

# MORE THAN WORDS

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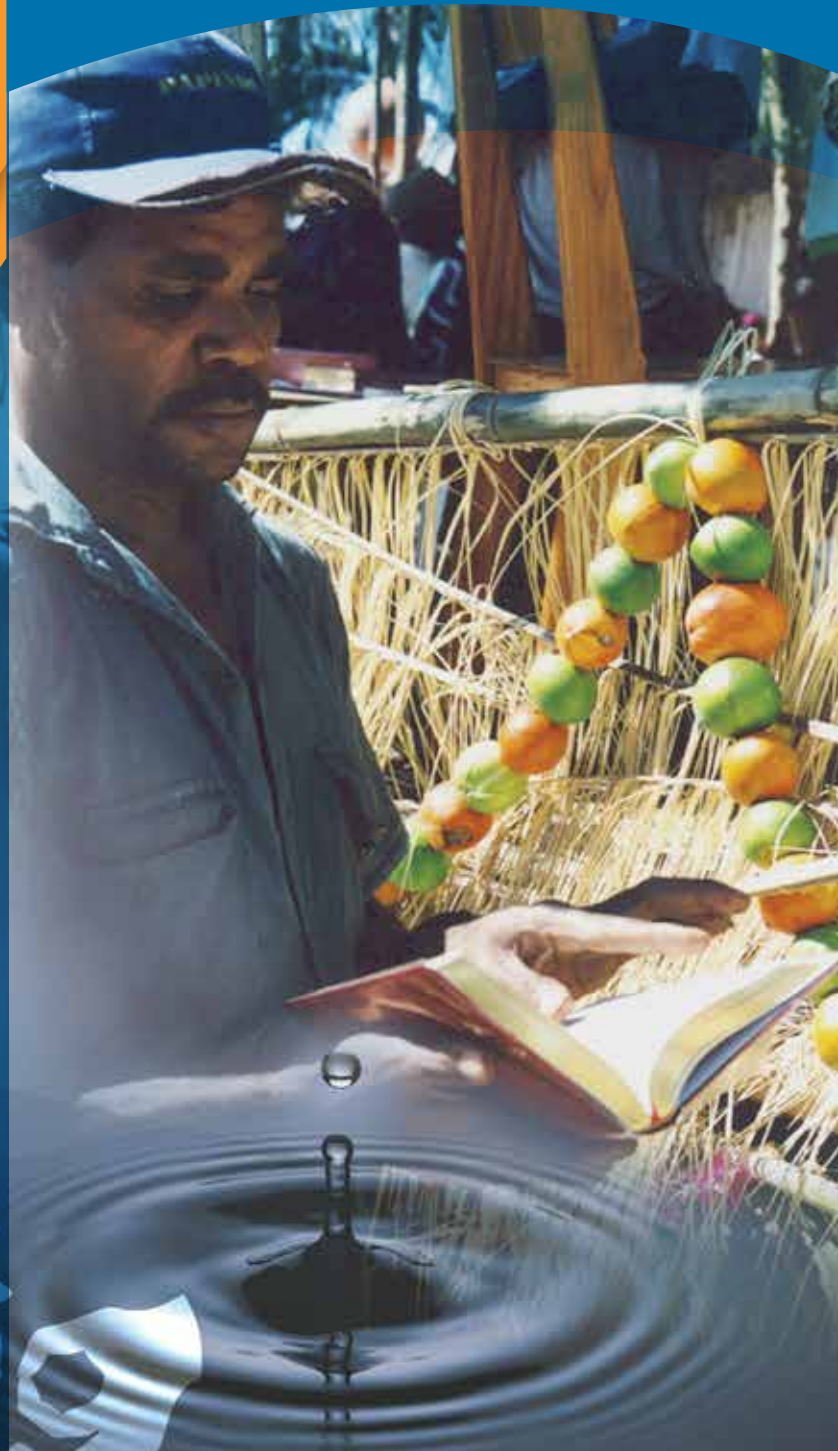
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## Heart Language

# Heart Language

by Dr David Tan, Chief Editor



We all use different languages for different purposes. In a work or formal environment, people will normally use the national or official language, or standard English in our case. Then when on the streets doing shopping, people will tend to use the trade language, which could be Mandarin in our case. But with friends and family, people will use the language of the home, which for many Singaporeans is probably Singlish or even a Chinese dialect.

The thing to note is that there is a preferred language for intimacy and deep issues of the heart. And for many, that will be the preferred language for relating to God. For myself, I spoke mainly Hokkien for the first six years of my life and Hokkien still resonates with me in some ways that English does not. I recall that during a personal retreat in 2015, I was moved to tears when listening to a Hokkien worship song “Hold my hand, Lord”. And that has never happened to me in English.

Nelson Mandela put it well when he said, “If you talk to a man in a language, he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”

Mandela was a reformer, and he knew what it took to communicate his ideas right into the hearts of people. And it’s the same with the word of God. If we want people to have a deeper encounter with the word of God, for the word to penetrate their hearts and touch their souls, for it to get rooted and implanted to produce transformation from within, then we need to put it in a language which communicates to their hearts.

A person from a minority group puts it like this:

*“When I read it (the Bible) in the national language, even though I was educated in that language, it takes a long time before the meaning sinks in. But when I read God’s word in my own language, it feels like a stone dropping to the bottom of the river. It goes right in to touch my soul.”*

(Kenyah (Borneo) speaker)

So in this issue, the theme is “Heart Language”. We have a feature article on Sign Languages which is the heart language of the Deaf. We also report on a workshop which had participants telling Bible stories in Chinese dialects. Another article writes how learning to read first in their heart language is transformational for a community. We also have articles on two people – one who has committed 40 years of her life to giving heart language scriptures to others, and another who is at the beginning of her journey.

May these articles touch your hearts about the need for heart language scriptures!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Tan'.

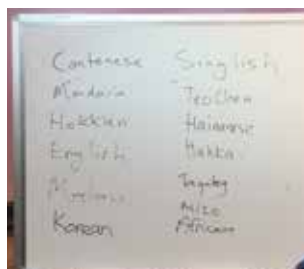
**Executive Director**  
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# The Spoken Word in Your Heart Language

By Grace Tan



Imagine this: Jesus has a *lao bu* (“mother” in Hokkien) who sets out to take charge of him after hearing reports that he’s *seow* (“mad” in Hokkien). We heard this story at the Bible Storytelling Workshop on 9, 10 & 13 May 2017. And, yes, it’s there in the written record (Mark 3:20–21, 31–35).

For many of us, the word *lao bu* instantly linked Jesus’ mother to the many worried Chinese mothers who try to do what’s best for their children. And at the end of the story, when Jesus didn’t do what his mother wanted, many felt offended at his response – though we tried to excuse his behaviour, since he is our Lord. For many, hearing the story spoken made it come alive. And for those who grew up speaking Hokkien, hearing the story in their “heart language” evoked a much greater emotional response to the account than hearing it in English.

Wycliffe Singapore has run the Bible Storytelling Workshop before. But this year, for the first time, we practised telling stories to each other in our heart languages – Singlish, Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochew, Indonesian, and even

Afrikaans – as well as English and Mandarin. In doing so, we experienced the shock and impact of hearing God’s Word in a homely context, where the stories spoke to our hearts, not just to our heads.

During this workshop, we had a taste of three different methods of crafting Bible stories. Once the story was crafted, the next step was to act it out. In Teochew, English and Singlish, three groups acted the story of Jesus calming the storm from Mark 4:35–41, to the immense enjoyment of all. We also practised doing inductive Bible studies on the stories.

On the last day of the workshop, we tackled a non-story: Philippians 3:1–4:9. We crafted segments of this passage, then we put it together, with tellings in English, Mandarin and Singlish. Hearing the whole passage spoken was powerful for us. We could feel Paul’s heart of care, even anguish, for the Philippians.

This workshop really demonstrated the power of God’s spoken Word in the heart language. May all of us use this wonderful tool for the glory of God. ■



# Languages for the Eyes — Sign Languages

By Sharon Tan

*Singing in sign, Tokyo Deaf Church. Photographer: Heather Pubols. ©Wycliffe Global Alliance*

How do the Deaf “hear” and “speak” to each other? Through their eyes! Sign languages are the primary means of communication for many Deaf people. And like other minority language users, many Deaf people would like to use Sign Language in the various spheres of their lives, including religious activities and worship.

To quote David M. Perlmutter, Emeritus Professor, University of California, San Diego:

*It shows that the human drive for language is so strong that when deafness makes speech inaccessible, it finds another channel, creating language in sign. Sign Language has taught us that human language can use either channel — speech or sign. It is a living testament to the fact that language is what we all need to be human.*

- *What is Sign Language?*

(<https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/what-sign-language>)

It is estimated that there are more than 400 distinct Sign Languages in use in the world today. Bible translation work has only been carried

out in about 50. Only American Sign Language has a complete New Testament, and there is no complete Bible in any Sign Language!

## Some frequently-asked questions:

### Q: *Are Sign Languages “real” languages?*

Sign Languages are unique languages (not versions of spoken languages), with their own vocabulary and grammar. They are rich, complex, and fully capable of expressing anything that can be expressed in a spoken language.

Sign Languages are visual languages, and form a unique class of the world’s languages. Some are specific to regions or cities, and totally unrelated sign languages have developed in regions which share a common spoken language. For example, American and British Sign Languages are different, mutually unintelligible languages which developed independently because the Deaf communities were not in contact with each other. Some signs mean one thing in one Sign Language, and a very different thing in another, just as a spoken word in one language may have a completely different meaning in another language.



**Q: How do Sign Languages “work”?**

Sign Languages consist of linguistically significant combinations of hand motions, body movements and facial expressions. Many signs may depict the ideas they represent, but many are completely arbitrary. Some Sign Languages may use a manual alphabet to spell out proper names or borrow spoken language terms. Just as spoken languages developed naturally through hearing people speaking with one another, sign languages developed naturally over time through Deaf people communicating with one another.

Signs express meanings and do not map to individual words of a spoken language. For example, a single sign can express an entire sentence such as “I ask her”. Additional meaning such as “I ask her repeatedly”, or changing an utterance from a declarative sentence to a question, can be communicated simultaneously by changing the sign slightly or through facial expressions. In a signed conversation, signers maintain eye contact and watch each other’s faces, and use their peripheral vision to gather information from the signer’s hand signs.

Sign Languages do not lack grammar; their grammar is just different from spoken languages. The grammars of Sign Languages are spatial — a number of ideas can be expressed simultaneously and the relative placement of people and places is depicted directly in the space around the signer.



*Thai Sign Language. Photographer: Marc Ewell.  
©Wycliffe Global Alliance*

**Q: Why can’t they just read the Bible?**

For Deaf people, written and spoken languages will always be their second languages. Letters are simply squiggles on a page. Without being able to hear the language spoken, Deaf people have to memorize the series of “squiggles” that represent certain concepts. Their world is visual and their language is vibrant and moving. Squiggles on a page will never speak to their hearts like Sign Languages will.

The message in the Scriptures is the most important message that we can communicate to anyone. That message is far too important to give people second best by offering them the Scriptures in any language other than their heart language!

**Q: What does a Sign Language Bible look like?**

Sign Language Bibles are produced in video format. ■

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*Want to know more about Sign Languages and the work of the SIL International Global Sign Languages Team? Visit:  
[www.sil.org/sign-languages](http://www.sil.org/sign-languages).*

Left:  
Praying in Thai  
Sign Language.



Right:  
Video recording a  
Bible story in  
Thai Sign Language.



Photographer:  
Marc Ewell.

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### R200 Project: Whitestone Cluster Project

At the recent “Heart Language” event, the speaker presenting the update on this project first exhorted the guests not to define the Deaf in terms of what they could not do (i.e. unable to hear), but rather in terms of what they excelled in (i.e. strong users of visual communication). He also answered some of the frequently-asked questions about Sign Languages. The presentation concluded with an eloquent video of the signs for “wait” and “now” in different Sign Languages, with increasing degrees of emphasis and emotion expressed through more emphatic gestures and facial expressions. The presenter closed with a simple plea: “The Deaf have waited long enough. They need their translation *now*.”

The **Whitestone Cluster** project aims to translate 110 Bible passages into the Sign Language of an Asian country. This Sign Language, and variations of it, is used by nearly 700,000 culturally diverse Deaf people. The Deaf community is often poor and marginalised, and job opportunities for them are limited.

These Bible stories will then be recorded as videos for distribution to be used for evangelism and discipleship. This work is being carried out by the SIL Global Sign Language Group of that country (GSLG).

Some of the challenges faced by the project are deciding on key terms for such a culturally diverse group. Also, many of the Deaf need to develop greater awareness of the reasons for the way they sign in order to become good translators.

#### **Fast Facts:**

- Project name: Whitestone
- Languages: Sign Language
- No. of speakers: 700,000
- Location: Asia
- Project start date: 2014
- Expected completion: 2023 ■





“Watching” the Japanese Sign Bible. Photographer: Marc Ewell. ©Wycliffe Global Alliance

### Singapore’s Deaf Community

In Singapore, 1 out of every 1,000 babies born has severe or profound hearing loss, and about 5 out of every 1,000 have lesser degrees of hearing loss. There is currently no Singapore Sign Language Bible. A few churches provide Sign Language interpretation for church services.

**Singapore Sign Language (SgSL)** is Singapore’s native Sign Language that is accepted and used by the Deaf community in Singapore. It developed from the 1950s and is a blend of various sign languages such as Shanghainese Sign Language, American Sign Language, Signing Exact English and other signs developed locally.

**Signing Exact English (SEE2)** is a sign system which uses English word order and grammar exactly. It is not a language per se but a form of manually-coded English as it does not make use of the spatial relationships,

facial expression and body positioning that is used in a typical Sign Language. SEE2 is the medium of instruction in schools for the Deaf and is intended to introduce Deaf children to the English language.

**Pidgin Sign English (PSE)** borrows many signs from signed languages such as SgSL, SEE2, Shanghainese Sign Language and American Sign Language. ■



Singapore. Photographer: Marc Ewell.  
©Wycliffe Global Alliance

# “The Boss is Good!”

Forty years ago, in December 1976, Precious Coral, the first Wycliffe member from Singapore, began her training in Sydney. To mark this milestone in ministry, she shared some of her thoughts and experiences at a celebration event held in her church, Fairfield Methodist Church, and also at the WBTS Annual General Meeting.

After 40 years, one question she is frequently asked is: “Would you do it again?” Her answer is unhesitating: “Yes, I would, all 40 years! The boss is good, and the ‘pay’ is good! Our heavenly father is a good boss, and the church and other supporters have stood behind me.”

## The Journey Begins

Her journey began in November 1976 when she graduated from Bible College. Less than two weeks later, she was on her way to Sydney for linguistics training. During “jungle camp” (an orientation camp for new missionaries) in Papua New Guinea (PNG), she met Liisa, from Finland, and thus began a friendship that developed into a 24-year partnership. At the time, Precious Coral was deciding between PNG and the Philippines as possible places to work, and she recalls being discouraged from selecting PNG as it was considered “too tough for Asian women”!

Despite this, she and Liisa decided to partner and work together on a translation project in PNG among the Mauwake people. In April 1978, they moved to Moro village. The day before they moved, they experienced a spiritual attack – Precious Coral stepped on a nail which penetrated one inch into her foot. However, she still decided to move to the village. In retrospect, she says that maybe she should have waited till her foot had healed. The outhouse was, in her words, very “out”, and she required the help of two persons to support her there and back!

She spent the next 24 years working on translating the Mauwake New Testament (NT) and teaching literacy classes. Apart from that,

she also trained PNGeans from other language groups to do translation, and acted as a translation consultant. Over the years, she has amassed a wealth of anecdotes about her life and work among the Mauwake.

In 1997, the Mauwake NT was finally completed and typesetting was about to begin. Again, the devil made his displeasure known – Precious Coral suffered such a severe asthma attack that she had to be evacuated to Cairns in Australia. One good thing that came out of that was that the Singapore office has since required every member in field to buy medical evacuation insurance! The dedication of the NT was held in 1999 in the village. Remembering that day, Precious Coral said that rather than feeling joyful: “That day, I wept. The Lord reminded me that there are so few people who love him there, and care about his word.”

## ...And Continues

The next phase of her ministry came in 2001 when she went to a new field in Asia as a translation consultant. In this new assignment, her experience as a translator herself was invaluable in her work which was checking translations for other teams as well as training consultants and senior translators. She travels a great deal, sometimes to remote villages. Recounting some of the conditions in villages where she has worked, she says that she has never had any tummy upsets, even with the number of flies that sometimes cover the food they eat.

When asked when she intends to retire, she replies, “I don’t know!” Her current plan is to continue to work for another two or three more years, and help two or three more teams until they finish their NTs, and train some of the senior translators to be consultants.

Precious Coral’s 40 years in ministry is truly a wonderful testimony of God’s goodness and a great encouragement for those who come after her. To God be the glory! ■





*Translation*



*Literacy class*



*The Mauwake NT*



*Their house*

# Right in the Thick of Things!

Jamie attended Camp Wycliffe, a stay-in introductory programme run by Wycliffe Thailand in May 2016. The experience obviously inspired her because she left on a 6-month attachment in an Asian country in early 2017. During this period, she has been attached to the Alpine Meadow\* (AM) project, enjoying an up-close-and-personal view of a real language project, and also helping out in various ways. She sent back an account of some of her early impressions:

## Language Learning

As for any new person in the field, one of the first things she has had to do is to learn some of the local language. Since there is no established “course” or textbook, she had to plan her own lessons! She reports, “It’s a steep learning curve but it’s going great!”

## Sheep Or Cat?

She is also sitting in on some of the translation sessions, and gives an example of some of the issues that crop up: “At the time of writing, we are trying to separate ‘sheep’ from ‘goats’ (Mt 25:32-33). In the AM language, the word for ‘sheep’ and ‘goat’ is the same, which is causing a bit of a problem!” To complicate matters, in some AM varieties spoken in other countries, there is a different word for ‘sheep’ – but unfortunately it translates to ‘cat’ in the local AM variety!

## Singing In The Heart Language

Music is a big part of Jamie’s life, and she is thrilled to report that five worship songs in the AM language were recorded recently, two of which are original compositions. It is always wonderful for any people group to be able to worship and sing in their own heart language instead of the national language which many may not understand perfectly. She also participated in a workshop on recording and editing audio files together with workers from other language groups. This will be useful for making audio recordings of scripture, stories and testimonies etc., which are very important for the AM group because many are not literate in their mother tongue.

## Anyone Can Serve!

The needs in any language group involve much more than language work. She notes: “It’s been really interesting to learn about all the possible ways to serve. Some of the foreigners are working on the language, but others are involved in other things like teaching English, music, sports, running businesses, and working among different minority people groups and different age groups ranging from kindergarteners and special needs children to college students. There are so many ways to serve and so many needs to be filled, and



every time I learn about one, I think of someone I know who could fill that need!”

She tells of a foreign English teacher in the local college. Apart from just teaching lessons, she also hangs out with students, sometimes one on one, and also organises movie nights and games nights at her house. And also, once a week, they play frisbee and everyone is invited. Students can join in and practise English and also enjoy good clean fun (instead of going out drinking or playing computer games). She says, “Anyone can serve; you don’t need any specialised training, just turn up/participate/make friends/let your light shine.” ■

\* Not the real names.



## Partners' Event – “Heart Language”

22 April 2017

The word of God speaks with the most impact when it is in our “heart language” and this was chosen as the theme for the WBTS Partners’ Event on 22 April 2017. The event showcased three language projects supported by WBTS – Robeno, Nyra and Whitestone\* – and representatives from the projects specially came to Singapore to participate. The event provided an opportunity for guests to mingle and visit information booths about the language projects and Wycliffe’s work. One of the booths even provided some local snacks for tasting!

David Tan, Executive Director of Wycliffe Singapore, launched the formal part of the event with an introduction highlighting the reasons why using the “heart language” was the most effective way to speak into people’s hearts and lives.

### Featured Projects:

#### Robeno

The Robeno project has developed a set of about 30 oral Bible stories in a cluster of 6 different languages spoken by a total of nearly 600,000 people in a Southeast Asian country. The stories are now being told and retold in the various language groups.

One of translators told of an orphan child who, after hearing the story of Jesus calming the storm, declared that he no longer needed to fear because Jesus would care for him. The Robeno team is now preparing to provide other materials for distribution – a printed Gospel of Luke, and also the Jesus film.

\* Not the real names.

(Cont. on page 12)

## REACHING 200 by 2025

By 2025, in partnership with the Singapore Church, Wycliffe Singapore will be engaged in 200 languages needing a Bible translation programme.

### My Response

I would like to:

#### CONNECT with a Wycliffe representative

- to explore volunteer, short-term service or long-term service
- for other matters (please specify)

#### RECEIVE

- Wycliffe’s updates on news and events
- Wycliffe’s prayer bulletins

#### GIVE to

- Wycliffe General Fund
- Language Project Fund

Please make cheque payable to  
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(Cont. from page 11)

### Nyra

This Bible storying project is for 5 clusters of languages with about 39 million speakers in another Southeast Asian country. The representatives from the project told of the acceptance by the local people when the stories were told to them in their heart language, and even more so when the stories were expressed using their own cultural forms such as music and dance.

### Whitestone

This project was the most novel as many guests had not had prior contact with users of Sign Languages. See the article on Sign Languages in this issue for more information on this unique project! ■

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