping of inner nature of the persons. As Bar-Efrat (1989:53) observes, direct characterization such as we have here often involves an element of judgment. In our contemporary situation we might quickly think negatively about these women because of our negative view of commercial sex workers. However, prostitution seems to have been condoned in the OT. For example Rahab in Joshua 2:1 was visited by the spies and Judah's intercourse with Tamar in Genesis 38 is not condemned (Bar-Efrat 1989:129).

5.3 Speech/dialogue

The story of the two harlots is broken up into two major scenes. From vv.16-23, we see the harlots speaking before the king. Then from vv. 24-26, the king dominates the stage. The narrator does not tell the story in straight narration but opts to be providing direct speech. To avoid confusing the reader, the narrator directs the sequence of scenes by introducing the speakers and making short comments. As a result each scene gets highlighted and the reader's attention is fully engaged.

The narrator also uses dialogue as a strategy for characterization. The narrator allows the first harlot to state her case and evidence before the king (3:17-21). Then shortly afterwards the narrator interrupts to let the second woman respond to the allegations (3:22). The king responds in 3:23 with an accurate summary of what the two harlots had said. The portrait of the king in this case is that of a judge who listens keenly to both sides and evaluates the statements. This creates a positive characterization on the part of the king.

Dialogue is also used in the narrative to expose the wisdom of the king and the inner truth of the two women. The narrator presents the king as coming up with a strange idea when the case seemed to have become very difficult to decide. The king's order for the sword to be brought and for the living child to be divided into two halves appears to be a remote idea not easily imagined. Only the king knew what he was driving at. The king's wisdom surpassed ordinary minds in the sense that the two women were forced to speak out the truth from their hearts making it easy for the king to pass judgment. Therefore, we can say that dialogue is used as a technique of characterizing participants by disclosing the quality of their inner thoughts. In this narrative, dialogue (3:26a) helps us to see that the first woman was the true mother of the living child. Similarly, we can tell that the second woman was not telling the truth (3:26b). However, the greatest role played by dialogue in this narrative is that of characterizing the king as a wise judge, capable of obtaining hidden truth from litigants.

5.4 Conclusive Comment/Judgment of Character

Finally, at the end of the story, the narrator makes a comment which completes the characterization of the king as we see in 3:28. I prefer to regard this as a conclusive judgment of character. The people came to know of the king's style of judgment and stood in fear of him. The Hebrew word for fear is יָרָא which means to fear or revere. This then characterizes the king as a revered person. The narrator gives the reasons for this as "because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to render justice". This characterization falls under the category of direct shaping of inner personality as suggested by Bar-Efrat (1989:53). The trait of wisdom noted by the other characters (all Israel) in the narrative is a positive characterization of the king.

6. Conclusion

This article has explored some of the most important aspects of Old Testament narratives, which readers of the Bible need to put into consideration. It is important especially for mother tongue translators to analyze the narrative plot and the characterization techniques applied by the author. By doing so, the translator will be able to understand the original intentions of the writer of the Hebrew narrative. Once the translator fully understands the narrative features, it becomes easy to find the closest natural way of re-expressing the narrative in mother tongue.

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Child Psychology: Speech and Children

Edward Jillo⁸, Acting project leader, Pokomo Language Project

Words are very amazing. We use words to pass on a message to others. Speech is so important such that every parent eagerly waits to hear the first words his child will speak.

The way children learn a language is very interesting. Have you ever asked yourself why our words for *mother* and *father* are the most similar words in pronunciation in the whole world? For mother, we have words like mama, mammy, mam, momy, etc. For father we have words like father, papa, pope, baba, aba, abi, pata, tata, etc

Well the theory is that, everywhere and in every language, children undergo the same sequence of learning a language. They follow the same process of learning.

Until about six weeks old, children mostly cry.

But soon after, they start trying out different sorts of sounds. By six months old, the sounds will have become almost speech-like. Gradually they start fixing on the ones that belong to their mother tongue. The reason why the words like mama and baba are most similar or common is that the children start practicing the sequences of the sounds e.g. ma-ma-ma or ba-ba-ba etc.

Most interestingly, when parents hear them pronouncing these sounds they get excited and assume that the child is trying to mention their names. But in reality, to begin with, they are not mentioning their names! This is because when they are very small, children don't understand the concept of names. When you point to a toy and say "Cat" they don't realize that the sound you have made is a label for that particular toy. Children's early words are tied to places. So their word for a toy cat is usually for one particular toy as it is kept on the cupboard, or shelf etc. It is only later they will use it for all cats. That is why sometimes a child may call his father "Mama" or vice versa. It's because their words are tied to places; and so in their minds, whoever sleeps in the bed room (for example) is 'mama.' And that is also why when you call him by name he doesn't respond until later when he starts learning the concept of nouns.

It is up to around 18 months old that they start discovering that things have names. To them this is a very big achievement. Parents never notice this, but to children this is a great discovery and quite exciting. This is where they get excited and start mentioning all sorts of names they have tried to learn! Soon they start combining these names with other words they have learned. E.g. Daddy car, my mam etc. This is also where they mention all sorts of crazy combinations of words, such that sometimes we don't even understand what they are trying to say to us. It is not because they are just copying the adults, but because they even try to invent their own words from nowhere. Later they start realizing that some of the vocabulary they have invented doesn't communicate any meaning and so they erase them from their memory.

We don't realize it, but children learn to talk amazingly quickly. This is because they know what to look for. So, their next step of learning to talk is that they discover how verbs function. So they learn all sorts of verbs, but to begin with they don't understand the different grammatical parts that go together with the verbs. That's why they can just mention words like in Kipokomo, "*vaji mwaa*" meaning "I want some water to drink." "*Mama koja*" meaning "Mom, I want to pass urine," or "Mom I have urinated." They don't seem to get it right at first, but they are learning. That is why two year olds often speak broken language. This will slowly improve as they discover the right tenses to use and the right grammatical parts that go with the verbs etc.

By three years they have learned how to use long and complex sentences, although things like pronouns still go wrong. At three and a half years, their speech is almost adult-like. By ten years old they are almost near perfect. Children's language learning is biologically programmed. Just as bees quickly learn to distinguish between flowers and stones, likewise, children are pre-set to pick up language sounds. That is why they don't get distracted by sounds of bucking dogs or clucking chickens or humming insects. Even babies of just a few days old show a particular interest in the sounds of their own language or rather the language of their environment.

So children have a pre-set order of learning a language: First, the sounds. Next, the verbs and grammar. Later, the vocabulary of that language. This is really amazing, isn't it? They pay attention to features like word order so

⁸ Edward Jillo trained as a Primary school teacher before becoming a Pokomo translator. He studied child development while in college and has maintained an interest in the subject since becoming father to 4 children aged between 1 and 13 years. He is also actively involved in the Pokomo Mother Tongue Education programme.

as to discover the rules of that language they are acquiring. And whether it is English, Spanish, Pokomo or Arabic, children learn every language equally well and they use the same formula to learn it.

Lastly, language is incredible, subtle and complicated. And yet children learn it as if by magic. They make it look so easy to learn. But it is not. In fact language learning stage is the time when the child's brain struggles the most. And let me say, your toddlers probably will never study as hard again as this time, for the rest of their lives. Age zero up to fourteen (language learning period) is the period when the human brain works the most and may never work harder than that.

The Problems that Hinder the Expansion of the Mijikenda Church.

John Magundo, *Giryama project leader*

Abstract

This paper presents the problems that hinder the expansion of the present Mijikenda church, drawn from experience while running a Scripture Use (SU) programme among the Giryama people in Kilifi and Malindi districts, the home of 7 of the 9 Mijikenda tribes, 2 of which are located in Kwale district (including the present Kinango district that was curved out of Kwale district).

Introduction

Right from the beginning, the task of spreading the Gospel of Christ has not been an easy one. According to Carl-Erik Sahlberg⁹ (1986), the early missionaries, some of who set foot on the land of the Mijikenda people in 1498 with Vasco da Gama, on his way to the Cape of Good Hope, failed to have a strong impact on the local people because of the following reasons:

- The Portuguese who arrived first were more interested in trade more than Christian mission and evangelisation.
- The early missionaries portrayed a tyrannical rule through their home governments.
- Islam had already started establishing itself in the coastal towns of Mombasa, Gede, Watamu, Malindi and Lamu.
- The long distance from Europe to East Africa and the poor means of transport available at that time were not adequate to enable the missionaries to thoroughly evangelise the whole Mijikenda land.
- Failure to contextualise the Gospel to fit the culture of the coastal Mijikenda people.
- Resistance of the local people for fear of being displaced by the foreigners. The Arabs had been displacing the Mijikenda people from their land.
- The Mijikenda were deeply rooted in their traditional religion.

Even with all these factors against them some of the missionaries persevered and were able to convert a few of the local people to Christianity. Some of the converts kept the faith, evangelised others, and by living exemplary lives they managed to bring others to accept the Christian faith.

However, as the missionaries and the local converts took the Christian faith far and wide new problems emerged. At the present time, most people have been reached with the Gospel and new problems have emerged. Some of the problems indicated here are hindering the Gospel from reaching the non-Christians and some of them hinder the Mijikenda Christians from having a deep understanding of the Gospel of Christ.

1. *The behaviour of the Christians in the church.*

Many years ago one missionary wrote, *"We feel the absence of the spiritual life out here in the Church. Conversion is practically unknown, and has certainly not been required as essential for admission to baptism. A mere knowledge of the Creed, Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments has always been reckoned as sufficient ground for baptizing anyone who offers himself. Can anyone be surprised if under such circumstances the Church is impure and rotten through and through?"* This may not hold in total today but to a large degree most of what this missionary quoted holds true to this day.

In Giryama the church may appear to have grown over the years but in most areas the growth is one mile wide and one inch deep. Rightly so because what some of the Christians do is very contrary to the stipulations of the Christian faith. Some sins are considered small and they seem a normal thing that even the Christians are not afraid of committing. Some of the sins like fornication and adultery are committed in hiding. Without realizing it, some Christians find themselves cheating and thus losing the confidence of the people in the church and the society at large.

One thing that the Christians do not realise is that they all live in a community and that all the people in the community have got their eyes on Christians. People expect them to be the role models in the society and set good examples for non-Christians to follow. When the non-Christians see Christians misbehaving they get a

⁹ Unfortunately, the full reference was not available at the time of going to print. The author apologises for this omission.

justification for their not becoming Christians because they cannot see anything special in the Christians. In other words they can't see any differences between the Christians and the non-Christians. That is to say the Christians are doing all the things that the non-Christians are doing, things that are contrary to the Christian faith.

2. Poverty

As a result of the widespread poverty people want to cling to anything that will make them earn money no matter what the means. Christians will go to the length of cheating or stealing from others as long as they make a living. Some Christians commit these sins saying that God will not punish them because after all they will use some of the stolen money to support the work of God and that it also helps them offer big tithes in the Church and help in many development projects in the Christian circles.

"I would rather earn five hundred in the town than earn one thousand in the village". These were the words of a young man in a village in Kilifi district. The running away from poverty and search for 'good' life in towns and cities has also affected the spread of the gospel in that most of the young men who go to the cities do not come back to the villages as Christians if they were one before.

3. Witchcraft

The fear of witchcraft is a huge hindrance to many people who are not Christians. It prevents them from accepting the faith because they don't think they will be very safe under the umbrella of Christianity. This is because their understanding of the protective powers of the Lord is very shallow and they don't see themselves surviving without the protection of a sorcerer.

A large number of the people who confess Christianity today do so because they are anticipating finding a solution to their problems. When these problems are not solved, then they go to seek the advice of fortune-tellers, fetish priests and witchdoctors. At the witchdoctor's, people are given charms or amulets and since these are things that they can see and touch it gives them the confidence that they have protection or they will be financially successful.

4. Non-Christian parents

Some parents stop their children from going to church. This stops the children from experiencing the joy of salvation. I am tempted to say that some of these parents are doing this out of ignorance of the word of God.

Also, some parents fear that if their children become Christians then they would be spending a lot of time in Church and less time at home hence, the children would not help their parents in their daily chores.

Yet other parents don't want their children to go to church because they have seen Christians misbehave so they wouldn't like to see their children doing the same.

5. Lack of (proper) teachings

It is easy for the Christians to be tempted and fall into the traps because they lack knowledge (*Hosea 4:6a NIV*) and they therefore do not know how to overcome the temptations and obstacles when they come across their way. Patience is easily lost because Christian men and women have not had a good foundation on faith and they may not have heard of the Biblical great men of faith, prayer and perseverance. The Christians/converts, both young and old do not know how to act or react when they are confronted by certain circumstances.

6. Wedding Costs and marriage

The cost of marriage is very high in many places as a result of the high bride price that the groom is required to pay and the high cost of the present day Christian weddings that have come as a result of people wanting to copy western weddings thinking that a Christian wedding has to be Western in style. As a result therefore, many young men and women end up getting frustrated. Young ladies get pregnant out of wedlock because their partners cannot afford an expensive wedding.

Some parents, especially the mothers, insist on their daughters marrying wealthy men. In this case if the girl had fallen in love with a poor young man of her age then they (the girl and the young man) could collude and have the girl pregnant by the young man so that she does not have marry the wealthy old man. The alternative of this is to elope.

On top of the wedding costs and bride price, many parents ask for expensive gifts from the groom. This ends up being a frustration to the groom.

In some cases if a couple has not had a child for many years after their marriage then rumours start circulating with most people saying that the wife is infertile. Without patience and perseverance that come from the Spirit of God, the lady may be tempted to engage in an affair with someone else with the aim of getting a baby. Cases of this nature are becoming less with time and within the Christian circles.

7. *Poor leadership skills and breaching of counselling ethics*

Some of the church elders breach the confidence of the youth. This is normally so especially when young men go to the church elders for guidance and counselling. It is human and common for anyone to feel bad when they hear others talking about them. The feeling is tremendous if what is being talked about had been confided to a pastor and then the pastor decided to make it a matter to be discussed in open forums for all to know.

8. *Weak cooperation between church leaders of different denominations*

Everyone for himself and these days it is every Christian for themselves. In some areas the church is divided and so there exists a gap between Christians of different church denominations, a gap that non-Christians use to refuse Christianity and to speak ill of the Christians.

9. *High levels of illiteracy in the community*

Counting on the high levels of illiteracy many people cannot read the Bible and hence they can't practice what is in it because they don't know it. A good percentage of the people depend on what the preacher says.

Apart from the issue of illiteracy, most of the literate Mijikendas reside in the hinterland and they don't have ready access to Bibles and other Christian literature.

10. *Islam*

This is a factor that cannot be ignored. The old towns of the Kenyan Coast had contacts with the Muslim world long before the European missionaries came, and even though Islam has not penetrated so much in to the interior, it is worthy noting that the religion is also growing fast and trying to reach the hinterland of the Mijikenda land.

11. *Contextualisation*

Some churches have made tremendous steps to contextualise the Gospel to fit in the culture of the people but there are still many areas of the Mijikenda people where the Gospel is still presented in a way that gives no room for the people's culture. This renders the Gospel very foreign to the people and thus reduces the practicing of Christianity to certain domains, mainly within the vicinity of the church or Christian fellowship. In some cases there is a conflict between culture and Christianity because the Christians do not know how the Gospel fits in, for example at a funeral, wedding, etc.

Conclusion

In the next issue of 'In Our Tongue' I will suggest ways in which BTL Language Projects can help the local church, and the entire communities where BTL is involved, to overcome the problems discussed above.

Success or Failure? Evaluating Unintended Outcomes

Report of the BI¹⁰ Dictionary Elicitation Workshop in Ilwana held at Madogo (Tana River District, Kenya), 20th –28th August 2006

Jacob Njagi, edited by Alison Nicolle

In BTL much emphasis is placed on strategic planning and on achieving set targets. At the end of a time period or specific project we are encouraged to evaluate whether certain goals have been met or not, and therefore whether time and resources have been well spent. However, sometimes things do not go according to plan. We work among communities where all sorts of things can occur which will disrupt our careful planning. In the early stages of a language project the community may not fully understand what we are trying to do, leading to misunderstandings and false expectations. If the community does not support the work of a language project, all our hard work will ultimately be in vain, even if we have consistently met our own targets. In the following report, Jacob Njagi explains how a ‘failed’ dictionary workshop led to a breakthrough in public relations and community understanding of what the project is trying to do.

A group of 12 native Kiwilwana speakers met for eight days and collected 1,786 entries using the list of semantic domains developed by Roger van Otterloo, Alison Nicolle and Ron Moe, and translated into Swahili by Oliver Stegen and members of the Rangi project. Edward Chome, Sabila Ng’ania and Jacob Njagi facilitated the workshop. Fatuma Ali dealt with the administrative and social issues since we were hosting the workshop at a centre where we provided food for ourselves. Alfer Lention Lempaine was also present but on a five-day internship programme in this project.

The workshop got off to a discouraging start. In our initial invitations, we had invited only four elderly people and sixteen youngsters who were all people with some level of formal education. However, these invitations were withdrawn by the community leaders who sent religious leaders to the workshop instead. The participants expected more in terms of living conditions and daily allowance which almost led to the cancellation of the workshop before it even began. By the grace of God, these issues were resolved the following day giving way for dictionary workshop discussions to kick off after lunchtime on 21st.

The composition of participants made it very difficult to elicit words. We spent the first afternoon and the following day teaching them what a dictionary is, why it is important in any language and how to elicit words. We also took this opportunity to teach them the Kiwilwana writing system. It was in this exercise that it was realised that most of them could not read or write at all.

When we felt that they had got the basic concept on how to collect words, we divided the team into three groups each under the supervision of either Ng’ania, Chome or myself. Fatuma would join Ng’ania’s group whenever she could be available. Alfer got the concept and started eliciting words in Ilchamus, his mother tongue.

In the actual word elicitation exercise we faced the following difficulties: -

- Some concepts were completely not understood e.g. 9.5 pronouns, 9.4 Affirmation and negation, 9.1 general words, 9.2 aspect, 9.3 mode, and 9.8 logical relations. Others were understood to some degree, but it took the effort of the facilitators to synthesise and then explain them in simpler terms.
- Word generation was not easy to come by. Due to this limited understanding of concepts the participants depended heavily on the facilitator’s guidance. It was up to the facilitators to provoke the participants’ mental database for them to give rise to Kiwilwana vocabulary. In a number of cases this did not work well because of cultural differences between the facilitators and the participants. In such cases the participants ended up translating words or phrases as they were in the list of the semantic domains, a thing that is not helpful at all in the exercise.
- All these people were not used to sitting and thinking for a long time. Word elicitation exercise therefore turned out to be very tiring and boring for them. They kept asking for time off after nearly every hour of working. It was even more discouraging to see some of them lying down as the other group members worked. As a result of this we devised a method where after every three hours, we would have a plenary session in which every member joined in and participated. In this session we would have every item elicited discussed all over again. This helped in clarifying what the groups had come up with and then

¹⁰ Bantu Initiative

make necessary changes. These sessions sometimes turned out to be very stormy and uncontrollable because of the emotions aroused in these old men especially regarding dialectical differences.

After two days of working, the participants confessed to me that they had made a mistake in coming to the workshop. One of them said that such kind of work required people with a university degree. I grabbed this opportunity and spoke to them about the importance of respecting our workshop invitation letters in future. I made them understand that we know them, and we know their abilities and therefore whenever we send invitation letters in future, they should respect them and let only those invited to come.

On Thursday afternoon, I gave Alfer one hour to speak with them on how they can emancipate themselves from the shadow of the Cushitic communities living around them. He pointed out that they, the Ilchamus, lived under the shadow of Kalenjin community even though they are Maa speakers. They embraced hard work- in schools, business and in livestock keeping- in order to be economically empowered. And at the moment they have started developing their language. He also cited how they had taken the government to court over *pilosophys* [*mathenge*] plant, which is posing a serious danger to Wailwana as well. This session drew very many positive reactions from the participants. They unanimously agreed to support our endeavours in language development in the community.

In conclusion, the dictionary workshop was in itself a failure. Spending eight days, about US\$1000 and collecting only less than 2000 words can be considered shameful. The amount of resources put in here would under normal circumstances be expected to give rise to about ten thousand words. But these are some of the challenges perhaps one might be expected to face in a cross cultural context before one gains proper acceptance by the target community.

The exercise was not all a waste of time though. With most of the community's religious leaders [all Muslim] in attendance, it turned out to be a good public relations forum. For the first time in this community, I was able to speak my mind out in matters pertaining to child marriage, laziness and idleness, and illiteracy, all which lead to poverty, without offending them. They promised to do something to curb it. This was one of the most exciting moments in my service in this community.

Conference Report

Bantu Grammar Conference at SOAS London, April 20-22, 2006

Oliver Stegen, UTB Linguistics Consultant

and Steve Nicolle, BTL Linguistics Consultant

From April 20-22, the final conference of the Bantu Project (3-year collaboration between universities in London, Leiden and Berlin) took place at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London.

The conference was attended by approximately 60, most of whom also presented (39 papers were presented, authored by 43 different people as a few were involved with two presentations). A regular paper took 20 minutes with 10 minutes of discussion. Specially invited keynote speakers were allowed 50-minute slots (these were Al Mtenje, Thilo Schadeberg and Katherine Demuth). On Saturday, a special session on the synchrony and diachrony of the Bantu verb took place, organised by Larry Hyman and Derek Nurse.

Overview of Presentations

In the following, all papers are listed in chronological order. Papers marked with * are the ones which I was unable to attend (due to parallel sessions).

- Rugemalira J. “The structure of the Bantu noun phrase”
- Philippon G. “Tone ‘anticipation’ in Bantu”
- Zerbian S. “Phrasing in Northern Sotho: Description and Theory”
- Letsholo R. “Tone, morphology and the syntax of the Ikalanga DP”
- Cheng & Downing. “The prosody and syntax of Zulu relative clauses”
- Leitch M.(SIL) “Babole minimal relatives”
- Thornell C. “Morphology of plant names in the Mpiemo language”
- Legère K. “Noun classes and names of wild plants in Bantu languages”
- Banoum B. “Basaa gender in typological perspective”
- *Klein U. “Encoding of ditransitive verb complements in Swati”
- v/d Wal J. “The Makhuwa disjoint form and an empty Immediate After Verb position”
- *Thwala N. “On the syntactic relationship of subjects and predicates in SiSwati”
- Devos M. “From contrastive vowel length to penultimate lengthening in Xangaci?”
- Mtenje A. “On Optimality Theory and vowel sequences in Bantu languages”
- *Bickmore L. “Stem tone melodies in Chilungu”
- *Kula N. “Tonal alternations in Bemba”
- *Marlo M. “The exponence of TAM in Bakweri”
- Dunham M. “The Verbal System in Langi (F33, Tanzania)”
- Stegen O.(SIL) “Lexical density in oral versus written Rangi texts”
- Waldburger D. “Patterns of modality in political speeches of Nyerere in Swahili”
- Maho J. “Bantu verb inflections, slot systems, and Proto-Bantu”
- Marten, Kula & Thwala. “Variables of morpho-syntactic variation in Bantu”
- Botne R. “On the *cognitive* organization of tense systems in Bantu”
- Myers-Scotton & Jake. “Steps in grammatical turnover/shift: The codeswitching of Xhosa-English bilinguals”
- Schadeberg T. “Expressing comparison in Swahili: description and typology”
- Kunkeyani T. “Semantics classification and Chichewa derived nouns”
- Fleisch A. “Semantic properties and grammatical patterns of verbs in Nguni”
- Nicolle S.(SIL) “Metarepresentational demonstratives in Digo”
- Riedel K. “Demonstrative Noun orders and DP internal Focus”
- Aboh E. “If we see *Focus*, you go left and I go right!”
- Möhlig W. “Prosodic Marking of Focus in Otjiherero (Herero R.30)”

- Demuth K. “Licensing null noun class prefixes in Sesotho”
- Buell L. “Two Merge positions for Bantu locative applicatives”
- Githiora C. “Gikuyu complex verb morphology”
- Nurse D. “Did the Proto-Bantu verb have an analytic or a synthetic structure?”
- Elders S. “Complex verb morphology in Kulango (Gur)”
- Segerer G. “The Bantu-like patterns of the Bijogo verbs”
- Good & Güldemann. “The Bantu verbal prefixes and S-Aux-O-V order in Benue-Congo”
- Hyman L. “Reconstructing the Proto-Bantu verbal unit: Internal evidence”

Evaluation

The conference was well organised and generally a very profitable experience. Both academic and social interaction was excellent, and the conference certainly rounded off a three-year research project succinctly. The suggestion to continue Bantu grammar conferences even beyond the end of this particular project was greeted by enthusiasm on the part of most participants. A tentative date and venue has been set for October 2007 in Gothenburg, Sweden.

Despite being a conference on ‘Bantu Grammar’, many of the papers (although interestingly none of the SIL members’) dealt exclusively with tone and phonology. As with all conferences, the quality of the presentations was uneven, but in this case only slightly so; most papers were both interesting and involved a high degree of sophistication. The one disappointing paper was Mtenje’s Optimality Theory analysis of vowel sequences, which was not explanatory and attempted a purely phonological account of what was clearly a morpho-phonological phenomenon. Quite a number of presenters expected special knowledge of the participants, particularly in Optimality Theory and in Generative Grammar.

As I prepare to write a grammar of Digo, a number of the papers suggested parameters that should be described, such as possible Demonstrative-Noun orders, locative object marking, (thematic restrictions in) locative inversion, agreement with conjoined NPs, and comparison and contrast and the order of Noun, Demonstrative, Possessive, Adjectives, Quantifiers etc. in the Noun Phrase.

BTL Staff News

Josiah Ole Kirisuah

Josiah Ole-Kirisuah, the Regional Language Programmes Manager for the Western region, has requested to take early retirement from BTL. The BTL Board has accepted the request and Josiah will be leaving the service of BTL at the end of October.

Josiah joined BTL in May 1999 and was appointed the RLPM-West. During this time, he supervised work in Sabaot, Marakwet, Suba, Tharaka and Daasanach. He also participated in the formation of the Samburu/Ilchamus project. He has also served diligently and faithfully in the Fundraising Committee of BTL. He will certainly be missed in BTL. Josiah and his family have been greatly involved in the PR activities of BTL for which we are deeply grateful. One of those activities was when he was part of BTL's team that did a PR tour of Australia and New Zealand in 2002 and recently (May 2006) he was on a speaking tour in Canada as a guest of Wycliffe Canada. We are grateful for the contribution he has made not only to BTL but also to the worldwide ministry of Bible translation.

On behalf of the BTL Board and staff, I wish to express our gratitude to Josiah for the seven years of service that he has rendered the ministry of BTL.

Before joining BTL, Josiah has previously worked as a head teacher of a school in Kajiado and also served for many years as the Director of Literacy and Evangelism. He studied at Mosoriot Teacher Training College and at Daystar University.

Josiah is married to Sarah and they have five children.

We wish him every blessing as he moves on.

Mundara Muturi

Discussion Forum: Are we selling ourselves short?

The following article is meant to promote discussion. Please send comments of any length to the editor, in particular if you have any innovative ideas that could be adopted by other projects.

BTL is a unique organisation in Kenya. As far as I know, no other group is doing as much to promote literacy and development through the use of minority languages. We run literacy classes, produce literature of all kinds and have a body of academic research into the diversity of languages in Kenya. All this is accomplished on minimal budgets.

However, in 2006 it is no longer good enough to have a good 'product'. People need to know about it and be persuaded that it is worth having. Commercial companies spend a huge amount on advertising their brands, and this is an ongoing process. They carry out research into their target audience, so that they can ensure that their products are what the customer wants.

In our language projects, how much attention do we pay to marketing? How do we display our books (if at all)? How do we ensure that what we produce is of interest to the people we hope to buy them? What strategies do we use to promote and sell our books? Are we satisfied with our monthly sales totals, or should they be higher? Should language project staff be salesmen at all, or is their job to sit in the office producing materials leaving others to sell and market our products?

BTL is not just about selling books. We are also selling a vision, a belief that education through the mother tongue can transform lives. Do our target communities agree with us? Do they even know about us? What are the most effective ways of getting the community behind us and enthusiastic about what we are doing? Should our approach be different in an area with a high Christian population as opposed to one with a Christian minority? Would a person walking into a project office quickly get a sense of what we are about, or do they just see dusty piles of paper?

BTL is highly dependent on outside funding. How good are we at 'selling' ourselves to potential donors? Are we focussing too much on certain sources of funding, while ignoring other potential sources? As regards the wider academic community, are we willing to share our expertise with them, or are we reluctant to interact with other linguists and scholars?¹¹ Are our linguistic archives usable and presentable?

Do BTL field staff receive enough training in marketing issues? If not, what sort of training would be useful? Or is the whole idea of marketing too 'commercial' and therefore inconsistent with what BTL stands for?

In the next edition of the journal I hope to have a whole host of comments, suggestions, stories and anecdotes to stimulate and inspire you. Everyone should have something to say on this topic, from the GS to the receptionist, from project leaders and consultants to field workers who are sent out on their bicycles each week. I look forward to hearing from lots of you!

Alison Nicolle

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or send comments to P.O. Box 5771 Diani Beach, Kenya

¹¹ See Steve Nicolle's article in this edition for more on this topic.