
Training Church Leaders from Minority Language Groups in Multilingual Bible Schools

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Whole groups of people are marginalized because the language they speak at home differs from the language used in Bible training institutions. Multilingual churches, Bible institutes and seminaries need to use the national language or trade language because their students are from numerous ethnic groups and have different mother tongues (MT). Consequently the training institutions use a language that may be foreign to all or some of the students. These students may only understand a vague idea of the meanings of important concepts that are unique to the Christian faith but do not have an exact word-for-word correspondence in their mother tongue—concepts like salvation, sanctification, glory, forgiveness.

If the students are not encouraged to use their MT as an integral part of their training, when they go home and preach to their own people, they borrow the most important words of the faith even if they preach and teach in their mother tongue. For example, what would you understand if you had never heard these Scripture passages before?

Romans 8:30: And those he requin waquir car, he also called; those he called; he also tayar bár chájacro. Tayar bár chaquír, he also carin yin ayin wac bahjacro.

Ephesians 3:1; Ay tewataro be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesús Christ, who has ay yajacro us in the Cuacur aba cuitar with every ay yajacro in Christ.

This practice excludes many people from engaging with Scripture and from intimate conversation with Jesus. Pastors trained in the national language have a hard time helping people from vernacular language groups engage with Scripture in the contexts where they live, and so the people perceive of Christianity as foreign religion that doesn't meet their deepest spiritual needs. When they meet a crisis, they return to their old ways of dealing with it.



When the Scriptures are available in the MT, students will use them if encouraged to do so by the staff of the training institutions. Professors may not understand the languages their students are working in and they may find this to be challenging, but the results are well worth the challenge.

A course was given in a Multilingual Bible Institute in Colombia, South America. Students represented 13 language groups. They were given opportunity to work in language groups to discover how key terms in Spanish were translated in several passages and contexts in their mother-tongue Scripture.

Sample Lesson: Repent, Repentance

1. Find each Biblical reference in the Scriptures in your own language. Read it aloud.
2. Write your answers first in your own language and then in English.

Bible reference	English term	Term in your language	Literal translation of the term of your language in English	What does a person do when they repent? (Write in your own language and then in English.)
Acts 5:31	Repentance	<i>Ay bar yajquíc et</i>	Stop doing bad	Éyinat ay bár yajquíc etro. They stop doing bad.

The work in small groups was followed by class discussion where each student shared a literal translation back into Spanish of the terms in their language. For example, repentance is translated by a word/phrase meaning 'stop doing bad' in Tunebo. Another language focused more on the aspect of 'feeling sad for having sinned' in their translation of repentance. The instructor grouped similar meanings on the board to help the students see the various aspects of the term.

Two courses were given in 2004 and 2005. In the first course, all of the instructors at the Bible school participated and saw how hearing the different ways the word had been translated helped the people understand the scriptures in a practical way. The students commented, "Now I understand the Scriptures more clearly."



Two side benefits of the course were that it showed the people the value of their own languages and it helped them gain more confidence and fluency in reading their languages.

What was learned about Scripture engagement?

- Collaboration between training institutions and Bible translation personnel can make the efforts of each partner much more effective. Staff at Bible institutions are doing a vitally important work of training in the use of the Scriptures. If translation personnel take the time to work with them, they will become more aware of translation principles and be able to explain the reasons a term was translated in a particular way. They will also see the value of using MT scriptures and the problems encountered in multilingual situations. Bible school staff changes frequently so contacts need to be renewed frequently.
- Language can be a significant barrier to Scripture engagement.
- Christianity will remain foreign to people if certain key concepts remain in a foreign language

This document was first made available as a report of a workshop held at the World Wide Scripture Engagement Consultation in Malaysia in October 2009. It is now available for download at: <http://www.scripture-engagement.org>

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