



# *NEW LIFE FELLOWSHIP*

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## HELPS FOR SPEAKING THROUGH A TRANSLATOR

Our goal in communication is transfer our idea to another's mind so that they clearly understand us. In communicating the Gospel it's very important to speak words which we can understand. You know how difficult it is to communicate to someone who knows your language and culture, you can imagine how difficult it is to communicate to someone who doesn't come from your culture and who doesn't know your language fluently. In Cambodia there are many people who speak different levels of English, but most people even though they can carry on a good conversation with you, they aren't fluent. Therefore just because a Cambodian nods his head in agreement doesn't mean that he understands. Trust me; I'm speaking from many years of experience. Therefore, you cannot just come in and talk in your normal way – that is, if your goal is to be understood and get your message across. Especially at NLF, very few of even our best English speakers can translate "normal" English language. Therefore, we have prepared these guidelines to help you communicate your idea clearly. It's important for you, as the speaker, to think about what you want to say and how you want to say it in simple English. To be quite frank, you should prepare your lesson/lecture/testimony to be understood by a third grade student. If you cannot explain your idea using simple language you will probably not be understood clearly. Preparing a lesson this way may be work for you, but our goal is to be understood, correct?

1. **Do not use idioms and "Christianese."** Idioms or expressions, such as "hot dog!" "Far out" "He's lost his marbles" and other such expressions will not be funny to most people nor will they translate into Khmer. Christianese, such as "under the blood" or "the Holy Spirit is moving" will often be translated literally and will make no sense at all. It's often difficult for English speakers to speak without using idioms. Our language is filled with it. Just start noticing your friends and how frequently they use it. I just picked up the local English language paper. Let's see how many idioms and expressions are used in it:
  - "Communist leaders are trying to silence their critics by an old-fashioned crackdown..."
  - "The authorities have muzzled newspaper..."
  - "Publications voicing independent opinions..."
  - "The law paves the way for..."
  - "That technical glitch had stalled the law..."

Very few English speakers in Cambodia would be able to translate the above sentences correctly.

2. **Be careful about your accent.** Australian, British, Southern US accents are sometimes difficult for Cambodians to understand so please try to speak slowly and clearly.
3. **Don't use big words.** Technical words associated with your expertise should be reviewed with your translator before you speak. Again, looking at the front page of today's newspaper, these words are too difficult:

- Unanimously
- Annulled
- In favor of
- Eliminate
- Goodwill
- Surveillance
- Accommodate

I've noticed that English speakers, at least Americans, like to make their sentences using the noun, while Cambodians like to use verbs. For example:

"Our redemption is found in Christ." Cambodians would translate it "Christ has redeemed us.

"The Fall of Adam and Eve led all of humanity into sin." Cambodians would translate it "Adam and Eve fell into sin and therefore, all people after them became sinners, too."

4. **Don't speak too fast.** You must practice speaking slower than normal. When we speak fast we slur our words together, making it even more difficult to be understood.
5. **Meet with your translator before you speak.** You should always find out who your translator is and meet with them before, looking at the Bible verses together (so he knows how to translate the biblical words you're using according to how the Bible translates them); sharing with him the important words you will be using and building your lesson on so he knows how to translate them; making sure the Khmer Bible translates the verse similar to how your English Bible translates them; and praying together.
6. **Be careful about making comparisons, long analogies and give spiritual application to natural things.** I've heard many translators get lost in the spiritual analogies of speakers. Cambodians usually don't use those kinds of abstract ideas. Be careful about saying the lampstand in the Tabernacle of Moses represents Christ, and then go into detailed comparisons. Your listeners will get lost, as well as the translator. It can be done and of course it's Biblical to do so, but you must be clear. I've listened to some preachers

who, it seemed to me, were not exactly clear themselves about how the analogy fit together. (Fog in the pulpit, fog in the pew). If I use analogies, I usually constantly remind the audience what the analogy represents:

"...and the water, which represents the presence of the Holy Spirit, was up to his knees..."

7. **It's really no use to try to tell jokes unless they are really corny jokes.** They just don't go over. I gave up telling most Western jokes after the people always responded by just giving me blank stares. Also, alliteration or making your points using the English alphabet are useless:

"Today I want to talk to you about the STARE Principle: Start Transferring Active Righteous Expressions." (It hardly makes sense in English!) The acronym doesn't translate nor does the English meaning. Also, if you were to make your points: S – T – A – R – E, it wouldn't make sense.

8. **Have a conversation with your translator before you speak.** This will help you discern his level of English. Have a normal conversation with him, using your normal manner of speaking and words. Ask him questions which he must answer based upon your conversation. You will find out very quickly how well he understands English.

9. **Preparing to speak through a translator means a lot of work for you, as the speaker, if you want to be understood clearly:**

- Think about the words you use.
- Think about the abstract ideas you use.
- Think about the cultural aspects of your culture which have no relevance in Cambodian culture (malls, elevators – anything modern!)
- Speak slowly.
- Consider your accent.
- Check Bible verses and key words and ideas with your translator.

We want your communication to be successful. We know you have something important to say. Therefore, let's work together to get the message across.