



GOING FAR TOGETHER

By Eshinee

In February, I got to be a part of two special training events on two different continents (it looks like my travel is finally returning to pre-pandemic levels!).

The first was a translation training meeting in Italy. A handful of us who routinely find ourselves on the same steering committees and workgroups were invited to take some time out of our usual workflow and dedicate three full days to brainstorming training needs and opportunities. We shared with each other our current training initiatives within our own organizations and looked for ways we could work together better. We spoke openly and frankly about the training challenges we face—our hopes and our fears—in what felt like a safe and sacred space. We made some solid plans for next steps to continue the conversation with the wider translation training

community. It was a truly special time for me; I don't often get the chance to nerd out with people whose passion is supporting Bible translation through training. (She said, not surprising anyone... it's a pretty niche interest group!)

The second was a weeklong translation exploration event in Tanzania. If that sounds like an unusual description... well, it was an unusual event. There were a variety of goals at play, which we somehow managed to work towards in a way that felt new, exciting, and effective.

One goal was to help identify promising translator candidates for new translation projects that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania is looking to start in partnership with three local language communities: Kara, Sumbwa, and Datooga. To that end, ten candidates from each community were identified and

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Right: Exploring different languages' terminology for the concept of translation in Tanzania. Photograph by Tiffany Smith.

Above: Eshinee and colleagues continue the training conversation over lunch in Italy. Photograph by Phil King.

Perspectives on Translation

By Eshinee

Something that I've been thinking about for a few years now is how different language communities think about what translation is. Their idea of what is actually happening when someone translates can be reflected in alternate meanings of different words that they use. They can also have different words that they use in different contexts, with slightly different connotations. For example, in English, we usually use "translate" to refer to cross-language communication that happens in some kind of documentary, permanent form, such as print or a recording. We use "interpret" for the same kind of activity happening on the fly. And inherent in the idea of the word "translate" is another (though slightly archaic) sense of that word which has to do with moving objects from one place to another. This suggests that we think of translation as being a permanent movement of meaning from one language into another.

We asked Kara, Sumbwa, and Datooga speakers three things:

1. the words that they use for the concept of "translate" in their language,
2. when they would use one of those words rather than another; that is, what were the differences between those words, and
3. which of these words would best be used to talk about Bible translation.

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Going Far Together

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invited to this event by the church. The facilitators—which included both LBT personnel and local Lutheran pastors—led the group of candidates in conversations about their community’s patterns of language use and their understanding of translation work. After Ruthie Wagner led a technical training session on back translation and I briefly talked about identifying and overcoming potential misunderstandings when translating for a new audience, all the candidates practiced translating a short English paragraph. They each produced their own translation and a back translation into either Swahili or English, which was then shared with the Lutheran church translation workers. This will help the church assess how well each candidate is able to both express themselves (in their translation) and learn new skills (in their back translation).

Another goal was to help the local Lutheran church get to know the language communities that they are working in better. To this end, they assigned several pastors to be scribes for the dialogue that was generated by the questions asked by the facilitators. Their task was to ensure that the information that was being shared by these language community members was recorded for future reference by translation project planners. This could help them make data-informed decisions on things like which portions of the Bible to start with when translation work begins, who should be involved in quality assurance, and what

media translation products should be distributed in to reach as many people as possible.

A final goal was for Tanzanian Lutheran church workers and LBT translation workers to get to know one another better, to share our perspectives on translation, to help us partner with one another more effectively, and to become friends, not just co-workers. One way that we did this was by working together throughout the week, with everything that was said being translated into either Swahili or English (depending on who was speaking). For example, Rev. Oscar Lema, who serves as Assistant to the Bishop for East of Lake Victoria Diocese as well as overseeing its translation program, interpreted many of the sessions that I facilitated. This required careful listening and processing on his part to ensure that he understood my perspective well. It also gave him an opportunity to contextualize what I said when interpreting it into Swahili. I could tell by the amount of time that he spoke relative to the time it had taken me that he was expanding on what I had said to enhance understanding and better stimulate dialogue. From the responses of the translator candidates—usually in Swahili, then translated back into English—I got a sense of his supplementation to my original message, helping me understand his perspective as well.

Check out the LBT podcast episode “Back from Tanzania” featuring Eshinee and Ruthie - <https://lbt.org/podcast/>



Eshinee and Rev. Oscar Lema talking about taking translation quality to the next level through partnership. Photo by Tiffany Smith.

Perspectives on Translation

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The Sumbwa speakers said that they had 2 words that they used:

- *kunonombola* – used when the translating/interpreting happens because the person you are talking to simply needs more information about what you just said
- *kusombola* – used when the translating/interpreting happens while you are sitting together and discussing

They said that the best term to use for Bible translation is *kusombola*, mainly because it is the more common term that is understood by most Sumbwa speakers. But hearing about their concept of *kusombola*, to me, it felt like a richer expression of what it is that we do in Bible translation than the English term. It evokes for me a sense of dialogue and community, of being a part of a conversation across time and space.

What terms do you know for the concept of “translate” in other languages?

How can these enrich our understanding of what is happening when we translate the Bible?

ABOUT US

Rob serves as LBT’s Scripture Engagement Coordinator and a specialist in EthnoArts and Vernacular Media.

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Veith ministry is funded through donations by individuals and groups.

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