

Broadcast 17 – Quality Testimonies

LUCAS:

Hello! This is Lucas. Thank you for joining our program. We have spent several programs talking about Bible translation checking. It is so important for translated Scripture to be accurate and clearly convey the intended meaning. MAST, which stands for Mobilized Assistance Supporting Translation, emphasizes checking throughout the translation process. Even after translated Scripture is used in the church and the community, there still is checking that can lead to improvements. To help us learn more about this on-going effort for quality, we invited John to join us.

JOHN:

Thank you, Lucas. I have been listening to your broadcasts. It is a pleasure to be with you. I am glad to share my experiences with the checking done to meet the on-going goal of quality in our Scripture translation.

LUCAS:

Please tell us a little about yourself and why you are interested in Scripture translation.

JOHN:

I have been a Christian for several years. I am comfortable with the national language, so I can do my own Bible reading and study. I went to a meeting with church members from several different communities. Some of the people who came to that meeting were using Bibles in their mother-tongue language. That was the first time I had seen translations like that. I talked with them about it. They explained to me that they had used the MAST process to do their own translation. They said it had been very helpful for many in their community who were not comfortable with the national language. Even for those who were comfortable with the national language, they saw that Scripture took on new meaning when they read it in their mother-tongue language. I could see how that would be true. I wanted to help make it possible for my own community. I talked with the leaders in our church and they decided to start the project. I volunteered to be part of the translation team.

LUCAS:

I understand that your team has completed the New Testament and several Old Testament books. Please tell us about the checking that was done during the process of translation.

JOHN:

The translation team did all the checking steps in the MAST process. The SELF-EDIT, the PEER-EDIT, the KEYWORD CHECK and the VERSE-by-VERSE CHECK. Throughout each of those checks, the translators revised their work to improve clarity and accuracy. What is important during that process is that each translator is open to the feedback from the other translators. All are working together to achieve a clear, accurate translation for our community.

LUCAS:

Yes, we have experienced great opportunities to learn from one another through checking. One thing that has helped us a lot is the quality assessment guide we created as a team. This keeps us all accountable to the same standards as we check the translations done by one another.

JOHN:

We also created a quality assessment guide during our first workshop.

LUCAS:

Great! We talked about creating the guide several weeks ago. Can you remind our listeners what we mean by this “quality assessment guide”?

JOHN:

Of course. The quality assessment guide is a list of characteristics we want our translation to have. The community develops their own guide for their language. Some translators invite others not on the team to help create the guide. We created our guide at our first workshop, so it was created by the original team of translators. This was so we would have that as a measurement for checking from the very beginning. When we returned home from that workshop, we invited others to join our team, so we recreated our guide. And in doing that, we discovered something amazing.

LUCAS:

What did you discover?

JOHN:

Our guide stayed pretty much the same. We changed some of the wording, but without meaning to copy it, the new members of our team felt the same—or very similar qualities—were necessary in a good translation of Scripture. Now we have all had part in creating the list, and we all hold each other's work accountable to that same list.

LUCAS:

That is a great discovery. Can you share with us what characteristics you included on your list?

JOHN:

There were several characteristics that we included to be sure of the quality of our translation. Our first concern was that our translation would be accurate and true to God’s inspired Word. So, we agreed that on these four points.

One -- Everything is included. Even if a passage is difficult or something that may be hard for us to hear, we need to include it.

Two -- There is nothing added. As we worked on the translation, we sometimes found ourselves wanting to add explanations. Sometimes without knowing it our translation was influenced by our own attitudes and perspective. We wanted to be sure that was not the case in the final version.

Three -- The important terms are included and accurate. Locations and names are correct.

Four -- The translation conveys the meaning of the passage. It may have more or fewer actual words, but it is translated so it is clear in our language.

LUCAS:

Those all sound like good characteristics. Were there other characteristics you included in your guide to be sure of quality?

JOHN:

We felt that clarity was part of quality. We wanted the translation to be easy to read and we wanted it to sound natural. We wanted it to be clear to those who are not already Christians, because we want the translation to help bring others to faith. We also wanted to be sure that the translation would be acceptable to Christians in other churches, not only our own church. We wanted to be sure that we did not add our theology but stayed with what was in the text.

LUCAS:

Thanks. That gives us a good idea of the characteristics that you included in your guide. Once you created that list of characteristics, what did you do next? How is it useful for checking?

JOHN:

The next step was to develop questions to decide if the translation fits the characteristics of the rubric. These need to be questions that can be answered “yes” or “no.” We ask a group of people to read the Scripture passage and then answer “yes” or “no” to each of the questions. If anyone answers “no” to any of the questions, that point needs to be discussed. We need to come to a resolution of what to do to be sure that part of the translation fits the characteristics. We want to be sure it is quality.

LUCAS:

Could you tell us an example so we can better understand how this works?

JOHN:

Yes. Let me use Psalms 23 as an example.

LUCAS:

Where were the problems originally?

JOHN:

There was some discussion about the overall way that we had translated the Psalm. Some people felt that it did not sound natural. They felt it was not the way our people would talk. That led to an interesting discussion about the format of the Psalms. How much should we try to retain the feeling of poetry of that Bible book? How much should we make it read the way people talk? We thought about the pattern of our songs and other artistic expressions are different from the way we talk. And we realized that in this case, clarity meant making sure that we were translating the psalms according to that pattern, not just directly the way we talk.

LUCAS:

Wow. That is a great example of clarity and what it means. What were some other problems the guide helped you to find?

JOHN:

Here’s another example in Psalm 23. Verse six says, “surely goodness and covenant faithfulness will pursue me all the days of my life.” Some people felt sad that our original translation did not

convey the meaning of the passage. They felt that we had used a word for “pursue” that could be understood as “chasing” in a negative way. That changed the meaning of the verse. As we discussed our goal of the original meaning being upheld in the translation, we realized this word was not the best choice. We needed to use a word that conveyed the meaning of “pursue” in this context – that throughout all our life goodness and mercy would be with us.

LUCAS:

Thank you for those examples of how using the guide improves quality. Another way to assure quality is involving the community in the refinement process.

JOHN:

We found that to be very helpful. When we have a community assessment event, we gather a group of people who represent the people who we want to use the translation. We include people from our church and people from other churches. We also include people from our community who may not be members of a church, because we want our translation to reach them as well. Sometimes because we work so closely with the translation, we miss things. They are responding purely to the mother-tongue translation on their first hearing or reading.

LUCAS:

Thanks for sharing how you involve the community. It is so true we can miss things because we are so deeply involved. Our team has experienced that too. And we are glad when we get others together to read the Scripture or hear it for the first time. Their thoughts and impressions really help us.

JOHN:

Having new people listen is another step that helps to assure the quality of the translation. Sometimes it lets us know that the work we did and the decisions we made are good. It assures us that the translation will be understood by others. Sometimes, though, we are surprised. There can be something we thought was clear. Then during the community event we find that it is not understood.

LUCAS:

Could you give us an example of that?

JOHN:

Yes. Perhaps the question that most opened our eyes was about the final verse of Psalm 23. That is the verse that reads: “I will live in the house of Yahweh for the length of my days!” The person asked if we would live in the house of Yahweh only for the length of our days. He asked us, “What about the promise of heaven and eternal life?” We needed to study the passage and get some insight from resources on that question. And we were glad he brought it up.

LUCAS:

Definitely! Now that you have these insights from those hearing the translated Scripture for the first time, what happens next?

JOHN:

The translation team will meet soon to go over the notes from our community event. We will discuss if there is a way that we should adjust the translation and, if so, what the change should be.

LUCAS:

If there is agreement that a change needs to be made, how will that be handled? How are the changes incorporated into the Scripture portions that are distributed?

JOHN:

After the translation team decides what changes should be made, we let people know about it. That way, people can write the changes into their Scripture portions. If people have their Scripture portion online, they can make changes there. We on the translation team make changes in the official copy of the Scripture portion, so that when that portion is printed again it will be improved. Its quality will be higher. That corrected version is available online right away for all to use. Depending on the seriousness of the changes, new copies of that portion may be printed right away. For example, if there is a theological misunderstanding, we would want to reprint the updates as soon as possible. We want the Scripture that people have in their hands to be correct. Other times, we may wait for several changes before we print that Scripture portion again.

LUCAS:

It sounds like once there is agreement, the Scripture portions can be revised quickly and easily.

JOHN:

That is important to us. For one thing, we want the people who participated in the community event to know that we listened, took their comments seriously, and responded. And, of course, we want everyone to have the highest quality translation possible.

LUCAS:

Thank you for sharing all these examples with us. It reminds us how vigilant those involved with the translation are to assure its quality – that it is clear and natural and accurate.

JOHN:

It was my pleasure to be here and share examples of how quality of translation is assured.

LUCAS:

Thank you, John. We will be talking about finishing translation and all that is involved in that wonderful accomplishment. Have a blessed week! *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.*