

JAARS **SPEEDING THE WORD TRANSCRIPT**

Speaker
Nico Doelman

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Interviewer
Arthur Lightbody

Primary Topic(s)
Transition of work in Suriname from SIL International to the Suriname Bible Society

Other Topics
OneStory, presenting creole stories orally

Location Discussed
Africa, Antigua, French Guiana, Guyana, the Netherlands, St. Croix, St. Lucia, St. Vincent

People Group (if named)
Arawak, Aukan, Carib, Saramaccan, Sranan Tongo, Suriname Javanese, Suriname Hindustani

Announcer:

Welcome to *Speeding the Word*, coming to you from the JAARS Center in Waxhaw, North Carolina, where JAARS speeds Bible translation for all people. And now our host Arthur Lightbody.

Lightbody:

I am talking today with my friend Nico Doelman, the tall guy from the Netherlands. It is good to be here in Dallas visiting with you, Nico.

Doelman:

It is nice to have the opportunity to tell something about what has happened in Suriname and the Caribbean.

Lightbody:

You are from the Netherlands. Would you like to greet the folks? How do you say “good morning”?

Doelman:

Goedemorgen.

Lightbody:

We are here in Dallas, as Nico mentioned. I am basically assigned at JAARS, but I also do some work with the Americas area. A lot of people don't know about all of the work that is going on across the Americas in Bible translation and literacy. Perhaps they don't know there are Dutch men and women that are serving in Bible translation, and we are really glad to work with you. You heard about Bible translation in the Netherlands—tell us how that happened and how you got involved.

Doelman:

Wycliffe Netherlands started in 1972, but even before that there were contacts with Wycliffe, and I still remember George Cowan coming to Delft—where I was studying at the university there—and telling students about Wycliffe. So I had an interest in Wycliffe early on and knew what they were doing. Still, the Lord guided me in applying for a job as a math teacher, but I never forgot Wycliffe and was always interested in missions. At a certain point I was able to do a translation workshop in the [United Kingdom] and found out that was something I would really like, especially to provide computer support to translators. That generated my interest, and I still had to wait for the time of the Lord—had to get married first, had to find a church that would support us. Then we applied for Wycliffe and went through a whole process there and had to get training, but after probably 10 years we were finally able to go to Suriname as computer support department manager.

Lightbody:

What was your role in the computer area? What kind of support did you provide?

Doelman:

Initially we were asked to manage the computer department in Suriname. In fact, it was a whole ... entity of about 40 or 50 members. There were six translation projects in Suriname, two in Guyana and one in St. Lucia that we were involved in. It implied that the translators needed help with their translation programs. They needed to learn new software; they needed to print their literacy materials and all that typesetting. In a variety of ways, I was involved in training them and helping them with computer work.

Lightbody:

That is a good word for those out there listening that may not know that we need people that work with computers. We've had other guests on that have said that. We are glad you went to help those people. Then you were invited to take part in leadership. Is that right?

Doelman:

After a while I was elected to become a member of the executive committee. In 1997 elections for director of the Suriname branch came up, and I let my name stand. A little bit to my surprise I was elected director, so that changed my focus, so I had to step down from my computer role and become an administrator.

Lightbody:

Can you tell us a little bit about what the picture of languages is in Suriname? Many of our listeners might not actually know where Suriname is, and they might not understand that there are several languages there. Can you give us that information, Nico?

Doelman:

Suriname is one of the three Guianas. In the northern part of Brazil you have Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. Suriname is actually four times as large as the Netherlands, but there are about 500,000 people living in the country. It is called "the world in miniature" by some, because every continent is represented there. Indentured laborers came to Suriname after slavery was abolished in the 1800s from India, from Indonesia. We have people from Africa there who worked on plantations, but we also have indigenous people and people from Europe. There are a variety of languages representing the whole world.

Lightbody:

What is the national language, the language of commerce, the language of the schools?

Doelman:

Well, since Suriname used to be a Dutch colony, Dutch is the national language that is used by the government and in the schools.

Lightbody:

What are some of the languages our Wycliffe translators were involved in?

Doelman:

Originally there were seven translation projects. The Arawak project was completed early on; in fact, it was not continued because of language vitality. We had six other projects in Saramaccan, Aukan, Carib, Suriname Javanese, Suriname Hindustani and Sranan Tongo.

Lightbody:

How many have completed Bibles or New Testaments?

Doelman:

We were able to do all the New Testaments, and [in] one language the Old Testament is now being translated. I must say two of those New Testaments [were] with the Suriname Bible Society, and the Suriname Bible Society is now doing the Old Testament translation project in Sranan Tongo. That is basically the progress that has been made.

Lightbody:

Now you went through transition, and we are talking a lot about transition. And that is one of the reports I am working on—how we work as organizations and how we work together. How many Wycliffe people do we actually have working in this area now? And how is the ongoing work being done?

Doelman:

During the 1990s we went through a time that most of the New Testaments were completed. It was an exciting time to see the enthusiasm of the people during those occasions and also seeing how the New Testaments were being used. At that time we were thinking that our work should probably be completed—not that everything was done, but that we felt our role was finished and we could turn it over to other people staying in Suriname. So we decided to work on a completion plan and to transition into a situation where we could withdraw and transfer the translation projects to others in Suriname. It was quite a process that we prepared. We had two centers; we had to sell the buildings. We had to find a good solution to see that the work would continue after we left. It was like the Lord timed all this that we were able to work together with the Bible Society on the Sranan Tongo project, where we had two separate translations projects that we decided to work together on this. That was the start of a cooperation for the future as well, where we were able to partner together and work out a plan with them so we could ultimately transfer all the work in Suriname and they would continue on with our support, but we were also planning to withdraw our membership more and more, as they were not needed any longer.

Lightbody:

We talk a lot about this type of transitioning in our organization, and sometimes we hear the older stories of the way it was done before, but there are many ways of doing it through partnerships. That's what we have been talking about here while I've been in Dallas on this trip. There are still many needs. Can you give us examples of needs, even during this transition period, where maybe somebody out there can come and help in the Bible translation movement—even in Suriname or this whole area?

Doelman:

Yes. We felt we were needed in Suriname, but basically in capacity building, meaning that we would send a consultant-trainer to help in training others—for instance, a literacy consultant who went to Suriname several times to train nationals in giving literacy classes and producing literacy materials. We still need other people sometimes as well who help with other projects that the Bible Society is working out. We are still partnering together and talking about how we can cooperate. We are kind of in the background, and the Bible Society is responsible for everything that happens.

Lightbody:

Now, you have seen a lot of the work—not only in Guyana and Suriname, where you served with your wife and children, but in the broader picture. Can you tell us a little bit about the whole Caribbean area, where you've also served as director for the Wycliffe people working there? What are some of the types of languages that are across this whole region?

Doelman:

Basically my responsibility is to oversee the work in the Caribbean. The majority of the languages are creole languages. A creole language is a mixture of a European language and African language where the vocabulary comes from the European language but the grammar is structured from the African language. The majority

of the creoles are English creoles. We have done a survey to find out if there is a translation needed in those creoles. In a number of those creoles, we feel there is a need for making the Scriptures accessible—especially to people who live in rural areas and don't understand the English language well, or in some cases the other European language [such as] French or Spanish. It is sometimes difficult to work in these situations where people are encouraged to learn English, because they need to have the opportunity to have a career and to learn how to get jobs.

Sometimes it means, too, that they say creole is not a way to use Scriptures. [Some say] creole is not really a language; it is a dialect. Or creole is broken English, so the language status is really low and not accepted by everybody. Still they talk creole all the time on the streets and in their homes, so it is definitely a language that is fully alive. We feel there is a need for translation, so we try working together with the church leaders and build vision for translation. We have found the written translation in most cases is something they object to because they don't want to see creole written down—they think it is a step back. We don't agree, but on the other hand you have to be sensitive to what they feel the needs are. We have found out they have no objection to an oral translation, so we are focusing on doing stories in creole. I would say this is really successful, because they identify [with] the story—it is a part of their culture. It is something they feel very comfortable with, and they really like telling stories.

Lightbody:

That is very interesting. Could you give us a couple of examples, perhaps, of some of the languages where this story approach has worked? Give us an idea.

Doelman:

We decided to start three projects that we called “OneStory projects” because OneStory is the organization. Basically it is a partnership of Wycliffe Bible Translators, the international board of Youth With A Mission, Campus Crusade for Christ and Trans World Radio.

We started three translation projects in St. Croix, Antigua and St. Vincent where we sent a OneStory team. They stayed there for two years and focused on learning the language, and they also focused on telling stories through local mother-tongue speakers. They trained people to tell the story, then they recorded about 50 stories and put them on CDs—high-quality production. Basically, the set of stories has a panoramic view of the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. They tried to go into the worldview of the cultures to see what stories would fit best that would really provide good answers to the questions people have. We have those stories now, and we are trying to encourage other communities and islands to also step in and use the stories.

Lightbody:

This interview was recorded a few weeks ago in Dallas, Texas, with Nico Doelman. Have a great day, everyone.

Announcer:

We hope that you have enjoyed *Speeding the Word*. Arthur Lightbody would love to hear from you personally if you are interested in becoming part of the Bible translation movement. He welcomes your call at 1-704-843-6048. You may look us up on the Web at www.jaars.org.