

Chad & Cameroon Trip Update, March 15, 2017

Dear praying friends,

I'm safely home in Florida with Jaci. Thank you for sharing this journey with me and for upholding every aspect of it in prayer. As I return to my daily work of writing verse by verse guidance for African Bible translators (current projects: checking a colleague's work on Genesis and drafting the notes on Revelation) I value your continued prayers for my part in the work and for God's Word to spread and to accomplish his purposes.

Yours for the unfolding of the Word,
Keith

Translation tidbit: In the eye of the beholder

As I look back over my notes of revisions we made while checking the Nuasué and Numala translations of Luke, I am reminded that the way people of a given culture see the world influences the way they speak. Let me share a few examples...

In Luke 12:53, the Nuasué translators used an idiomatic way of talking about opposing forces: "They will be divided: father and son—*fire and water*; mother and daughter—*fire and water*; mother-in-law and daughter-in-law—*fire and water*."

In Luke 12:27, Jesus says, "Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these." The Greek word rendered as "lilies" in most English translations could actually refer to one of several wildflowers of the open fields, including poppies, daisies, and others. The Nuasué team had translated using the name of a pink flower that grows on a tree in the forests of their region, but they weren't happy with that choice, since Jesus was talking about flowers that grow among the grass in the field. One of the translators suggested that the new green grass that grows in rainy season could be used. Since the point Jesus is making is that God takes care of us, clothing even lowly wildflowers with splendor that surpasses that of kings, I asked the translators which image people in their region consider to be more beautiful—the pink flowers on the tree or the new green grass. Most of them shrugged their shoulders. The woman who translates their text into French for me to check said, "Our people don't talk about things like that. We don't have time to think about beauty like you Europeans do."

But someone begged to differ. A couple of men from a neighboring language group were taking a break from their translation workshop, and they were sitting quietly in a corner listening in on our conversation. One of them spoke up: "When the new grass sprouts in rainy season, you see whole bright green fields of it. The wind blows over it gently, and it ripples like waves. It's beautiful!"

"Listen to that," I said. "It's poetry!" They all promptly agreed to use "the new grass of the fields" in their translation.

In Luke 13:15, Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of those who criticized him for healing a woman on the Sabbath. The Numala translation had him saying, "You who walk like parrots! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?"

I asked, “What does it mean to walk like a parrot?” They explained that a parrot walks along a branch taking a few steps forward, then a few steps backward. To them, it’s a metaphor for someone who says or does one thing one day and says or does the opposite the next day—a hypocrite.

I’m thankful for all the forward motion we’ve experienced over the past few weeks in preparing God’s message for these language communities. May it unfold with power among them!

Keith Patman