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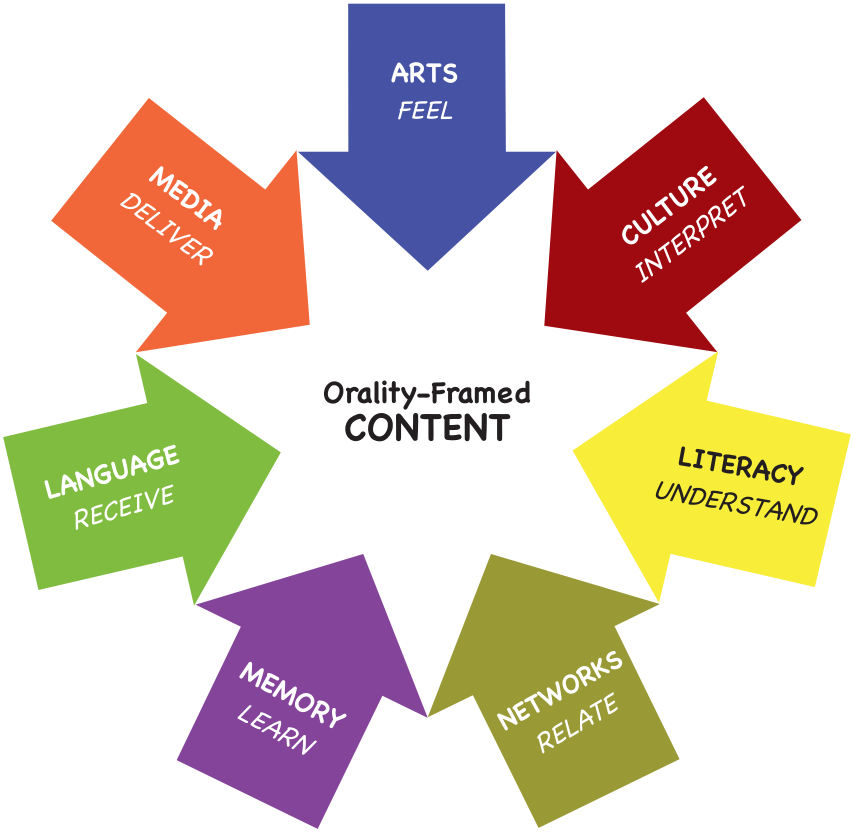
# Orality Journal

*The Word Became Fresh*

## The Seven Disciplines of Orality

Madinger • Snead • Gravelle • Moon • Getz
Handley • Logan • Swarr • Koch • Williams • Rye

# SEVEN DISCIPLINES OF ORALITY:
## A Holistic Model




*Courtesy of Dr. Chuck Madinger who leads Global Impact Mission and serves on the International Orality Network's Leadership Team facilitating the Research Task Force.*

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**Cover Photo**

Uniskript can be traced back to 1446 when King Sejoung launched the Korean alphabet which triggered a literacy revolution in Korea. In 2002 Korean linguist Dr. Kim Cho shared her doctorate discoveries on the ancient alphabet at the University of the Nations. The basic idea was then further developed by a team of innovators from the University of the Nations. As a result, the letters were redefined and a technique created to generate new alphabets that are both attractive and relevant.

The art—visual and font creation—is all derived from within the culture, thus providing greater opportunities for natural embracement than an alphabet that might be imported from outside of one's culture.

As we watch the development of Uniskript, which had its roots in a phonic system from the mid-1400s, we are reminded just how much the digitoral era is mimicking and borrowing from the pre-Gutenberg era.

Among the gods there is none like you, Lord;
no deeds can compare with yours.
All the nations you have made
will come and worship before you, Lord;
they will bring glory to your name.
For you are great and do marvelous deeds;
you alone are God.

Psalm 86:8—10 (NIV)

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*The Word Became Fresh*

Orality Journal is the journal of the International Orality Network. It is published online semi-annually and aims to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on the issues of orality, discoveries of innovations in orality, and praxis of effectiveness across multiple domains in society. This online journal is international and interdisciplinary, serving the interests of the orality movement through research articles, documentation, book reviews, and academic news. Occasionally, print editions will be provisioned. Submission of items that could contribute to the furtherance of the orality movement is welcomed.




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# Editor's Note

*Samuel E. Chiang*

**More Textual / Digital Possibilities Please**

When my family moved to Canada as immigrants, I was in my early teens and I knew only the Roman alphabet and seven English phrases that my grandfather had taught me. On the UNESCO "illiteracy to literacy" continuum, I fitted nicely into the illiterate category as a young immigrant in Canada. On the orality continuum (see Lovejoy 2012), which includes learners from those who are exclusively oral to highly textual/digital, and who by necessity or by choice prefer to learn in an oral manner, I was and still am an oral preference learner.

As an eager immigrant, I sought to learn English with gusto. But the Roman alphabet for the English language seemed arbitrary to me, and spelling of words did not always make logical sense. It was bad enough that I could not exercise intuition in the language acquisition effort, but I was lost because logic could not be readily applied to make words and sentences. I wished there was some way in which I could see the link between sound, symbols, and the writing system, so that I could progress along the UNESCO literacy continuum a little quicker.

Decades later, I believe there is now an in-between system which will move people more quickly into textual and language acquisition. The developers of this innovative system call this Uniskript©.[1]

While working on her doctoral studies in linguistics, Ms. Sek Yen Kim-Cho discovered the applicability of the Korean *Hangeul* alphabet system (see *http://sejong-nurigle.com/*). This system was developed by King Sejong (1397-1450), and put into place in 1446 for the Korean people (see page 3 of *http://sejong-nurigle.com/uploads/14_Nurigle_Project_Proposal.pdf )*. Innovators used the principles of the *Hanguel* system and developed Uniskript.

Uniskript is developed from a set of proto-symbols: a rectangle representing the lips; a triangle representing the tip of the tongue; one to three lines representing how wide the mouth opens for the generation of vowel sounds, and so on. Whereas the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA,

http://www.langsci.ucl.ac.uk/ipa/) covers all phones (the sounds possible within human language), Uniskript[2] is fitted to each language as it is developed, only covering the relevant phonemes (sounds possible within a *specific* language).

The difference between the Roman alphabet and Uniskript may be comparable to that of varying symbols used on public restrooms. Consider two washroom doors, the symbol ♂ on one and ♀ on the other. Most people will consider it common knowledge that the first symbol signals male gender and the second signals female gender, but these signs are completely arbitrary and perhaps difficult to remember. In fact, these symbols are created based on a high acquisition of literacy skills. On the other hand, one door with the icon of a man and another door with the icon of a woman in a skirt would be more intuitive (across *most* cultures), because the symbol corresponds directly to what it represents.

Uniskript is not meant to replace any already-existing alphabet; it is simply meant to introduce literacy in a variety of settings.

**What Are the Applications of Uniskript, and Where Is It Going?**
The innovators are already launching test trials, academic experiments, and scalable study groups to implement Uniskript into different domains. Consider the following.

**Reading.** Uniskript can be used as an introduction to reading, because it helps people see the correlation between symbol and sound. Uniskript teaches symbols (icons) that correspond to symbols (phones) in a way that makes sense. This process is called *iconophonological* or *iconofeatural*. Uniskript is unique in that a visual translates directly to sound. Furthermore, the art—visual and font creation—is all derived from within the culture, thus providing greater opportunities for natural embracement than an alphabet that might be imported from outside of one's culture. The implications for oral preference learners are huge, including those who are highly textual/digital.

**Children.** Children sometimes have difficulty learning to read because the Roman alphabet is arbitrary, providing no intuitive connection between sound and symbol. Uniskript can accelerate the reading process by making

a clear visual representation of how and where sounds are made. Children then understand how an alphabet represents sounds. Can we dream of what might be possible with biblical literacy?

**Dyslexia.** Current focus group studies and trials in the English language, it is already demonstrating that the deployment of Uniskript as a tool to introduce the concept of an alphabet to a child produces different outcomes. The alphabet avoids any mirror images that might create confusion as to what sound is meant to be produced. More scalable studies are now underway to see how individuals with dyslexia will function better with Uniskript.

**Apraxia.** Speech therapists handing cases of children apraxia (difficulties in handing motor movements involving facial muscles) and adult apraxia due to trauma are teaching patients how to speak through Uniskript.

**Deafness.** The advancement of technology is so great that hearing devices implemented into the ears can now help people who are born deaf to "hear"—but how do they pronounce words after years of inactivity in the muscle formation of sounds and words? Uniskript is deployed to help formerly deaf people to recognize facial muscle formation and how sounds can be made and words can form.

Lack of space precludes me from discussing the Uniskript digital input system, and ultimately, the Uniskript contribution to shell books (www.shellbooks.org) through crowd-sourcing.

This fledging system will need to be reviewed by many others (an intensive process which has already begun), and if proven fruitful, will take time to gain acceptance. If this happens, it may present a fresh hope for the 1.6 billion adults who are excluded from the opportunity of reading scripture for themselves.

As I watch the development of Uniskript, which had its roots in a phonic system from the mid-1400s, I am reminded just how much the digitoral era is mimicking and borrowing from the pre-Gutenberg era.

This issue of the Orality Journal is a special one; not only do we celebrate our one-year anniversary, but also the articles are keyed off from the anchor

piece by Chuck Madinger. He provides both scale and scope of coverage in "A Literate's Guide to the Oral Galaxy." Then, we include an aspect of each of the disciplines of orality—culture (Snead), language (Gravelle), literacy (Moon), memory (Getz), networks (Handley), arts (Logan), and media (Swarr, Koch, and the ION Audio Scripture Engagement team). Keith Williams was gracious to provide digital and mobile interests and implications for oral-preference learners. Tara Rye provided reviews on two excellent books that are now being translated into multiple languages.

As promised in the last issue, the labs on adaptive changes are here—in print, it is covered by Joe Handley (covering network and participatory learning in leaders development), and online, the blog (www.orality.net/blog) by Jennifer Giezendanner (describing the acceptance process of Bible storying in a cross-cultural organizational environment).

Finally, we are in for a special treat, as each of the writers of the "Seven Disciplines of Orality" are also the presenters at this year's ION conference. What they have written is also mediated audibly into what they shall say and what we shall hear.

On the Journey Together,

Samuel E. Chiang
From Johannesburg, South Africa

[1] The developers of this system have filed patents globally.

[2] A simplified description of the process for developing Uniskript for a language involves a few steps: 1.) First, the phonemes of a language must be determined; if certain phonemes do not exist within a language, there is no need to develop extra symbols for it. 2.) A team is sent to collaborate with indigenous speakers of the language in order to determine how the proto-symbols may be adapted in a way that is relevant to their culture and art—sometimes images and shapes that are significant within a culture may be incorporated into the Uniskript alphabet. This creates a connection between the people and this new alphabet as well as the shape of the symbol and the mouth. 3.) Once symbols are decided on, an artist finalizes them, ensuring their aesthetics. 4.) A font is developed.

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# More Than Words: Linguistics, Language and Meaning

*Gilles Gravelle*

*Gilles Gravelle is Director of Research and Innovation with The Seed Company. His research and writing focuses on translation, missiology, technology, and strategic planning with the goal of improving mission and ministry models in general and Bible translation practice in particular. His PhD is from Free University, Amsterdam. He bases out of his home in Seattle.*

The seminal work of Erick Havelock and Walter Ong influenced our understanding of how primary oral cultures and print-oriented cultures communicate, process, and retain information. Havelock described orality as action or performance-oriented communication and literacy as syntactic linear sequencing (1984, 24-25). The former involves auditory processing, whereas the latter linear analysis of symbols. This assumes differences in thought processes, as Havelock and Ong have argued. Whether someone is speaking or writing, information is produced. How a listening and reading audience makes meaning out of that information in the process of translation is the subject of this article.

## Linguistic Meaning

A structural functional understanding of linguistics says meaning is disembodied and represented by universal codes. The meaning is indicated through signs and symbols, such as alphabets, characters, and sign language. In this light, translation "can be looked at as a process of substitution, in which one code for referring to a realm of universal forms is replaced with another code referring to the same realm" (Tymoczko 2010, 290). Maria Tymoczko points out how this model presents meaning as a relatively simple thing. It can be analyzed, understood, and then transferred into the code system of another language, hence the disembodied universality of meaning.

Linguistic universals are the forms and structures that all languages presumably utilize to generate meaning, and on the surface it seems to be consistent. Descriptive linguists can identify those universal syntactic operations in most any language. Syntactic positions indicate semantic roles. Changes in word order shift the role of subject and object. This is the translation theory of form and meaning; to decode and encode, a positivistic understanding of how

meaning is made. However, the turn to transdisciplinary studies in the field of translation is now challenging this notion of meaning and translation. Making meaning is perhaps more complex than we have imagined.

## Where Does Meaning Reside?

This is not a recent question. During the last century, linguists such as Wilhelm von Humboldt and Benjamin Whorf believed meaning resided in language. Franz Boas hypothesized that meaning resided in the mind in the form of mental images (Slobin 1996, 72). If meaning resides in words within a syntactic structure (e.g., phrase, sentence, and paragraph), then the code model of translation seems predictable and thus workable.

However, Tymoczko questions the simplicity of this translation model. She argues that in addition to linguistic meaning, there is ideological meaning, metaphorical meaning, embodied meaning, and emotional meaning. Meaning is derived from genre and performatives. It is also derived from historical and cultural context. Embedded within these two contexts are situations, practices, customs, symbols, and qualities that all express meaning (2010, 282-284).

Rather than view all of this as meaning to be transferred in translation—if that were possible—Christiane Nord suggests that translators consider this meaning as information. She argues that only part of this complex web of information can be transferred in translation. Thus, "a translation is a new offer of information in the target culture about some information offered in the source culture and language" (1997, 26). Translators make choices over the information they deem necessary to bring into the local language and culture. How, then, do translators deal with meaning generated by non-linguistic signs? This is the Jakobsonian notion of intersemiotic translation.

## Non-linguistic Meaning

Robert Hodgson explains, "Non-linguistic signs are potentially words, images, cultural artifacts, secret codes, thoughts, feelings, plants, animals, lines and colors, smells and tastes" (2007, 164). He also speaks of how the Bible has been translated in non-linguistic forms. That is, biblical information is communicated dynamically through performance in music, drama, dance, storytelling, and recording. The information is also communicated in a static way through sculpture, icons, mosaics, and stained glass. The receiving

culture makes meaning from these sorts of non-linguistic signs through the five senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell (2007, 167, 182).

Along with this linguistic and non-linguistic information, add the context-generated information a hearer or reader brings to the text being translated into his or her cultural setting—that is, his or her naturally-occurring biases, assumptions, experiences, knowledge, and perceptions. This is the filter he or she uses to make meaning from the information being transferred through translation. The combination of linguistic and non-linguistic signs represents a significant amount of information that a receiving language hearer or reader utilizes to make it meaningful in his or her own cultural context. It is clear that the linguistic code model seems like an oversimplified understanding of translation and meaning-making.

## Embodied Meaning

Dan Slobin claims, "The language or languages we learn in childhood are not neutral coding systems of an objective reality. Rather, each one is a subjective orientation to the world of human experience, and this orientation affects the ways in which we think while speaking" (1996, 91). During the last decade, advances in cognitive sciences support Slobin's claim. Laboratory experiments in cognitive processing of information (i.e., thinking) suggests that instead of symbols conveying meaning, meaning could really be something much more closely intertwined with our experiences in the world. That is, meaning is not made away from our bodies—specifically our minds—but instead is tightly connected with our bodies (Bergen 2012, 12).

Studies using MRI imaging suggest that meaning is made in our minds through simulation. That is, "actively imagining or visualizing an action uses parts of the brain that actually control those imagined actions…That's because, to a large extent, when we're visualizing, our brain is doing the same thing it would in actual practice" (Bergen 2012, 25). The brain sends signals to the muscles to move them. It also does that when just imagining a movement, albeit at reduced levels so muscles don't actually move.

Simulation involves seeing. Our visual system sees non-present things in the "mind's eye" in the same way it sees present things in the world. So this means that thinking is performing. When you are seeing it in the mind's eye, you are performing it in your mind, too. When you hear language about

things, like the action of running, you use the same brain pathways to visualize it as if you were actually doing it. It's not just vague perception. You construct very detailed meaning. You hear a sound in your mind. You see an action happening. You imagine a result.

Your mind's eye places you in a distinct position in relation to the thing you are visualizing. You visualize brilliant colors. You see all of this in your mind just from hearing or reading something. In other words, there is far more information encoded in your mind than what you draw from when hearing, reading, seeing, touching, or smelling something. All of that comes from experiences in the world. This is what embodied meaning is.

Bergen takes it a step further in saying, "If we use our brain systems for perception and action to understand, then the processes of meaning are dynamic and constructive. It's not about activating the right symbol; it's about dynamically constructing the right mental experience of the scene" (2012, 16). Therefore, the hypothesis states that meaning is not disembodied universal code represented by signs and symbols. Rather, the signs and symbols stimulate meaning that is already present in the brain through experiences.

If so, then meaning really is more of an embodied experience. Conjuring mental images is accessing embodied information (2012, 45). When you hear, read, or see, you are making meaning and not just decoding phonetic sounds in syntactic constructions or analyzing linguistic symbols in linear type face, according to Bergen.

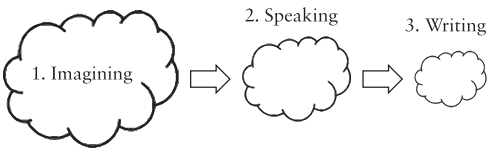
## Mental and Oral Processing (or Thinking and Speaking)

Based on this understanding of where meaning resides and how meaning is made, what meaning-making process would benefit translators? Should they just mentally decode the meaning conveyed by the writing system of the source language and recode it in the target language writing system? Or would oral processing of the source language text with the target language audience produce clearer or more precise understanding of what should be conveyed in the target language translation?

Slobin says that when people are thinking, they are not so constrained by the grammaticalization patterns of their language. They can think more freely in concrete and abstract ways. But when they verbalize meaning, their language forces them to speak in more constrained ways according to how their language

works. Testing convinced Slobin that events involving seeing, as in seeing a story in a picture book, are experienced differently by speakers of different languages. That was evident in the process of making a verbalized story out of the pictures they looked at (1996, 88).

Therefore, orally processing a text with the target language audience would aid the translator and the audience in knowing what each of them understands the text to mean. First, as they act out the information in their mind (i.e., make meaning), then as they verbalize the information through oral language, which begins to reveal how they understand the text, and finally as they code the information in their written language. The following graphic illustrates the path and amount of information conveyed from imagining to speaking to writing the translated text.




The oral processing step (2) seems critical in helping a translator know how the audience understands the text to be translated. How does the audience imagine situations, actions, and timeframes from the source text? What sort of non-linguistic information is shaping their understanding of it?

As Tymoczko and Nord say, there is far too much meaning that can be brought into a written translation. Nord believes that a translator must choose how much information to communicate in the translation. This means some negotiation must take place, assuming the translator works closely with the target audience. Oral processing allows for this sort of negotiation. The goal is to figure out what should be said or written and what should be left unsaid or unwritten.

## What Does Worship Mean?

Consider the following example from the Meyah language of Indonesia. A Western translator wants to translate the concept of worship symbolized by the English verb (or noun) "worship" into Meyah. Thinking about the concept, the Western translator sees what worship is by visualizing it in his mind's eye. What the translator visualizes will draw from his own experiences of worship. He will also draw from what he visualized in his mind's eye while studying the word proskuneo "worship," literally "bow low," in the Koine Greek language context where it was

first used. According to the theory discussed in this paper, the translator is making meaning of it all.

The translator's thinking for speaking process requires him to communicate in another language, one that he learned. He receives help from Meyah speakers by asking them how they express "worship." But it's not a concept these Melanesian people have experienced. They understand "appease" or "pacify," but they don't understand worship. The former concept is typical of animist societies. Benevolence is not a characteristic of the spirit world in their experience, thus they do not worship those spirits, at least in the Western understanding of the word worship.

In addition, the English and Meyah grammaticalized forms force both language speakers to express worship differently. There is no way to reconcile the differences to produce the same meaning. Oral processing allows for meaning negotiation to take place. The translator and target language audience need to arrive at some degree of mutual understanding (i.e., agreement) of what "worship" means in Koine Greek—as far as one can know—and how that can be expressed in Meyah.

Abstract concepts, such as worship, are packed with complex intersemiotic meaning—the sort mentioned earlier. It can't possibly all be translated from one language code into another through a word or phrase. Choices have to be made to capture in a coded word or a phrase so people in the source language and people in the target language understand those concepts to mean in generally the same way. It seems oral processing to negotiate understanding would aid in the translation process. This is because mental simulation helps the translator and the target language audience to see together what is meant to be conveyed in the word "worship."

## Conclusion

Oral processors and print media processors mentally simulate the things they hear or read, according to Slobin and Bergen. Havelock says primary oral cultures process information differently. Slobin believes differences in meaning are apparent when speakers of different languages verbalize the same information, as testing has shown. Either way, oral processing of a text to be translated (or indeed, oral translation) could greatly aid in producing similar experiences in the mind of the receiving language speakers so that what they simulate matches, more or less, what is simulated in the mind of the source language oral or written text. That is a goal of translation.

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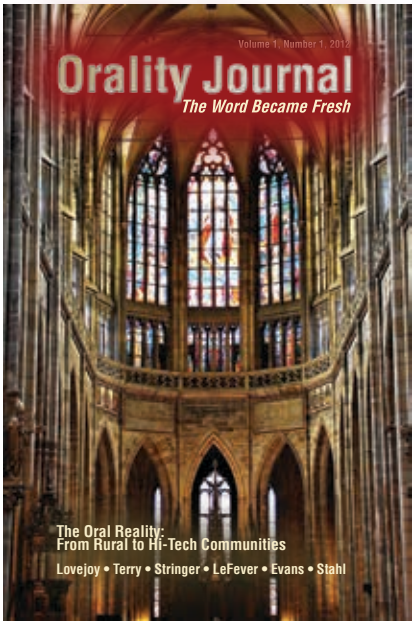


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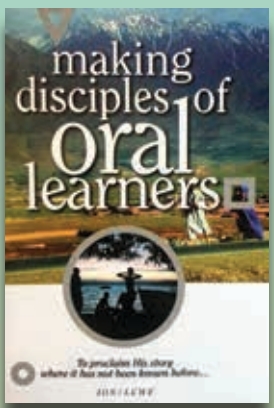


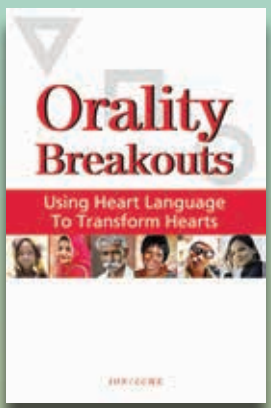


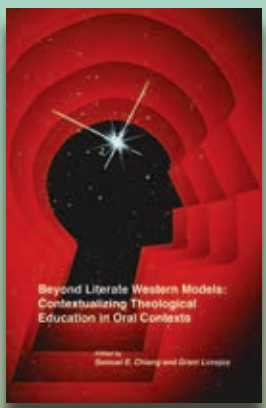


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