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Sorry about the delay. I was about to send this out the week before Christmas but then — along with half of Jos — I got a bad cold that I've only just thrown off, which wiped me out. David.

### A visit to Ashe land

On a Monday in the middle of December, I (David) travelled about 3 hours out to the Ashe Bible Translation office in a small town called Kurmin Jibrin which is past Kagoro and on the way to Abuja. (Many of our colleagues know it as Banana Junction, because there are always ladies with trays of bananas on their heads waiting to sell them to passing travellers.)



Apart from overseeing some adjustments to doors and locks for our colleague Kathleen, the main thing I went there for was to join her and the translators as they work their way through studying some natural Ashe stories. Patiently and methodically, Kathleen is leading the translators on a journey of discovery about how their language fits together.

### Studying Ashe tales

As they start this work, they are using a true story told by Gideon — one of the translators — about an incident that happened about a

year ago when a python attacked a flock of sheep near his village. It was recorded originally in the Ashe language, then transcribed using software called SayMore and given a rough translation into English to help outsiders understand the story. Kathleen helped direct them to divide the story up into clauses. Then the translators identified actions/ descriptions and participants: who is doing what, and who gets affected by the actions. Then clause by clause the translators took turns to see how all these ingredients fitted together.

**clause:** like a simple sentence — with only 1 action / description + participants. Often several clauses join to make a complete sentence.

Some of the most significant learning moments come when the translators realise they can't quite explain why a certain word should have been used, but in some ways it makes it 'sweeter' that way. These are the expressions that don't immediately match up with English, but which may be vital for making a story clear and interesting. They help the hearer follow with ease rather than getting hopelessly confused. But these vital expressions and patterns are in grave danger of being overlooked or clumsily abused when translating something from another language, simply because they are just the kind of thing that varies considerably from one language to another.

Once we have learned a little from some Ashe language texts we'll have a fresh look at Luke's gospel which we have already translated and checked as thoroughly as we could. While we did our best to check all the right ingredients



L-R: Gideon, Kathleen, Moses and Arams huddle round a desk in the Ashe translation office to study an Ashe story

were there for the translation, I knew that without serious study of how stories are told by Ashe people, we wouldn't be able to check these ingredients were being mixed together properly. We'll let you know how things work out.

### **New story books**

Talking of story-telling, Julie's become quite aware that there's a lack of (interesting) reading materials for Nigerian children, whether in English, Hausa or local languages. And while we've got quite a library of books for various ages of children, most of them are somewhat western in their setting. Even if such books are interesting enough, we'd really like to help children (and adults) enjoy learning through reading without the implication that everywhere should become Western or that the only good stories are Western ones. So Julie has had an idea to try to make some nice books of stories which actually come from a recognisable Nigerian setting — like the python and the sheep. We're hoping we get time to organise that and find some illustrators who can make them engaging and recognisable. I'm hoping that our work on studying the structure of the stories will actually enable us to make more interesting translations of the stories into English. Otherwise translations tend to end up rather stodgy and boring, or else run the risk of distorting the stories and missing the point.

### **Family news**

Just before Christmas Julie's grandfather Eddie was hospitalised and very seriously ill so much so that we were trying to work out whether Julie should travel back — not easy around Christmas — but in a great answer to many prayers he has against all hope recovered surprisingly well. It's hard being far from family at such times.

Quite a few presents arrived in time for Christmas, from friends, family and churches in



the UK, so we felt very loved. Some more have trickled through afterwards too. We enjoyed having several friends staying with us around Christmas, and we even had a Boxing Day cricket match, joined with a bunch of Indian



Boxing day dinner with Creighton and Mort families and James MacDonell

friends. Then just before New Year we were sad to say goodbye to the Mort family who have been staying on our compound for the last 5 months. They're going back to their village location a long day's drive away West and we'll all miss them.

Sisters Sarah and Blessing who work in our house sadly lost a relative over Christmas. Blessing is expecting number 2 and has been on bed rest for quite a while — much to her frustration — but Julie's looking forward to Sarah coming back to work this week after the Christmas break.

Julie restarted home school this week, with Rebekah, Elizabeth and Abigail genuinely champing at the bit for it. Do pray for Julie as she gets everything organised.

Many thanks for your prayers and support as we serve in Nigeria. Love from us all,

**David, Julie,  
Rebekah, Elizabeth, Abigail & Helen**

ps. This newsletter has been delayed so long that I actually went off to *Banana Junction* again last Monday (8th) for a couple more days of work on the Ashe stories. Possibly next week they will start comparing the Ashe translation of Luke's gospel to what they've discovered about the language of their stories.