SAFE ARRIVAL IN FIANARANTSOA

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Category: Madagascar

On Friday it took 10 hours to fly from Paris to Antananarivo, capital of Madagascar. Then on Sunday it took us almost 10 hours to drive the more or less 400 km from Tana to Fianarantsoa. It wasn't quite as bad as I expected or had been led to believe and I managed not to get nauseous despite the constant bends as we went up and down the mountainous road of the central plateau. I never thought I'd experience quite so many hairpins in one day! But fortunately the tarmac was mostly in a good state of repair. I'm rather glad that I wasn't doing the driving though.

The countryside is quite pretty with lots of rice terraces in wonderful shades of green on the hillsides, little groups of two-storey mud brick houses, lots of cows and the odd duck or goose. The mountains are mainly volcanic and there are lumps of granite everywhere - and I mean HUGE lumps, and the occasional stone quarry. But after several hours it does get boring and you start to think that stopping for a coffee or some lunch or just stopping would be nice. We finally got to have lunch just before 2pm, before that just stopped for calls of nature, and briefly time to buy apples at the roadside. (All kinds of fruit and vegetables grow here in Madagascar, both tropical and temperate, especially in the Antsirabe area on the road to Fianarantsoa. tropical and temperate, amazing that you get apples as well as mangoes, peaches and papayas, potatoes and peppers.) After lunch as we set off again I noticed a milestone said nearly 150 km to Fianar and Pere Benolo reckoned another 3 hours - and he was fairly spot on. As we came within about 20 miles, it started to rain, and suddenly we saw an amazing rainbow! It was so bright and you could see the full arc - I don't think I've ever seen that in England.

We finally arrived at the Catholic centre where we are staying around 5.30 pm, just before dark, and we were shown to our rooms. Mirana, who does some admin work for the Luke Partnership Project is traveling with me, and it's nice to have her company as well as have her there to help with practical arrangements. The rooms are simple but adequate, and I'm glad to have a mosquito net too. After supper and a good night's rest it was time to start work.

I've come to work with the Tandroy translation team to help them check their translation of John's gospel for accuracy. Pere Benolo reads out a passage in Tandroy, then phrase by phrase, one of the other team

members gives the meaning back into French so that I can follow how they have expressed the meaning in Tandroy. It can get complicated talking 'across' languages like that because giving the explanation obviously involves translation again. Believe it or not, it really does work! Already working through John Chapter 2 we've spotted several things which needed changing. We also came across an interesting problem in John 2. John is describing what happens at the wedding in Cana where Jesus turned water into wine. Verse 5 says:

His mother said to the servants, â€œDo whatever he tells you.â€

The problem was with the verb 'tell'. In Tandroy there are two different verbs meaning 'tell' and the one you use depends on whether the person you are referring to has a higher or a lower status than you do in terms of showing respect. As in many Asian cultures, this is an important part of Malagasy culture. The dilemma here of course is which verb to use for Jesus's mother referring to Jesus? If it was a normal mother - son relationship then you would choose the verb which indicates less respect, but then Jesus is no ordinary son and his mother seems to have some understanding of who Jesus is and is expecting him to do something extraordinary, so then should we use the one which shows more respect? It's interesting that other Malagasy dialects don't have this distinction, and of course the commentaries on John don't shed any light on the problem, because this distinction doesn't exist in European languages.

I wonder what translation challenges we'll encounter in the next few days? Meanwhile with my head still buzzing with a multitude of languages, I think it's time for bed!
Goodnight.
Sue