

Video Script Chapter 12: Oral and Written Translation

Video 12.1

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.

Let's read Genesis 11:1-9.

Some key thoughts from this passage are:

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.

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.

Video 12.2

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?

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- 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.

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.

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.)