

# Spot the Flaws

June 2022

## Hmwaveke Translation Project



We give thanks for the life of Thierry Michel-Villaz, who was an immense support to his wife Yvonne in the Hmwaveke translation project. Last year, Thierry, Yvonne and their son Thierry Junior moved from the town of La Foa on New Caledonia's West Coast to Yvonne's Hmwaveke-speaking home village of Tieta.

In the months that followed, when not curtailed by COVID restrictions, they led the group in its current project of translating Luke's Gospel. Thierry's moral support and computer know-how was a huge boost to the team.

Thierry's health deteriorated in March and April this year and he died in hospital in Noumea just before Easter. We'll remember Thierry's love for God, his pastor's heart, his spirit of worship and his words of exhortation.

Following his death, Yvonne wrote, "Thierry has done his part and now I must continue the work. It will feel very strange to lead the group without him, but God is there to help me, and your prayers give me the boost I need to keep going. The Lord knows how dear this project is to my heart."



The group's first meeting without Thierry was emotional for everyone, as they missed his encouraging presence, but they

were delighted to welcome a new attendee, and grateful to have the use of the village meeting room and the community centre in the nearby town.

Yvonne will continue to send the translated passages to Marietta for checking.

## Paicî Study Progress

Ian is getting closer to completing the first part of his programme of study of the Paicî language: a 10,000-word research proposal. This needs to be submitted to the University of Waikato postgraduate research committee for approval to proceed. As well as explaining Paicî's characteristics in comparison to other Oceanic languages, the proposal includes a comprehensive summary of previous research on relevant topics, examining their strengths and weaknesses. This has involved tracking down obscure linguistic books and articles written in both French and English between 1946 and the present day.

Despite Paicî having the most speakers of the indigenous New Caledonian mainland languages, its complete grammatical structure has not yet been analysed. It is one of around 450 Oceanic languages, which are spoken in Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia across a vast swathe of the Pacific Ocean. As an introduction to the language, Ian and Paicî translator Jacques have collaborated to write an article about Paicî for a website that publishes descriptions of minority languages.

## Word Order Quiz

A detailed analysis of the word order of the sentences in this newsletter might prove challenging, but at a basic level, English word order is **Subject Verb Object (SVO)**, e.g., *Peter baked a cake*. Word order in Oceanic languages varies.

Your turn at analysis! Write **SVO, SOV, VOS, VSO, OSV** or **OVS** for the following examples:

- 1. *Peter a cake baked*** (Order used in some parts of Papua New Guinea)
- 2. *baked Peter a cake*** (Much of Polynesia/some of Solomon Islands)
- 3. *Peter baked a cake*** (Most of Vanuatu)
- 4. *baked a cake Peter*** (Fijian/much of New Caledonia)
- 5. *a cake baked Peter*** (Äiwoo in the Solomon Islands is the only Oceanic language known to use this order.)
- 6. *a cake Peter baked*** (Tobati in Papua is the only Oceanic language known to use this order.)

### ANSWERS:

1. SOV; 2. VSO; 3. SVO; 4. VOS; 5. OVS; 6. OSV

## New Caledonia Independence Referendum

In December last year, a third independence referendum was held in New Caledonia. This resulted in a No (to independence) vote of 96.5%, a vast increase from the previous 56.7% and 53.3%. The hugely different outcome arose from the variation in voter turnout: from 85.69% in the previous referendum down to 43.87%. Kanak pro-independence parties had asked the French government to postpone the referendum to allow for a traditional mourning period, as so many Kanaks had died during the country's COVID-19 outbreak. The French government declined the request, and the pro-independence leaders called on Kanaks to boycott the referendum, a call which was evidently heeded. The division in opinion will make for challenging discussions ahead.

## Rest and Recreation

When we were in our late teens/early twenties, we canoed down the Whanganui River with a group of friends. A few years ago, one of the group suggested a 40-year reunion trip! The idea was put on hold for a couple of years, due to COVID and sorting out participants. Our son Michael and oldest grandson James were going to join us, but they and our group organiser had to pull out, due to illness or injury. In January, the remaining six of us made the trip and spent five days canoeing from Taumarunui to Pipiriki.



We appreciated getting away from the computer and into nature, the beauty of the river and surrounding hills, spending time with friends, and finding we were physically still up to the task!

## Family News

In April, our 11-year-old grandson Legion spent a few days with us. He was over the moon to visit Staglands, a wildlife reserve near Wellington, and to get up close to many different animals. He loved it so much, he declared, "This will be the best memory of my life!"

Go to <https://wycliffenz.org/> to read the latest issue of *Living Words*, including an article by Marietta.



## Prayer Points

- Pray for political leaders in New Caledonia to be able to work together to shape a joint future.
- Pray for encouragement for Yvonne and the Hmwaveke translation team as they forge on without Thierry. Praise that one of the group is able to get computer training in the nearby town.
- Pray for Marietta to make strides in understanding written Hmwaveke.
- Praise that Ian is close to finishing his research proposal. Pray for freedom from the neck pain that's been bothering him.
- Praise God for his love for each of us!

*Thank you for your prayers!  
Marietta and Ian*

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