

message for all MAGAZINE

When God's Word starts to take effect

Andreas Ernst, who has served on a short-term project with Wycliffe Switzerland, is currently living in Hungary. His wife, Eszter Kurdi-Ernst, became a member of Wycliffe Hungary last November. Currently they are preparing for overseas service. Below, Andreas shares about his experiences in his two year short-term project in Cameroon:

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Unfortunately the work of Bible translators is not finished once the New Testament is translated into a tribal language. The translation, revision and printing are just the beginning and the best is still to come! If even in our literate Western society the majority of Bibles spend most of their existence collecting dust on a shelf, we cannot assume that a newly published Bible translation will be used in a culture where reading has never been an important part of life. Illiteracy and the tradition of orally passing on information and teaching are only some of the barriers which have to be overcome, in order for the newly published Word of God to be put to use in the lives of believers.

Bible translation without Bible promotion is like spending hours in the kitchen baking a delicious wedding cake and then putting it into the fridge and forgetting about it without anybody ever tasting it. But serving the delicious cake in an attractive way to people who can enjoy and appreciate it – that is the goal and reward of every baker!

These last two years I had the privilege and challenge to be involved in just that part of Bible translation: serving the cake. Working in a team of six young people, our task was to promote the freshly translated word of God among the **Mambila** and **Kwanja** people of Cameroon. The Mambila New Testament had been translated by a British translator, while the Kwanja New Testament was about to be published thanks to the translation work of a Canadian missionary couple and their Kwanja translators. None of us were trained linguists, and ►



► only one of us had gone to Bible College. But with the help of more experienced missionaries, and as we worked together with the local people and churches, we discovered a number of ways in which the Word of God can be promoted. When I talked about our work with a Bible translator colleague in Cameroon, he told me: 'You are so lucky, you get to do all the fun stuff! To be honest, I am a little bit jealous of you.' He was right – we did get to do a lot of exciting stuff!

In the following I would like to share some of our experiences with you. I hope this will broaden your understanding of the huge and precious task of Bible translators. And I also hope to get some of you interested in working with Wycliffe yourselves, as you get to know new aspects of the work.



Literacy promotion

One big part of our work was to promote reading classes, so that men and woman can learn to read their own language. The women especially showed great interest in going to these reading classes, often because they had never learned to read well. This gave them not only an opportunity to learn to read, but also to gain self-worth. Poor teaching in public schools, work in the fields, and getting married at an early age are often reasons for this illiteracy among women. However, young men and also a growing number of young women read French (the national language) quite well, and can learn to read their own language quickly. All it takes for them to learn to read their mother tongue is an introduction to the Mambila alphabet and practice.

Another aspect of promoting literacy was to train mother tongue readers to become teachers of others. Although we found it difficult to motivate many people to learn to read well, we were able to make reading Mambila more attractive by developing reading and writing diplomas. We set up an examination system and awarded those who passed the level I or level II test with a diploma, publicly handed over by the chief of the village or one of his counsellors.

When we discovered that some people made fun of those going to reading classes, we decided to organise public readings, giving readers an opportunity to gain more self-confidence, getting others interested at the same time.

Once, for example, we played a fishing game in the middle of the market. Those passing by could try to fish a paper fish out of a big basin. If they could catch a fish and read the sentence written on the back of it, they received a small prize. On another occasion we set up a reading box, out of which readers read different stories and texts in the middle of the market next to a drinking place. People passing by could throw in a coin and sit down in a comfortable chair and then listen to the reading. These public readings were great fun, started interesting debates, and made many realise that reading their own language is not that difficult.



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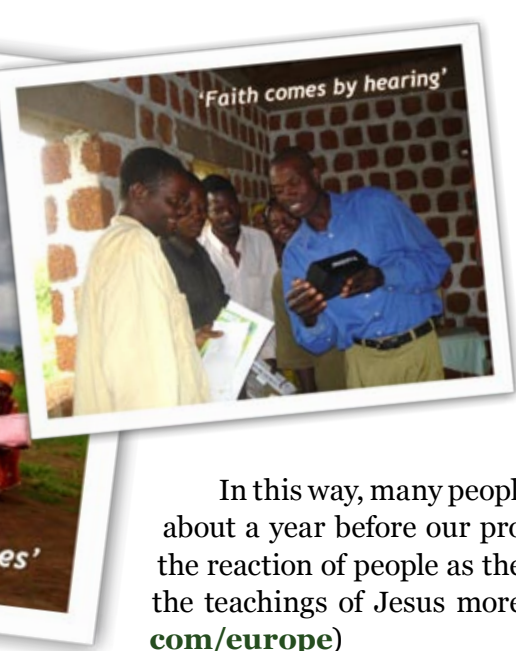
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Faith Comes By Hearing

But what about those people who cannot learn to read because they are too old? In Africa many people have bad eyesight and no access to an optician nor the money to pay for an operation. Do they have no chance of having personal access to the word of God? Thanks to a project called Faith Comes By Hearing, New Testaments all over Africa are recorded and made accessible to people in the form of an audio device run on solar energy. Listening groups are set up, which meet once a week for an hour, listening all the way through the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation in about one year.

In this way, many people can be reached by the word. The Mambila New Testament had been recorded about a year before our project, so we got to help promote such listening groups. It was exciting to see the reaction of people as they heard the word of God read out in Mambila without any mistakes, making the teachings of Jesus more understandable than ever before. (www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/europe)

Acting out biblical stories

Another way to make the teaching of Jesus more understandable and down-to-earth is to teach church members to act out biblical stories. It made such a difference when they acted out well-understood Bible stories in their own language, as opposed to passively listening to the Sunday Bible reading, which is often done in French.

These are only a few ways in which the Word of God can be promoted in a people group where there is no tradition of reading the Bible. As you can see, the work of sharing the Word of God with others is a huge process and involves a lot more than just linguistics. If you love the Word of God and like to work with people, if you are a creative person, and also a good communicator, then maybe you have a place in the Wycliffe team!



Andreas Ernst



Current Bible translation statistics:

(by the number of languages)

