When to start a translation program

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In September 2003 I wrote up a list of what I then called "necessary pre-conditions contributing to a successful translation program" based on what we had learned from the Kapingamarangi project. This was the foundation for the Polynesian strategy which since then morphed into the Isles of the Sea strategy. When one or more of these pre-conditions does not exist, it is better to wait starting a translation program until these conditions exist. Special strategies need to be developed to get to this point.
I have adjusted the list in some minor points to incorporate what we have learned since then, but mostly it is the same set of conditions we have used in starting translation projects in Polynesia and Micronesia.

1. **High motivation** among the leadership of the language group to have the Scriptures in their own language. This motivation shows itself in a number of ways:
   a. The majority of the church leaders are in favour of a translation project.
   b. A translation committee has been established. Representatives from the various churches and denominations in the language area are represented in this committee. If there are a number of dialects in the language area, then representatives from the various dialects should also be represented in this committee. The various factions (religious or otherwise) have agreed to work together. I have found it useful every now and then when factional differences get in the way of working well together to remind them what we are all about, to help them re-focus on what they really want: the Bible in their own language.
   c. The translation committee has shown a willingness to work together with an outside advisor/consultant, and to provide logistical support such as housing for such an outsider.
   d. The local language is being used in the churches, as much as possible, both for sermons and Bible readings.
   e. The committee has initiated fund raising for the translation project.
   f. The community is prepared to care for the concrete needs of the advisor team.
   g. A group of potential translators has been identified, representing all the denominations present in the language area.
   h. The committee has worked out ways to recompense the translators for their work, if they are being paid at all.

2. **Linguistic conditions**:
   a. The orthography has been established.
   b. Most of the people are literate.
   c. An advisor team is available. This can be an experienced or inexperienced SIL advisor team, or a local team with translation experience in a related language. The advisor will supply some of the skills that will be missing in the local translation team.