

## 05 Oral and Written Translation – Walkthrough

*(White board; slide deck – 30 min.)*

**Intro:** Some languages in the world do not yet have a complete written form. Some communities with written languages have low literacy. Other languages have a written system, but very little published work. We want to talk about how to best serve these communities in translating 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 the 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:** According to the [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com) almost half of the world's living languages do not have a formal written language.

- Many minority language communities who need a Bible lack a standardized writing system.
- Communities that rely primarily on oral communication may be more respectful of oral communication and more comfortable with significant information being passed on orally. This should be considered when discussing what type of translation they want.
- Some languages who lack a standardized writing system still have a method commonly used to write some things in their language. They may use the writing system of the language they learned in school. They may text or have signs and announcements in their language borrowing a script from a common language near them.

### **Important Questions:**

**Q:** Who should make the decision on what kind of translation, oral or written, to work on?

**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. Trainers should carefully explain the challenges in creating an oral translation. An audio narration of a written Bible is easier and less costly to produce than an oral translation. Oral cultures may be better served in this way.

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

**A: Written –**

- Is there a written form of the language, even if it is not completely standardized or formally recognized?
- Is literacy encouraged or desired?
- Do the people want a printed Bible?
- More tools and easier-to-use resources are available for written translations.
- Making changes or revisions in written translation is much easier.
- If literacy is low, the written Bible can be recorded for an audio version making the Bible accessible to those who cannot read.

**A: Oral –** If the language does not have a written form, oral translation may be an option.

- Will people in the community have a way to listen to a translation—like an mp3 player or smart phone?
- 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, but supporting tools are **only** available in written form.
- Editing audio files requires more time, effort, and technical ability than editing written work.

**Share the options for translation process and format:**

**If there is a writing system:**

- Translate the Scripture in writing for a written translation.
  - If the writing system is not standardized yet, encourage the language group to consider that translating in written form could be a significant help in the process of standardizing their writing system. The translators will have extra work in keeping track of the decisions the team makes about punctuation, spelling, and specific ways to write sounds and words.
- 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.

**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.