

Broadcast 07 – Checking Steps 5 & 6

MARA:

Hello! This is Mara. I am happy to be with you again today. We are going to learn more about the MAST method of translation. The last few programs, we have heard about the importance of accountability and checking in Bible translation. Today, we have a guest with us. We have invited one of the translators, John, to learn about his experiences with two of the checking steps of the MAST process. We will focus on steps five and six, which are SELF-EDIT and PEER-EDIT. Welcome John. Thank you for coming and sharing with us today.

JOHN:

Thank you, Mara. It is good to be with you today. I hope that sharing my experiences with these two checking steps will help and encourage you and others.

MARA:

Before we start talking about the checking steps, please tell us a little about yourself. How did you become part of the translation team?

JOHN:

I was visiting a friend who is also a Christian. On Sunday morning we went to his church. It was the day that a team from his church brought back the book of Mark that they recently translated into their mother-tongue language. It was such a time of celebration for the congregation! I felt that God arranged for me to be with my friend at his church on that specific day so I could see the joyous effect on the people of hearing Scripture in their mother-tongue language. There was a celebration after church with songs and special food. I had an opportunity to talk with some of the translators. That made me more interested and increased my confidence that someone like me could be involved.

MARA:

It sounds like that was a very special time. What happened next?

JOHN:

When I got home, I talked with my pastor. He had some doubts about the translation process and using ordinary people. He always had been told that translation needs to be done by theologians who can go back to the original sources in Greek and Hebrew. I shared with him what I had experienced at my friend's church. I think that made him more open to the idea. A few weeks later, he told me that he had heard about a translation workshop for our mother-tongue language. He asked if I wanted to attend. I was very excited and made the necessary arrangements. The pastor let me have some time to talk with our congregation and explain that we could translate Scripture into our mother-tongue language. Four other members of our church and our pastor were able to go to the workshop with me. Our team has completed translating the book of Mark. We are continuing our work with the goal of having the New Testament in our mother-tongue language completed next year.

MARA:

That is wonderful. Yes, it seems that God had you at that church service on that day, so you were ready to accept His call to attend the translation workshop. I am sure that you have many things to share from that experience. What we would like to do today is to talk now about your experiences with steps five and six of the MAST translation method. Those are the first two checking steps. Step five is SELF-EDIT. How would you explain how Self-Edit works?

JOHN:

As you know, there is a lot of work that happens before we get to the checking steps. First read, or CONSUME, the chapter you are working on. Then VERBALIZE the chapter in your mother-tongue language. Then CHUNK the chapter into smaller portions and then write or type the BLIND DRAFT of each chunk from memory with your source text closed.

MARA:

After all that work, why is the SELF-EDIT necessary?

JOHN:

The purpose of the SELF-EDIT is to check your own blind draft against the Bible that you are using as a source text. It is to be sure that you have included the important ideas and words and that your blind draft is accurate and sounds natural as you read it.

MARA:

When you say that you are checking for accuracy, what does that mean? Some of our listeners may wonder if you need to be sure you have translated every word from the national language and not left anything out.

JOHN:

Yes, Mara, that is a question that many translators have. The goal is not word-for-word translation. What we are translating is the meaning and we want to make it sound natural. With step five, the SELF-EDIT, we are checking to be sure that we have not left out any important ideas, added any ideas or conveyed the meaning incorrectly.

MARA:

Let me ask this question because I think it is one that many translators have. It would seem to be easier to keep the chunk in your national language in front of you and translate it into your mother-tongue language while looking at it or referencing it. Why is it important that you do the translation without looking at the passage in your national language?

JOHN:

That is a good question. I wondered about that myself. The people leading our workshop explained that translating while looking at the chunk in the national language does not result in a translation that is easy to read or understand. Some of the translators tried translating with their Scripture in front of them. The result was accurate individual words, but the translation did not sound natural or smooth. It was very rigid and chopped up. It did not sound like we were talking in our mother-tongue language. Some of it did not make sense at all and we had to try hard to understand it.

MARA:

Is there anything you worry about when you do the SELF-EDIT?

JOHN:

Often, it is difficult to do the SELF-EDIT. I find it helps to pray and ask for God's help before and during the SELF-EDIT, so I can communicate the ideas accurately and clearly. I needed to remember that my first blind draft of a chunk will not be perfect. That is okay. As we work through the checking steps it will improve.

MARA:

Thanks. The next is step six, the PEER-EDIT. Some people wonder why there needs to be another check. What is important about the PEER-EDIT?

JOHN:

What is important about the PEER-EDIT is that someone else is looking at your translation for the first time. Sometimes when someone else reads your BLIND DRAFT, they see things that you did not see yourself. Because you have worked so closely with the chunk, you know what you are saying. But to someone else, some things may not be as clear as you think they are.

MARA:

Tell us how the PEER-EDIT works.

JOHN:

Two translators trade their translated chapters, and each translator reads the other's chapter to check that it accurately conveys the meaning, and that the translation is clear and natural. The checker compares the translation to the original source text. Then you get together and discuss what is confusing or where the meaning may not be clear, or where something seems to be missing. It is important during the checking steps to listen to the comments of your fellow translator. They are not being critical of your work. They are trying to help you and assure the translation is the best it can be. It is up to you, as the translator, if you want to accept a suggestion and make a change.

MARA:

Can you give us an example of how the PEER-EDIT helps?

JOHN:

The PEER-EDIT is interesting because sometimes there is something that the original translator totally has missed and does not realize it. The PEER-EDIT can catch a missing name in one of the genealogies, for example, or one of the languages spoken on Pentecost listed in the book of Acts chapter two. In one case, the translator doing the peer edit caught that the word "not" was missing. That completely changed the meaning of the verse. The translator was very glad that the omission was caught in the PEER EDIT!

MARA:

That is a good example of how we can be so close to something that we do not realize the word is missing. I know that sometimes it can be difficult to work with another person. Are there times when the two translators have differing ideas and are not able to work together smoothly?

JOHN:

Yes, there are times when there is a disagreement when people do the PEER-EDIT. I think that one reason for this is we are all very serious about our work. Everyone tries to be sure the translation is the best that it can be. People feel very strongly about the word that should be used or how an idea should be expressed.

MARA:

Is there an example you can share?

JOHN:

This example presents a different type of challenge. Some of the verses in Scripture are difficult to translate because they include things that we do not know anything about. For example, in Mark 11, one of our translators worked on the passage where Jesus curses a tree that only has leaves. We do not know what kind of fruit that tree produces. It is called a “fig tree” in the national language, but we don’t have that kind of fruit where we live and don’t know what that word means. So, the translator simply called it a tree. But the peer editor said we should use the national language word for the fruit and label the tree. He said it was leaving something out not to identify the tree. The translator did not like that suggestion. Another team member suggested that we call it one of our common fruit trees, like a hobo tree, which is common in our area. But the translator said that would be adding something to the translation because it is not the same tree. Everyone had their own idea and the discussion was intense. Finally, the translator suggested using our common word for “edible fruit,” as a description of the tree and everyone agreed that would work. So, you see, one person’s idea was not enough for this simple problem.

MARA:

That certainly is a helpful example.

JOHN:

Yes. It is good that the translators were so careful to be sure that they communicated the intended message of the verse. Even a small thing, like what kind of tree Jesus cursed, matters.

MARA:

John, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today. Your explanations and examples help us understand steps five and six better – the SELF-EDIT and the PEER-EDIT. We appreciate the work and dedication of you and the other translators to bring an accurate translation in your mother-tongue language. In closing, now, could you please offer a prayer?

JOHN:

I would be happy to. Dear Lord, thank You for the MAST method to translate Scripture into our mother-tongue language. Thank you that so much emphasis is put on the accuracy of translation. Be with us as we continue our work to provide accurate, meaningful Scripture in our mother-tongue language. Help us to work together well, especially when we are doing the PEER-EDIT. Help us to be open to suggestions from others, knowing that they are meant to improve the clarity and accuracy of our translation. We pray that others will hear the call and join with us to work on the translation. Also, we ask your blessings on those who will read the translation – that they will grow closer to You through hearing Your Word in their mother-tongue language. Amen.

MARA:

Thank you for sharing with us and for your prayer. To those of you listening, we pray that you will have a good week. For those who are translators, we pray that it will be a week with few distractions and much production. We look forward to our next time together. God bless 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.