

New Bible Translation Triumph of Imagination and Persistence

Render, a new kind of software that streamlines the process of translating the Bible for oral cultures, is a triumph of imagination and persistence.

Experts say there are more than 1,800 oral cultures—representing perhaps 1 billion people—that don't have the Bible in their own language. Historically, Bible translators have had to create a written language for these groups before creating an audio Bible that people could use, lengthening the translation process by years.

Render, which eliminates the need to create a written language for an oral culture, represents a new way of thinking. A partnership of three ministries—Faith Comes By Hearing, Pioneer Bible Translators and Seed Company—developed Render and plans to use it on translation projects beginning this year.

With Render, a written translation is no longer required, and non-literate people can join a process that previously excluded them.

“Oral communicators are capable of translating Scripture into their mother tongue,” Robin Green, the Render project manager, said. “They just need a translation approach that accommodates their skills and talents.”

Larry Jones, Seed Company's Sr. vice president for Bible Translation, noted that there are tremendous advantages to using modern audio technology for Bible translation for oral communicators. “You don't need to be educated to be a good speaker of your language,” said Jones, who has a Ph.D. in

humanities with a concentration in linguistics.

Render—one of the meanings of the word is “translate”—facilitates the various aspects of Bible translation, including drafting, peer review, revision, community testing, back translation and consultant checking, and also manages workflow, with the unique aspect of everything being done orally.

Render has an elaborate system of checks and balances to ensure accuracy, but just the concept of oral translation historically has encountered skepticism in the academic community. Despite opposition, Green outlined a strategy for oral Bible translation in her master’s thesis in 2007.

After graduation, she began working on a translation project in India, but for a variety of reasons, the project fell through. So she came back to the U.S. and had to find work outside of ministry. “I really felt like the vision had died,” she said.

Unknown to Green, Faith Comes By Hearing began to consider the possibility of audio-to-audio translation in 2012. But Jonathan Huguenin, Language Recording Division Manager at Faith Comes By Hearing, ran into brick wall after brick wall. Then one day, someone handed him Green’s master’s thesis, and he quickly determined that her ideas could help make the concept a reality.

Not knowing how to contact her, Huguenin sent letters to five individuals named Robin Green, and finally received a voicemail from the correct Robin Green about one month later.

Green joined Faith Comes By Hearing soon afterward, and the three organizations worked together for 2 1/2 years to design, build and test the software for oral Bible translation.

Today, Pioneer Bible Translators President Greg Pruettt says the software has the potential to revolutionize Bible

translation.

“Now that we’re working in more and more settings where a lot of the people can’t read, the end game isn’t a book anymore,” he said. “To get the Scriptures to everyone everywhere, you have to have some kind of audio. The audio is the end game.”

Faith Comes By Hearing records audio Bibles and relies on its partners to do the translation. Render is an example of translation and recording coming together like never before to create a new tool that will empower oral peoples to participate in creating access to the Bible in their own languages.