

Special Strategies for Small Language Groups

Part II: Proposing an Alternative Initial Strategy for Small Language Groups in the Pacific

by Karl Franklin

Summary

SIL International has a goal of beginning a translation project in every language group needing one within 25 years. This can be a daunting task when considering the many small, or nearly extinct language groups in the world. This article outlines the rationale and strategies for giving these groups the advantage of having portions of the Bible using the oral format that fits the cultural style of oration and discourse in most of these societies. The strategy focuses upon finding good storytellers in the culture, acquainting them with Bible stories, training them, and then allowing them to retell stories in their own languages.

Introduction

Approximately 30% of the languages in the Pacific, in particular the countries of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Australia, have 500 or less speakers. In Australia (as in the US) most of the indigenous languages of this size are either extinct or face rapid (within a generation) extinction. The situation may seem less bleak in other parts of the Pacific, although it is clear that multilingualism, the adoption of the Pidgins, and widespread urbanization will continue to affect the viability of even the most “isolated” language groups.

This paper, therefore, suggests that a different strategy should be promoted initially with such small language groups by providing limited editions of retold Bible stories in an oral format.² These retold Bible stories would be based on existing and appropriate source languages, which in the Pacific would be mainly English or some Pidgin variety (Tok Pisin, Solomon Pijin, Bislama). The source text would still ultimately be the Bible. This proposal would recognize and encourage retelling Bible stories as the front-end default strategy for small language groups.

I also hope that this paper and the approach it suggests will be a precursor to a more standard Bible translation project because it will reveal and demonstrate the interest of members of a particular language group in vernacular materials. It also can be the impetus for the survival or renewal of these endangered languages.

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Is there really a problem?

The Bible translation task, as historically perceived and carried out in the SIL framework, takes a considerable amount of time and involves many expatriate (and of course national) people assisting in each language group. The needed human resources have been lacking. Retelling Bible stories is a practical way to initiate a translation project on a limited basis, allowing the evaluation of both the motivation and participation of language speakers, before committing to a long-range translation project.

There are thousands of languages without any part of the Bible, especially in countries like Nigeria, India, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. In the Pacific alone, most languages are very small and many of them will probably be non-viable or even extinct within the next 25 years.³ It seems clear that these small languages often comprise the most neglected groups in any country. Surely the needs of these small groups calls for a plan that is radically different from the default practice of assigning a language team to either translate or supervise translating the whole New Testament, and in some cases the Old Testament as well, for every language group.

In addition, given the extraordinary task of initiating Bible translation programs worldwide within a certain time (say the next 25 years), the particular needs of small and endangered language groups should be a major concern. However, based upon past Bible translation history, personnel will not be available to initiate, supervise, or train others for such a global task. In addition, the continuing assimilation and multilingualism of the groups (with larger, dominant languages and with “official” languages like Pidgins and English), presents other formidable problems.

This is because small language groups are unique and have survival problems. Because of their size, information is exchanged orally and quickly. New information generally comes in from the “outside,” from people in other dominant language groups.

New linguistic forms are borrowed freely, allowing smaller languages to change rapidly. With increased mobility, media exposure, and outside relationships, the degree and rate of influence accelerates. The exchange is mainly one way and soon small language communities may rely on outsiders for their linguistic innovations that are, in turn, deployed rapidly in the community. Given these conditions, the rapidly changing linguistic communities need some opportunity for the use and stability of their own vernacular languages.

Small language groups in the Pacific

The 14th edition of the *Ethnologue* (<http://www.sil.org/Ethnologue>) gives population and some sociolinguistic information for the languages of the Pacific. The data illustrate the problems of language demise and probable extinction for many groups.

Note, for example, what has happened on the Australian continent. Of the 268 languages listed in the *Ethnologue* for Australia, about 255 of them are vernaculars. Of these, 31 are already extinct and 137 are “nearly extinct,” usually meaning that there are only a few older speakers alive. In addition, 41 languages have less than 100 speakers and only 9 have between 101 and 200 speakers. To round out the picture, 18 languages are spoken by between 201 and 499 people and 7 are spoken by between 500 and 1000 people. Only 12 languages are spoken by over 1,000 people. If we magnanimously consider any language spoken by over 500 people still viable in the next 25 years, then only 12% of all vernacular languages in Australia are in this category. While it is true that the sociolinguistic and political factors that led to the demise of Australian languages are quite different than in the rest of the Pacific, the statistics indicate clearly that the languages of Australia are dying. We should be surprised if other countries do not demonstrate a similar trend.

Consider Vanuatu, also in the Pacific, which is reported to have 110 languages. Some 60 of them have less than 500 speakers, i.e., 54% of the languages. However, despite the small number of speakers for most

languages, they have apparently retained a strong viability, probably due to their isolation. Nevertheless, the prospect of beginning traditional full New Testament projects in most of those languages seems very slim. It would seem prudent to initiate the Bible retelling strategy as the primary one, with vernacular speakers trained for the job.

The Solomon Islands seems to be in a somewhat better position, at least in terms of population figures: of 69 living languages, only 14 have less than 500 speakers (roughly 20%), indicating that the languages generally have a larger average population than elsewhere in the Pacific. Although there are few sociolinguistic surveys from the Solomons to cite as evidence, language viability seems strong. Nevertheless, the prospect of initiating traditional full-scale translation projects in the Solomons is dismal given the lack of personnel that are being assigned there.

Finally, consider the nation of Papua New Guinea with the most languages in the Pacific—some 850 of them. However, roughly 27% of all the languages in PNG (233 by my count) are spoken by 500 or fewer people. The number of speakers and languages are (roughly) as follows:⁴

Number of Speakers	Number of Languages
One to 100	45
101 to 200	57
201 to 300	43
301 to 400	51
401 to 500	37

These small languages are concentrated in four main Provinces, all of which have had Tok Pisin in use for many years:

Provinces (30-500 Speakers)	Number of Languages
Madang	86
East Sepik	35
Sandaun	30
Morobe	21

If my figures are correct, nearly 30% of the languages in PNG, the Solomons, and Vanuatu, consist of language groups that have less than 500 speakers. Note, too, that of the 233 or so small languages in PNG (again, defined as any language with 500 or less speakers), through 2001, only three have had the NT published: Ama, Binumarien and Bisorio. About the same number are listed as having “Bible portions.” Given these facts, there is no evidence of priority for translating the whole New Testament for small language groups. It seems clear that the default strategy of assigning a translation team to one language for an undetermined period of time will mean many language groups will not be included in future translation projects.

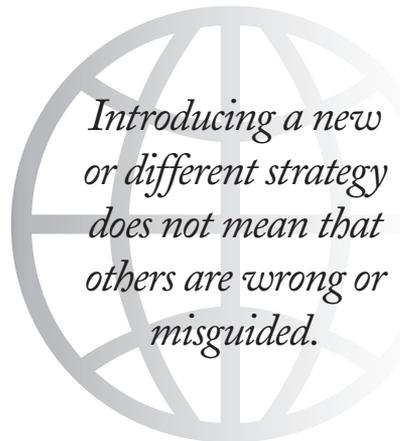
A different strategy

Introducing a new or different strategy does not mean that others are wrong or misguided. And indeed, I have been informed of a number of alternative approaches in the Pacific (and elsewhere), but none of them are of the nature I have outlined.⁵ According to my research, there has hardly been any translation work done in very small languages and, given the way personnel are assigned to programs, there is not likely to be much more. On the one hand, this argues for more personnel to be assigned to PNG and the Pacific (clearly a need), but on the other hand, the lack of available personnel calls for some alternative strategies as to how the people are deployed.

I have belabored the point that the historical strategy has been to assume that every language should have at least the New Testament published in the vernacular and, more recently, that the whole Old Testament be translated, as well. I am proposing a different strategy that would be equally valid, particularly for small language groups. An important aspect of this approach would be an initial agreement with leaders in the particular language group (or some recognized segment of it) that the translation program involvement would be deliberately restricted and reduced. Training offered to the people

would focus on retelling certain stories from the Old and New Testaments.

Depending upon the interest of the people, the missions and the church(es), as well as the continuing viability of the language and the availability of trained national speakers, a “fuller” program hopefully would develop. This, however, would be a local decision and, initially, the program would differ from most “traditional” ones in a number of respects. First of all, the retold stories would not be based upon the canonical text, but instead upon an approved derivative source text for the stories. For example,



in PNG the source text for many of the languages might be the Dynamic Tok Pisin, or some equally understandable “front” translation. The retold stories could be cast in various formats when they are told or written: chronological, synoptic, and without verse numbering. They could be in audio or visual format, rather than printed, and of course some combination would also be possible. Finally, and as a major point, retelling stories would fit the cultural style of oration and discourse in most of these societies.

The retold stories would represent the approved source texts as clearly and accurately as possible. They would not simply duplicate the genre of popular translations, such as *Philips Modern English* (1962), F.F. Bruce’s *Letters of Paul* (1995), or *The Living Bible* (Taylor 1971). In terms of popular idiomatic style, they might be more like *The Message* (Peterson 1995). Eugene H. Peterson, translator of *The Message*, explains why he felt an

informal idiomatic translation in the “street language” was needed:

The version of the New Testament in a contemporary idiom keeps the language of the Message current and fresh and understandable in the same language in which we do our shopping, talk with our friends, worry about world affairs, and teach our children their table manners. The goal is not to render a word-for-word conversion of Greek into English, but rather to convert the tone, the rhythm, the events, and the ideas, into the way we actually think and speak. (Peterson 1995:10)

Or, we might add, the retold Bible story would be in the same cultural style and persuasive discourse as one would use to tell any good story (as outlined, for example, in Maguire 1998 and Sawyer (1942). The purpose of retelling Bible stories in the vernacular is the same as for any modern idiomatic translation, namely, clarity and understanding, as Peterson and others have forcibly reminded us. Taylor, for example, in his introduction to *The Living Bible* (1971), recounts that his purpose was “to say as exactly as possible what the writers of the Scriptures meant, and to say it simply, expanding where necessary for a clear understanding of the modern reader.” If a synoptic retelling was chosen, stories could parallel something like Christianson’s continuous narrative harmonizing of the four Gospels and Acts (1973). However, the style would be different because the goal is retold stories, not paraphrases of a full translation.

Some possible objections Choosing language size as a criterion

It is true that the size of a particular group, such as the figure of 500 as a cut-off point, is in some sense arbitrary, so additional sociolinguistic information would be needed. And of course “small” does not always mean that a language is “dying.” On the other hand, bilingualism or multilingualism has, or will take place in the small groups, and there seems to be no approved mission strategy at present that represents such circumstances, except in the traditional manner.

Choosing time as a criterion

The very notion of trying to enter each language group in 25 years is daunting and not very appealing to many people. “What is the hurry?” some say. Or, as one translator told me (I hope with tongue in cheek), “If the people change their language in 25 years, that will simplify our task by not having to deal with these languages.” Another person said, “If people are dying without access to the Scriptures in their own tongue, then why not adapt this [particular] strategy for all languages.” Besides, as others have said, many languages may disappear but the people don’t, they merely shift to using another language. Accepting a retelling approach to communicating the Bible’s message as legitimate in projects assures us that the task can be completed within a limited time frame, and time has to be a major consideration when considering the endangered nature of so many languages around the world.

Choosing something other than the canonical text as the base text

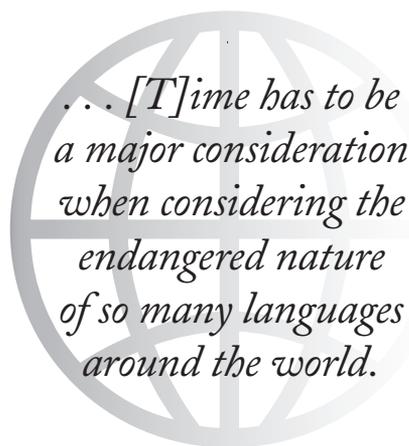
Translators and linguists may have trouble with the notion of retelling Bible stories, instead of providing a translation or paraphrase, because of concerns about accurately representing the source text. The decision about which particular set of Bible stories to use may also be a problem, although this problem would seem to be easily overcome by asking the church leaders for their opinions.

The essential component of the strategy given here allows the trained vernacular speaker to retell the Bible story in a clear and natural way. But retelling the Bible stories includes the same concerns that idiomatic translations, functional and dynamic translations, or “meaning-based” translations have, only in a different manner. This difference is because the trained native speaker compiles the “translation” in a story format. As such, the native speaker is always the best and final storyteller.

Choosing an already existing exegesis of the stories

Other concerns may be about exegesis. This strategy assumes that an

acceptable and satisfactory exegesis of the passages upon which the stories are based has already been done. Will it lower the quality, as some would claim, by retelling Bible stories rather than translating the Greek (or some national language) text? Why would this be a concern if the stories were retold naturally and accurately? (At every Bible study or church service, preachers and expositors retell Bible stories.) At present it takes years for an expatriate translator to properly exegete and translate a text. The strategy proposed here bypasses this long-term commitment or requirement for



exegesis, yet gives ethnic groups the Bible stories in a language they not only understand easily, but also can read easily. It therefore complements the concomitant goals of literacy and Scripture use.

The problem of checking and assuring quality control

To highlight further a possible concern about accuracy, note that the present default approach to a verse-by-verse or proposition-by-proposition translation of Scripture requires exegetical preparation, meticulous attention to detail and consultant checking to assure that all has been transmitted accurately. The entire process requires considerable time. However, by following the strategy proposed here, retold Bible stories would not require the same linguistic or exegetical detail. They would be checked for the accuracy, naturalness and overall discourse meaning, just as in any translation project. However, the checking procedure would not require

a strict adherence to the proposition-by-proposition content of the original text. Checking would depend upon many factors: How are the stories told in the culture? What audiences do the tellers have in mind? How can the stories best be constructed? What can be added to a story?

The problem of adequate and appropriate training

In the strategy of retelling the Bible stories, the coordinators or facilitators would train native speakers who are culturally recognized storytellers to use their own dialects in a natural way. In fact, the particular dialect in a variety of dialects would not matter at all. The point is that the native speaker would retell the selected Bible story text with naturalness and clarity in mind. Admittedly, these are not scientifically defined terms and in retelling a story there is a certain art form that emerges, as in any oral setting. The Bible stories are retold using the vocabulary and style that most effectively “reaches” the desired audience by getting the main idea of the story across.

Learning to use their own vernacular well is not generally the goal specified in training translators (expatriate or national), although literacy programs do focus on training national writers. It is also the case that many English-speaking (or other major language) translators do not have a facility for writing their own language well or expressing themselves clearly. By adopting this alternative strategy (within the scope of the language groups mentioned), we can begin to discuss the Bible translation task and how to train for it in a different way.

What might the new paradigm entail?

Retelling a Bible story does not bind the teller literally to a particular Bible text. The storyteller is free to supply additional information that will make the story attractive and memorable to the hearer(s). In fact, as Schank (1990:189) explains, “much of what passes as original thinking is the coloration of neutral stories made relevant to new situations.” If stories are not reprocessed and retold in another

culture, the principles that a story is meant to capture will not be relevant in the other culture. When people share stories, they build a cultural bond, and of course, knowing how to tell stories in the culture will provide additional convincing evidence about the theme of the story. People refer to and represent their cultures in stories, and a story that is not immediately relevant or understood in its retold cultural context will be of marginal use, especially in a society where written literature does not have the same value as oral literature.

Schank also comments on where stories come from and why it is that people tell them. In respect to the former, he outlines five basic types of stories: official, invented (adapted), firsthand experiential, secondhand, and culturally common. Often, because of translation, stories that are read in church are more like pronouncements and take on the guise of official stories. Such stories often leave out a lot of detail and suggest that situations are less complicated than they really are. Invented stories expand the content and build upon the experience of the storyteller for effect. Depending upon the goals of the storyteller, old stories may be changed considerably. Firsthand stories are ones in which personal experiences are represented, while secondhand stories are acquired from someone else and still remembered. Culturally common stories are pervasive because they do not belong to any one person or place. Retold Bible stories need to become individually common to have a lasting effect.

But why do we tell stories? Schank (1990:54) states that "... the most you can expect from an intelligent being is a good story." Storytellers think about the points that they intend to express, both in terms of self-expression and how they wish others to respond. Storytelling ability is an act of intelligence manifested by the content and innovative ideas present in the story. And, to quote Schank again, "[d]ifferent people understand the same story differently precisely because the stories they already know are different." (1990:56)

The Bible story becomes a part of the life of the teller and the hearer. Needless to say, this is how we want the stories to affect the lives of the people . . .

Schank's central thesis is important to our emphasis on telling Bible stories, namely that "People think in terms of stories." Everything that is heard is understood in terms of previously understood stories. And, according to Schank, dimensions of intelligence concern data finding, data manipulation, comprehension, explanation, planning and communication. Storytellers learn how to utilize these dimensions in generalizing, crystallizing or elaborating so that the stories express insights that are not obvious in the original story. It seems clear that, if we are to take seriously the work of Schank, retelling Bible stories is a valid and necessary form of communication to pursue.

However, it is also true that storytelling, in the sense of turning the story of one particular language into that of another language, has some parallels with translation. In translation, according to Newmark (1988), the most important feature in the process is "being sensitive to language and being competent to write your own language [the target language] dexterously, clearly, economically and resourcefully." (Newmark 1988:3) In storytelling the narrator is trying to do the same thing orally.

Facilitators would need to concentrate on a twofold strategy in training native storytellers: oral retelling on the one hand and written stories on the other. In the first instance, natural storytellers have learned to compose their stories for maximum audience effect, although they have not learned to do this well in writing. Later, in composing written Bible stories, their written forms would differ from the spoken variety. But they would not have to wrestle with questions of exegetical subtleties because, in either case, their work would be based upon an already accepted exegesis of Bible stories in some major language.

The facilitators and trainers can teach the storytellers to concentrate on

telling stories, how best (culturally) to construct and express them, and how to examine and evaluate them. In storytelling the teller does not follow the parent story word-for-word or phrase-for-phrase, sentence-by-sentence or even proposition-by-proposition. Rather, native speakers need to retell chunks of discourse as natural pieces, using cultural idioms wherever possible and inserting implied information wherever the meaning was unclear.

But could we actually train people to tell stories? It is clear, on the one hand, that everyone has a story to tell. But, on the other hand, not everyone tells a story equally well (that is why we like some speakers and not others). Coles (1989) recounts how he taught medical students the benefits of hearing the patient's story, and how the stories were not only therapeutic to the patient, but also of value to the doctors. As they told their stories, often in response to the right kind of questions, the feelings and emotions surrounding certain events were revealed. Coles did not represent his work as techniques, but rather as excursions into the lives of the patients. Storytelling, when effective, is highly creative. Sawyer (1942:142) put it this way:

I think stories must be acquired by long contemplation, by bringing the imagination to work, constantly, intelligently upon them. And finally by that power to blow the breath of life into them. And the method? That of learning incident-by-incident, or picture-by-picture. Never word by word.

The Bible story becomes a part of the life of the teller and the hearer. Needless to say, this is how we want the stories to affect the lives of the people (as well as ourselves).

Summing up the strategy

I have not carried the matter of the new strategy very far, particularly in terms of pedagogy, but I have raised

some important questions and issues. Indeed, if we are serious about allowing people an initial access to God's word within the next 25 years, we need a new paradigm for some language groups in particular. I will now summarize my main points.

I do not claim, of course, that the idea of telling and using Bible stories is new. Some readers may immediately relate some of what I have been discussing to "Chronological Bible Storytelling," which has been used as an evangelistic tool and strategy by New Tribes Mission for many years. More recently the International Missions Board of the Southern Baptists Mission (see in particular Lovejoy 2000) has run workshops in a variety of contexts to promote Bible storytelling, building on the New Tribes model. However, a major concern would also be to gather basic linguistic and cultural data to help preserve the intellectual property of the minority groups. So, what I propose here is not an expatriate evangelistic tool; rather, it is a practical and efficient way to encourage the use of the vernacular by having speakers retell Bible stories in a culturally defined and acceptable way.

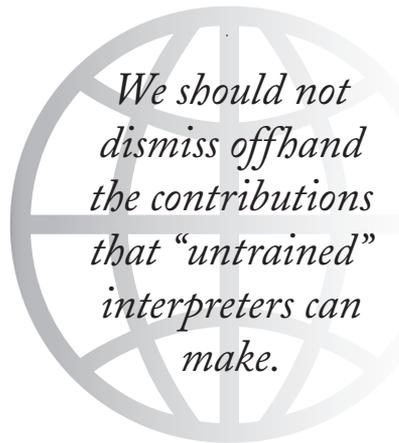
Although this proposed paradigm is suggested for very small language groups, I believe it could serve as an initial strategy for any language group. In cases where the predominant national language is also the language of the source story, the preaching and teaching has already been based upon retelling the message, so "interpreters" are available. These people may intuitively know how to retell the story. We should not dismiss offhand the contributions that "untrained" interpreters can make.

It is important to emphasize again that, although there are technical decisions in such a retelling process, the storytelling facilitator focuses upon perceived naturalness, not upon back translations and exegetical checking. Quoting Newmark again:

... for the vast majority of texts, you have to ensure: (a) that your translation makes sense; (b) that it reads naturally, that it is written in ordinary language, the common grammar,

idioms and words that meet that kind of situation. (1988:24)

There is a mixture in the techniques of retelling stories based on a text and a translation of that text in a number of respects. For example, the use and translation of figures of speech, the rearrangement of the text, interpretation of obscure parts of the text, considering when to add implied information, and so on, take place in a "normal" translation. In the case of a retelling, there are fewer constraints originating from the source text because there is no claim to adhere closely to its forms. As already indi-



cated, the translation checkers would spend their time trying to ensure that the source text is retold naturally. This is difficult and impressionistic in many senses but, in a real sense, only a native speaker can judge what is necessary in a story to reflect clarity and naturalness. These considerations represent the native speaker's understanding, so it is natural that insertions and interpretations would have to be supplied. I add that these considerations imply a different emphasis in the re-training and re-tooling of present translation consultants.

The checking procedures would also need to change in matters of both detail and degree. At present, in most situations, a translation consultant embarks upon a word-by-word checking based upon a back translation. This is a test for exegetical accuracy, but shows less about overall meaning and clarity. In a retold story form, checking would focus on the general theme of the story itself, not upon a back-translation of the story.

Checking would assure that adequate background information has been provided, and that the reader or listener is able to understand the general principle given in the story, while at the same time avoiding details that would be confusing.

As a final point, the present and continuing arguments by translators about how much freedom the translator can take by inserting implied information would be a moot point in this new strategy. The problem would not be in focus because the insertion of implied information is considered a natural and necessary part of the task. It is what happens in retelling a story.

Habits of the Mind

Howard Margolis (1993) has demonstrated that habits of the mind can block out what later come to be almost irresistible solutions. This is because certain ways of talking about things, for example, views on translation ("literal" and "free"), or "paraphrase" bind together (or separate) certain educational and intellectual communities. The habits of the mind seem quite reasonable to those who are members of the particular community. Consultants who translate or check translations in a particular, accepted method, also represent such a community.

Regarding the translation task, how might we determine what constitutes a habit of the mind? Only by examining some alternative view, in Pikean terms (Pike 1982:42-51) by contrasting the essential components that demonstrate differences. In comparing retold Bible stories with translating the canonical text, one of the essential differences is the way that exegesis controls the translation, and naturalness controls the retelling. The assumed necessary habit is that the translator or translation checker must adhere closely to the original text. Such a habit can be a barrier to an alternative way of thinking about the translation task, such as retelling stories. Another barrier may be the SIL terminology. We call something a translation when it is judged as accurately representing all and only the meanings of the source text. A paraphrase may move somewhat further from the source text and incorporate freer forms of expression. It is therefore

generally rejected as a “true translation.” By employing the method of a retold Bible story, the gridlock over what is acceptable in translation theory and practice could be broken.

In traditional thinking, Bible stories are often relegated to something less than what a mature Christian would want or enjoy. One critic of this paper told me that “Bible stories are for children,” implying that Bible stories are baby food and that only the full translated text is adult food. But as C.S. Lewis said (1982:59),

... a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story. The good ones last. A waltz which you can only like when you are waltzing is a bad waltz.

It seems clear that, if we are to adopt the strategy proposed in this paper, retold Bible stories will have to be awarded a status that is higher than merely for children. In the end, perhaps children can show adult members that the stories are enjoyable for everyone. The story of the Bible, when read as a story (as written, for example, by Wangerin 1996) is an outstanding and convincing example of adult reading as well.

Conclusion⁶

As Philip Sampson (2000:157) recounts,

Narratives are not just gripping accounts. They may also have profound cultural power. . . . The biblical narrative has deeply marked the development of Western societies.

Storytelling is one of the most important and widely accepted methods of communicating in any culture. A great story—and the Bible is full of them—is the way to connect with other people. In any culture it is an art form, but it is also one that can be taught (Maguire 1998, Sawyer 1942). In fact, storytelling societies abound (there are dozens of sites that can be found on the Internet) in many cultures around the world. In addition, stories are the fabric through which moral and religious meanings abound (Murphy 2000, Coles 1989, Rodari 1996). Any worker who has spent time living in another culture has learned the importance of the people's stories. People love to hear

stories and people who can read love to read them. They can be Scripture-in-use at its most practical level.

However, to think differently about the Bible translation task in any radical sense requires a paradigm shift. The shift proposed here is to not provide full source-text translations, but rather to encourage trained nationals to retell Bible stories naturally in their own languages. The strategy focuses upon finding good storytellers in the culture, acquainting them with Bible stories, training them, and then allowing them to retell them in their own languages.

For this to happen, administrators will need to survey small language groups and assess their linguistic viability, and then assist the language groups in making some difficult decisions. They will have to decide, “Do we have the capacity to warrant (not deserve) the efforts of a full translation project?” Given the limited resources available, particularly in terms of trainers and consultants, Bible retelling projects will need to be seriously considered as a strategy. It will also need to become part of multiple language programs, in many instances.

However, if storytelling is simply conceived as one of a number of possible strategies and the default strategy is always a “full” translation project for every language (even if reformatted or adapted automatically), then retelling Bible stories will not be given a serious hearing. Rather, as I have emphasized repeatedly, retelling Bible stories must be seen as a legitimate strategy in its own right. And because I have had small and often endangered languages in mind, linguistic salvage would be an accompanying strategy. This aspect would require further study to define what can realistically be recorded within the “retelling” strategy. **IJFM**

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Endnotes

- ¹ A version of this paper was presented at the ILAC IV Conference in Chiang Mai, Thailand, Sept. 5-12, 2001. The basic idea was first presented to the

SIL International VP/AD meetings in Dallas, April 28, 2000. I have appreciated comments received from participants in those meetings, as well as from a number of SIL linguistics and translation consultants, none of whom will agree entirely with what I say here, although all have stimulated and helped my thinking on the subject.

Ray Gordon assisted me in searching the Ethnologue <http://www.sil.org/Ethnologue> database for information on language populations of the Pacific.

² The strategy begins with oral outputs, but it is not meant to end there. In most cases, print publications will result as well. Nevertheless, the initial oral repetition of the stories is what will largely ensure their naturalness.

³ The Linguistic Society of America established a Committee on Endangered Languages and several SIL members played an important role in their discussions. Ken Hale published a key article (1992), exclusively aimed at the problem of language endangerment. A recent issue of *Tic Talk* ([http://www.ubs-translations.org/No. 47, 2000](http://www.ubs-translations.org/No.47,2000)), the Newsletter of the United Bible Societies Translation Information Clearinghouse, provides a very helpful list of web resources on endan-

gered languages. I have not commented in this paper on the kinds of linguistic and cultural information that should be gathered in working with endangered or neglected language communities. However, this would be an important and essential component and one that could more easily be outlined. The Endangered Language Fund <http://sapir.ling.yale.edu/~elf/> supports efforts to preserve endangered languages and gathering linguistic materials would be a part of its goals. See also <http://www.sil.org/sociolx/ndg-lg-grps.html>

⁴ A full inventory of the languages spoken in the Madang, East Sepik and Sandaun Provinces of PNG (taken from the 14th edition of the Ethnologue) is available in a separate document. Note that the survey information for most of the languages in these areas is at least 25 years old and that population figures are most likely inaccurate. These three provinces represent people with a widespread knowledge of Tok Pisin and I would predict that the total number of monolingual vernacular speakers for most small languages is less now than recorded.

⁵ The Adapt It program and strategy is an example of a successful means of

transferring existing Scriptures into a closely related language. Other multiple translation projects are in progress elsewhere in PNG by SIL and other groups.

SIL in PNG has four categories of language projects, allowing a diversity of approaches. Each category is determined on the basis of whether SIL will direct it, manage it, mentor it, or consult in it. In considering such programs, the degree of outside contact, degree of training and consultant checking needed, and the relationship with partnering organizations are important considerations. The strategy outlined in this paper could presumably fit in any one of the four categories.

⁶ This is not the end of the story. I have prepared a series of storytelling training modules, built on adult education principles and the Criterion Referenced Instruction (CRI) model. See my article "Re-thinking Stories" (IJFM 22:1) for a summary of some of the modules.

"What is the greatest crime in the desert?"

"Finding water and keeping silent."

- Arab proverb

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