

Broadcast #6 – Church Engagement

LIAM:

Hello, this is Liam and Sofia. We are here to continue sharing our story about how God's Word came to our people in our mother-tongue language.

SOFIA:

The Bible was available to us in the national language. It was okay for Liam and me because we are fluent in reading and speaking the national language. There are many people in our community who are not fluent. I remember when I would read to my cousin in the national language, she was confused about the meaning. To her and to many others in our community, God's Word was in a language they did not really understand. Even the lessons in the church were in the national language. It made them feel God's Word was not for them. We prayed God would help us find a way they could hear God's Word in our mother-tongue language.

LIAM:

God answered our prayers! A friend from another community shared good news. A language group there used a new translation method called MAST. It is short for Mobilized Assistance Supporting Translation. They were able to translate the New Testament into their mother-tongue language in about a year. A mission organization called Wycliffe Associates developed this new method. They have been sharing and supporting the use of the method around the world.

SOFIA:

We learned about the eight-step method of translation. Each step has its own descriptive name – CONSUME is when you read and understand your Scripture portion, VERBALIZE is when you tell the message of the portion out loud, CHUNK is breaking your chapter into smaller sections. BLIND DRAFT is when you write out the chunk in your mother-tongue language without looking at the source text.

LIAM:

After those four steps, there are four steps for checking and to assure quality. Each of these four steps has a descriptive name as well. There is the SELF-EDIT where you compare your blind draft to the source text and make corrections and edits. There is PEER-EDIT, where you work with another translator to get their perspective on whether you have captured the meaning of the Scripture you are working on. Then working with a different translator, you do the KEYWORD CHECK to be sure all key words like names, numbers and important terms are included and represented accurately in the translation. Finally, there is the VERSE-BY-VERSE CHECK. You may recall our team chose to do this step by translating the Scripture portion back into the national language and then compared it to the original source text. We made sure all the content was there and sounded natural in our mother-tongue language.

SOFIA:

We also talked about other ways to assure a quality translation by working with people in the community. Last time we talked about how tools and pipelines are important in the translation process and in sharing the translation with the community.

LIAM:

We talked about the role of the church a little bit last time. It is so important we wanted to go into more detail. Today we want to tell you more about how we engaged the churches in our community. This is an important step because a foundational belief of this method is that the local church has the authority and responsibility for translation into their mother-tongue language. That means the translation of God's Word doesn't rely on an outside or partner organization. It is our job. It is up to us.

SOFIA:

First let us share with you what we learned from Acts chapter 2. The events of this chapter take place after Jesus had risen from the dead. He had spent time with His disciples for forty days and then ascended into heaven. Jesus promised His disciples He would send a Comforter and Helper. The disciples spent much time together in prayer seeking what they should do.

LIAM:

About ten days later, the disciples were in Jerusalem celebrating the Jewish feast of Pentecost. People from many different countries had come to Jerusalem for the celebration.

SOFIA:

The disciples gathered in a room to pray. Suddenly they heard the sound of wind. They saw what appeared as a flame of fire over each of them. This was the sign of the Holy Spirit – the Comforter and Helper Jesus had promised. Each disciple began telling the wonderful message of God to the people who had gathered in Jerusalem from all over the world.

LIAM:

The amazing thing is each of the people heard the message in their own language!

SOFIA:

Let me repeat your statement because it is so important. All people present heard the message in their mother-tongue language. From the beginning of the church, it was important to God for people to hear His Word in their own language. It was not only the major, larger languages. It was not only the official national languages. It was each person's language!

LIAM:

Reaching everyone with God's message in their mother-tongue language continues to be a priority for the church. The church can play an important role in not only translating God's Word but reaching out to other churches and language groups to teach what they have learned. We wanted and needed the churches in our community to be involved with our translation project.

SOFIA:

The first thing we did was to spend time in prayer, asking God to lead us to the right people within each of the area churches. We prayed God would open their hearts and guide our conversations.

LIAM:

We asked each of the pastors in our area if they would give us the opportunity to meet with them and share about this new translation method.

SOFIA:

We wanted to make a good impression and help the pastors experience what it would be like to have Scripture in our mother-tongue language. So, we carefully translated a few chapters. We made sure they were formatted nicely. We copied each one on clean paper. We wrote very neatly. When we met, we read part of a chapter aloud to the pastor. It was the first time many of them heard Scripture in their mother-tongue language. Often the pastor was visibly moved. Some had tears in their eyes. One applauded!

LIAM:

We left a copy of the translated chapters with each pastor. We asked for them and their congregations to support and get involved with the translation project. We suggested several ways they could partner with us.

SOFIA:

They could encourage church members to become part of our team. Having more translators could keep the translation moving forward.

LIAM:

They could get involved in supporting quality assurance. They could review translated passages to identify unclear areas or where wording does not flow naturally.

SOFIA:

We are grateful many of the churches accepted our invitation and got involved. The work can go more quickly with more people translating and participating in quality assurance. However, it does bring a few challenges. We want to prepare you for those in case you encounter them as you work with the churches in your area.

LIAM:

One challenge is every church brings its own doctrine. Everyone on the translation team brings their own doctrine, too. We each have certain viewpoints or perspectives on how we interpret the Scriptures. As a team, we sometimes found it hard to simply translate the text and not impose our own doctrinal perspective.

SOFIA:

Here is an example. Mark chapter one talks about baptism. As you may know, there are several traditions about baptism and how it should be performed today. We found some members of our team included their baptismal tradition when they translated this passage.

LIAM:

They did not do this intentionally. It was natural to them to see this story through the lens of their own traditions. In their translation, some wrote Jesus went down into the water and water was poured over Him. Others wrote that Jesus was put under the water.

SOFIA:

We carefully looked at the Scripture passage. It says Jesus went into the water and was baptized. So, the question is what does “baptize” mean. Does it mean water was poured over him or that he was put under? Since we did not have a word for baptize in our language, we needed to know the meaning of this word to translate it without doctrinal bias. After a lot of talking, we decided to borrow the national language word for baptize, so that we did not add anything to the message. The translation should not add anything to the original message.

LIAM:

Another challenge is culture. In our culture, age and position are held in high respect. There is nothing wrong with respect but sometimes it can bring an element of power and control. Here is an example. An older church leader is part of our team. For a while, we found ourselves turning to him to make all decisions about translation questions. We were all quiet when he spoke. No one ever questioned his statements, even if everyone else looked at the passage in a different way. We gave him the respect we had been taught to give those who are older and those who hold positions of leadership. In our culture, women especially have been taught to respect men and let men make the decisions.

SOFIA:

One day as we were translating a passage, the Spirit led this older church leader to a new insight. He realized humility comes with respect. He understood there is value in everyone’s perspective. The Spirit told him sometimes he might even be wrong. This was a hard lesson for the older church leader. It was changing something he had assumed his whole life. The lesson impacted him greatly.

LIAM:

It also changed how our team interacted with him. Now he welcomed our questions and listened to our thoughts. We think honoring the perspective of each person has resulted in a more quality translation.

SOFIA:

The church leader now speaks to other elder leaders about this lesson and his experience. He tells them of the need to give younger people the opportunity to speak out and contribute. He also makes sure people understand women also should be given this permission, regardless of their age. It was yet another way we saw God reaching people through this translation project.

LIAM:

God was with us through this journey to bring the Scripture to our people in our mother-tongue language. He made us aware of the new translation method. He called each of the volunteers. He provided the tools we needed.

SOFIA:

He helped us persist through times when it was challenging to continue translating. He provided the pipelines to share the translated Scripture with our community and celebrate the completion of each book. Now we have finished more than half of the New Testament. We are continuing to our goal of finishing the New Testament in our mother-tongue language. Then we plan to move on to the Old Testament! We are so excited about what the Lord has done for us that we want to pass what we have learned to a new language group. With our experience and training we are looking forward to working with another church that does not have the Bible in their language so we can help them start a Bible translation of their own, and hopefully when they have finished their translation they will pass it on to another group.

LIAM:

Thank you for joining us to learn about our journey. Now it is time for you to start or continue your own journey. Perhaps you can join a team already working on translation. If God's Word is not available in your mother-tongue language, pray about getting a team together and beginning a translation project using this new translation method.

SOFIA:

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.