

All's Well That Ends Well

Description:

a translation problem to solve with audience participation

Aim: to show how *small* words make a *big* difference in understanding God's Word

Audience:

teenagers and adults, any size group

Time: 10-15 min.

Equipment:

overhead projector, 2 overhead transparencies (masters included)



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Instructions:

Use the Leader's Script below to talk the audience through this Canela translation problem. Overhead transparencies are provided to go along with the script. Each stage of the script is numbered so that the corresponding text can be displayed on the overhead projector.

Leader's Script:

Stage 1: (Hide Stage 2 & 3 boxes from view with paper)

Canela is one of Brazil's 209 minority languages and is spoken by just 2,500 people. Here's a puzzling feature of the Canela language for you to figure out:

(Transparency 1)

'**Iren**' means 'He put it in the fire.'

'**Ire**' means 'He put it in the fire.'

Canela verbs have **SHORT** and **LONG** forms.

Question: What problem do you think these two verb forms would pose to you, if you were a Bible translator working with the Canela?

Answer: The verbs appear to mean exactly the same thing, even though they sound different. It is important to discover what the short and long verb forms are really communicating, so that they can be used correctly.

Stage 2: (Hide Stage 3 box from view with paper)

When Bible translators Jack and Jo Popjes [POP-jus] were learning Canela, their Indian friends told them to use the short form of their verbs for events that are 'distant'. Based on this information, the translators came up with a solution to explain the different meanings of Canela verbs:

(Transparency 2)

LONG verb forms refer to events that happened in the **RECENT PAST**.

SHORT verb forms refer to events that happened in the **DISTANT PAST**.

Question: Following this solution ‘Iren’ would mean ‘He put it in the fire ten minutes ago’. In what sort of sentence would ‘Ire’ be used?

Answer: ‘He put it in the fire . . . ten years ago.’ (or similar!)

Stage 3:

The first draft of the New Testament was written using short verb forms because the events recorded in the Bible happened a long time ago. However, while listening to the Canelas talk, the translators began to realize that the solution they had come up with did not always work. One day they heard this Canela folk-story:

(Transparency 3)

‘An enemy group of people came and massacred all the children in a Canela village while the elders were away. When the elders returned, they made the sad discovery and buried the corpses. At this time a boy was born. While still a child he was told of the massacre of his brothers. As soon as he grew up, he led a vengeance raid on the enemy village and executed his brothers’ murderers.

Question: All of the action in this folk-story happened a long time ago, so which form of the verb would you expect the Canela to use?

Answer: The short form.

Stage 4: (Hide Stage 5 box from view with paper)

Jack and Jo were surprised that the story contained both long and short forms of the verb. They began to realize that their first theory was not right. Trying to find a better solution, they discussed Canela verbs at a workshop held to sort out translation problems. For two whole weeks at breakfast, lunch, dinner and times in between they debated the difference between the verb forms. Just what could it be? As the workshop was coming to an end, the translators and consultants still had not come up with an answer. In desperation they prayed for understanding. God answers prayer: The next morning they discovered the real solution!

Using two different colored pens, the translators went back to square one and marked the two different verb forms throughout all the Canela texts. Then they took another good look at them. In this version of the same folk-story, the *long verb forms* are in ***bold italics*** and the short verb forms are in normal type:

Notes:

Notes:

(Transparency 4)

*'An enemy group of people came and massacred all the children in a Canela village while the elders were away. When the elders returned, they made the sad discovery and buried the corpses. **At this time a boy was born.** While still a child he was told of the massacre of his brothers. As soon as he grew up, **he led a vengeance raid on the enemy village and executed his brothers' murderers.**'*

Question: What solution would you now come up with to explain the difference between the two verb forms in Canela?

Answer: Long verb forms convey the most important information. Short verb forms convey secondary information!

Stage 5:

It is possible to read only the italic parts of the Canela folk-story and still understand the gist of it. The normal type contains background information that is less important to the action.

If you think about it, the Canela explanation that the short form of the the verb means 'distant' was correct. In a way, the secondary information in a story is more distant than the main storyline, but not distant in time as the translators first assumed. This then is the final solution:

(Transparency 5)

LONG verb forms are used to convey the most **IMPORTANT INFORMATION**.

SHORT verb forms are used to convey **SECONDARY INFORMATION**.

If the Canela New Testament had been published the way it was first written, a Canela reader would have understood it to mean something like this:

'Jesus, God's Son, came to earth, born as a baby. *(That is not very important to the story.)* When Jesus grew up, he performed many miracles, healed the sick and revealed what God's love is like. *(But wait! The interesting information is coming soon.)* Then He died on a cross to pay once and for all for the sinful things that

people have done. (*Hang on, the exciting part is almost here.*)
Three days later, Jesus rose again. (*Don't pay much attention to that because the punch line is still to come.*)'

Can you see how the wrong verb form would have made the good news of Jesus seem totally irrelevant to the Canela people? What a disastrous translation that would have been! Let's stop right now and thank God for answering the Popjes' prayer for help. He opened their minds so that they could understand Canela verbs.

Translation problems such as this one are very common indeed. They must be solved correctly so that people understand the message of Jesus clearly. The Canela New Testament took 20 years to translate. Bible translators Jack and Jo Popjes first had to build good relationships with the Canela people and learn their language. For many years, they spent much of their time doing medical work, writing the Canela language down for the first time, and teaching Canelas to read. Today there is a growing, indigenous church* and the people are proud to have their language written down. Despite many hardships, the Popjes say it has been worth it all to give the Canelas God's Word in their own language.

Personal Application:

God wants people from every language and people and nation to have the good news in their own language. And He wants all of us to work together to get the job done. How can you help? Can you pray, give or go? Ask God to make it clear to you. He will open your mind to understand, just like He did for Jack and Jo Popjes!

Optional Extras:

If an overhead projector is not available, photocopy and enlarge the transparency masters, or hand write the information on large sheets of paper, erasable white board, or blackboard.

**churches led by their own people, not foreign missionaries*

Notes:

1.

‘**Iren**’ means ‘He put it in the fire.’

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Canela verbs have **SHORT** and **LONG** forms.

2.

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3.

‘An enemy group of people came and massacred all the children in a Canela village while the elders were away. When the elders returned, they made the sad discovery and buried the corpses. At this time a boy was born. While still a child he was told of the massacre of his brothers. As soon as he grew up, he led a vengeance raid on the enemy village and executed his brothers’ murderers.’

4.

*‘An enemy group of people came and massacred all the children in a Canela village while the elders were away. When the elders returned, they made the sad discovery and buried the corpses. **At this time a boy was born.** While still a child he was told of the massacre of his brothers. As soon as he grew up, **he led a vengeance raid on the enemy village and executed his brothers’ murderers.**’*

5.

LONG verb forms are used to convey the most **IMPORTANT INFORMATION.**

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