

Broadcast 11 – Developing a Quality Assessment Guide

OLIVER:

Hello! This is Oliver. I am excited about this program. We are going to talk about developing a Quality Assessment Guide. This is a list of characteristics of a good translation. We invited Ava to be with us today. Ava was instrumental in developing the guide for the translation of Scripture into her mother-tongue language.

AVA:

Thank you for inviting me, Oliver. I am happy to be here to share my experience.

OLIVER:

To start, please tell us about yourself and why you became involved with Scripture translation.

AVA:

Thank you, Oliver. I was born and raised in a Christian family and my parents only know our mother-tongue language. They are not fluent in our national language, so when I heard that we could translate the Bible into our mother-tongue language, I felt like this was something I could do for them and the others in our village that only know our mother-tongue language. When I read about the MAST process of translation, I knew it would be possible! The approach made sense to me. Those of us who know our mother-tongue language and our national language do the translation. If we work diligently, we can have the entire New Testament completed in a year. I asked my pastor. He was able to find a translation event happening nearby. I helped recruit some other people from church and we all went together to learn this translation process. By the time we left the event, we had already translated the book of Mark.

OLIVER:

That is a great and encouraging story. This translation process includes many checking steps to help assure clarity and accuracy. There also is another step -- the development of an assessment guide. Can you describe to us what that Quality Assessment Guide is?

AVA:

Sure. This is a list of characteristics that must be present for the Scripture translation to be of high quality. It is not a guide that is given to us. Instead, we create it ourselves, as an objective guide for checking our work.

OLIVER:

Can you explain what you mean by objective guide? And then tell us how the guide was developed for the translation you were involved in. How did your team do this task?

AVA:

Sure. What we mean is this guide will be the standard for everyone who works on the translation and anyone who helps us to check it. The list of qualities that are on this guide must be adhered to by everyone, from the most educated elder among us to the youngest student. So, you see the guide creates a standard we all must agree to and work toward.

I have heard of translation teams building their guide together during their first week of training. This is a good idea, because it means the guide is immediately available for checking. It does mean only translators who go to the workshop get to be part of creating the guide. For our group, we waited to create the guide until we were back in our village after the translation event. Then we invited the

churches in our community to a meeting. We included Christians of all denominations, not only our own.

OLIVER:

So, I understand there are different ways of doing this process. Sometimes the team of translators creates this list. Could you explain to our listeners why it was important to invite all the churches in the community? Would it not be easier and faster with fewer people involved?

AVA:

It is important all the churches feel they are part of the process from the beginning. We felt that would make it more likely others will help with the translation. Also, we hoped this would help all the churches and people use the translation when it is completed. Not all the churches who were invited could attend. But we did have four churches represented, and 15 people participated in the meeting.

OLIVER:

Having everyone involved can make a difference. That sounds like it was a pretty good representation of the churches. What happened at the meeting?

AVA:

We began with worship and prayer. We asked God to prepare our hearts for the task at hand. We shared what we had begun at the translation event and our translated book of Mark. We talked about the vision of having all of Scripture in our language and what that would mean for our people. Then we handed out paper and pencils. We asked each person to make their own list of what they want for our translation. We suggested each person come up with a list of ten characteristics.

OLIVER:

That could result in a lot of different characteristics. You had fifteen people. If they each came up with ten ideas, that would be 150 characteristics!

AVA:

Yes, you might think that would make too long of a list. But there were a lot of similarities on everyone's lists. For example, most people said the translation should be easy to read and understand. That told us it was a very important characteristic to people because so many had mentioned it. We wanted to develop no more than ten characteristics and we had more than that. So, we worked together to merge the lists and combine similar ideas. We thought the idea of being "easy to read and understand" was similar to "simple language." So, after discussing it, we combined those two characteristics. Then we discussed each of the qualities that expressed a different idea, to see how those present felt about those as a guide for our mother-tongue translation.

OLIVER:

I am sure that was an interesting discussion.

AVA:

Yes. Any time people get together, there will be different thoughts and some strong opinions. When that was the case, we tried to understand why a certain characteristic was important to someone. One idea some people had written down was that the printed version should have two columns on each page. When we asked them about it, they told us every Bible they had seen had two columns. This made them think it was important to indicate it was a holy book. We shared that this guide should concentrate on the quality of the content, not its format or layout. This was hard for them to understand

at first, but as we discussed other characteristics, they began to understand. They decided what the Scripture said was more important than having it look a certain way.

OLIVER:

That is a good example of the importance of listening to others and understanding their point of view. It sounds like you all worked together well. What ten characteristics did your group agree to for the guide?

AVA:

We agreed to four characteristics that have to do with accuracy.

1. The intended meaning of the verse or passage is accurately conveyed. We want the translation to convey the message, even it means using more words or fewer words or revising the construction of the sentence, so it is clearer in our language.
2. Important terms are accurate. An example of this is the terms for the members of the Trinity are not changed. “Father” is translated as “Father.” “Son of God” is translated as “Son of God.” “Holy Spirit” is translated as “Holy Spirit.”
3. Nothing is missing. By this, we did not mean every individual word had to be included. Every *idea* needed to be included, though. There are some difficult teachings in Scripture, but we needed to include those as well. We could not cut something out.
4. Nothing is added. We did not want our own opinion or perspective to get in the way of the inspired Word of God. We agreed not to add chapter headings or illustrations. They are not in the original inspired Word of God.

OLIVER:

I can understand why the team wanted to include them in the guide. What other characteristics did the team include?

AVA:

We included three characteristics that have to do with clarity and the ability to understand the translation.

5. Easy to read, with words that are familiar to people and concise sentences.
6. Make sure the text stands on its own, without the need for footnotes. There was considerable discussion about this. We ended up agreeing to not rely on footnotes, though. Footnotes can complicate the message and interfere with reading for the common reader.
7. Natural sounding. We wanted our translation to sound the way people talk with each other, not stiff or unnatural in any way.

OLIVER:

I understand why those are important. They will help ensure the message is clear and understandable. What are the last three?

AVA:

They will make the translation widely available – to all Christians, to those who are not yet Christians, to those who can read and those who cannot read.

8. Acceptable to the broad Christian community. No theological bias. This was important because we want our translation to reach as many people as possible. It means there will be careful consideration of how to address references to baptism, for example, because some churches teach immersion and others practice sprinkling with water.

9. Understandable to those who are not yet Christians. We wanted our translation to be understandable to those who are not yet believers.
10. Historically faithful. We want our translation to clearly reflect the culture of the day and the environment in which the stories and teachings took place. We do not want to substitute or create an environment like our own but to be faithful to the original history.

OLIVER:

So, to review the list, the ten characteristics are:

1. The intended meaning of the verse or passage is accurately conveyed.
2. Important terms are accurate.
3. Nothing is missing.
4. Nothing is added.
5. It is easy to read.
6. The text stands on its own, without footnotes.
7. It is natural sounding.
8. It is acceptable to the broad Christian community.
9. It is understandable to those who are not yet Christians.
10. It is historically faithful.

After you had established these ten characteristics, how did you decide if the translation had each characteristic?

AVA:

For each of the ten characteristics, we developed questions about whether the translation had that characteristic. These had to be questions that could be answered “yes” if the characteristic was met or “no” if it was not met. Let me give you an example. One of the characteristics is “Easy to read.” For that, the questions are “Is the passage easy to read?” and “Are all of the words familiar?” For the characteristic of “nothing added,” the question is “Do all of the ideas here appear in the source text?” For the characteristic to be “natural sounding,” the question is “When you read the passage, does it sound the way a person would talk to you?”

OLIVER:

Once the list of “yes” and “no” questions is developed, what do you do?

AVA:

Then we take a translated passage – usually a chapter – and ask the group all the questions for each of the ten characteristics. We are looking for all the answers to be “yes.” If anyone feels the answer to any of the questions is “no,” the group addresses that concern. It may be necessary to edit the portion so all the answers can be “yes.”

OLIVER:

When people answer “no” to one or more of the questions, did your team think the translation was wrong or bad?

AVA:

It is not a problem if there are answers that are “no.” It does not mean the translation is bad. Having a “no” answer shows there is an area to edit and improve. It needs to be discussed. We must be willing to work together in this way, so the translation is something all agree is of high quality and accurate.

OLIVER:

This can be a difficult task.

AVA:

Yes, but it was a glorious day when all the church representatives were asked to formally approve the translation. It was easy for them because they all worked together to agree on the characteristics of a quality translation, and they all answered “yes” for the questions that assure the translation has those characteristics.

OLIVER:

Thank you, Ava, for sharing your experience with us. Thank you for your work and how you and the other representatives worked together to assure a quality and accurate translation in our language. Thank you to all of you listening. Please join us again next week as we continue learning together and encouraging each other in the important task of Scripture translation.

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.