



Far Trekkin'

News from Rob and Eshinee Veith

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Spoiler alert!

by Eshinee

We say that the goal of Bible translation is to translate accurately: nothing added to the original text, nothing changed, and nothing removed. But there is at least one thing that every Bible translator has been forced to add to the original: section headings.

We decided to come up with our section headings as a team during stage 2 (team review) of our translation process. When we were looking at Matthew 1:18-25 last month, I noticed something about the section heading in all the translations that we were referencing; they were all variations on “The birth of Jesus”. But have you read Matthew 1:18-25 recently? Sure, the first sentence says, “The birth of Jesus was like this...” But, after that point, what is the story about? Who is the main character? What event is the most important in the narrative? More importantly, if a person was flipping through Matthew looking for this particular event, would a section heading “The birth of Jesus” provide enough information to help them find it?

Because that’s what section headings are for: to tell you what’s in the section that follows. It not only helps you find the section you’re looking for; it primes you for what to expect in that section. If it’s a section of a hortatory text (i.e. designed to change people’s behavior), the heading

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Arts a “natural way forward”

by Rob

I attended **Arts for a Better Future** (ABF) last year as a part of the Global Consultation on Music in Missions (GCOMM). I intuited that ABF ideas could powerfully inform LBT’s Bible translation efforts and suggested that Eshinee attend the workshop when it was held in South Africa in January in her role as LBT’s area representative for Botswana and Namibia. I had already been invited to attend as a facilitator.

The program focuses on using local art forms—both traditional and contemporary—to address issues in a community. The Bible itself is usually published as a book; the book—the printed word—is a form of artistic communication which has a great deal of importance in Western culture. But perhaps other media forms might more powerfully communicate Scripture to other cultures. How can we discover the best forms of communication to bring Scripture into the language

communities we serve?

And how would knowing that change our process for translating the Word of God? Could we translate with the receptor media in mind so that the Bible might have a more powerful impact on the language communities we serve?

The workshop works through several stages in media development. It begins by meeting a community, learning their strengths and challenges. We discover various media they use to communicate. We determine how the people in the community want to see their community transformed by the Word. Then in collaboration with the community, a “Kingdom Goal” is determined. This leads us to a plan.

I facilitated a group whose resource person lead a Scripture Engagement team in Cameroon. Her group had already done tons of things. They had new songs, dances, and had even filmed a motion picture. A native of Cameroon

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What else?

Much has happened in recent months!

Rob spent August in Namibia recording New Testament portions

in the Dhimba language. He hopes to finish the New Testament on his next trip in 2016.

Eshinee returned to Zambia in October to teach both Lexicography and Greek at the

annual The Word for the World translator training. She took with her 6 translators from 3 Botswana translation projects and LBT intern Rosemary Selking.

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might be the theme on which the reader is being instructed or even the main instruction itself (see Matthew 5-6, ESV). Psalm section headings are—true to poetic style—like poem titles. But have you ever noticed how narrative section headings sometimes “ruin” the story for the reader? “Jesus Cleanses a Leper... Jesus Calms a Storm... Jesus Heals Two Men with Demons” (all from Matthew 8, ESV). If anyone were picking up the Bible today to read it for the first time as a collection of stories, they might think, “Well, no point in reading to the end of that story. Or that one. Or that one. Come on, y’all! Leave *something* to the imagination!”

And section headings are read aloud in church in Botswana as an integral part of the text, taken to be just as much a part of the Word of God as what follows them. The section heading informs the audience what the text is about, its main characters and/or themes. In fact, if the section heading identifies the wrong character or theme as the primary one, that will color the reception of that text by the audience such that they may even misunderstand it. Take for example the last parable in Luke 15. Try to ignore the section heading. Who is the main character in this story? In a typical parable of Jesus, it’s the first character introduced. In this parable, the first character introduced is also the character who has the last word. Yet the section heading in most translations of this parable puts the focus on the actions of a supporting character. This causes us to identify with that character in a way that overshadows the point that Jesus was clearly trying to make here: his justification for receiving sinners and eating with them (Luke 15:2).

The translators drafted a section heading for Matthew 1:18-25 that we felt clearly identified what the text would contain but without ruining the ending or being too different from what people will expect because of the Setswana and English Bibles that they already own: *Indjwezi yi ya Josifa shi ku pakwa kwa Jiso Kirisiti*, Joseph’s dream about the birth of Jesus Christ.

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herself, though not of the people group her team was trying to engage, she brought a wealth of knowledge about the community. Over the course of several hours, she articulated the many strengths and problems she had seen. She didn’t believe the many things they had done had had the desired impact. We talked about our Kingdom goal, phrasing (like the textbook does) as “Where the Kingdom of God thrives...” I asked her to finish the sentence. We sat for a long time while she considered everything we had discussed in the previous hours, then she said, “Where the Kingdom of God thrives, people build Godly family altars.”

Which is not an answer any of the rest of the group would have come up with.

She explained that traditionally, people live in family groups in cottages built around a family altar. This altar is both the geographical and social center of the family. Because of the strong associations with animism, this altar is destroyed when people come to faith. Without the altar, people seem to have lost a sense of how to be a family... the centerpiece of family life is gone. We talked about various cultural festivals, ceremonies, and rituals, many of which had no religious significance except that they were done near the family altar. People need to build a kind of spiritual altar on Biblical principles of family roles... learn how to be

a Christian father, husband, son, wife, mother, daughter, and so on.

We began to develop ideas around songs, dances, and stories—some of which had already been created by her team—which could be used in the context of birth celebrations. Stories, songs, and dances were already a part of this ceremony; they were already used to tell the mother had to raise her new baby properly, to the husband how to care for his wife, and so forth. Imbuing this event with Biblical content made perfect sense.

Media could be used to help people learn to build a Godly family altar.

At the conclusion of the workshop, Eshinee said, “My biggest takeaway was that we are all bound by our own ideas of what is helpful, what is beauty, what is of value. It’s too easy for us to enter a language community as outsiders and make all the decisions for that community based on our own observations and cultural biases. The method taught in this workshop provides a way of engaging members of a language community to share their deepest felt values and needs in a way that leads to the emergence of a natural ‘way forward’. The emphasis on listening—truly and deeply listening—allows a community’s solutions to emerge from within it, rather than being imposed from an external perspective.”