

Steve's Work

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Turning a computer text into a Bible



Checking the Mündü NT (East Africa)

After years of painstaking work, with all the struggles, setbacks, breakthroughs, laughter and tears, the Bible translators in some distant corner of the world are finished. *The job is finally done!* Here it all is on the laptop, checked and re-checked. Declared 'finished' by the team, the expert consultants, and the leadership.

What now? How do those computer files become a book that people can read and carry with them?

That's where **scripture typesetting** comes in. It's my privilege to work with translators, turning their finished translations into a book. It's a great joy to share with them in the culmination of their long years of hard work.

So what's the big deal? With computers, you can print stuff out in minutes.

Well, it's not quite that simple. This work has been going on for many years. There may be major differences between the first book translated, and the last one. Different people may have been involved in both translation and keyboarding. This can result in inconsistencies. Translation checking deals with the major inconsistencies; scripture typesetting deals with minor ones like spelling, punctuation, capital letters, hyphens, and so on.

But why bother about these nitty-gritty details?

Because this is the Word of God. if you've tried to read something that's been badly typed you'll realise it puts an extra strain on the reader. That's an exaggerated example. But the principle is: ***We don't want anything to stand between the reader and the message of God's love.*** No effort is too great to produce a Bible or New Testament that is well and clearly laid out, making it easy to read and understand.

So to begin with we do a thorough check of all these nitty-gritty details, using software produced jointly by Wycliffe and the United Bible Societies. This may include going through a list of all the words in the publication (anything from 4,000 to 20,000 words for a New Testament, twice or three times that number for a whole Bible). It's amazing how many spelling mistakes are caught this way. They jump out at you:

catch 106 (number of occurrences)

caught 542

cought 7 ...

"Cought"?! Each word has a set of references attached showing where it occurs—so seven clicks, and all the 'coughts' are corrected.

Next we discuss **what the final book should look like**. Will it have a single block of text per page, or two columns? Will the type be large or small? Will we mark verses with a full-sized number or a little raised number? Will we mark the footnotes with numbers, letters, or a star? Which pictures will be included, and where will they go? Will they have captions? And so on. The translation team has a lot of input here, as they know what will be acceptable in their community. I usually print out one book as a 'trial version', which we then carefully assess together.

The typesetter also balances the conflicting demands of having a **small book** that's easily carried, and having **large, clear print** that's easy to read. Making the print only slightly larger can result in a much bigger book!

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Then comes the major work for the team: **proofreading a printout** of the whole NT or Bible in a format close to the final version. Corrections are entered, the checks run again, and if necessary a second printout is proofread. When the team are satisfied that the text is as near perfect as they can make it, the dread moment arrives: *signing off!* From that point no more corrections can be made to the text.

Finally I do the **detailed typesetting and layout**, eliminating accidental blank lines at the end of pages, adjusting widely-spaced lines, positioning the pictures, and so on. The team has a look at the final version, and any layout errors are corrected. Then the publication goes to our publishing department in Dallas, USA, who do a final check and organise the commercial printing.

Six to nine months later the printed Bibles or NTs reach their destination—and there'll be a **dedication service** filled with rejoicing that they can now read the message of God's love in the language that speaks to their hearts!



A heated moment proofreading the Joola Kaasa NT (Senegal)