Bible translation in my backyard:
Translating the Bible with displaced communities

Sunny Hong, PhD, Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics faculty and SIL International

Abstract

“The world is coming to us.” “The mission field is here not only overseas.” “The whole world is connected.” These sentences are repeatedly heard in the 21st century, which reflects new open doors for doing missions. According to the United Nations, in 2005/2006 10.8% of the population in the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries was foreign born. In 2016, the total number of refugees in the world was 17,187,488. These statistics indicate that many languages that need Bible translation are accessible outside of their homeland. Languages which cannot be translated in their homeland due to political and religious difficulties can be translated with displaced communities. This paper describes issues in the Bible translation process with the displaced communities.

Introduction

Bible translation done outside of the language area is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history, many Bibles have been translated outside of the language area because of security risks or social linguistic reasons. “The LXX [Septuagint] is a translation from Hebrew into Greek that was produced for the Jewish community resident outside their own land in the North African commercial and intellectual Hellenistic metropolis of Alexandria.” Tyndale translated the English Bible in Germany. The first complete English Bible was published in Germany in 1535 by Miles Coverdale. Casiodoro de Reina worked on the first Spanish Bible in Switzerland and published it there in 1569 because there was an almost total ban on the production of Spanish Scriptures in Spain. The first Amharic translation was done in Egypt in 1840. Korea was closed to any foreign influence, including missionaries, for most of the 19th century. From 1882 until 1887, John Ross, John Macintyre, and Korean Christians—UngChan Lee, Hongjun Baek, Sangryun Suh, and Sungha Lee—worked in China to translate the Bible into Korean. At about the same time Sujung Lee, another Korean, went to Japan, became a Christian,
and started to translate the Bible into Korean in 1885, without knowing that the Bible was already being translated in China. After the first Korean Christians smuggled portions of the Bible into Korea at the risk of their lives, some Koreans became Christians by reading the Bible and then established the first church in 1883 in Sorae, Korea.\(^7\) Horace Grant Underwood, who was one of Korea’s first expatriate missionaries, was surprised to find Korean Christians there when he arrived in Korea in 1885. “I came to plant the seeds in Korea but started to harvest” [translated].\(^8\) Koreans, including the present author, are beneficiaries of displaced translation projects.

As of October 1, 2016, there are 1700-1800 languages that need Bible translation, which represents 160 million people.\(^9\) About half of the languages where translation work still needs to begin are spoken (or signed) in sensitive contexts where there may be issues of safety, security, and political or religious opposition,\(^10\) similar to the situation in Korea in the 19th century. Therefore, new strategies are needed to get the Bible into these languages.

Instead of relying on traditional models of Bible translation projects being carried out on site, it may be possible to initiate and carry out more translation projects that are geographically based outside, yet still connected to, the homeland.\(^11\) Wan defines diaspora as “people on the move,” or “people who take up residence away from their places of origin.”\(^12\) There are significant number of diasporas in the world. By specifically including 20 million refugees, the number of diaspora reached 244 million in 2015, a 41 percent increase from 2000.\(^13\)

The top twenty countries sending the largest diaspora populations in 2015 are on the following chart.\(^14\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Name of the country</th>
<th>Number (mil.)</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Name of the country</th>
<th>Number (mil.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>State of Palestine</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^10\) Personal communication with Peter Brassington, compiler of global translations statistics for Wycliffe Global Alliance.

\(^11\) “Homeland” in this paper indicates the country (or countries) where the majority of speakers of a given language traditionally live.

\(^12\) Enoch Wan, *Diaspora missiology: Theory, methodology, and practice*, (Portland, OR: Western Seminary, 2011), 3.


\(^14\) Ibid., 18
The top 20 countries receiving the most diaspora in 2015 are listed on the following chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country name</th>
<th>Number (mil.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above charts show a tendency for diaspora to move from religiously restricted countries to religiously free countries, and from less economically developed to more economically developed countries.

Refugees comprise a certain category of the diaspora. Refugees are defined as “persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution, … protected by international law.” Immigrants are willing to move to another country for better education, living conditions, job opportunities, etc., while refugees are forced to leave their home countries mainly for political, ethnic conflict, or religious reasons.

Three countries—Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, and South Sudan—produced 55 percent of all refugees worldwide. The following is a list of the ten major countries where refugees originated, which comprises 79 percent of the world refugee population as of 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Name of the country</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Syrian Arab Rep.</td>
<td>5.5 mil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>2.5 mil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>DR of the Congo</td>
<td>537,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Central African Rep.</td>
<td>490,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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16 [http://www.unrefugees.org/2015/08/refugee-or-migrant-which-is-right/](http://www.unrefugees.org/2015/08/refugee-or-migrant-which-is-right/) (Accessed on Sep. 11)
17 Ibid., 3
18 Ibid., 16-19
The following chart lists the ten countries hosting the most refugees in 2016.\textsuperscript{19}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Name of the country</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Name of the country</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>2.9 mil.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>791,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>1.6 mil.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>685,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>1.0 mil.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>669,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Islamic Rep. of Iran</td>
<td>979,400</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>DR of the Congo</td>
<td>452,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>940,800</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>451,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A comparison of the two charts above shows that most of the countries where refugees originated have high numbers of languages with a likely need for Bible translation, yet are inhospitable to the work of Bible translation. Some of the refugee-receiving countries also have high numbers of Bible translation needs and are hard to enter as a foreigner. Among countries identified by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2005/06, over ten percent of the total population were foreign-born.\textsuperscript{20}

All the statistics above indicate that many of the languages needing Bible translation are those with significant populations living outside of their homeland.

The purpose of this paper is to present some success factors, difficult issues, and suggestions from both Bible translation workers and the researcher for this project. It gleans from case studies of Bible translation projects among displaced communities so that more strategies can be developed for reaching the most difficult to reach language groups with Bible translation. The twenty-two people from five organizations interviewed in July and August of 2017 for this research include mother tongue translators, expatriate translators, language facilitators, administrators, IT personnel, Scripture engagement consultants, translation consultants, and language surveyors.

**Case studies**

Out of ten displaced language projects for which I held interviews for this research, four languages have been selected to show how some displaced language projects have been initiated and processed and to present some of the difficulties and success factors that have resulted.

\textsuperscript{19} \url{http://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34} (Accessed on Sep. 11, 2017), 14-16

Nunmul language

Nunmul language is an example of doing a translation project with one mother tongue translator.

Background

Nunmul people are a minority people group in Asia, numbering 244,000 people in the country of origin. The total number of Nunmul speakers from around the world is 298,000. Their primary religion is Islam, and 0.01% of the population in the country of origin are Christians.

Translation process

After refugees came to the West in the late 1970s and early 1980s, an SIL team was asked to start work on a displaced project for the Nunmul language in the US because SIL did not work in the country of origin of the Nunmul people at that time. From 1988 to 1992, in addition to working on the dictionary, the expatriate translators (ETs from now on) translated portions of Luke, with the help of a Nunmul speaker, in preparation for making the Jesus film. The same speaker translated a summary of Genesis and Exodus in the mid 90’s.

In 1992, one of the ETs and his immediate supervisor, the Associate Director of Displaced Language Projects at SIL, met Sarah in Canada. Sarah had become a Christian around 1980 when she was in a refugee camp. She had been separated from her son, but from her account, God miraculously allowed her and her son to immigrate separately to Canada. In Canada, she attended an English-speaking church that hosted a national language church in her country of origin. There she met a board member of an agency involved in Bible translation and was subsequently connected with the ETs. At that time, there were no other known Christians from the Nunmul people group in North America. However, Sarah was too busy to be involved with translation work at that time, because she was busy with her five children as well as taking Theological Education by Extension (TEE) courses at her church.

In 1999, the ETs began Bible translation with Sarah. Although they were not able to survey the Nunmul language in the heartland, they were able to learn a lot from the research that had been done previously, as well as from conversations and detailed inquiries while working with other Nunmul people.

The Nunmul people had always had an oral society. The mother tongue translator (MTT from now on), Sarah, chose to draft Scripture using the alphabet of the national language of the country of origin of the Nunmul language. The ETs would call Sarah, who would read her translation to the ETs so they could record it and then write it down using a Roman script. Then the ETs did an exegetical check of the draft. Early in 2000, the ETs and Sarah began working via video conference.

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21 Nunmul is a pseudonym.
23 Sarah is a pseudonym.
24 The term “heartland” is used for a place where a minority people group lives or came from originally. It can be a region in a country.
The ETs did not learn the Nunmul language because they did not have a community in which to live or a language teacher to teach them. But as they worked on a 6,000 plus word dictionary before beginning translation, they learned the words and their correct pronunciation. English was the common language used between the ETs and Sarah. The role of the ETs was primarily to be consultants and to do exegesis. The dictionary they worked on was used in creating a back-translation of the Nunmul translation that Sarah worked on.

When the ETs visited the heartland in 1999, they did community testing of the first few chapters of Genesis with two Nunmul Christians, who readily accepted the translation and told them that it said the same thing as the national language Bible. The ETs were encouraged that the translation they were doing was good.

In 2001, the ETs went back to the heartland to do further community testing. The ETs began community testing of their translation; but before long, the testing devolved into comparing their translation with the translation being worked on by two missionaries in the heartland. Due to the missionaries’ choice of older Nunmul words to replace borrowed majority language words and religious words from a language in another country, many Nunmul people, young and old, were not able to understand the Bible that was translated by the two missionaries. Sarah used borrowed words from the majority language of the country of origin that were used in normal Nunmul speech.

In order that survey work and orthography development take place among the Nunmul people, the ETs requested SIL to assign an additional team to the Nunmul language project. In 2002, a new team began work in the heartland. In 2003, the SIL administration over the heartland of the Nunmul people, who had taken over the administration of the North America Branch (NAB from now on) displaced language projects in the late 1990s, asked the ETs to stop working with Sarah and either move to another area where more Nunmul people lived in the newly settled country or go to the heartland. The ETs left the organization and continued to work with Sarah with hopes of cooperating with the new translation team assigned to the heartland, which, for one reason or another, never happened. After attempting with no success to coordinate translation project in the heartland, the ETs decided to wrap up their part of the Nunmul translation project and find ways to publish the translation work that they had done.

Scripture Engagement

Little Scripture engagement was done for the Nunmul language by the ETs. Because of security issues, Sarah did not want Nunmul people to know that she was doing translation work. A possibility for Scripture engagement in the future may be to make available online the eleven books of the Bible that have been completed. Sarah and her older sons encourage this, because they say Nunmul people are constantly online on Facebook, YouTube, and other sites on the Internet.

Success factors

Sarah had Bible training and a desire to do the translation, and she felt God had called her to translate the Bible for her people even before she met the ETs. Throughout the translation process, Sarah and her children stayed strong in their faith, even though Sarah’s family members
in the heartland are strongly resistant to the gospel. The translation process has served to disciple Sarah and to share the Gospel with the two prominent Nunmul men who initiated the Nunmul-English dictionary in the US, one of whom is now in a high position in the heartland.

Difficulties

The ETs were not able to live in the heartland to learn the Nunmul language, and they only had help from a limited number of Nunmul speakers. The ETs found it difficult to stay motivated to keep working on the translation with the lack of help from the Nunmul people and lack of support from their administrators, as well as the challenges in working with a displaced person.

Few opportunities existed for community testing because there was no access to a viable group, although the ETs did a limited amount of community testing when they visited the Nunmul’s heartland. Translated Bible portions were not printed and used, because ETs were not able to engage in many Scripture engagement activities.

It was hard for the ETs to raise the needed financial support for themselves, as well as to pay the MTT, although God did consistently meet the needs of the ETs and their family in a variety of ways.

Due to the vast area over which the NAB personnel were scattered, as well the lack of experience of the administration in working with a team beginning work on a displaced language project without having been in the heartland, the ETs felt alone, not welcomed, and not a part of the branch. While this project began as a NAB project, the ETs were later caught between two different administrations as the heartland administration took over more control of the displaced language projects. Neither administration knew how to work well with the ETs, because each had a tenuous relationship with them due to the distance and the lack of time invested in developing good communication with them.

Because Sarah left her heartland over thirty years ago—only ten years before the ETs’ first contact with her—her Nunmul language is outdated when compared to the current Nunmul language, although she is well understood by all Nunmul speakers whether displaced or in the heartland.

Suggestions

Many speakers of the language are needed to make a viable translation team. Involvement of a church is important whenever possible.

An MTT needs to work fulltime on a translation for much progress to take place. It is best not to choose a native speaker who has lived outside of the heartland for a long time, because of the potential for possible shifts in their knowledge of language and culture. Likewise, someone who left their heartland before reaching adulthood is not likely to have developed vocabulary or higher thinking skills sufficiently in the language to be effective as a MTT or translation helper.

Coordination is necessary between someone in the country of origin and the country where the translation work is done, but the translators should not have two bosses for their project. It would
be best for administrators over displaced language projects to have had experience or training in such projects before they oversee translators in a project.

**Gippum language**

The Gippum language project is an example of a translation done with a viable sized displaced community.

**Background**

Gippum people comprise a minority people group that in the past was located in two Asian countries. However, in the 1950s, some people left their heartland within the country of origin and relocated to another place within their country. Some of these people moved on to two other countries before they were able to come to the final destination. Currently, the population of the Gippum people in their country of origin is 825,000, and the combined population in all countries of the world including the heartland totals 951,100. The major religion is the ethnic religion of their heartland. Only 1.25% of Gippum people are Christians.

**Language Survey**

Language survey work was limited to what the ETs could do, in one resettlement village in the country of origin in the late 1960s. From this work, the ETs were able to identify the province and district which best represented the standard language dialect. Throughout the translation project, a person from this district was usually present to help the translation to conform to the chosen standard language dialect.

**Translation process**

Because of instability, ETs went to a resettlement village in the country of origin to learn the Gippum language from Gippum people located there. This language project began as a displaced language project in the country of origin. When the political system changed, ETs evacuated to an SIL center in a neighboring country. Following some time in refugee camps in a neighboring country, about 750 Gippum people moved to Saeddang in a new country. Then the ETs moved to Saeddang to continue language learning and translation. A translation committee was formed with a few believers, and the translation work continued in Saeddang.

Most of the Gippum people who initially left the country of origin were well-educated and considered to have high status in their heartland. If the ETs had been able to work in the heartland, they would have also chosen other people to work with them to have input from a wider spectrum of backgrounds.

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25 Gippum is a pseudonym.
26 Ibid., (Accessed on August 28, 2017)
27 Saeddang is a pseudonym and a name of a state in a country to which Gippum people moved.
Since Gippum language speakers came from both the country of origin and a neighboring country, sometimes the ETs found it difficult to determine the origin of certain words and to decide which would be best to use in their translation work. Once a Gippum speaker, who had resettled in Europe, visited the ETs in Saeddang to share his knowledge of the language and correct some significant words. The translation of the New Testament in the Gippum language was completed in 2014.

From the beginning of the Gippum project in the homeland until the publication of the Gippum New Testament in the new country, the goal of the project has always been to make Scripture available in the Gippum language to the majority of Gippum speakers living in the heartland, not just to the diaspora.

Orthography

An IT specialist who had received training as an SIL translator, as well as having a background in computers, worked on three different orthographies for the Gippum language: one based on the traditional script, a second from the country of origin, and a third from the neighboring country. The reasons for having three different orthographies were because the Gippum language already had a traditional orthography that Gippum people used for religious occasions and searching genealogies for ancestor worship, and Gippum groups were scattered in two different countries where the governments of each required use of their country’s own orthography.

When the country of origin became more stable in the 1990s, the government made an effort to preserve the ethnic orthography and introduced use of this script to the elementary schools in the heartland. Also, the same script was taught in the country of origin. The current literacy rate of the Gippum language in the heartland is 1%-5%.

Translation Checking

Many of the translation and linguistic consultants for the Gippum language project had worked in neighboring language groups in the country of origin or that general area, where they had gained a lot of cultural understanding from living in cultural situations similar to that of the Gippum people. One translation consultant who had worked on a related language project in a nearby country checked one-third of the New Testament translation by email for two years without visiting the country of origin. This checking went well because the ETs were experienced in the language, culture, and the work of translation by that time. The use of key terms had already been determined, and it was near the end of the project. Until the end of the translation project, there was some hesitation over the use of certain terms. The ETs wished they could have visited the heartland to confirm their use with more speakers of the language.

Most of the translation work on the New Testament, including consultant checking and community checking, was done in Saeddang. Gippum people in Saeddang were hired by the ETs to accomplish this task. Most of the Gippum people who were hired for community and

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consultant checking were non-believers, while believers did most of the drafting and revision work as well as serving on the translation committee.

**Scripture Engagement**

Several attempts of Scripture engagement were made from outside the heartland. First, in the early 1980s, some Gippum radio programs were recorded in Saeddang for broadcasting. Some of these Gippum programs continued to be broadcast to the country of origin until 2012 when they were discontinued. Second, during 1990-1999, an IT specialist engaged in Scripture distribution took Bible portions to the heartland. Third, a Gippum church in Saeddang sent people to the heartland to help with Bible classes and Sunday school. Fourth, the ETs visited the Gippum area in 2005 and found they could be understood there. Also, the Scripture engagement specialist visited Gippum Christian leaders in 2014 and presented them with the first copy of the Gippum New Testament. In 2015 and 2016, a Scripture engagement specialist visited Gippum leaders and was able to deliver an additional 400 copies of the Gippum New Testament. During the past two years, missionaries from other organizations have taken a number of Gippum New Testaments to Gippum leaders in the country of origin and some into a neighboring country. Fifth, one couple is currently working on daily radio broadcasting programs in a neighboring country to send the Christian message to the heartland. Also, the Jesus Film has been produced in the Gippum language.

At present, some work is going on in the heartland. There are foreign workers from mission agencies who use the translated New Testament for Bible studies, Bible stories, and training Gippum people in the Word. The Gippum New Testament is recorded and available on the web for distribution. However, getting the printed New Testament into the heartland is a bit difficult. The printed Bibles are supplied from a neighboring country.

**Administration**

The project began in the home country under the administration of an SIL branch working there. After the SIL branch left the home country in the mid-1970’s, the project was moved to Saeddang, and administrative control was transferred to the North American Branch (NAB) in 1978. In 2002 it was transferred back to an administrative group which included the home country.

**Success Factors**

Several factors worked together to make this project successful. There were Gippum people who were proud of their language and lived nearby in one place in Saeddang. The Gippum church in Saeddang and very knowledgeable language helpers were involved in the translation work.

Because ETs lived in a resettlement village for a few months when they first started learning the language and then had steady contact with Gippum speakers for another five and half years in-country, they were able to learn the Gippum language well.

Also, an IT specialist, who was trained as a translator, acquainted with the Gippum language, and had the needed computer knowledge, helped make it possible to write the three different orthographies using computers.
It was also helpful that the linguistic and translation consultants had worked with languages and cultures similar to that of the Gippum people.

Difficulties

In addition to the expected difficulties in doing cross-culture language work, difficulties were added to this project because it was displaced from the heartland. Some expatriate workers who were just beginning to learn the Gippum language in Saeddang were not able to be fully immersed in the Gippum language. They found the background English on TVs playing in the Gippum homes hindered their language learning when they were visiting there. Opportunities to practice conversing in the Gippum language were limited. Times for language and culture learning were limited to when they were invited into the home of a Gippum person or to a Gippum group social event.

Learning about culture was not easy, because Gippum people could not be observed as they would have when living in their heartland. Homes of Gippum people were scattered around their area in Saeddang, so ETs were only able to observe weddings, funerals, or celebrations of the Lunar New Year when the Gippum people gathered to participate in these events.

Hiring Gippum people to do translation work in Saeddang created paperwork for being a sole proprietor, doing payroll taxes, and handling finances and insurance. Hiring the right people for short periods for the community checking was a challenge. Paying Saeddang wages was another challenge.

Coordinating work with workers from another agency, who were working in the heartland, presented another long-distance challenge. E-mail made possible the complicated process of typesetting and publishing the Gippum New Testament, when the administrators and type-setters were in Asia; the ET’s remaining in Saeddang due to illness, but the IT specialist, map makers, publisher, and printers were scattered across the settled country.

Suggestions

When ETs wanted to work with a native speaker of the Gippum language, they chose an adult who was fluent in the language when they left their home country. They also found that a Gippum person who spoke English without being as fluent in the Gippum language was a great resource in some checking and polishing situations, because they could ask their family members for correct words. Therefore, it is important to select language workers based on how their qualifications can be effectively used for the work.

The New Testament in the Gippum language impacts the older generation who continue to speak the Gippum language in Saeddang; but the younger generation does not use the Gippum language Scripture, because they were born in a new country where their parents settled and English is their primary tongue. Therefore, it is important that a displaced language project be done before the first generation of displaced speakers dies out.

The number of mother tongue speakers, how recently they moved away from the heartland, and the number of Christians in the group are factors that affect a translation project.
Some of the churches that Gippum people attend in a newly settled country have a mixture of other Asian minority people. English is used in worship as a common language. The multicultural worship in a newly settled country may not be helpful to a translation project because of the potential for shifts in language that come from encounters with other languages.

A displaced language group project should not be started outside the heartland until thorough research has shown that there is no possible way to work in the heartland, or at least in the homeland.

A support system is needed to help ETs with the paperwork for taxes, insurance, and other financial items. It would be helpful if a person, who has specialized in a displaced language project, could help with paperwork for employment or volunteers, resettlement issues, and supporting the refugees. Encouraging the ETs in this way would be helpful, because it is easy for them to feel very lonely in their work and overwhelmed by the tasks that take a lot of time away from translation but are legal requirements to gain the ability to do the work.

On-the-job training from linguistic, cultural, and translation consultants and workshops—especially from those knowledgeable in linguistic and cultural issues of the language family and area—is important and needed for displaced project personnel, just as it is for those working within local SIL entities.

Coordination of supervisors is needed when one is in the country where the displaced people project is taking place and another in the homeland. The one in the country where the project is taking place may know little about the language that is from a different part of the world, but the field supervisor might not know how to handle such things as taxes, paperwork, and finances required for the project. Good communication between the two is essential.

**Yulshim language**

Yulshim language is an example where the diaspora church is heavily involved in the Scripture engagement work in the heartland and the neighboring country.

**Background**

Yulshim people are a minority people group who live in two countries in Asia. The population of the Yulshim speakers in the dominant country is 242,000, and of all the Yulshim speakers in all countries, is 411,000. The gospel came to them through the work of the Christian Missionary Alliance Church, so that now, 30 percent of Yulshim people in the heartland are Christians. The majority religion is an ethnic religion. Yulshim people became refugees and were sent to two neighboring countries before some of them moved to Meenara.

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29 Yulshim is a pseudonym.
32 Meenara, a pseudonym, is a country name that Yulshim settled.
Translation process

There have been three different translations of the Bible for the Yulshim language. The first Yulshim New Testament and Psalms was translated by expatriate missionaries, in cooperation with Yulshim people. The translators had no translation training and used a non-standard, but adequate dialect. This Bible has been out of print after the war and is no longer available.

The second Bible translation was done as a displaced language project. The translator was an MTT who had come to Meenara in 1994, and whose father had worked on the first version of the Yulshim Bible. That MTT received translation training from members of SIL. He worked on the translation of the Bible in Meenara for 15 years. In the beginning stage of his translation work, 30 Yulshim speakers were living in Meenara. The Old Testament was completed in 2010, and the New Testament was completed in 2013. Helps for Bible study, which includes maps, a concordance, and a dictionary, are printed as well. The whole Bible was dedicated in the heartland in December 2014. Most of the Yulshim people understand the dialect chosen for this version. This version will be the main focus for the remainder of this paper.

Local pastors in the heartland, with the help of a United Bible Society consultant, completed a third translation in 2016. This Bible used familiar words from the Yulshim language to identify names and places whereas the second translation had spelled the words so their pronunciation would sound more nearly like Hebrew. Some church leaders prefer to have the names from the language of the home country rather than words that sound like Hebrew. Some leaders in the heartland insist that people use this third version.

Consultant Checking

The major consultant work for the second version was done by the SIL consultants, who had worked in the country of origin with languages in the same language family group and in a similar culture.

Yulshim people in both Meenara and the heartland participated in the comprehension checking of the translation. Yulshim people in two different places in Meenara helped with the community checking. Sometimes the MTT called people in the heartland to do checking as well as visited the heartland from time to time to do the checking. Even though the MTT was only allowed to visit his home village to do community checking, he had traveled widely in the Yulshim area before he and his mother came to Meenara, so he was very knowledgeable in the Yulshim language.

Scripture Engagement

During 1980-1990, an expatriate worker provided a radio station with a few improvised recordings of Yulshim radio programs combined with some gospel recordings done earlier. He also recorded about ten more Yulshim programs with a Yulshim person from a refugee camp in another country and many other Yulshim radio programs. Yulshim hymns were recorded with Yulshim people in Meenara.
The radio station received many positive responses from listeners. The Yulshim church in the heartland was well-established before the war, and the radio programs have brought encouragement and teaching to Yulshim believers during the political upheaval, especially since most of the minority churches in the country of origin were closed by the government. Their only means of receiving teaching and the oral Scriptures was by radio for a few years, and so Yulshim people would gather around their radios each week to hear programs in their language. The radio programs gave people hope and strengthened them by reminding them that they were not forgotten.

With the economic reform in the heartland, Yulshim Christians in Meenara have gone back to the neighboring country to share the gospel with the Yulshim people.

Success factors

A capable MTT, who was well-trained both in theology and translation, and capable consultants, who had lived in the country of origin for at least a decade and spoke a related language, were important reasons this displaced language project was successfully completed.

Difficulties

Currently, Yulshim people have two different versions of the Yulshim Bible. The first translation needed to be replaced, but it would seem that either the second or third was necessary but not both. The overt reason given by Yulshim people in the heartland for not accepting the Yulshim translation by the dispersed MTT was that he was too young to translate God’s Word. However, it may have been due to other interpersonal factors. The MTT was criticized for things such as his spelling of the word for God. Yulshim people knew the second translation was in process when they chose to begin the third translation. Was it because the second Yulshim translation was done as a displaced language project by a dispersed person that it was not considered acceptable to Yulshim people in the heartland?

Somang language

The Somang language is being translated by MTTs on two different continents, and the Internet is used by Somang believers for their fellowship with each other.

General information

Several versions of the Somang language are widely in use outside of the Somang language homeland. However, in this paper, the focus is on a particular version of the Somang language that is used within the homeland as the language of wider communication. The Somang language is spoken by 4,130,000 people in the homeland and by 4,802,000 in all countries of the world. The Somang people are scattered in 22 countries around the world due to religious and political

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33 Somang is a pseudonym.
persecutions. Over 96 percent of the people in the home country are Muslim, and 3.1 percent of the foreigners are Christians. There is no Somang church to plug into in either the homeland or the outside countries.

Translation process

The language facilitator went to the homeland of Somang language in 2002 to learn the Somang language and do Somang language survey. However, he was forced to leave the country in 2011 at a time when he was drafting portions of the Bible. He moved to Europe in 2012 and started working with four mother tongue speakers of the Somang language who were settled in Europe and Africa. Three of the mother tongue speakers had left their home country because of persecution for their faith, and the fourth person had come to Europe as an international student and had become a believer. The facilitator stays in a country where it has been possible for him to get a visa, but none of the Somang Christians with whom he is working live there. Four times a year, the people who are involved with the Somang translation project (MTTs, a facilitator, and consultants) gather together in a third country to work and to give MTTs training in translation.

Currently, they are translating a publication called “Discovering Bible Study,” which introduces Jesus, Mark, Genesis, and Jonah. Translation checking of the Jesus Film has been completed. The Somang Bible translation organization is preparing to send a team to the homeland to do more translation as well as community checking of what has been translated.

SIL has two different lines of work for the Somang language: one is to encourage the spiritual growth of the online community of Somang believers around the world, and the other is for outreach to the non-believers in the homeland.

Translation Checking

The translation consultants know the culture and a related language well enough that they can check translation work in the Somang language without needing a back translation. Partner organizations in Europe and Africa plan to help with the community checking of the translation. They plan to do it in a third country because there are so many restrictions in the homeland.

Scripture Engagement

The partner organizations will use the translated portions in their ministry. The language facilitator is working to put the translated Bible portions on the web so that the Bible portions can be available on the Scripture mobile app, Facebook, and social networking service (SNS).

Success factors

There are mother tongue speakers who want to have the Bible in their language. An online community among Somang Christians around the world meets online once a week to share testimonies and prayer concerns. Expatriate workers are not involved in this online community. Some people from the online community, who have not suffered persecution in the homeland,

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36 Ibid.
desire to go there to share the gospel with their family members. They would also like to be involved with dubbing the Jesus Film. Giving voice to it might be dangerous for their safety. Even so, they are willing.

The time that the facilitator was able to stay in the homeland at the beginning of the project was very essential to his being able to survey and learn the language and understand the culture. Annual meetings with the partner organizations have proved to be a great networking opportunity to further the work.

Difficulties

Distance has been a big issue. Because of visa matters, the facilitator has had to make moves to two different countries in Europe. The MTTs live on different continents. Somang people living in 22 countries are difficult to reach.

Not only is there a physical distance between the MTTs and the target group in the homeland, but also there is an emotional distance between them. The MTTs who were persecuted for their faith in their homeland have negative feelings for the people who persecuted them and a negative view of the culture and religion in the homeland. They want to forget the negative things that happened before and move on; they do not want to have a part in their homeland.

The Christian MTTs are translating the Bible for people in their homeland, who not only do not understand the Christian key terms, but they have refused to accept Christianity. The key terms that MTTs choose for their translations come from their Christian background and cause further distance between them and people of the other religion who do not understand the terms. As the MTTs live in Western societies, they adopt Western thinking patterns that create even greater distance between them and the people in the homeland.

Mother tongue speakers who do not have someone to speak the Somang language with lose some ability to speak it even after a year or two. They do understand what has been translated but have difficulty or take a long time in choosing the right words. Mother tongue speakers who have a family with them and are connected with people back in the homeland have a better chance of keeping their language. Mother tongue speakers who have been to many different countries before they settle in the final place gain vocabularies from other languages. Sometimes they do not distinguish those terms as not being Somang language.

Each country where MTTs are working has rules and regulations about their receiving a salary. Dealing with the paperwork and legal issues in different countries is a challenge for the translation project leaders. If MTTs get financial help from the governments of their residency because of their refugee status, but have income from another source, their funds from the government will be reduced. Paying taxes is hard for MTTs, because they were not accustomed to paying taxes in the home country.
Local communities within the homeland may choose not to own the translation project because the work has been done outside the homeland. The translated Somang Bible has not had an impact yet on the Somang people in the homeland.

Suggestions

If it is at all possible, it is best to do a translation project in the heartland. It might be preferable to start the translation with people in the homeland to have a more relevant translation; but translators need to be very cautious about this option, because people in the homeland may be very much opposed to Bible translation because of their religion. To be able to work in the homeland, translators would have to find very open-minded people with whom to work.

Findings

In this section, difficulties, success factors, and suggestions for displaced translation projects are listed.

Difficulties

In addition to the difficulties that are encountered in regular translation projects, displaced language translation projects face some unique challenges. This section presents difficulties MTTs and expatriate workers must overcome to do Bible translation in a displaced language project.

Mother Tongue Translators

To be chosen for work as MTTs for a displaced language, the MTTs must have the target language as their mother tongue. However, if the MTTs have moved from the heartland to multiple countries, including refugee camps, before settling in a final location, their language may have shifted as they have taken on vocabularies from the temporary places. The MTTs who do not have the opportunity to speak in their heart language with other speakers of the language may lose their ability to speak the language in a short period of time, as was reported in a previous section of this paper. If there is no survey of the language before beginning work on a language, or if there are no other speakers of the language to verify the dialect of the MTT as being a standard dialect, the translator is likely to struggle throughout the program in determining what standard should be followed.

Usually, refugees who speak languages that have no Scripture in them do not have access to churches where they can worship in those languages. If they join a church of the majority culture of the homeland in their new country of residence, a multicultural church, or a national church of their residency, they may gain Christian language from their church that influences their translation work but is meaningless for people in the heartland. If this happens, there may be a need for two lines of work that require a strategy to provide translation to help diaspora...
Christians in their spiritual growth and another strategy to translate Bible stories for the people in the heartland, so that their hearts might come to be open to the Bible message.

If MTTs are not proud of their homeland because of their treatment as minority people, either ethnically or religiously, they may want to forget their previous history and move on to a new life in a new country. Rather than wanting to keep their language, they may take pride in gaining the ability to speak the national language of their new residency and willingly integrate into a church in the resident country. When they lose interest in keeping their language, language loss happens.

As they live in a Western country, the MTTs may adopt a Western worldview that distances them culturally from people in the heartland. A Bible translated by MTTs with a Western worldview may not be well-understood by the people in the heartland.

In certain countries where there have been centuries-old churches, church members may be considered Christian because of being born into the church, and these groups may be mainly a certain ethnic group. There may be a big gap culturally and theologically between a centuries old church and the new evangelical churches. A centuries-old church may use a Bible that new evangelical church members do not find easy to understand. Also, if the Christians are from a Muslim background, they might have a hard time being accepted in the traditional church of their homeland because of cultural differences. This research has found that traditional churches, both in the homeland and in the new country of residence, have not accepted Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) as their brothers and sisters in the Lord and have neglected relating to them. MBBs were not able to bring their friends to a traditional church in the new country of residence because of the cultural differences and cold responses they received in the traditional church. If the Bible were to be translated by MBBs for the people in their homeland, cultural differences could keep traditional churches in the country of residence from helping with or accepting the translation work.

Christians who have been persecuted for their faith in the homeland may feel indifferent to people there. The law in the homeland may not allow them to evangelize people, and their emotional state may hinder their readiness to share the gospel with the people who persecuted them. Scripture engagement is hampered if the MTTs do not want to reach out to the people back in the homeland, even when the diaspora evangelical churches in the country of residence have vibrant ministries overseas.

MTTs who were persecuted for their faith may have so many negative feelings towards their persecutors and the culture or religion of the homeland that they cannot produce a quality translation that would capture the hearts of the people in the homeland.

Each country where MTTs are working has rules and regulations about their being paid a salary. How to help them financially within legal boundaries requires careful research and

37 This is reported by a Scripture engagement consultant.
understanding of the paperwork and legal issues of the various countries. It is hard to raise support to pay MTTs because the living cost in Western countries is generally high.

Foreign ministry workers

Expatriate workers may find learning a language is difficult because opportunities for learning it are limited, and they may not be able to immerse themselves in the language and culture. When they try to learn the language from a non-Christian displaced person, the expatriate will need to give a good reason for doing so to avoid looking suspicious.

Cultural learning opportunities may be very limited. The expatriates may only be able to experience the culture for set functions like funerals or weddings. Cultural understanding may come more from listening to the target people rather than from first-hand experiences with them.

Even if there are no religious or political issues, an expatriate worker may have difficulty in securing a visa to stay in a foreign country.

Translation in general

Usually, there are not enough native speakers available to accomplish all the necessary tasks in a translation. For example, it is essential to record the translated materials for an oral culture. However, if the majority culture in the homeland is an oppressor, few native speakers may be willing to have their voices recorded because of their concerns for safety.

The quality of a translation can suffer if the concepts and translated words of the translation cannot be checked on many different levels because there are not enough native speakers available for the community check. Sometimes community checks are done in multiple countries, which make them more complicated logistically and linguistically because differences in dialect have to be taken into consideration. The cost of community checking increases greatly if it has to be done in a third country for security reasons. If the community checking is only done with the displaced population, the people in the homeland may have difficulty in understanding some concepts.

It is rare for more than one translation to be done for a specific minority language. However, out of the ten projects investigated in this paper, two different translations were made by different organizations simultaneously for two of the languages. This raises an issue of duplicated efforts and a concern that community in the homeland may not accept ownership of a translation completed outside of the homeland.

For most of the languages that I researched for this paper, language survey was not done, was partially done, or was done a long time ago.

Success Factors

In every language project I researched for this paper, the translation consultants for the projects were experienced in a language that was related to and similar in culture to the one in their current project. While this knowledge would be relevant to any translation project, it is even
more significant and helpful for the displaced language translation projects because of the nature of the linguistic and cultural limitations on the projects.

McGavran coined the term, *gospel receptivity*,\(^{38}\) which means there is more openness to the gospel when people encounter it during a major life shift such as death, departure from family and friends, a move, or another major change. Displaced people have experienced multiple kinds of these shifts that may potentially make them more receptive to the gospel, which in turn may open a door for them to be recruited as MTTs to translate the Bible. People who fled from their home country because of their Christian faith may also be resource people as MTTs. Being able to work with MTTs in a non-threatening environment is a success factor for displaced language projects.

Pride in one’s language and the desire to have the Bible translated into it is an important motivation for a regular translation project, but it is even more critical for a displaced language project. Displaced MTTs have been motivated for these reasons, despite their language being a minority language in the new country where they need to learn the national language in order to survive.

The involvement of the diaspora church, as seen in the Yulshim language project, helped to make translation and Scripture engagement successful. One MTT from the Yulshim language said:

> The more we experienced persecution by the authority, the more the house churches grew, and many Christians were hungrier for the Word. I experienced it myself before I came to Meenara. Another factor that contributed to the [church] growth is the translation of the Bibles. It didn’t matter which version the believers used, but they all loved to study God’s Word daily. Those people had never been in school; they were taught among themselves to read the Bible in their own language… Yulshim people from Meenara also made a huge impact on many Christians who are still in the home country by Bible study materials we sent, by phone calls to encourage them in difficult times, by visiting them once in a while, and by training them, etc. It is the same as we do for our brothers and sisters in the home country, we also do it for our brothers and sisters in the neighboring country [where Yulshim language is spoken].\(^{39}\)

The Scripture engagement activity by the Yulshim diaspora churches in Meenara is one of the reasons that 30 percent of the people in the homeland are Christians and 10 percent are Christians in the neighboring country. I eye-witnessed the impact of the Yulshim diaspora church in the neighboring country when I did my other research.

Obtaining citizenship in their new resident country may give refugees freer access to their home country and may protect them as they go back to work in their heartland as a Scripture engagement short-term worker. Legally, they are foreigners because of their passport; but they

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\(^{39}\) From email communication with a Yulshim MTT on Sep. 14, 2017
are not foreigners, because it is their homeland. Also, funding from the diaspora churches for the heartland has benefitted Scripture engagement activities.

Technology was one of the key success factors in translation and Scripture engagement work. Through radio programs and the Internet, the Bible can penetrate into the heartland without much limitation. The Internet makes translation checking possible with the MTTs who are scattered around the world. As reported earlier, the Internet was the only way for the Somang Christians around the world to have fellowship in their mother tongue and to encourage each other in their faith.

The culture of most Bibleless people is collectivistic, because the family and community have a very high value. Because of this cultural value, the family network, including e-networks such as social media, have been used for Scripture engagement work. McGavran calls this using “the bridges of God,” and Green calls it using “a super-highway.”

Understanding their home culture and understanding the gospel message enables the diaspora to become a mechanism for taking the gospel back to the people in the homeland in culturally relevant ways.

It is these vital links to the culture that will enable diaspora believers to translate the Scripture message into a contextualized form that has true meaning within their own cultural worldview. It is also this contextualized framework which will construct bridges between the Christian worldview and the traditional, cultural, ethical worldview should ethnic believers decide to return to their homeland or to engage others within the diaspora with the Good news.

Working on Bible translation for many years is a way for MTTs to grow as disciples of Christ. People from the places where changing one’s religion is not allowed may have an opportunity to be discipled without political or religious hindrances through the process of translating the Bible.

If a refugee has settled in his final country and is working as a displaced Bible translation worker, he may be able to provide help to his refugee friends who are in need through the connection he has with Christian workers. These opportunities might be a good Christian testimony and lead non-Christian friends to become open to the Gospel. Getting a full-time job in a newly settled country gives the MTT a higher status in the refugee community, which might allow a good chance for his testimony to be heard.

**Suggestions**


41 McGavran, p. 253

42 Peter Green. *Church Planting Among Diaspora Refugees For the Purpose of Reaching the Nations* (Doctoral dissertation, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016)

43 Ibid., 162-163.
When a strategic plan is being developed to make Scripture accessible to a displaced people group, the success factors that have worked in other similar projects should be considered and incorporated as seems appropriate.

In the context of the United States, Bible translation organizations may find help for Bible translation and Scripture engagement by seeking partnerships with refugee ministry organizations and mission organizations working in the heartland. Some agencies to consider are the voluntary agencies (Volags) in the United States that help refugees to settle in the United States and work in conjunction with the State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration: Church World Services, Ethiopian Community Development Council, Episcopal Migration Ministries, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, International Rescue Committee, US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and World Relief Corporation.\(^4\) In addition to Volags, there are many local mission organizations and local churches involved in teaching English and helping to resettle refugees in the United States, which might be willing to extend their relationships to Bible translation organizations by connecting the language speakers from the Bibleless groups with the Bible translation organizations. Intentional networking with the mission agencies working in the heartland might lead to active and creative ways for Scripture engagement to be accomplished there.

It would be most helpful for ETs to have organizational support for handling administrative work, such as paperwork for taxes, insurance, other financial issues, employment, and rules and regulations for the refugees. Coordination of the supervisors of various aspects of the translation work is essential, because the speakers of the language and the translation work may be done in different places around the world. While administrative help is necessary for the places where translation projects are done, linguistic support should come from the homeland or consultants who have worked with the related languages. Planners need to coordinate the community check in the heartland, including speakers there as well as other speakers scattered in other countries. Administrators need to be willing to think outside the box to be able to give the needed support to the displaced language projects beyond geographical boundaries.

The translation process in displaced translation projects needs to be recorded and compiled to show solutions or suggestions for the difficulties experienced in these projects, to create a suggested model for future projects.

Even when there is a limited number of MTTs available to work with a displaced language project, the organization should evaluate their qualification and strive to select the best candidates possible. Here are some questions to consider: Are they confident in their language? Do they speak the language fluently? Did they live in the language environment until reaching adulthood? Are they likely to have lost some proficiency in their home language from living in different countries and from the length of time spent there? Where is the first place they felt safe enough to be involved with Bible translation work after they left their heartland? Is there a sizable number of language speakers with whom they currently have contact? How recently did

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they move away from the heartland? How many Christian believers are in the group? When possible, it is better to work with a good number of people rather than to work with just one person.

The translated Bible has its greatest impact on the first generation of displaced speakers who continue to speak the language in a new country. The younger generation, who are born in the new country, may not speak their parents’ language well and may claim the language of the new country as their mother tongue. Therefore, it is important that a displaced language project be completed before the first generation of displaced speakers dies out, to be able to impact the diaspora community and also people in the homeland.

Refugees may have experienced trauma such as the death of family members, severe living conditions, and so on in the process of fleeing their homeland and settling in a new country. “Refugees living in diaspora not only bring with them their own traditional worldviews from their homelands, but they have also developed an additional worldview.” After resettling in a new country, their adjustment to the new country may be difficult as they adopt a lifestyle in a foreign country and learn a new language. When possible, it is best to help them reduce or heal their trauma before they start to work with a translation project, because of the negative attitude they may have toward their language and culture.

If there are significant religious differences between the displaced believers and the people in the homeland, two different kinds of Bible study materials may be necessary: one for the believers scattered around the world with a focus on spiritual growth, and the other with a focus on pre-evangelism materials for outreach to non-believers in the homeland.

When possible, expatriate workers should seek to be fully engaged and immersed in the language and culture in the heartland to learn it well. When living in the heartland is restricted, ETs should visit the heartland, if possible.

**Conclusion**

A displaced language project should not be started outside the heartland until thorough research has shown that there is no possible way to work in the heartland. However, if there is no other way to translate the Bible into certain languages because access is too restricted due to political or religious reasons, then a translation project with displaced people is the answer. Currently, there is no other way to reach half of the remaining languages in the world without working with displaced people. Therefore, working with the displaced people projects is not merely an option; it is mandatory if all people are to have access to God’s Word. God may have brought the displaced people out of their homeland so that they could get God’s Word into their language. It might be the crucial time and way for Bible translation organizations to be able to work with them.

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45 Green, 74
Not only are there displaced community projects, but there is also a displaced worker project currently going on. When the expatriates could not get into the heartland, the expatriate workers moved to the neighboring country, and now the MTTs travel to the neighboring country to translate the Bible. In another situation, the mother tongue speaker in the US is capable of being a bridge between people in the heartland and the diaspora population in the US to mobilize both, so that translation work could begin in the heartland. All these opportunities are playing out before us. In many cases, not everything can be planned out before a project gets started, because many changing factors can have an impact on the displaced language projects.

Displaced language projects do have more challenges to face and overcome than the regular language projects, as this research has pointed out. However, even though Ross was criticized for the colloquial style and northern dialect of the Korean Bible that resulted from his displaced language project in China in the late 1800’s, the Ross translation became the seed for the Korean church, when there was no other way for Koreans to come to know God. Translation organizations should look for all possible ways to make the Bible accessible to everyone in a language and form that they can understand.

References


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46 Interview was done by Janet McLarren and Mary McLendon with Wycliffe Bible Translators


