

Broadcast 02 – How We Started Our Translation

OLIVER:

Hello! This is Oliver, and I am so excited! I wish you could see what I am holding in my hands. It is a copy of the Gospel of Mark. Many of you might be wondering why that is so exciting? The Gospel of Mark is not new; our pastors read from it regularly, but the one I am holding is in my mother-tongue language! I just returned from a translation workshop where five other Christians and I translated the entire Gospel of Mark. I want to tell you how we did it, but first let me tell you when I read from it at church last week, Pastor Fin was so excited he changed his sermon to preach from the passage I read!

MARA:

Hello everyone! This is Mara. I remember our church leaders were uncertain about our translation efforts and attending this workshop. Now they can hear the scripture in our mother-tongue and are excited to preach from it.

OLIVER:

That is true, Mara, but they were not the only ones who had concerns. Siara, my wife, told me about Jesus three years ago and I began to read the Scriptures in our national language, which we both know, but something was always missing. Because I think, pray, dream, and feel in our mother-tongue language I wanted to hear God speak to me through the Scriptures in my language. I was told by many that we would not have the Scriptures in our language in my lifetime because it takes too much time for a missionary to come, learn our language, translate and then consultant check our Bible for us.

MARA:

Last spring church members from a nearby community showed us the New Testament they translated from their national language into their mother-tongue language, and it only took one year! They worked with some friends from Wycliffe Associates who believe local church members can translate the Bible. The Scriptures already exist in our national language, and we have people in our congregation who know both our national language and our mother-tongue language; we could do the same. It was just about that time Oliver taught me about Jesus, and I became a believer. I was so excited at the thought that someday I might be able to read the Scriptures in my own language.

OLIVER:

Yes, they told us about MAST, which means Mobilized Assistance Supporting Translation, a new method used to translate the Bible. They said they attended a workshop where they were taught the MAST method of translation. They used their own computers and tablets and were taught where to access the source text to translate from and many resources to help with the translation. Then they were shown how to start their first book, 1 Thessalonians. With some support from their church and Wycliffe Associates, they finished the entire New Testament in a year.

That was amazing! And it made me wonder... because our people have known about Jesus for many years. Much of that time our pastor and church leaders have prayed for the miracle of having the Scriptures in our language, with little hope that it would ever happen. Even when we saw the New Testament the community near us translated; many could not believe it could happen for us. I was one of the people that doubted this. But I do not doubt anymore because I am holding the first gospel in our mother-tongue language!

MARA:

It was not easy to assemble the translation team, was it? You needed believers who knew both our national and mother-tongue languages. You also needed members who could leave home for a few weeks, for the length of the workshop. That was one of the reasons I could not go. My husband is not a

Christian and I could not ask him to add the care of my father, our house, and two children to his workload so I could pursue a dream he does not share.

OLIVER:

So, it was with Siara. She would have been a great addition to our team except for her business and our son. As I said, home and family are important. I want her to join our team here at home even though she is still not sure of her mastery of our national language. I was glad that our pastor was able to visit for a day to see the translation process, because now he is excited and that helps us keep the work going on here at home.

MARA:

A team I am soon going to be a part of!

OLIVER:

Yes, you will. Let me tell you what happened at the workshop. As I said, we gathered the team and went to the workshop. We were not sure what to expect, especially when we got there and realized the teams from other villages spoke and were translating into different mother-tongue languages. We shared the same trade language so we could communicate with each other. And we also shared a love of the Savior and sweet fellowship over meals and worship times. And we shared hard work. It did not matter which mother-tongue language each team was working in, they wanted to see the Scriptures as badly as we did. Each time a team finished a chapter it was great to celebrate with them. I am still thrilled at the memory!

After we all met each other and shared a time of prayer and worship, our new friends from Wycliffe Associates began teaching us the eight steps of MAST. They helped each team find and download the needed resources on tablets and computers. We also used the tablets and computers in our initial translation of the Gospel of Mark. We continue to use the resources for checking our work and as our source text now that we are working as a team at home.

MARA:

Those resources have been very helpful.

OLIVER:

One team had a laptop and two tablets; that was a great help as they went through the checking steps together. We did most of our work with paper and pencil. Not many of us were good at using technology. We decided to start with the Gospel of Mark though other teams chose different books to start with; it did not matter which book we started with in this translation process.

MARA:

Maybe we should tell them about the MAST translation process you learned at the workshop? What is the first step?

OLIVER:

Step one is CONSUME. No, do not eat your Scriptures. This step is to read the passage you are going to translate until you believe you understand it. This takes five to seven minutes. It should not take longer.

Step two is VERBALIZE. This is your first chance to check your understanding in your mother-tongue language. Share the main points of the passage out loud, preferably to another person but, if necessary, out loud to yourself. You just read it in the national language and now you are re-telling the passage in

your mother-tongue language. You are not trying to memorize the Scripture; you are re-telling what you read and the main points of that chapter. This should only take two or three minutes per person. The listener will not interrupt or discuss what you are telling though they may ask about something that was unclear after you finish.

Now you are ready for step three, which is CHUNK. This means you should break the passage into smaller pieces, like two to four verses. Try to make the chunked portion a complete thought or story you can easily remember and retell. You should read through the source text in your national language and mark each chunk with a pencil for clarity or mark in your source text if working on a computer.

Step four is BLIND DRAFT. Now you are ready for the most exciting and scary step. Read your first chunk a few times thinking about how you would say it in your own language. Then turn the source text over, take a pencil and paper, and without looking back, write the chunk in your language or type it if you are using a computer or tablet. On this step, do not worry about complete accuracy. Try to write or type the thought chunk as naturally as possible. You are going to check and recheck so if you make mistakes at this point you will have an opportunity to correct them. Do not look back at the source text! Looking back at the source text will keep the translation from sounding natural.

Step five is SELF-EDIT. You have drafted your first portion of Scripture! Now it is time to check your work. Look back at the source text in your national language and see how close you came, not in getting a word for word copy but a smooth and natural telling of the material in your language. Now make changes and corrections. Try not to recreate the translation as it is in the source text but make the message of the portion is complete and clear.

Step six is PEER-EDIT. Now you can share your work! Give your translation to another team member who will check it against the source document and make suggestions about changes they might see. One way to do this step is to read the passage aloud and see if the other person understands it and believes it is clear and natural. You and the listener can now discuss what you have written and what it means in your language, and then the translator can make changes that you both agree on.

Step seven is KEYWORD CHECK. There are many words and terms in the Scriptures that are very important to translate correctly and consistently. Some of these important words or phrases may be discussed before you even start translating to be sure you are all translating them consistently. It is good to make a list of these words available to all the translators and add to the list as new words and phrases are identified. Some words that should always be checked on this step are proper nouns, like names of people and locations, numbers, and abstract, spiritual terms such as love, redemption, and faith. This step can be done in a small group or one on one. You will discuss changes that you think should be made and then make them in the translation and move to the next step.

Step eight is the VERSE-by-VERSE CHECK. Once again, this step can be done in a small group or one on one. Read through each verse of the translated chapter out loud while another team member listens, comparing what you read to the source text. Stop at the end of each verse and ask: Does the translation sound natural in your mother-tongue language or like it is in small pieces? Do you understand it well? Is everything in the source text represented in the translation? Is anything added that is not in the source text? This is the last step before you present your work to the wider audience of the church and community. You want to be sure the quality of the work is the best you can make it. Sometimes the checkers will translate it back to the national language to see if it resembles the source text.

MARA:

Wow! I know I asked to be part of the team, and I want the whole Scripture in our language but that sounds complicated. How can I learn all those steps, hearing them only one time?

OLIVER:

Mara, I have good news and challenging news. The challenging news is that there is even more that goes into a quality translation than just following the eight steps, though they are very important. Even after we returned, we needed to re-examine our work with the help of our pastor and others who understand the Scriptures. Other people can help us be sure we have expressed what God is saying in a way that is most meaningful to our people. The good news is that this is just an overview of the translation steps. In our next broadcast we will look closer at the first four steps in detail and the broadcast after that, we will spend our time on the last four steps, the edits, and checks.

This is an exciting time for us who know Jesus Christ as our Savior and want God's Word in our language. Listen to all our programs to learn more about it and how you can be involved too! May God bless each of you.

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.