

# Ndjébbana Oral Bible Workshop

By Melody Kube (AuSIL)



Monica, Karen, Amanda and Rachel

Five women arrived on a charter flight from the remote community of Maningrida NT on Monday morning, ready and excited to translate a second story from the Gospel of Luke into their Ndjébbana language. Monica was especially eager. She had been part of the Christmas story translation workshop the year before and had been looking for opportunities to translate the Bible for her community since 2006 when she first sensed God calling her to this work.

Paul and I picked the ladies up at a small hangar near the Darwin airport. I was pleased to see that the team, though nervous, were talkative and easy to engage with. There were representatives of both Ndjébbana dialects

and Monica had brought her young adult daughter too. My colleague Rachel, who works with AuSIL in Maningrida arrived on a later flight. Many important conversations happened that first day, as we learned more about the language situation in Maningrida, [one of the most linguistically diverse communities on the planet](#). And talked generally about how much of the Bible is actually a collection of stories that can be “told” rather than “read”.

An oral translation of the “parable of the rich fool” from Luke 12 :16-21 was the target of the workshop. A significant part of the workshop week was spent on the first step of translation: “understanding”. We examined the story in its own context in the book of Luke, and in the genre of parables. We told the story over and over again to one another, using props and body language, far past the point where we all thought we knew it by now. It seemed more and more nuance was revealed each time we went over it again. We exposed ourselves to multiple English versions and I was able to contribute by reading the Greek text for the story. Gradually we were able to recognise and remove our own assumptions about the story. For example, the rich man doesn’t plant anything, or show any evidence of earning his wealth through hard work, the text says only that he owned a piece of land that produced abundantly.

We also talked carefully about the difference between oral Bible translation and interpreting Scripture for people. There is significant overlap between the skills of a translator and a Bible teacher and many of our translators have a hand in both from time to time. Interpretation and application of the story into our own lives is an important task, but it must remain a separate task, only after the transmission of the story itself. We must not add any gems of interpretation or application into the story itself. This is much harder to do than we might think!



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# Ndjébbana Oral Bible Workshop continued

Only after thoroughly immersing ourselves in the story did we begin discussing the key terms needed for translation. The Ndjébbana language doesn't have a clear word for "rich", rather they would describe a rich person in terms of "having lots of food", which happily fits the story nicely. We were pleased to have Lindsay Parkhill and Louise Macdonald available for many of these discussions too. By the middle of the week, we could see that two of the participants were naturally moving into the storyteller roles, where the others continued to support and contribute in other ways.



Rachel Monica and Paul



Karen

One day we had visitors, relatives who were in Darwin for other purposes. This presented an opportunity for retelling to a fresh audience and measuring their understanding, a process known as "community checking" in the Bible translation world. This is naturally a point of frustration as there is always something in the translation that needs to be fixed up because it didn't come across as clearly as it does to those of us who have literally heard it many times by now. We also got to share the story in real life as we all shared our own food and welcomed the unexpected people around our table!

After some further revision Karen and Monica came across to the recording booth at Nungalinga College. After a few practice attempts Monica was able to record a complete version of the story in Ndjébbana. Next, we played this recording back slowly, line by line, and Karen told us, as literally as possible in English what Monica had said. This is called "back translation," a process that we had also been practicing earlier. Monica had not left anything out and had told the story exactly as she intended.

So, we went on to the final step of translation the "consultant check". So, we called up Sam Freney, a Bible Society Translation Consultant in Sydney, whom Paul had keyed up ahead of time to expect to a call from us. This was already late Friday afternoon, but we hurried the recording and its audio back-translation, off to him and we were pleased when he got back to us quite quickly. Sam told us that our translation, for the most part, was very good! We put him on speaker phone in front of the whole group. Many of his queries were things that we had already been discussing, like the term "rich man" mentioned above. I was happy to discover during this conversation that Monica had used an idiom for the last phrase of the parable for the phrase "rich towards God" (see side-bar story) This was a sign to me that the extra time and effort spent on understanding the story had been a great success. Idiomatic language comes out best when a storyteller has completely internalised the story. Literal methods of translation rarely produce idiomatic language, and idioms are the backbone of good storytelling. It took some doing to get us outsiders to properly understand what Monica had instinctively said. Once we got there Sam did not disagree but felt it was best that the idiom also be explained in plain language in the body of the story, which is a great suggestion.



Karen, Rachel, Joy and Monica

Unfortunately, the workshop time was well and truly done, the recording studio packed up, and rides back to YWAM accommodation already waiting. So, the final, consultant approved recording, the one that will go in Bible apps and be officially published, will have to wait for the next time we get together, probably in April. I did, however, encourage the team to remember that the living Word, is not what is held in a book or a computer somewhere, it is alive as it comes off their lips guided by the Holy Spirit. As they tell this story to their children and grandchildren, to their neighbours and relatives, in the Ndjébbana language back home on Ndjébbana country, and especially as they put the lessons of this story into live action in their own lives, they are sharing the Word of Christ.

# National Translation Gathering Report

By Louise Sherman (RIMS BSA)



There were 92 attendees from across Australia from 17 different organisations, of which 46 were Indigenous leaders. The 24 *language group represented*: Alyawarr; Maung; Mayali; Gurrindji; Rembarnga; Gulumoerrgin; Pitjantjatjara; Nyungar; Tiwi; Burarra; Njébbana; Gupapuyñu; Liyagawumirr; Anindilyakwa; Dhuwa Dhuwau'mi; Gumatj; Djambarrpuyñu; Wangurri, Waramirri; Kriol; Kuninjku; Garrwa; Eastern Arrernte; Anmatyerr and Murrinh-patha.

Here are some of the comments from Tuesday's Indigenous leaders & translator's session:

- Not just focus on how do we work together? But how do we be together?
- Time to share the difficulties of Bible Translation, sharing from years of experience.
- Importance of Bilingual education in schools for Bible Translation work
- Need for support/resource workers and linguists in community.
- Desire for a list of all the languages projects so we can pray for each other.
- Need for specialist training for back translators.
- Desire for Indigenous Translation Consultants
- Continued translator training at Nungalinga College.
- Also training in communities especially for the younger next generation translators.
- Translators need not just an understanding of their own language but also an understanding of the Bible.

## Does it make you feel warm or cool?

By Melody Kube (AuSIL)

We know that metaphors and idioms don't translate well cross culturally. But, they are so important to good story telling. Like a social short cut, they can quickly add a lot of meaning in a few small words. But, if you don't have the same shared context they can mean almost nothing at all, or worse, change the meaning entirely. I learned a new one this week during a translation workshop.

One of the Ndjébbana translators (East Arnhem Land) talked about feeling and acting "cool" towards someone. But she was smiling as she said it. I could tell from context she didn't mean anything like the distance, offense or indifference I would naturally attach to "cool" feelings. In fact it was very much the opposite. She described "cool" in terms of generosity, refreshing kindness, even reconciliation after conflict. Curiously, a near perfect overlap to the feelings I would attach to a "warm" relationship, such as being comfortable with someone, cheered by the relationship and wanting the best for the other person.

And she used it to explain how we relate to our Father God. He is the one who provides for us and protects us from the elements. Whether you are picturing a warm fire and a cozy cabin, or a cool breeze under a shady tree, what you're getting at is an expression of fulfilment.

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# National Translation Gathering Report cont.

## Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> February:

This was the first day in which all the Gathering participants were together, both the Indigenous translators and the 'whitefella' or 'balanda' organisations. Mätjarra Garrawurra, Liyagawumirr translator, Elder and Pastor from Milingimbi in East Arnhem Land representing the Uniting Church did the first devotion and shared a dance.



Yurrandyjil & Mätjarra



David & Tjuljata

The first presentation of the morning was by Yurrandyjil Dhurrkay, a Wangurri translator and Uniting Church Pastor from Elcho Island off the coast of the Northern Territory. Yurrandyjil used the analogy of Turtle Hunting, a regular activity in her community and likened it to Bible Translation. The idea that with a Turtle Hunt there needs to be a team approach, with each person playing their part and then the whole community benefits from the meat. This analogy seemed to resonate strongly with many of the Indigenous Translators present.

This was followed by a presentation by Bible Society's Dave Barnett and Tjulyata Tjilya (Pitjantjatjara Translator) sharing their experiences of translating the Old Testament. Dave also shared some of the Scripture Engagement resources their team has been developing which included a daily prayer devotion and a children's art Bible featuring paintings by the Pitjantjatjara translators. These

resources concepts seemed to excite much of the small group discussion with many translators wanting to develop Scripture Engagement resources that speak to the younger generations in their communities. The subsequent group discussion time involved participants gathering in community groups based on geographical location and denominational background to discuss questions related to the previous presentations.

The planning committee had decided that the afternoon sessions would be less formal than the presentations in the morning sessions. So Wednesday afternoon was dedicated to an EthnoArts Session. EthnoArts is the process of empowering local language communities to create visual art, music, dance and drama representations of Scripture in a culturally-relevant way. There were two options: an art workshop run by Nungalinya's 'Faith and Art' Teacher Sal Moes and a Music/Drama/Songwriting/Dance workshop run by AuSIL's Lucy Rogers.

For further information about EthnoArts – <https://wycliffe.org.au/preserving-culture-through-ethnoarts/>

After the session both groups joined together to share what they had been working on, a group of ladies from Arnhem Land had created a dance to a Christian song and there was an interesting drama from a group of Kriol speakers to encourage people to come away from bad things eg. drinking, gambling etc. and follow Jesus. The art group shared their paintings and explained the story behind them, one of the paintings has been given to Bible Society for the upcoming end of year appeal and features a depiction of Acts 17:26 *"From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands."* This verse was well received and loved by the Burarra people of Maningrida when missionary and translator Dave Glasgow shared it with them many years ago.



Mätjarra



Yurrandyjil

Yurrandyjil, Margaret, Mätjarra & Lucy



# Gathering Report continued

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## Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> February:

The final presentation was a case study in collaboration from Louise Macdonald (Coordinate/Uniting Church) in which Louise emphasised all the different organisations that were involved in helping to run an Oral Bible Translation workshop for the Njebbana language of Maningrida in Arnhem Land. These included: AuSIL Fieldwork/linguist Rachel Shipp; Bible Society consultant Sam Freney, with logistics from Uniting Church and Pioneers as well as audio assistance from GRN (Global Recordings Network).

Before finishing our morning sessions we wrote the words: 'We will work together on Bible Translation' on the white board and encouraged those present to sign their name to this statement. It was very encouraging to see at the end of the session that there was a crowd in front of the white board as most of the people present added their names to the commitment.

## Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> February

The last morning of the Gathering featured a devotion from Tiwi Island Elder Father Xavier Kurrupuwu from the Catholic St Teresa Parish, Wurrumiyanga. It was really special to have the devotions over the course of the conference from an Uniting representative, an Anglican representative and a Catholic representative given these are the three churches that together formed Nungalinya College.



The final sessions on Friday morning consisted of prayer and an encouragement for people to think about 'What Next?'. Lunch time was filled with

conversations about future plans and many of the translators seemed to have a renewed energy and purpose. The next few months will involve further follow up but with so many organisations keen to work more closely together it will be exciting to see what happens in the future.



Ben & Djawut



# It's all About Finding the Right Words.

By Bruce and Glenys Waters (Gupapuyŋu translation supporters)

It's not always easy to coordinate the diaries between the Gupapuyŋu translators and ourselves and when that does happen finding a place to meet and work is always a challenge. In January this year God orchestrated a two-week window for us to meet in Darwin and opened up accommodation options at Nungalinya College. Thanks so much to the college! We met with Judy Nalambirra and Jessie Murarrgirargi. Unfortunately two other ladies were unable to make it.

We try to meet when the ladies indicate they are ready for another work session. The planned activities of our January meeting focused on completing an advisor check of the books of Luke and 1st & 2nd Peter; and doing the read through of John and Romans. The translations of these and other books has been done independently by the ladies in Adapt It using the Djambarrpuyŋu New Testament as their source text. It's a language closely related to Gupapuyŋu.

These are the steps we generally use in doing an adaptation. They help us find the right words to express God's Word in Gupapuyŋu:

1. A local translator adapts the source text into Gupapuyŋu, making any changes they determine are needed. They often talk to others about word choices and other issues - either people in their own community, or they contact other knowledgeable 'living dictionaries' by mobile phone. Sometimes, instead of doing a word by word translation, they may choose to re-translate a phrase, sentence, verse, or set of verses. They do this when they need to make the text flow better and sound more like Gupapuyŋu rather than Djambarrpuyŋu, or to make the meaning more clearer for Guapuyŋu speakers.
2. They either turn off the source text from the screen or use a print out of the Gupapuyŋu version to do a read through of the Gupapuyŋu text. They check that it flows well, sounds good and makes sense. They make any changes needed.
3. Discuss and perhaps retranslate again any passages that are unclear or can be translated 'tighter' in Gupapuyŋu. Discuss any words that are not known or are unclear to see if the right translation choices have been made.
4. Do an Advisor Check with an experienced translator. Check that key words in the passage are translated consistently and understood; review the key meanings of what is being said; and discuss words in the source text that are unknown to Gupapuyŋu speakers. (Sometimes we need to find a better word or phrase, because there is no obvious or known equivalent.)
5. When the Advisor Check is complete, print out some copies for people in the community to do community checks. (These checks can be done informally in small groups or set up more formally.) Copies are also sent to Gupapuyŋu speaking supporters, or to 'living dictionaries' who live in other communities, because they are very interested in the translation and want to read it with their families, or community members, and give feedback.
6. Work on a back translation for any passages in each book that are significantly different to the Djambarrpuyŋu New Testament. A back translation is made by translating what is written in Gupapuyŋu back into English. The back translation is sent to a Translation Consultant.
7. Work with the translation consultant, typically with other language speakers present, to make sure the correct meaning has been translated.
8. Once the consultant check is successfully completed, the book or books can be submitted to be properly published.

When we met in January, Nalambirra had done the translation and read throughs of Luke and 1st & 2nd Peter in previous work sessions. But there were still places that we all felt needed further work. We decided to clear those up to the point where these books could be printed out for Community Checking. Then we decided that we would work on the read through of Romans which Nalambirra had recently completed, and then help Murarrgirargi do the read through of some parts of John. (Murarrgirargi had translated John during Covid.)

## Finding the word for sprinkled in 1 Peter 1:2

Many of our discussions end up focussing on finding the right word for something.

"What does that word mean in Djambarrpuyngu in this context?" "What word is used in English? or in the Greek?"

"We need to ring so and so to talk about that word and what would be a good word for it in Gupapuyngu." "That's still not capturing what Paul intended here? It's more like this..."

"How would you say that in

Gupapuyngu?" And so we go down different trails searching for the right words to use.

In 1 Peter 1:2 for example, how would you translate sprinkled? Why does Peter use the word sprinkled here?

To God's elect,...who have been chosen .... through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood. (NIV)

Bruce was concerned that the connection of this phrase with the Levitical sprinkling in the Jewish sacrificial system not be lost. Sprinkling with blood was a purification rite, important for making offerings holy. For a community that does not have access to the Old Testament in a Yolŋu language, this connection of blood sprinkling with purification could be unknown to the translators, and so may easily go unnoticed. So we all discussed it.

Gupapuyngu has a word for squirt - when you squirt someone or thing with a hose. Or splash - when you splash water from a bucket or from your hands after washing - people might do this in fun or to annoy those they splash. But Gupapuyngu just does not have a suitable word for sprinkling in the manner of the Levitical sprinkling. So the word for sprinkling became 'cleansed' and the phrase became "washed and cleansed by his blood" instead of "washed and sprinkled by his blood".

## Naming of groups with the right words in John 18:3

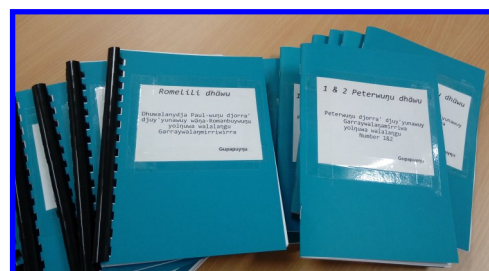
Another issue was determining what Gupapuyngu words were suitable for making it clear which groups of people banded together to come and arrest Jesus in the night. There were a few problems here. One was the presence of many footnotes. Footnotes often go unread in a public reading, and even when privately reading. We needed to get rid of them. So we had to make sure that the different enemy groups of Jesus, or individuals, were clearly identified in the text. And that resulted in a further problem.

The Djambarrpuyngu text defined the enemies that Judas was leading as:

1. Ones from Rome
2. Caretakers of the constructed building[the temple]
3. Some from the ceremonial leaders
4. Some from the Pharisees
5. Light bearers
6. Men having spears

The Djambarrpuyngu translators chose to translate the term for ceremonial leaders using a word that is specific to Yolŋu culture which would be immediately understood by Djambarrpuyngu speakers, later in their Bible study, teachers would need to explain the differences between Yolŋu culture and the culture of Jesus's time. But the Gupapuyngu team felt that in Jesus's time, Yolŋu culture was unknown to the apostle John. So they decided to be less specific and chose a word with a broader meaning which might need to be explained more when the time comes for Bible Study.

Bruce, Nalambirra and Murarrgirargi



# It's all about finding the right words.

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The last day of our time together saw us printing and spiral binding a few copies of Romans and 1&2 Peter so the ladies could take them back to the communities to be used in community checking. Once back in Melbourne we worked on preparing and printing copies of the book of Luke for checking. When ready we will mail them up to the translators.

The next fellowship meeting that Nalambirra attended, the sermon just happened to be from the book of Luke. So she offered to read the passage out of her one copy of Luke. "Everyone was so excited to hear the scriptures for the service in language," she said, by phone. She continued, saying: "When we hear it in English we pick up some of the words in the reading that we know, but we don't get it all. When we hear it in Gupapauynju we understand every word and the message really speaks to us."

Murarrgirarrgi also rang us recently. We were so encouraged! She has been sharing from Romans and 1&2 Peter at a recent funeral. She said that when people read from English, not much is understood well. But when they hear it in their own language, they understand the message clearly.

There's always more advisor checking than we can do in the time available. So we are looking forward to being regular users of the Language and Translation centre that is planned to be built at Maningrida soon. All of us in this important translation work share the burden and the hope that some day the Gupapauynju people will be holding their own published New Testament in their own hands.

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