SHOULD I HAVE SAID THAT?

Posted on November 23, 2021 by Eddie

If I'm going to say write about things mission agencies shouldn't say, I have to be willing to re-assess my own writing.
Category: Observations

Over the past few weeks, I've posted a number of pieces on things that mission agencies should not say. This is, of course, holding myself a hostage to fortune. In putting together a daily blog, I may well end up saying more than some agencies and not all of it is as wise or thought through as it should be.

Back in 1988, when we first started working with the Kouya, I kept a daily diary of our experiences for a calendar month. The diary, which you can read here was received in various ways.

Some friends thought that it was hilarious - especially the bits that I didn't intend to be funny. For a few years, Wycliffe used it as orientation material to help new translators understand what they were getting into. Our how church (for whom it was written) were concerned that I was having a breakdown. More than a decade later, people asked me whether I could say more than "hello" in Kouya, yet (we'd finished the New Testament!).

For myself, I look back and barely remember the young man that I was more than half a lifetime ago. On reflection, the diary makes an interesting historical document describing; very few Wycliffe people would do what Sue and I did back then, today. Time has moved on and our approach to translation and mission work has changed.

I'm also left wondering whether the way in which I referred to Kouya friends and colleagues was appropriate. Would I still write the same way today? It's hard to know. I feel embarrassed about much of the diary, but partly this is due to knowing how naive we were at the time. Have a read, it may give you a laugh and make up your own mind as to whether I should have said that.

> *In the afternoon I was whisked off to another house for what reason I couldnâ€™t tell. When we got there, rather breathless, we found a baby, who was obviously not well, and her worried parents. What to do? I had no medicine with me and wouldnâ€™t have known what to give even if Iâ€™d had some. Itâ€™s at this sort of point where you realise how little preparation youâ€™ve really had. Four years to get to this point and the first time any one in the village needs me Iâ€™m stuck. I suggested that we pray for the baby, and then I held her for a while, and told her parents how to keep her fever down. As I left they were squirting some foul vegetable preparation into her eyes, the poor little thing was in agony.*
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> *Church; lots of singing, none of which I could understand, I reintroduced myself and spoke about the fatherhood of God, with Emile translating. It was rather discouraging to have him translate the one word of Kouya that I used, (hello) because no one understood it.*

Wednesday June 29 1988

While I was chatting to someone in the village a couple of guys came up. They made a few derogatory remarks about me not being able to understand French, I really wanted to say that I understand French well enough to get by in France, but that their accents were so bad that I couldnâ€™t understand them. But whatâ€™s the point? When things get you down it is easy to indulge in point scoring, but itâ€™s hardly a servant-like attitude. Life here is so different, I can drive a car, read Sartre in the original or programme a computer, so what, I speak Kouya like a one year old and I donâ€™t even know how to plant manioc!

Tuesday July 19 1988

We had lots of visitors this morning, a good opportunity to practice my Kouya. One young lad started arguing about Christianity, he said that it was alright for whites but it could not help Africans. Rather than argue the point I called for Emile, who was more than happy to explain his faith. The best people to evangelize the Kouya are other Kouya. Our role is really that of catalysts.

Saturday July 30 1988