

05 Oral and Written Translation – Walkthrough

(White board; slide deck – 30 min.)

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.

Read Genesis 11:1–9. Some key thoughts from this passage: 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 dispersed people throughout the earth. 3. God is not surprised by the challenges faced in spreading His word, even to remote, unwritten, or minority languages.

Background: 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.

- If we picture a spectrum with completely oral communication on one side and completely written communication on the other side, the majority of languages remaining on the list 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.
 - These are two examples 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: it 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.

Important Questions:

Q: Who should make the decision on which format to use?

A: The local Church should make the decision—that is, the decision should be made by those who are believers in the community and are invested in getting Scripture for their

heart language. These are the people best positioned to decide whether an oral or written translation will serve most effectively.

Q: And what should be considered in making that decision?

A: *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, then a written translation would be the best fit.

- Do the people read and write in their heart language?
 - If they say yes, ask some more questions to determine if it is 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 (“literate” in that language) growing or decreasing?

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

- Will people in the community have a way to listen to a translation—like an mp3 player or smart phone?
- Does the language community prefer oral communication for important information?
- Is literacy encouraged or desired?
- Are the translators literate in the Gateway Language (GL)? The source text is written. Some GLs have audio, or the source text could be read aloud.

Share the options 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.

If there is no commonly used writing system:

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

Q & A – Review and Confirm Understanding:

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

Confirm: When translators understand the options, they will make an informed decision about how they will do their translation, and they will be better prepared to assist others in making this decision.