

Chapter 12: Oral and Written Translation

Objective: *Participants will have the information they need for the community to decide which process is best for doing their heart language (HL) translation.*

Core Concepts:

- Some communities are more comfortable communicating important messages orally.
- There is Bible translation software available for these communities to preserve their oral preferences.
- Only the local Church can decide the format that is best for their language community.
- The final format should be decided before translation begins, as it will determine what software can be used.

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name (Mal. 3:16).
How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written... (Rom. 10:14-15a).

Intro:

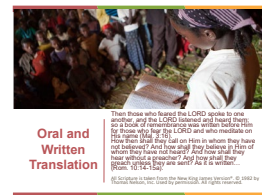
Many languages in the world do not yet have a complete written form, or perhaps literacy is low in a community even if it has a written form. We want to talk about how we can best serve these language communities in getting Scripture.

Time: 15-30 min.

Materials:

- ✓ *White board*
- ✓ *Slide Deck:*
T3.Slides_12_Oral.and.Written.
- ✓ *Bible with place markers*

Teacher's Notes



Some key thoughts from Gen.11:1-9:

1. God created languages and therefore knows every language.
2. Even though God used the original confusion as a judgment, language diversity is not a bad thing. Instead, it is a way in which God spread people throughout the earth.
3. God is not surprised by the challenges faced in spreading His Word, even to remote, unwritten, or minority languages.

Let's talk about why this discussion is important.

If we picture a spectrum with completely oral communication on one side and completely written communication on the other side, **the majority of languages with no Scripture are on the oral communication side of the spectrum. That means they either have no written form of their language, or else they do have a written form but there are few people that use it often.**

Communities that rely primarily on oral communication may be more respectful of oral communication, and more comfortable with significant information being passed on orally.

Notes:



Read (or have a participant read) Genesis 11:1–9.

Share a little bit of data on the number of oral languages in the world (over 3000), and how oral communities function differently than literate communities.



These are two of the types of oral communities:

1. Those that express important cultural information orally **and consider that ideal for their community**
2. Those that, although they do not yet have a standardized written language, **wish to communicate important cultural information in written form**

The first kind of oral community might choose an oral translation of Scripture that can be listened to. This is an audio recording of people speaking the words of Scripture.

The second kind of oral community might choose a written translation of Scripture that can be read on papers, or in a book form.

Discuss:

- **Who should make the decision about which format to use?**

The believers (the local church) in the community, who are invested in getting Scripture for their heart language, should make the decision. These are the people in the best position to decide whether an oral or written translation will serve most effectively.

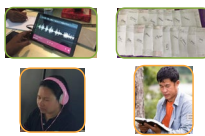
- **What should be considered in making that decision?**

Notes:

Differences in Oral Communities



Oral Translation Written Translation



Who Decides?



Guide discussion to help participants understand that each community is the authority on its own needs.

Written: If the mother tongue has been a written language for a long time, and most people in the community can read that written language, a written translation is likely the best option.

Helpful considerations are:

- Do they also write in their heart language?
- Is there written literature in the heart language?
- Is it age-specific or common for people to read and write in their heart language?
- Is the number of people who read and write in that language (are “literate” in that language) growing or decreasing?

Oral: If the language has never been in a standardized written form and the people are proud of their oral culture, they are probably used to important truths being passed to them orally. They may be best served with an oral translation.

Notes:

What Should the Church Consider?



- Has there been a written language for a long time?
- Does the language group have other literates?
- Do the people read and write in their heart language?
- Is that common?
- Is the number of readers growing?

This discussion helps prepare facilitators to reach and lead other language groups in translation.

It is important for them to understand what factors to consider, but emphasize that their job will NOT be to decide the format for another community.

Instead, facilitators should present future partners with thorough information so that the believing community can make an informed decision for their own language group.

Helpful considerations are:

- Will people in the community have a way to listen to a translation—like an mp3 player or smart phone?
- Is there a cultural preference for oral communication for important information?
- Is literacy encouraged or desired?
- Which format will enable the community to use the translation right away?
- Are the translators literate in the Gateway Language (GL)? (This is important because the source text will be written. If translators cannot read the source text, some of them have audio, or a volunteer could read the text aloud for the translators. These factors will impact the process used.)

Here are the options Wycliffe Associates offers for translation process and format:

If there is a writing system:

- Translate the Scripture in writing for a written translation.
- Translate the Scripture in writing and make an audio recording for an audio translation.

Notes:

What Should the Church Consider?



- How could people listen to an oral translation?
- What do they prefer?
- Is literacy wanted?
- Are translators able to read the source language?

What Are Options for Translation?



- If there is a writing system:
Translate in writing
GL
Translate in writing and record an audio for oral reading
- If there is no currently used writing system:
Translate by speaking and produce an oral translation

Terms to be aware of when discussing processes:

- **Audio translation** refers to an audio recording of a previously done written translation. Oral communities can easily use this translation, but may

If there is no commonly used writing system:

- Translate the Scripture by speaking to produce an oral translation. (This may later be transcribed to produce a written translation.)

refuse to do it for themselves because translators must be able to read and write. It is also a long process because it requires both steps (written translation and recording).

• **Oral translation**

refers to a translator speaking and recording a translation after reading or listening to the source text, or listening to a speaker reading the source text aloud.

Teach Back:

- **Who determines what kind of translation will be best?**
- **What questions should they consider?**
- **What might happen if the church doesn't consider the options before they start the translation?**

It is important for a translation team to know the final format for their translation before beginning, because that goal determines what process and what tools they will use.

Notes:

Though all formats will use the 8 steps of the MAST method, the process will differ for each format depending on whether written source texts and drafts are used or only an audio source text and recorded oral drafts.

Confirm: Participants understand the options for translation processes. They understand that each language community makes their own decision about which format to use. They have begun to consider the factors that must inform that decision, and how the format will impact the process used for translation.