



The Jamaican Patois People

‘Our Language is Not Inferior!’

The Jamaican language has long been associated with poverty and the uneducated—a stigma that dates back to Jamaica’s colonial roots. “During slavery, the slave masters looked down on how the slaves spoke, and the slaves saw their language as ‘the language of slavery,’” comments project coordinator Bertram Gayle.

Unfortunately, the sentiment was retained even after Jamaicans gained their freedom. Today, parents pass the negative connotation on to their children through reprimands such as, “Yu chat bad, iihn!” (Your use of language is terrible!)

This is a major hurdle for the translation team to overcome. If Jamaicans are ashamed of speaking their language, can they be expected to read the holiest of books—the Bible—in a language they consider degraded?

But Bertram has high hopes for the future of the Jamaican language: “By raising the standard of Jamaican to formal, important domains by means of the Scriptures, the BSWI (Bible Society of the West Indies) and its partners seek to validate Jamaicans.

“Contrary to [the ideas that have] been passed down to us over the years, God delights in speaking to us in our language, and we can relate to Him in our own language. Our language is not inherently inferior to Standard Jamaican English, and neither are we inferior to anyone.”

In fact, the team has seen this change of perspective first hand. One elderly lady told the team that she’d always felt ashamed for talking to God in Jamaican. For her entire life, she believed that her language was inferior. But as soon as she heard the Word of God in Jamaican, all those old ideas melted away. Now when she speaks Jamaican in church, she feels no shame. She knows that God delights in her communion with Him.

- Pray that many more Jamaicans will experience freedom and worth when they hear Scriptures in their own language.

Revising and Refining

The Jamaican team is committed to bringing the best, most accurate translation of God’s Word to their people. This is why they submit the initial drafts to rigorous checking, reviewing, revising and refining. They recently tackled the books of Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, James and Revelation, reviewing and checking the drafts as a team.²

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- Location: Jamaica
- Number of Speakers: 4,000,000
- Year Project Began: 2008
- Expected Completion Date: 2012

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- Remember the team in your prayers as they refine God’s Word for Jamaicans.



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Five of those six books were then passed on to consultants for an in-depth check.⁵ Hebrews must first be backtranslated⁴ before it's handed off to a consultant who doesn't speak Jamaican. Matthew and John, two drafts that needed some extra attention, were also reviewed.

More team checking is in the team's near future. They plan to check Matthew, Mark and John, then submit the revised drafts to consultants. They'll also back translate Hebrews. Next year's plans are another concern—the team is currently hammering out details for the 2012 audio Bible launch.

- **Pray for translator Jodianne, who is on a leave of absence in Canada. Ask that the team will work efficiently while she's gone.**

A Benediction

“Evri taim mi prie tu Gad mi memba yu, Failiiman. An mi gi Gad tangks fi yu, kaaz mi ier bout ou yu chos iina di Laad Jiizas an ou yu lov aal a Gad piipl. Az yu andastan aal a di gud sitn dem we Gad gi wi kaaz wi an Kraiz Jiizas a wan, mi prie se di fiet we yu shier wid wi an aal a Gad piipl wi gruo. Failiiman, mi breda, yu lov fi Gad piipl, du mi aat gud an gi mi chrent. Yu lov kaaz aal a Gad piipl fi api” (Philemon 1:4-7).

“Every time I pray to God, I remember you, Philemon. I give God thanks for you, because I have heard about how your trust in the Lord Jesus and about how you love all of God's people. Seeing you understand all of the good things that God has given us because we and Christ Jesus are one, I pray that the faith who you share with us and with all of God people will grow. Philemon, my brother, your love for God's people has done my heart good and has given me strength. Your love has made all of God's people happy” (Jamaican back translation).

Six Steps of Translation

- 1. First Draft:** translators analyze what a passage says and produce a first draft.
- 2. Team Check:** translators check each verse for accuracy and clarity.
- 3. Community Testing:** translators share drafted Scripture with community members to test how well it communicates.
- 4. Back Translation:** translators translate the draft “back” into a major language for a non-native consultant.
- 5. Consultant Check:** a consultant checks the translation with the team to make sure expected standards are met.
- 6. Proofread:** translators rigorously proofread the final draft for errors before publication.

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