

Broadcast #4 - Quality

LIAM:

Hello! This is Liam and Sofia, continuing the story of how God brought His Word to our mother-tongue language – and how you can bring God’s Word to yours.

SOFIA:

We began our story by sharing our heart’s desire to have the Bible in our mother-tongue language. This was important to us because the Bible has been available only in the national language. Many people do not understand the national language well enough to really understand God’s message or feel it is for them.

LIAM:

I recently read about a similar situation in Jesus’ time. Greek was a prominent language throughout the world. We could think of it as an official language, like our national language. There was a scholarly religious language – Hebrew. There also was Aramaic, the language of the people. Aramaic is the language Jesus spoke every day. There is evidence in Scripture Jesus could understand Hebrew and Greek. But when He taught the people, He did not use the most prominent language in the world. He did not use the scholarly language of religion. He chose to use the everyday language of the people. He taught in Aramaic so people could understand and know God’s messages were for them.

SOFIA:

We want our people to have the same experience of hearing Jesus’ message in the language we use every day. We prayed and prayed for a way our people could have Scripture in our mother-tongue language. We knew translation could take many years. We thought especially of the older generation like Liam’s mother. We wanted her to be able to experience God’s Word in our mother-tongue language during her lifetime.

LIAM:

God answered our prayer! Our friend told us about a new method of Bible translation called MAST that another language group used. One of the most amazing parts of our friend’s story is how believers from his language community were the ones who translated and led the whole project. The MAST method is designed so that local churches can do their own translation. And they were able to translate the whole New Testament into their mother-tongue language in about one year!

SOFIA:

A mission organization, Wycliffe Associates, helped us and our team of volunteers to learn this new translation method. Our team has been working hard for a year now. We have finished translating over half of the New Testament. Members of our community have tears of joy because God now is speaking directly to them in a language they fully understand.

LIAM:

In our previous time together, we went over the eight steps of translation. Four steps for translating and four steps for checking. Let us review them quickly now.

SOFIA:

Step one is CONSUME. You read the chapter you are assigned in the national language to ensure you understand its message.

LIAM:

Step two is VERBALIZE. You tell the message of your Scripture out loud to a partner in your mother-tongue language without looking back at the source text.

SOFIA:

Step three is CHUNK. You divide your portion of Scripture into smaller pieces. Usually each chunk is one to four verses long.

LIAM:

Step four is the BLIND DRAFT. First you review a chunk of Scripture from the source text. Then you write the message of the chunk in your mother-tongue language without looking at the source text. You write it as if you were telling it to someone. Your goal is for it to sound natural and flow as conversation does.

SOFIA:

Those are the four steps to draft the translation. Completing those four steps is quite an accomplishment!

LIAM:

Those four steps are followed by four checking steps. We must ensure our translation is clear and accurately brings God's message to our people.

SOFIA:

Step five is SELF-EDIT. You compare your blind draft with the source text to see if you have missed any important ideas or words. You check again to make sure it sounds natural, the way you would speak to someone if you were telling them the message in person. You make corrections and edits, so your translation is even better.

LIAM:

Step six is PEER-EDIT. This step is done with another member of the translation team. It gets their perspective on whether you have captured the meaning of the Scripture you are working on. This other person should compare the text to the source text to make sure everything is there. Reading it out loud helps them answer questions about naturalness. Do they feel it sounds smooth? Is it clear? Was anything confusing? Did anything sound strange to them? If it did, this is the time to make changes.

SOFIA:

Step seven is the KEYWORD CHECK. This step is done working with a different member of the translation team or group. It is to be sure all key words like names, numbers and important terms in the passage have been included and are represented accurately and consistently.

LIAM:

Step eight is the VERSE-BY-VERSE CHECK. This is another way to be sure the translation sounds natural in your mother-tongue language and the message of the source text is represented. This step can be done a few different ways. What worked best for our team was to translate the Scripture back into the language of the source text and then compare it to the original source text. This helped us make sure the message and all the important points were there and translated clearly.

SOFIA:

Throughout all these steps, remember to pray for God's guidance.

LIAM:

Yes, Sofia. That is true. Prayer is necessary. We prayed as a team. Members of the community also prayed for us and our work. Having prayer support is important. For the sake of those who will read our translation, it is important it is done well.

SOFIA:

We want to be sure our translation is high quality and gains the approval from the churches in our community. Then the church will use it and the people will use it. Before we started our translation work, we invited each church to send representatives to attend a meeting. We shared our vision to have God's Word in our mother-tongue language. We asked their approval of the project.

LIAM:

We asked the representatives two questions. One, did they want volunteers from their church on the translation team? Two, would they help with the next phase of quality assurance and approval?

SOFIA:

All were supportive of our work. Some of the churches agreed to have people join our translation team. Nearly all the churches wanted to be part of the next phase of quality assurance and approval.

LIAM:

It was good to know we had the support of the churches in our community. We began to work on the translation. When we finished a major portion of the book of Mark, it was time for our team to meet with the representatives from the churches to start the quality assurance phase. We found a time when all the church representatives could meet. We began the meeting with prayer. We shared the vision for God's Word in our mother-tongue language. Then we asked everyone to think about what makes a good translation. After a quiet time for thought, we asked each person to create their own list of ten characteristics of a quality translation.

SOFIA:

Each person shared their completed list. We wrote down all the characteristics on an easel. Everyone was surprised the lists were very similar to each other. It was easy to merge them and create one list everyone agreed on.

LIAM:

Then we discussed each of the characteristics on the list. We defined what makes each characteristic true in a translation. For example, what does it mean to say the Bible translation should be accurate? We came up with two characteristics of accuracy. One characteristic was key words and terms are accurate when compared to the source text. The second characteristic was historical accuracy. Did it match up with Bible history in scripture?

SOFIA:

Then we worked together to develop questions to determine if a passage met the characteristic. We made sure the questions could be answered "yes" or "no." Think about the characteristic of accuracy of key words and terms compared to the source text. We had two questions about accuracy. First, are all the key words and terms in the source text found in the translation? Second, are the words and terms accurately translated?

LIAM:

The group answers each question for each characteristic for each chapter as they review the translation. If the answer to a question ever is “no,” it is an area to review and improve so the answer becomes “yes.”

SOFIA:

Having “yes” for each of the questions is a clear way for all the church representatives to approve the work. They all agreed on the characteristics of a quality translation. They all agreed on the questions to check for the characteristic. So, when they all answer “yes” for all the questions, we know the translation meets their standards of quality.

LIAM:

This process takes a lot of work and time. It is not easy and cannot be rushed. It is well worth the effort to have the churches involved in quality assurance in this way. It is important they approve the translation as you finish a major portion of each book.

SOFIA:

Another step you can take to assure the quality of your translation is to gather groups of people from the churches or the community to listen to the reading of selected chapters of your translation.

LIAM:

After reading a portion, stop and ask the group if it was clear and flowed naturally. Can they summarize the message? Did they understand it well? Did they have any questions? Did it seem to contradict any point of theology or doctrine? Based on the responses, the translation team then can decide on any necessary revisions. One tool we found to help guide this discussion was a Reviewer’s Guide we were told about when we started our translation on the bibleineverylanguage.org website. This is the same website where we got our source text and other helpful resources.

SOFIA:

There is an additional benefit to involving the community in this way. It increases interest in the translation task. People may be excited about volunteering after they experience the joy of hearing God’s Word in their mother-tongue language. More help is always welcome! Those who cannot volunteer themselves can support your translation work by praying for the team.

LIAM:

We pray sharing our experience encourages you. If you already are working on your mother-tongue translation, we hope it encourages you to continue your work. Keep doing the eight steps. Expand your team by getting others involved from your church and community. Keep in mind the goal of having Scripture in your mother-tongue language so all can know God’s message is for them. Keep up the good work!

SOFIA:

If there is not a translation project in your area, we hope this encourages you to start one. It is an important and rewarding endeavor. Next time we will share tools you can use for translating. We also will share ways you can distribute your translated Scripture with your community.

If you have questions about your current project or want to start a project in your own mother-tongue language, please call or text (local country partner info) or send an email to reachingalldialects@gmail.com or radio@wycliffeassociates.org.