



The AGNT Project Report—Q2 2010

As a licensee or friend of AGNT or ANLEX, we would like to update you once a quarter about our continuing work to enhance and perfect these databases and about our plans for the future.



The Project. *The AGNT Project Report—Q3 2008* introduced the team, outlined ongoing tasks, and discussed potential tasks.



Why I Promote the AGNT

Phil Fields, Pioneer Bible Translators

When teaching Indonesian translators about the benefits of using the AGNT, one of the first things I tell them is that “You too can learn Greek!” I give them my testimony: I don’t have academic credits for Greek classes. (It’s proof of God’s grace that someone like me, with only a master’s degree in music, can be a Bible translator.) But I have learned how to read and understand Koine Greek by making a habit of reading some of the language every day. And I started out using the AGNT in BART.¹ With BART, you can easily toggle transliterations on and off, until you feel comfortable reading directly from the Greek text. You also can toggle the English glosses on and off with a mouse click, making it easy to test and stretch your memory.

I encourage Indonesian translators to notice the grammar tags. The main RSV-like, and somewhat-archaic, Indonesian translation uses *kamu* for “you/your plural,” while the population at large predominately uses *kamu* for “you/your singular.” Unfortunately, most of the Bible-reading public in Indonesia does not realize that *kamu* is never used for the singular in their Bibles. So in Philemon 25, virtually all Indonesians misunderstand when Paul says, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with *kamu* (your) spirit.” They think he is talking about Philemon’s spirit only. But take a look at the AGNT, and you can clearly see that *your* is plural. Paul is addressing the last sentence to the whole church that meets at Philemon’s house. In fact, if you look at your own English translations, it is likely that you will find that you have always misunderstood this verse! Virtually none of the popular English translations show that Paul uses “you all” here. In the same place, the word for “spirit” is singular. So Paul doesn’t say “with your (plural) spirits,” but “your (plural) spirit.” I won’t take space here to talk about that, but that also is the kind of thing that one is empowered to notice when using the AGNT.

Many mother-tongue translators in Indonesia use another translation, one like the TEV, as a model when they translate, since it is easier to understand than the older translation. In Mark 8:19, an expert in the law comes to Jesus and says, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” The TEV-like translation adds an honorific, which is quite natural for the Indonesian language. So the quote begins with “Father Teacher . . .” I always point this out to translators, because even though the national language works this way, I have yet to find a vernacular language inside that country where such an honorific can naturally be added. In Orya, for

¹ BART—Biblical Analysis Research Tool. See “AGNT and BART,” *The AGNT Project Report—Q1 2010*.

instance, one might call Jesus “Father” or “Teacher” but never “Father Teacher.” This shows why it is so important for translators to have a clear window into the Greek source text. It helps them to avoid doing unnatural things in imitation of the translations they are using as models.

An English speaker looking at a Greek interlinear seldom looks to see if a word is plural or singular. That's because the English translations and interlinear gloss lines usually show this. Such is not the case for Indonesians looking at their translations. Indonesian is notoriously vague in many ways, especially regarding what is singular or plural. Indonesians usually leave that to be determined by context. This is why I want all Indonesian mother-tongue translators to notice singular and plural in the AGNT grammar tags. For example, in John 6:14 Indonesians read this: “Now when the people saw the miraculous {signs//sign} that Jesus performed, they began to say to one another, ‘This is the Prophet.’” From their translations they can't be sure if it is the last sign (the feeding of the five thousand), or all the recent signs.

Yohanes 6:14

TB: Ketika orang-orang itu melihat **mujizat** yang telah diadakannya, mereka berkata: "Dia ini adalah benar-benar nabi yang akan datang ke dalam dunia."

BIS: Ketika orang banyak melihat **keajaiban** yang dibuat oleh Yesus, mereka berkata, "Sungguh, inilah Nabi yang diharapkan datang ke dunia!"

The answer is that *sign* is singular. In Indonesian, the translations really ought to make this clear by saying “saw that sign.”

Indonesian translators also should look at the AGNT grammar tags for every verb, because Indonesian is also notoriously vague about verb tenses. An Indonesian mother-tongue translator working on John 10:10 will not know when or how many times Jesus comes. They will read, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. But I {come//have come//come repeatedly} that they may have life.” Again, while the national language doesn't bother to mark verb tenses, it is common for languages (especially on the eastern side of the country) to be particular about marking them. Without the grammar tag lines, a translator will be shooting in the dark, working on suppositions.

Yohanes 10:10

TB: Pencuri datang hanya untuk mencuri dan membunuh dan membinasakan; Aku datang, supaya mereka mempunyai hidup, dan mempunyainya dalam segala kelimpahan.

BIS: Pencuri datang hanya untuk mencuri, untuk membunuh dan untuk merusak. Tetapi Aku datang supaya manusia mendapat hidup—hidup berlimpah-limpah.

Finally, I would like everyone to have a window into the source text of the Bible, since there are concepts that are obscured by our traditional key terms. Some of these things are crucially important. My example is *faith*. A few Sundays ago, our adult Sunday school teacher in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, started the class with a warm-up question, “Is it hard to have faith?” The first who responded said, “It's not just hard. It's nigh on to impossible.” I wonder how that man would define “faith”!

The problem for English speakers is that the abstract noun “faith” looks nothing like the verb “believe.” But in Greek *pistis* and *pisteuō* are clearly related. Indonesians have the same

problem, because “to believe” is *percaya*, while “faith” is *iman*. The two words look nothing alike. I was impressed that this causes a difficulty in checking our translation of 1 Peter 1 in a village in eastern Indonesia. In verses 5 and 9, we had used *iman*/faith, so I asked a group of church elders to give the meaning of the word. No answers. Finally, I asked if any of them thought they had faith.



Fig. 1. Church elders checking Scripture, Wamho (Kecamatan Subdistrict), Papua, Indonesia

Out of twelve people, there were two who shyly raised their hands. I couldn't believe it, and said, “Come on! You are church leaders! Why so slow to admit that you have faith?” “Because,” said one, “we think it's like this: If Mary tempts Joe to sin, and if Joe doesn't go along with her, he has faith.” So for them, *faith* is spiritual endurance. Several months later, I had the opportunity to check the same key term in the capital, Jakarta, testing our translation into easy-reading colloquial Indonesian. A man helping us check was a long-time Christian with only a sixth-grade education. He fits well into our target audience. I asked him to define *iman*/faith, and he confidently responded: “It is one's strength of heart to follow Jesus.” He was confident but wrong! This is why I am no longer in favor of using *iman* in our translation, even though it has been used in all the current national language translations. We will use the verb “believe” instead.

I think a good question for our Sunday school would be, “Can you know if you have faith while you are still alive on earth?” Before the Orya people started receiving New Testament Scripture in their heart language, they would answer “No.” The word they used to translate *iman* meant “to have inner fruit.” “Inner fruit” means the inside part of the fruit, the part you eat, like the red part of a watermelon. They thought that people don't find out if they have faith until they get to the gates of heaven, where God would reveal if they have inner fruit in their heart. (Their faulty translation of *faith* as “inner fruit” was based on their faulty understanding of *iman*.) Both the Orya “inner fruit” concept and the more widely held “endurance” meaning of *iman* have this big problem in common: You can never have any assurance of your salvation while living on this earth.

So in 1 Peter 1:4-5, Peter writes about “an inheritance . . . reserved in heaven for you, who are protected through *faith*.” But if you aren't confident about *faith*, you cannot feel protected.

In verse 9, Peter desires to assure his readers that they are “attaining the goal of your *faith*—the salvation of your souls.” Peter wanted them to know that their *believing* was going to bring them salvation. The simple fact of their *believing* is evidence that they are on the road to salvation! But a reader with a faulty definition of *faith* receives no assurance.

In Hebrews 11, the great “faith chapter,” the writer wanted people to be encouraged by all the examples of people who *believed*. He wanted them to say, “I am like Abel and Abraham in *believing*,” and “I want to persevere in believing like all those examples, whether or not I am rewarded on this earth for believing.” But a person who has a faulty understanding of *faith* will read, “Abel had faith . . . Abraham had faith,” and will say, “Well, lucky *them*. I wish I had faith.” And when they read in verse 6, “without faith it is impossible to please God,” they say, “Well, I might as well give up! I wish I knew where I could buy some faith.”

This is why it is important for all Bible translators, and even all believers, to have a window into the biblical source languages. This is why it is important for every mother-tongue translator to have more than just various translations to work from. All their translations, no matter how good, are subject to the limitations and imperfections of our human languages. No translation can be a perfect reflection of what is contained in the original languages. The distinctions that are pointed out via tools like the AGNT can make the difference between believing and obtaining *life*, or being confused *to death*. That difference is the very reason we translate God's Word.

Editor's Note. Phil Fields has a Master of Music Degree from the New England Conservatory of Music, where he met Gale. Phil and Gale have three children and four grandchildren. After Phil taught music for eight years, he and Gale joined Wycliffe, and worked with SIL and Wycliffe in Indonesia for 28 years, during which time they finished the Orya New Testament translation. They have been members of Pioneer Bible Translators for one year. Phil is currently working with a team of people to translate the Bible into two dialects of Indonesian—easy-to-read western dialect, and colloquial eastern dialect. (These can be seen at www.bahasakita.net.) Phil continues his music hobbies by playing woodwinds in church and at www.clarinetpages.net.



As always, we remain open to developing AGNT and ANLEX in ways that are most useful to the needs of students and readers of God's Word.

Thank you for your continued support of *The AGNT Project*, for faithfully marketing the AGNT and ANLEX databases, and for making these state-of-the-art tools for studying the Greek New Testament available to students, scholars, pastors, TRANSLATORS, and laypeople worldwide.

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