

Living Words

ISSUE
NO. 12

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching,
for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.



For this edition of *Living Words*, we chose to delve into a theme of 'Innovation' in Bible translation. The importance of innovation in today's changing world has become increasingly eminent to me over the past year, as I have had several opportunities to explore the idea of God's mission in a changing world. While God's mission is assuredly unchanging, as is clear in the way it is woven through all of Scripture, the world we live in is constantly changing. Change naturally presents challenges with it, and it is this changing and challenging environment that requires us to continually adapt the way we operate within it.

Amidst the most recent source of change and uncertainty that is the Covid-19 pandemic, I have found the book of Ecclesiastes to be extremely relevant and insightful. Chapter 11 in particular tells us to continue the work God has set before us, specifically amidst uncertainty, for we do not know what will happen, but we can trust that God does. Verse 4 further reminds us that waiting for the perfect time, circumstance or environment will not lead to fruitful work, indicating it is better for us to continue our work amidst an unpredictable environment.

"Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap."
— Ecclesiastes 11:4

Continuing work in a changing environment inherently requires innovative ideas, which makes the innovations we see within Bible translation prime examples of people faithfully continuing their work despite uncertainty and change. In the articles that follow, we hope to honour that faithful obedience in adapting and persevering amidst change by highlighting some of the innovative work our own members are involved in.

You will find the articles in this edition divided into four sections: I) *Why we innovate*, II) *Innovation across all areas of Bible translation*, III) *Software innovations*, IV) *What drives innovation*.

Each of the articles in section II highlights innovation in a different aspect of Bible translation—in training, in the translation process, and in Scripture engagement. Likewise, each article in section III covers a type of software innovation in a different phase of the translation process—translating, and publishing.

I hope you thoroughly enjoy these short windows into different areas of the Bible translation mission, and are inspired, as I have been, by the way our members unwaveringly work to achieve God's mission. Thank you for partnering with us to make God's Word accessible to all people—particularly those who do not have Bibles in their language yet.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Lovatt
Executive Director

Check out our *Story of Hope* Podcast!

Sharing stories of how Bible translation brings hope to the people groups of the world.



In line with our theme of innovation, we thought we'd share about one of the ways we have been adapting to a changing world from our Wycliffe NZ offices. As part of our efforts to keep up with the world's increasingly digital methods of engaging with content, we recently launched the *Story of Hope* Podcast—a collaborative effort between Wycliffe NZ and Eversmith band. The aim of the podcast is to create a dialogue with different guests each episode on how Bible translation brings **hope** to the people groups of the world.

The podcast is co-hosted by Esther Smith, singer for Eversmith and Wycliffe Musical Ambassador; and Alex Winslade, the Director's Assistant and Communications Coordinator at Wycliffe NZ.

In previous episodes we've introduced the co-hosts and their passion for Bible translation, and asked guests various questions ranging from their involvement in Bible translation and missions to how they see Bible translation in relation to the church and the Great Commission. Each episode also contains a segment where we pray for five different nations, and promote praying for Bibleless people groups. Coming up in the November episode we will be talking with Mark Penny, who you will see has contributed several articles to this edition of *Living Words*.

- Episodes are released monthly and can be found on our website under Explore, or through the link in our Facebook and Instagram.



A “legacy” of innovation

BY MARK PENNY

Many decades ago when I was about 5, I shared a room with my sister. I was at the age when everything around me was new and exciting. And I was determined to figure things out on my own. My favourite weapon in this game was the question “WHY?” and with lots of adults around, I was always learning. But always asking “Why?” drove my older sister crazy. One night as we were supposed to be nodding off to sleep, I was still firing one question after another at her. Eventually, exasperated by my relentless persistence, she blurted out, “If you ask ‘why?’ one more time, the angels will come from heaven and throw you in the fire.” Yup, you guessed it... “Why?” came my curious, but daring reply. And I lived on to tell this tale!

Curiosity has always been my friend. I've always wondered why we do what we do, or why we go about doing what we do in the way that we do. And this has often resulted in changing what we do, or how we do it.

With a background in Computer Systems Engineering I have always wanted to squeeze more out of computers for the sake of fulfilling our God-given mission to ensure that everyone on the planet has access to his Holy Word. And if you know anything about translation work, you will know that it is a long and painstaking process with numerous steps along the way to ensure that God's Word is clear, accurate, natural and acceptable to the communities for whom it is being translated.

There are at least a dozen different software packages that we use for day-to-day language development, literacy and translation work; and several dozen other apps that we use for specialised tasks within the wider process.

Before I start using a piece of software, I come back to my friend WHY and ask what it is going to do for me that I can't already do myself through some other manual way. The software should either make the task at hand easier, or quicker, or more accurate, or enhance the process in another way, like enabling others to join in with the task to achieve a better end result. If I can't answer that WHY question, then I'd be better off doing it manually.

I recall using a piece of cutting-edge grammatical analysis software (called Lingualinks) while we were training to be Bible translators. It was a wonderful tool and made some of the steps of discovering patterns in a language a fun process. But, when it came to getting those results out of the program and into our grammatical write-ups, we were hamstrung. There was no reasonable way of doing so! Why? Perhaps no one had followed the logical progression of what should be done with the data after making all these wonderful discoveries. So with a bit of spare time over a few weekends I cobbled together a program to extract that complex data and import it into our grammatical writeups in Word. **Everyone on the course was delighted to have a tool to help them re-use the data that they had carefully entered into Lingualinks – and it made their write-ups far easier to write, and more accurate too.**

On another occasion, before home printers could print in booklet format, pagination software was unaffordable and rather complicated. We worked out a way forward by writing a Word macro to do the magic for you. That enabled teams to create their own booklets locally for testing and feedback. Twenty years ago that was groundbreaking!

A few years later, Unicode—a globally accepted standard for encoding every written script on the planet—was introduced. This was welcome news, but what about all the scriptures that had

already been keyed in with pre-Unicode fonts? Everyone was being told that these materials would have to be re-keyed into the computer to be in the right Unicode-compliant format. **Why?** Because there wasn't a solution available to transfer their data from one standard to another. **Well, why not?** Because no one has needed it before! **Well, then, why don't we build the bridge?** And so it was. I worked alongside a far more gifted programmer colleague to build an Encoding Converter which would do exactly that—take old legacy data and transform it into new Unicode data saving people from having to retype it, and re-proofread the contents.

Thousands of hours of work were saved, and that tool is now embedded inside all sorts of other software that we use. For example, if you need to publish the same scripture in more than one script, you can call that software to do it for you—it converts an entire Bible in a matter of seconds.

I could go on—there are half a dozen other “inventions” that I designed to solve specific problems we've encountered on our journey of doing translation with Wycliffe in South Asia.

One of the things that drives me, apart from “creative laziness”, is the realisation that solving a problem that our team is facing could have a much wider impact on the global family of translators all around the world. **So it is always worth asking the Why? question, because you never know where that train of thought might take you.**

My sister's theology might have been a little bit mixed up, or perhaps the story of Shadrach, Mesach and Abednego had warped her perception of reality, but thankfully it wasn't enough to shut me up. I'm still asking WHY?

Pioneering Kiwis tend to have this much-needed quality of noticing when something's not quite right and then the attitude to ask, “Well, why not?”. Often this leads them to embark on a process to solve the problem that no one else seems to have noticed. **If nothing else, the WHY? question forces others around us to pause and think about whether there's a better way to do what we're doing. This can be a wonderful gift to the world of Bible translation.**

 Do you have an analytical mind that God could use in solving unique problems? If so, get in touch with us at inquiries@wycliffenz.org

Innovation from the training perspective

In the past, people who joined Wycliffe in sending countries like New Zealand received their training in linguistics—how languages work—and the Bible before going to their field assignment to translate God’s Word into an unwritten language. There would be occasional field workshops to help them build their skills and work on specific issues with translating Scriptures into the local languages. Innovations from this traditional method have accelerated since March 2020 with the rise of the Covid-19 pandemic, but first a little background to highlight them.

When I joined Wycliffe in 1984, there was a set of prerequisite courses at the tertiary level which included linguistics, translation, anthropology, and literacy that had to be completed before going to the field assignment. The training was delivered in person at an accredited institution by experienced field workers who were also Wycliffe members. They shared not only their academic knowledge but also

personal life experience of the work. It was very encouraging and challenging to get the training from them. We received both accredited training leading to degrees, which helped in getting work visas, as well as additional non-accredited training. All of this to help us be effective in our life and work.

While the fundamental training needed in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes has not changed since then, the understanding of core competencies and how to achieve them has been refined. **The training focus is now on how to develop people to be able to do the task God has asked them to do.** People need to be trained in the areas of core competencies and demonstrate their ability to produce the desired outcomes. That means instead of requiring new members to complete a list of specific courses, there is recognition when other experiences show that they have the required competencies.

BY LESLIE FOSTER
Training Coordinator
Wycliffe New Zealand

For the past 30 years, the emphasis on training the local people in all aspects of the work has grown, so that it is now the norm rather than the exception. This means our members will also need multicultural training, language program management skills and leadership courses to be able to train and work with others in the field.

We have also come to realise that translation is just one aspect of minority language development. Sociolinguistics, Language and Culture Documentation, Literacy and Education, and Discourse Analysis, among other courses, are now required for those working on a language development team.

The use of computer programs has also evolved over the years. My field linguistics course back in 1984 was the last one to do analysis on paper rather than using a computer program. The computer programs to do language analysis and translation have proliferated, with much development, especially in the last ten years. With the introduction of each program, people need training on being able to use them effectively, which is generally provided

through manuals along with mentoring, mostly online, with consultants.

“Just-in-time” training became popular in the 90s when it became apparent that all the accredited pre-field training needed would keep people from taking up a field assignment in a timely manner. **Getting the appropriate training while members are already involved in their work tasks has been found to be more effective in helping them achieve desired outcomes.**

It has only been with the development of more powerful computers and internet capacity even in remote locations, and at a reasonable price, that online training has become a reality. Not just for our members but also for their local teams. Online training, including meeting via Zoom, has made it possible for people who would otherwise not receive the training needed to get it without travel overseas or even far from home. **The greatest innovation in training has been its increasing accessibility for all people involved in God’s work of transforming lives for His glory.**

While the fundamental training needed in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes has not changed since then, the understanding of core competencies and how to achieve them has been refined.

New doors open with diaspora communities

Myriam*, a Dudarni* speaker stopped the recording almost as soon as it started and exclaimed, “This is so beautiful. This is really, really amazing!” She was astounded and kept repeating how beautiful the Scriptures were. It was Myriam’s first time to hear the audio Dudarni Scriptures.

Myriam is a Dudarni speaker living in the diaspora in the USA. “We have the Bible in Dudarni,” she told her friend. “But no one can understand it.” She continued, “It’s old and the language is antiquated. It doesn’t make sense to us.”

Unknown to Myriam, a team was working near her home country on a new Dudarni Scripture translation because it was well known that the very old translation needed updating into language the people could understand.

There are three main phases to the process of Bible translation. The first is drafting the text using both related languages and

BY DARLENE FARROW
Material from Trevor Deck
SIL Global Diaspora Connector

the original Biblical languages. The second phase is comprehension or community checking. It was during this phase that the Dudarni Bible translators were struggling. **In such a sensitive location, they were finding it difficult to find enough speakers whom they could trust to check that the Dudarni Scriptures were clear and natural.** (The third phase involves consultant checkers who study the translation and check it against the original languages for accurateness.)

But working with Myriam—even though she lives far from her homeland—was a huge blessing. Not only could she hear God’s Word in her mother tongue, but she was able to give valuable feedback that was sent back to the translation team.

At the conclusion of listening to the book of Ruth, Myriam had one pressing question, “Is the Bible really supposed to be easy to understand? Because this is really easy to understand!”

There are over two thousand languages that need a Bible translation project started. Of those two thousand languages it is estimated that one thousand of them will need to take place outside the host country due to sensitivities and hostility to Christian work.

Interestingly, the speakers of many of these languages are now located in diaspora communities around the world. The Lord is bringing these people to our doorsteps! Research continues into what languages are represented where, but this is an opportunity that our partner organisation, SIL, is actively pursuing.

Technological advances are making this possible. **While translation teams in one part of the world can upload their translation work onto a secure platform, such as Scripture Forge, those in other parts of the world can be given user access in order to test the Scriptures with**

diaspora communities. These can include both audio and written forms.

Teams are working with diaspora communities doing both of the first two phases of Bible translation. Translations into new languages are being drafted and Scripture translations are undergoing community checking.

These are exciting new opportunities that are making Scripture translation possible for people whose language communities are in difficult to reach nations. Perhaps God is calling you to be involved. There are needs for researchers and diaspora specialists who can connect diaspora populations with Bible translation projects.

- If you would like more information on how you can be involved in this or some other aspect of serving in the Bible translation movement, please contact inquiries@wycliffenz.org

There are over two thousand languages that need a Bible translation project started. Of those two thousand languages it is estimated that one thousand of them will need to take place outside the host country due to sensitivities and hostility to Christian work.

*pseudonym

Engaging the unchanging in a changing world

Scripture apps are rapidly growing as a method of not only distributing the Bible, but providing interactive ways to engage with it.

BY ALEX WINSLADE

Bible translation is a lengthy process, involving many crucial steps to seeing God's Word transform lives and communities. Even after complete translated Bibles are distributed, something we call *Scripture Engagement* is required to help people dig into their newly translated scripture, and learn to apply it to their everyday lives.

In our increasingly digital world, everything is being converted into something that can be done on a mobile device. You can find an app for almost anything, from doing your online banking to things as pointless as telling you what moments to go to the bathroom during a movie. **It is in this digital age that our Scripture Engagement teams are needing to find ways to make the Bible relevant and engaging.**

Enter Ester and her role in Scripture apps and software support. Scripture apps are rapidly growing as a method of not only distributing the Bible, but providing interactive ways to engage with it. Scripture apps can contain a range of media, depending on what is available in the target language. Some contain text, audio and videos, while others may only have some of the three. Having different media options available for translation teams speeds up

the process of getting the translated Word into the hands of speakers, especially those of languages that don't yet have a writing system (what we call an orthography).

Ester works with Wycliffe New Zealand assisting us with software systems, as well as supporting some of our members in their use of Scripture apps. Ester is also involved with an organisation called JAARS¹ and one of their digital media partners where she helps develop Scripture, dictionary and reading apps, and teaches other organisations how to create their own websites. Ester helped facilitate the first online website-building workshop with JAARS website partner in March this year, which equipped 16 participants—representing 11 languages—to better distribute Scripture resources to unreached language groups².

One significant innovation in the area of Scripture apps was the creation of the Scripture App Builder (SAB), developed by SIL International. Members of SIL and partner organisations working in Sahel, Africa, identified the need for a Scripture app that could be customised for local contexts and distributed without internet access, as well as being able to integrate text and audio to facilitate literacy in local languages³. The resulting app is an app

builder, which can be used to create a scripture app for any language community with existing translation files.

Although the SAB was first released in 2015, updates and improvements are continually being added to the app. **In 2020, a Progressive Web App (PWA) feature was added, which enables users of mobile devices to access the app on a web server, without having to install it through an App Store⁴.** This is beneficial for mobile users that do not have access to a particular app store.

One of the newest innovations Ester is involved in is the JAARS Website Partner's "PWA Website Service". They identified an issue in that PWAs only work if there is an existing website associated with the app, and found that 153 of the Android Scripture Apps they support did not have an associated website to provide access to the mobile app for its language. **The PWA Website Service addresses this need by creating websites in PWA format for all apps that don't have one, rather than waiting for language teams to build their own website.**

In creating access to PWA websites, Ester and the rest of the team are ensuring more people have access to the digital Scripture

Engagement made possible with Scripture Apps. The Scripture Engagement tools previously limited to smartphone devices with compatible app stores are suddenly accessible on any computer, laptop, tablet or mobile device.

The reason behind all the work people like Ester do in developing Scripture apps and websites is reflected in one of her workshop participants who prayed "We have been waiting a long time for this. Thank you, Lord, for providing it for us today." We have been blessed with so many accessible and interactive ways to engage with Scripture that it is sometimes easy to forget their significance in our lives, or that others do not have the same tools. **At the heart of every innovation in Bible translation is the desire to see more people get to know God through His Word, and finding ways to make His Word accessible in our changing world is one of the best ways to see this vision achieved.**

1. <https://www.jaars.org/>

2. <https://www.jaars.org/blog/no-longer-just-a-number/>

3. <https://software.sil.org/scriptureappbuilder/about/>

4. <https://software.sil.org/scriptureappbuilder/release-notes/>

Bringing Jesus to life in Luke's Gospel

BY MARK PENNY

Shortly after *The Jesus Film* was dubbed into our language, I was updating our Android Scripture App, which was already popular and very useful because it integrated the audio with the written Word. People could read along as each phrase was highlighted while the audio played in sync. I wondered how we could make it an even more immersive experience, and we eventually figured out a way to include the 60 or so clips from the movie into the App.

So now, after reading the text of (or listening to) a passage in Luke's gospel, you can click to watch that segment of Jesus' story from the movie. The idea caught on, and eventually the App builder software incorporated that as a feature—so now *anyone* can do the same.

An idea leads to dreaming about possibilities, which leads to pioneering a way, which eventually leads to making the concept accessible to a wider audience. Where would *you* fit into that progression?

Bible translations for all

BY CRAIG FARROW

New software innovations are speeding the work of Bible translation. In 1984 Tod Allman was frustrated as he translated yet another chapter of Greek into English for his Bible College course. Each night he wondered, “Why do I have to do all this work? I could make a computer programme do 90% of this work for me.” So Tod wrote a computer programme to help him do his Bible College homework! This was the seed that developed into something much larger over many years—an exciting project that would eventually produce first drafts of Bible translations automatically.

Tod, with the help of Stephen Beale, developed a system to represent the Biblical text in a simplified, but highly specified format. This is known as the *semantic model*. Alongside the semantic model, the vocabulary and grammar rules of the language the Scripture is being translated into are entered. **Then, at the push of a button, the software generates a draft of the verse, chapter or book in that language.**

This software system has been named “All the Word” since some of the early motivation was to speed up the process of translating the Old Testament. The Old Testament is three times the length of the New Testament and some have called it the dictionary of the New Testament. Many of the teachings and concepts from the New Testament have their foundations rooted in the Old Testament. For example, the patriarchs, Passover, blood sacrifice and so on.

In many translation projects around the world the time and effort to produce the New Testament is such a mammoth task that the Old Testament often doesn’t get translated. **One of the visions for All the Word is to enable the translation of the Old Testament in a much more efficient way by leveraging the existing team’s skills and the understanding of the grammar and vocabulary that were developed during the New Testament translation process.** The grammar of the language can be entered into the software to produce these computer-generated drafts automatically.

The same process can be used for the New Testament as well. Several books have been completed and work is currently underway to create the semantic model for the remainder of the New Testament. This is an intensive process, akin to a full New Testament translation, but the idea is that it only needs to be done once, whereas the grammar rules need to be created for each target language.

After producing the computer-generated draft, the next step in the process is for the mother-tongue translator to edit and polish it. **At this point they can focus on making it sound more natural, because the meaning is already accurate and clear since it comes from the semantic model.** This editing is much quicker and less demanding in terms of Biblical knowledge and skills than the regular translation process.

Another advantage of the system is that the editors don’t have to work through an intermediate language like English or the national language. A translator from the Philippines explained,

“What is good is that it is already in our language. It’s not like before where we had to think in Tagalog and then how to say it in our language. We would translate the Word of God from Tagalog into our language and it was a long process. Not like now where right away it is in our language and we just have to make it good.”

From that first draft phase there are other stages that need to be completed. These are community testing and consultant checking. **Evaluations have shown that the time needed for the consultant checking stage is also significantly reduced because the computer-generated draft is already exegetically solid.**

Although this process streamlines some of the translation work, creating the grammar rules for a new language is not a trivial task. It will generally need the input of a computer specialist and a linguist familiar with the language. Methodologies are being developed to guide this process to make it easier for new teams to get started. Adapting the grammar rules to a related language is much easier than starting from scratch. For example, the Tagalog model has been successfully adapted to a related language in the Philippines. The book of Genesis has been completed and was released at the New Testament dedication in June this year.

The system and process is still being refined, and it doesn’t suit all translation situations; **however, there have already been encouraging results as language communities are receiving translated books sooner than would otherwise have been possible.**

● For more information check out alltheword.org

For such a time as this

BY MARK PENNY

What we were able to do in our team in 10 minutes was taking others several months. Frankly, I found that unacceptable, and unfair to the teams and their communities who were eagerly waiting for the scriptures.

I'll never forget the day that a member of our recently-formed translation committee popped into the office unexpectedly. As a team we had just completed checking one of the gospels. Right then and there, we created a nicely-formatted PDF of the translated scripture, printed it as a booklet, stapled it and handed it to him a few minutes later. The joy on his face as he received the first ever copy, and the joy in our hearts was unforgettable. But sadly, I later came to realise that this isn't what life is like for most teams...

A couple of years ago at a workshop in an exotic location in Asia at a beautiful venue overlooking a volcano, I realised from the participants that they were spending hours exporting, formatting, tweaking and refining their scriptures in order to print a single copy. Because it was such a laborious process, only a few teams were in the

habit of publishing trial copies of scripture regularly. I taught them some tips-and-tricks to make the process easier, but it still seemed too technical and difficult—especially for those who struggled with English, let alone all the technical codes needed to make it work just right.

A few months later I was almost in tears at another workshop when I heard that due to the backlog of work to be done some teams were having to wait 5-7 months for a trained typesetter to typeset a single gospel for them. Typesetting is essentially formatting for publication. What we were able to do in our team in 10 minutes was taking others several months. Frankly, I found that unacceptable, and unfair to the teams and their communities who were eagerly waiting for the scriptures. One of my own convictions is that the sooner we get trial publications into the hands of key

people within the community, the more likely it is that real scripture engagement takes place, lives are impacted and, as a bonus, we get vital feedback to improve the quality of the translation many years before the whole New Testament or Bible is ready to be formally released for use within the community.

A few weeks later, after some conversations with an extremely gifted programmer colleague, PTXprint was born!¹ This piece of software is built on the same technology (TeX) that we were using, but hides all the complexity from ordinary translators while making available all the options that a team needs to produce high quality scripture printouts through a simple-to-use interface. It can handle any script, including right-to-left (like Hebrew or Arabic), and top-to-bottom (like Mongolian) scripts, accurately place illustrations, footnotes, cross-

references, and everything else needed for scripture to be meaningful and attractive. It is fast (enabling an entire New Testament to be formatted for printing in less than 30 seconds) and free—an OpenSource project with three developers working around the clock and around the world.¹

The response from the worldwide Bible translation community has been staggering. Hundreds of users in dozens of organizations around the world have been using it to produce trial scripture publications. Given the Covid-induced difficulty of travelling right now, PTXprint could not have come at a better time. Teams stuck in remote locations are able to produce what they need in situ, with little effort, and share it locally with their communities.

1. <https://software.sil.org/ptxprint>



Examples of Scripture pages formatted using PTXprint

Crisis as a catalyst for innovation

BY ALEX WINSLADE

This issue has explored many aspects of innovation: we've questioned the 'why' behind innovative ideas, looked at different areas of Bible translation being impacted by innovation, and highlighted detailed examples of software innovations—the most prominent area in which we are seeing cutting edge ideas emerge. These all focus on internal factors surrounding innovation, but what if we look at what externally drives the formation and implementation of innovative ideas? **History suggests that, while seeming wholly adverse, times of crisis may in fact be a catalyst for innovation.**

As a lover of language and all things linguistic, it is only fitting that I draw on language to illustrate this point. The Chinese character for 'crisis' is made up of two characters: the first meaning 'danger' and the second, an affix meaning 'a crucial point when something begins to change'.¹ Indeed, crisis creates an environment for change, where the disruption of routine and convention makes room for creativity and improvisation.

At the global scale, some of the world's largest innovations have come out of a time of crisis: influential companies such as Microsoft, Disney, Apple, Uber and Airbnb were all founded in an environment of economic recession. In the world of Bible translation, it is no different.

Wycliffe USA translators John and Bonnie Nystrom were ten years into a translation project in Papua New Guinea when a tsunami wiped out the coastal village where their translation was taking place, destroying translation materials, literacy resources and causing massive loss of life. However, the tsunami created an opportunity for them to change the face of Bible translation in Papua New Guinea by introducing a more large-scale and sustainable style of translation. The translation of two related language groups had already been on their hearts, but until the tsunami they had not seen a way of achieving all three at once.

Having to rebuild their translation project after the tsunami caused the Nystroms to think differently about

the needs around them, and prompted them to question their decision to finish their current translation before helping the neighbouring language groups. As they began to delve into this thought, they learned of an innovative method that was starting to be used for translating multiple related languages at once called the ‘front translation method’, and were able to introduce this to their translation project in Papua New Guinea.²

The Covid-19 pandemic is likewise causing people in all industries to rethink how things are run, and come up with innovative ways of moving forward in a physically distanced, but technologically interconnected world. Once again, the world of Bible translation is no exception to this.

In one sense, the Covid-19 pandemic creates an environment where innovative ideas can be fostered. More and more training courses are becoming accessible online, which enables people who may not have previously been able to attend courses to get the training they require. Similarly, conferences and gatherings previously restricted to those who could attend in person are now becoming accessible globally. Access to such resources gives more people opportunities for professional

development and to expand their thinking and ideas. **This kind of environment creates a chance for people to have new ideas sparked and the space to develop them.**

In another sense, the Covid-19 crisis necessitates innovation where methods of translation that previously relied on travel and in-person interaction need to continue. The previous article by Mark Penny describes one such innovation—a software program used to rapidly format and produce trial copies of Scripture—that has taken root among hundreds of users globally in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. While this innovation’s ability to meet translators’ needs in remote locations has caused it to become more widespread, particularly in the restrictions of a global pandemic, the invention was not a direct result of the pandemic.

In many ways, the Covid-19 crisis serves as a catalyst for innovation by simply accelerating existing ideas for innovation. It does this both by necessitating the development of alternative ideas, and providing people with the time, space and access to resources in order to develop their ideas into pioneering innovations that are changing the face of Bible translation.

1. <https://workplacepsychology.net/2014/08/10/in-chinese-crisis-does-not-mean-danger-and-opportunity>

2. Excerpt from *Sleeping Coconuts*, where John Nystrom describes the innovation in translating multiple related languages at once.

“For you to understand what Ellis told me, I first need to explain the concept of a “back translation.” Before a translation is published, it must be checked by an experienced translation consultant. The consultant usually doesn’t know the language of the translation, so he can’t read it. To help him see exactly what is in the translation, translators render it back into a language the consultant understands.

A back translation, of course, is always done after the original translation is completed. But Ellis told me Robert Early had turned this idea upside down by creating a “front translation,” a clear, literal representation of what the

translation should say, before it is even written.

If I were to do a front translation in English to help guide the Arop translators through the Mark 1:4 phrase “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,” I might write, “John came talking-around talk like this: ‘I will baptise you to show that you have turned away from the bad things you have done and that God has forgiven you.’”

Robert Early did his front translation in Bislama, the language of wider communication in Vanuatu. He would give that front translation as the source text to the translators in the three languages on Epi Island. This was much easier for them to work from than translating from other available translations, because Robert had structured it the same way their languages were structured. Using this method, they could make better progress in their translations sooner and with less training.” (Nystrom, 130–131)

In many ways, the Covid-19 crisis serves as a catalyst for innovation by simply accelerating existing ideas for innovation.

We believe in universal access to God's Word

wycliffenz.org

facebook.com/wycliffenz

instagram.com/wycliffenz

Phone: +64 9 262 8440

Toll Free: 0508 992 543

Email: admin@wycliffenz.org

Level 6, Laidlaw House
20 Amersham Way
Manukau City, Auckland

PO Box 276005
Manukau City, Auckland 2241



wycliffenz
Partners in Bible Translation