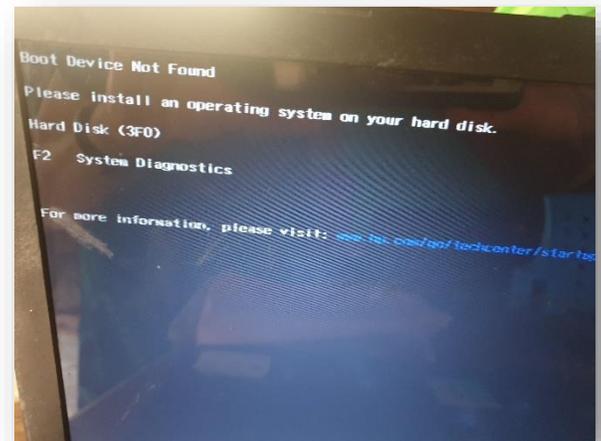




Africans often use **proverbs** to make a point. Rather than saying something directly, a proverb is quoted to express a lesson or warning indirectly and more poignantly. People are expected to think out the meaning. Those who cannot might be looked on as slow or childish. This practice is challenging for me because my culture prefers directness. I'm not used to deciphering such riddles much less think of some to use. Proverbs told in another culture may derive meaning from an unknown cultural context making understanding even more difficult.

All these proverbs were used recently in Liberia.

1. "Your own soup that you cook will run your stomach."
2. "It is better to be with the old lady you know than the young one you are not used to."
3. "Dry dog is sweet, but what will you be eating until the dog gets dry."
4. "If you don't want the cat to eat the fish, protect the fish so it doesn't smell."
5. "It is difficult to fell a tree when you have peanuts in your pocket."
6. "If you are on Liberian time, you will never go."



Match the proverbs to the real-life scenarios below: *

- a. Someone brought donuts while we were checking.
- b. Someone was concerned I had promised a new computer to someone.
- c. A translator was given a different computer to use because there were issues with his, but he preferred the old one as the replacement had worse issues.
- d. Someone told the above translator to get by with the replacement because new computers were arriving. He gave a proverb in response.
- e. People were planning a trip.
- f. When someone doesn't listen to advice. We might say, "You will reap what you sow."

The Dan team checked and completed their book of Proverbs in June. Since culture has an impact on how proverbs are worded, the Dan translators had to use "lick honey" rather than "eat honey" for

naturalness in chapter 25:16. In 17:1 they used mushroom soup in place of bread since mushrooms are free and bread is a luxury. Proverb number 1 above is how they rendered Proverbs 1:31.

PRAY

Praise: for the completion of Psalms and Proverbs in Dan and Daniel in Maan.

Pray: for plans and exploration concerning new work among the Grebo people in Liberia.

Who I am

Becky is YOUR HEART IN ACTION. She serves you as a consultant for translation teams in Liberia, West Africa by using your prayers and support to fulfill your desire to "PUT GOD'S WORD IN THEIR HANDS." Becky rejoices that she is part of your Lutheran Bible Translators team and values this special relationship.

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Cultural context affects more than just Proverbs. Poetry of any type with figurative language sometimes transfers and sometimes does not. Even concrete terms which may be well known in one culture may not be known at all in another. As we checked Psalm 147:16, we went through a couple stages before we arrived at a version which was clear and natural.

The text originally said something like, "He spread cold block called snow on the ground like hair or cotton that is white. He spread dew like ashes." This rendering had almost zero meaning and was not poetic at all. For people who have seen snow, comparing it to hair might seem strange if not disgusting. All the descriptive phrases used to provide clarity to those who have never seen snow were distracting.

The second version said, "He made dry season, when its starting, cold comes. He made rainy season, when the time comes, it just rains constantly." This version has local context in mind and is understandable without all the distracting unknown ideas, but it is rather bland.

Finally, the translator found some local figurative language and made this dynamic version. "He made dry season when cold blows and water sets on the mat. He made rainy season when heavy rain comes and cuts bamboo's tail."

Context also comes into play with semantic or meaning domains. Since we are doing Leviticus in Bandi, we have had discussions on clean and unclean. Often a word for pure is used. The opposite is not impure but contaminated. But that doesn't work well when talking about animals. They have used a word meaning forbidden. There are also levels of meaning in their worldview working their way up from contaminated to cursed that affects the guilty party to really cursed that affects future generations. Context of the text will have to guide us as to which of their words to use that reflect the correct biblical meaning.

Another word that diverges from our source texts is *tojaní* which means any domesticated animal. Most Liberian languages have a similar word, but when they put that back in English, they use the word cattle. So, when they see cattle in an English source text, they assume it refers to all domesticated animals. When they learned it only refers to bovine animals, their *nika*, they were surprised. As we worked through Leviticus, sometimes *tojaní* came in handy to avoid making a list of bulls, cows, sheep, or goats. Other places require that we name the specific animal(s) as the all-inclusive *tonani* would be misleading.

Sometimes there is context within the grammar structures of a language. In English, we put the preposition in front of its object whether singular or plural. We say, "for Aaron and his sons." In Bandi, the "for" follows the object. However, they do not say "Aaron and his sons for". The most natural way to form such a phrase with a plural object is to say, "Aaron for and his sons." In Leviticus 6:10, the order of the clothes needed to be reversed or the person would be dressed backwards, and the undergarments/trousers would be outside the gown. Context and local perceptions of the world must be considered as we translate.

May the soup that we cook be tasty (your prayers and gifts give God's sweet word to many), and the seeds we sow produce an abundant harvest. Pray for more workers to sow, plant, and reap.

Becky



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*Answer key: 1-f, 2-c, 3-d, 4-b, 5-a, 6-e