

Broadcast 12 – Community Checking

BEN:

Hello everyone! This is Ben. Mara is here with me to talk again about our Bible translation work. We have shared our story with you for a few months now. I cannot believe we have so much of the New Testament translated! I am glad you continued to listen to our story. I hope it is helping you to get started, or continue, on your own translation project for your mother-tongue language. It is a blessing to be part of this very important work.

MARA:

I think one reason we continue to feel so much excitement is because we get to witness God's Word transforming our community. Every time the pastor reads it in church, or someone joins us for a community check, I am reminded how powerful God's message is.

BEN:

Yes, Mara. Repeatedly, the community's response proves to us the importance of this work. During this time together, we want to talk specifically about our efforts to involve the community in checking our translated Scripture. One thing we learned in using the MAST process is we must listen to our team. None of us has all the right ideas. The more we work together and learn from each other, the better our translation is. When it is the best, we can make it as a team, we need to invite the community to also look over our work and give us their thoughts and suggestions. This step is important because we may think we communicated the message clearly and accurately. But when someone else hears it for the first time, they could find it confusing.

MARA:

This kind of checking helps our team see things we may not have communicated what we were intending. It is an important way to test the work and confirm its usefulness. Not only that, it also gives our brothers and sisters here in our village the chance to be part of this project. That means a lot to them. I was talking to a friend the other day. She told me she had not thought this project was very important for her personally, until she came to participate in one of our community checking workshops. Since she speaks our trade language very well, she did not see a need for the Bible in our language. But when she saw the community talking enthusiastically together about the translation in our mother tongue language, she realized how much more meaningful it was to them, and even to her. She also said it made her want to talk to others about what God says in His Word. It gave her a desire to share more freely with those who do not believe.

BEN:

Wow! That is an amazing testimony! Yes, your friend has been a big help at our community checking workshops. She knows the trade language well and has helped us use some of the resources that are only available in the trade language.

MARA:

I am glad she wants to help. We will spend a few minutes now telling you what our community check looks like. Maybe our story will help our listeners to understand this important part of the process better.

When we complete all eight MAST steps on a portion of Scripture, it is as good as we can make it. We want to have a whole book, or even several books, completed before we conduct a community check. We found it is important to have paper copies of the books being checked so everyone who is literate can read it as we go. We also have at least two members of the translation team present to make notes on suggested changes or edits.

BEN:

This is how we started our community checks. We invited anyone from church who had time to stay after the service for a time of Scripture checking. We made this announcement the week before. We also made sure at least two of our translators could attend the meeting and our leader for the project could lead this checking. We did not know how many would stay after church, but we thought if we had at least four or six, that would be enough.

MARA:

We were so surprised when twenty people stayed! That showed us how important this Scripture is to our community.

BEN:

Yes, and four people from the translation team also stayed. We split the group up into two groups of ten participants and two translators each. We had four copies of Mark and Luke printed. One group took Mark and the other took Luke.

MARA:

I went with the pastor and the group to check Mark. Ben went with the group to check Luke. Our group started by having a participant who is literate in our language read the first chapter of Mark out loud to the whole group. As he read, we listened to see if it was easy for him to read, and if it flowed naturally. We also listened to see if the meaning was clear. When he finished reading a chapter, we asked someone to verbalize what they heard. If one person could not remember the whole passage, others in the group spoke up and helped. You might notice these first two steps are very similar to the first two steps of MAST.

When we were satisfied the summary was complete, the pastor asked lots of questions. The goal was to bring out the details and see if the overall purpose of the passage was understood. How did your group do the check, Ben?

BEN:

We followed a similar process. If a chapter was long, we broke it down into shorter portions and allowed the group to ask us questions about the passage first, before we asked them questions.

MARA:

How did you keep track of problem areas, or things you wanted to talk to the translation team about changing?

BEN:

I had a laptop and the other translator with me, led the discussion. Any time we heard comments or questions that made us think something might need to be changed, I made a note of it. When our team gets together to do more checking, we can start by going over those notes. We can easily see what we need to do to improve our translation of Luke.

What did you and the pastor do?

MARA:

I wrote down questions and notes in the margin of one of our paper copies. I will take that with me to our meeting for checking so we can go through those notes together as a team.

BEN:

It seems we had similar approaches overall and both ways mean we can check our work together based on the community's suggestions.

Can you share an example or two of questions the community asked about a passage?

MARA:

Yes. One question they asked was about the names of places. Verse 5 of Mark 1 says, "The whole country of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. They were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins." That verse mentions three geographical locations—the Judean countryside, Jerusalem and the Jordan River. We used borrowed words from our trade language to translate each one of these. One person simply asked us where the "Judean countryside" and "Jerusalem" are. Another person asked if these locations that were mentioned meant only Jews went to John to be baptized. And another person asked if the Jordan River was part of the Judean countryside or a long way off.

None of these questions resulted in us changing anything in the text. But they did give us the idea to include a map of these ancient places. It also helped us think about what people might not understand because the culture and geography are different from ours. We decided to add a couple of footnotes to give more information.

BEN:

A map is a great idea! I have some friends from another mother tongue language group who are also doing MAST. They told me Wycliffe Associates is working on more free resources for us to use, and one of those projects is Bible maps!

MARA:

That would be wonderful! Here is an example of a question someone asked that made us think we might need to change something in the text. In verses 10 and 11 of Mark 1, we read about Jesus being baptized. The passage says Jesus saw Heaven open and the Spirit descending like a dove. Then a voice from Heaven was heard. Someone asked how the dove could talk. We were not sure why they thought it was the dove talking, until someone reread the verse out loud. Our translation said a dove with a voice came out of Heaven saying, "This is my Son." We realized we probably need to say a dove came down from Heaven and then a voice came out of Heaven. I made a note of this on the text and we will talk about it at our next meeting.

BEN:

Those are some great examples. We also learned a lot by having the participants ask us questions. But since you gave a couple good examples of that, let me share some of the questions we asked them and how their answers helped us to check the translation.

MARA:

Yes, I am very interested to hear how that went for you.

BEN:

As you mentioned, we started checking in Luke. After we had someone read the first 23 verses of Chapter 1, we asked them to summarize what happened. This passage includes the story of Zechariah. An angel of the Lord spoke to Zechariah while he was in the temple, performing his priestly duties. The angel told him his wife Elizabeth would give him a son and his name would be John. My summary here

was extremely brief, but their summary was good! We thought the questions we asked them would be easy for them to answer. Some of the questions were easy, while others were not. One translator asked them how Zechariah responded to seeing the angel. Someone said he was angry because no one else was supposed to be in that part of the temple. Another person said he was startled and impatient because he was supposed to be performing his duty and the angel interrupted him!

We were surprised by both of those answers, so we asked our reader to read verses 11 through 13 again to the group. When he did, we noticed the word we used for “fear” can sometimes mean feeling resentful or manipulated. We made a note to discuss this with the team and see if we might find a better way to say it. We also explained to the group Zachariah was not angry or impatient, but rather surprised and afraid because he had never seen an angel before. They suggested two other words in our language that mean awed and uncertain. These are good suggestions. I think our team will agree to making a change to this passage, so it is clear.

MARA:

That is a great example of how something can be misunderstood and change the whole tone of the story. I am thinking about the word we used in that passage and I can understand why they might have thought that. Zechariah was bold and he questioned the angel.

Our checking team spent four hours together and completed eight chapters in Mark. The participants said they can come again next week for the afternoon, so we hope to finish the rest of Mark. What about you, Ben? How far did your group get?

BEN:

We finished six chapters. Several people from our group can come back again next week too, so we will keep going.

MARA:

It is so wonderful to see the church members eager to participate. We asked how many of them wanted a copy to take home with them to read this week. Every household in our group asked for one. Thankfully, the pastor has access to the printer and could print off four more copies so we could give each family a copy. We asked them to please make notes of anything they wanted to talk about during next week's meeting. That way we hope to complete even more chapters next week.

BEN:

Yes, we asked the same thing, and we also had more printed to send home with families. We told them to try to read through at least eight more chapters and come back with notes on what they want to ask us about.

MARA:

Thank you for being with us. I hope this conversation will encourage you to involve your church members as well!

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.

