IS FASTER ALWAYS BETTER?

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Ours is an instant age. We move quickly and we want to have instant access to our money, to music and to people. But is faster always better? What about when it comes to Bible translation?

Last week, I had the amazing privilege to sit in on meetings where people were planning to translated the Scriptures for the remaining languages in Burkina Faso (read about them here). During the meetings, I found myself musing on the issue of how long it will take to actually do the translations. Generally, it is assumed that it is good to make translations available to people as quickly as possible. I regularly hear two reasons for wanting to speed up translation.

The first is that people need to hear the message of Scripture and until translation is finished, many will not be able to do so. Last week, I heard a number of BurkinabÃ© translators expressing concern for their families who were not yet able to fully appreciate the Bible because it wasn't available in their language. The fact that people around the world are living and dying without a knowledge of God's reconciling love should give a sense of urgency to our mission, including Bible translation.

Another reason that people give for speeding up Bible translation comes from an eschatological view that implies that the return of Jesus will somehow be triggered when every people group has access to the Gospel. At some point in the future I will do a blog post on Matthew 24:14, but for now let me simply say that I don't believe that it is talking about the end of the age or a worldwide Christian mission. (If you want to disagree with me, wait till I write my full post on the subject. I'll delete any comments on this post that get into the exegesis of this verse as it isn't the central point of the post.)

In my experience these are the two main reasons given for speeding up Bible translation: one is good, the other (I believe) less so. But is faster always better? The thing is, I can think of two good reasons for slowing down the rate of Bible translation, too.

Just for a moment, reflect on the resistance in some English speaking circles to the use of Modern Bible translations. Now imagine that you are a Christian leader in a minority language community. You have been using the Bible in a trade language for years, you are familiar with it and as far as you are concerned this is the only Bible you have ever seen. Now imagine that someone comes along and tells you that you should use the Bible in another language altogether (even if it is your own).Â It is not hard to imagine that some people will oppose the use of this new-fangled Bible, even if it is easier to understand. It is not just the King James only crowd who can be reluctant to move to a new translation - it happens all round the world. If all we want to do is translate and publish Bibles, we can move as fast as we like. But if we want people to be enthusiastic and eager to use the new translation, we may need to spend significant time in building relationships, explaining how translation works and demonstrating the advantages of the new book.

Another reason for taking time to do translation is that the process of translation itself can be of great value. A while ago, Mark Brown rashly suggested that Google tools would soon allow us to translate the Bible into a new language in 20 minutes. At the time, I pointed out that this was not as

imminent as he suggested. I also said that even if we could translate that fast, we may not want to;

> *But, even if we could do a Bible translation in twenty minutes, would we really want to? As Lingamish pointed out, the problem is not getting the word translated, it is getting people to read it and base their lives on it. One of the most important aspects of any translation project is the Godly lives of the translation team demonstrating the reality and relevance of the message long before the words emerge from the printer. As one African church leader put it, â€˜we want to see the Holy Spirit in the lives of the translators long before we see the words Holy Spirit on the pageâ€™. (Read more)*

Speed is a value in Western culture: a very high value. Because of this, it is hard for us to realise that speed *per se* is not a Gospel value. In Bible translation terms, the Gospel value is to see communities and individuals bringing their lives into alignment with God's claims on them as they get to grips with the message of Scripture. All things being equal, it is good to get the Bible to people as quickly as possible - but speed must never be allowed to compromise the Gospel impact of the missional work of translation. As I wrote in the post quoted above:

> *There is a value in speeding up Bible translation, but not at the cost of losing the human and community touch. This is something we westerners with our task orientation find very hard to understand ...*

Somewhat related to this is my post examining Wycliffe's long term vision: Vision 2025.