



Brian and Helen's News & Views

February 2012

Discovering Your Language



Kenneth eagerly listens to the next lesson plan while Sakias reads from a workbook. We introduced modern netbooks that run well on solar panels in remote locations.

After our furlough in the USA, we arrived safely back to the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, and back to our training roles.

Pray For:

- The participants who recently finished our Dictionary Workshop would be equipped to carry on their assignments in the years ahead.
- That Helen would teach well our PNG and expatriate staff the assessment and care of sick children. Also excellent overall patient care especially in a world where our infrastructure is faltering.
- That Brian would assess well the needs of PNGan students coming to our new Training Centre and be able to advance new training curricula for National Bible Translation and Literacy Development (INSPIRE Project).
- That our Son Dave and his fiancée Anne-Marie (see below) would make great wedding plans and celebrate well with family and friends this July in Seattle. Yes, rejoice with us !!

Making Vernacular Dictionaries

"Hmm.... what do my people call the 'forehead' part of anyone's face?... Not sure we have a word for that part." And what about our hierarchies used in 'brotherhood'? There's no equivalent in English or Tok Pisin for that concept."

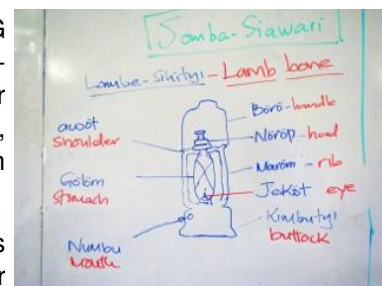
Such are the many decisions made by students from all over PNG who attended the latest National Dictionary Workshop. An interactive course and time of instruction on how you can prepare a publishable dictionary in your vernacular language.... the same language that your mother and father taught you when you were a child.

Most of the wonderful languages of PNG have little if any documentation, in any form. But there are very few expatriate workers left in the country and they are busy doing a host of other needed activities. The solution, is to train the local communities to develop tools for their own languages. One basic tool, one we take for granted in the West, is a simple dictionary of words in our language. In the West we argue about the "best"

dictionary; in PNG communities are talking about making their very FIRST dictionary, ever, for their own people.

So why is all this important? Well... for one thing, the many cultures and languages of PNG are being pushed aside in the

wake of national development efforts, including multi-national mining and logging interests in this country. Lifestyles are changing. The young ones leave the home village in search of work in towns and cities, and there are lots of inter-marriages. Cultural truths embedded in the home language representing cultural knowledge can be lost in the wake of changing environmental conditions. Losing the knowledge of the ancients is a



Samba-Siawari language workers try to decide how to express the parts of a common kerosene lantern found in the village houses.

worry for the elders today. It must be preserved somehow.

Not only do the local communities lose out in the long run, but the **entire world** as well. For example, there may be an exotic plant, well known in the language, that really does have medicinal value. But outside medical researchers would never know it existed.... and soon such common knowledge will be lost forever.

And what about the Bible Translation task? Why is a dictionary so important for that? It's all about literacy. Dictionaries promote esteem in a given language



Sakias explains a conjunction word that he finds in the Agarabi language.

community. When my language has "weight", so to speak, and is important enough that God's Word can be translated and made more clear – then it can align better (or sometimes cross) with the standard cultural values of my own people. If there is a difficult word in the

text, and I am young and don't quite know what that means.... well now I can consult a reference and gain the knowledge of my forefathers on that very word or cultural concept. It would be hard to think about reading and writing, without a suitable reference in my language.

So, there you have it..... helping people document their mother tongues.... can be part of advancing the Kingdom of God.

What would life be like without a dictionary? Would we wrangle about our words and argue about the "meaning"



WeSay the SIL custom software designed to be "easy to use" for those with little computer experience

of things? Is the Lord the Lord of clarity.... or confusion?

New Technology: WeSay

"So why is Brian there?", you may ask. Some national teams brought data files done earlier by other language researchers, and often such old

dictionary data is not in a format conducive to importation for use with our current dictionary computer software. That means a "technician" type, such as myself must grab a set of custom tools and "hand massage" the data, on the spot, to make the data acceptable to programs like modern "WeSay". The necessary transformations take from as little as three hours, to three days, to complete – one never quite knows until you analyze the data.

David and Anne-Marie

Yes the news is out! The most darling couple to ever grace Seattle has decided to "tie the knot". Both sets of parents are well pleased, and they are in the planning phase for an end-of-July wedding celebration.



The Lovely CoupleCaught.... Anne-Marie and David spotted last Fall in Seattle, Washington.

"Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father." – Matthew 5:16

Staying Connected

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