An alternative approach to consultant checking

when working in language clusters

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Translations of the Bible must be of good quality, and translation consultants have to make sure that that the translation they have checked is of a good quality and can be published. Quality of a Bible translation means the translation is *accurate, meaningful, natural* and *acceptable*. So how can consultants know these qualities have been achieved, especially as they have to check translations in a number of different languages? In many cases they have to depend on back translations giving a literal translation back into the national language. This paper explores an alternative approach to consultant checking based on the *Essential Bible Translation Skills* paper. This approach works especially well in cluster projects.

An alternative way of consultant checking

In the Isles of the Sea project we have developed a multi-tier consultant check. The main idea is that the consultant is an integral part of the translation team. This implies that the *consultant is involved in the project from the very beginning*, and not just at the end of the project.

When I get involved in a new project, I assess the skills that are present in the translation team, so that I know which skills are missing, and therefore which skills I will need to supply to complement that team. It will also tell me what kind of training the members of the team need so they can become increasingly capable in their roles. This initial assessment visit is followed by checking sessions, preferably in the language area, where I can interact with the members of the translation team. While this is happening, I as the consultant and the rest of the team all increase in our respective skill levels, working towards a time when these face-to-face checks will no longer be necessary; at that point the switch can be made to written checks. With the Isles projects spread over many countries it is imperative that most checking will happen in this way.

Following this approach with the Nukumanu and Takuu projects in PNG, I have recently decided to divide the written check into two separate phases, and this has proved to be a good model to follow. The first phase happens early in the project. When I receive a book to be checked, I make my comments in a separate Paratext “project” which I then send back to the translator. These comments are of two types:

- Suggesting alternative wording, from word level to entire verses. While I check, I often look for alternative ways of translating the same word or phrase, so I am also checking for consistency early on in the project.

- Depending on the ability of the translator, I will insert a note in the translation (in English), explaining what I think the problem is, or why I have suspicions about a certain rendering, and what question the translator could ask from the people that will help with the village testing. This is good training for the translators who will learn to anticipate similar problems in future translation work. They also may be surprised by the responses they will get from the villagers when they ask these questions, and so they learn from their mistakes.

The local translation team then processes my alternative renderings and my consultant notes, and then goes on to do the village testing. Once the changes resulting from these two checks have been incorporated in the translation, I receive a copy of the cleaned-up version, and compare this with the notes I have made earlier on in the process. I have found that about 90% of my notes have in fact been incorporated in some way or other, which leaves 10% to be resolved. In order to process this final residue, I will pay another visit to the translation team and work with them to resolve this residue. About half of the remaining 10% prove to be invalid suggestions, while the final 5% should have been incorporated but my question or alternative translation had been missed or misunderstood. I have also found that while going through the translation for a second time, I find other ways to suggest improvements to the translation that I missed during the first check. This is mostly due to the fact that by the time I get to the second check, I know the language better. At the end of this second check, I will be able to sign off on the translation with a great deal of confidence, because I know exactly what the translation is saying at the time it is sent to the typesetter. Also, because I am constantly looking at the actual translation, I will also see if my suggestions about other items such as punctuation, consistency in the use of Biblical terms and spelling have been followed up.

Recently I completed the final consultant check of the Kapingamarangi Bible. I realized that for most of the books this was the third or the fourth time that I checked its quality. The New Testament books had gone through a number of revisions, each one again checked by me, each time finding some small way to improve them.

I see the following advantages of this approach to consultant checking:

- Better quality control at the end of the project
- A check early on in the translation process, thereby training the team when they need this kind of help most.
- No need for back translations since the consultant will be learning to read and understand the text he or she is checking.

Some drawbacks:

- The consultant will be limited in the number of languages he or she can assist in this way due to heavier involvement in each of the projects he or she is involved in.
- A single consultant is checking the translation from beginning to end, with no other consultant checking the quality. So, this is not to be recommended for “new” consultants.