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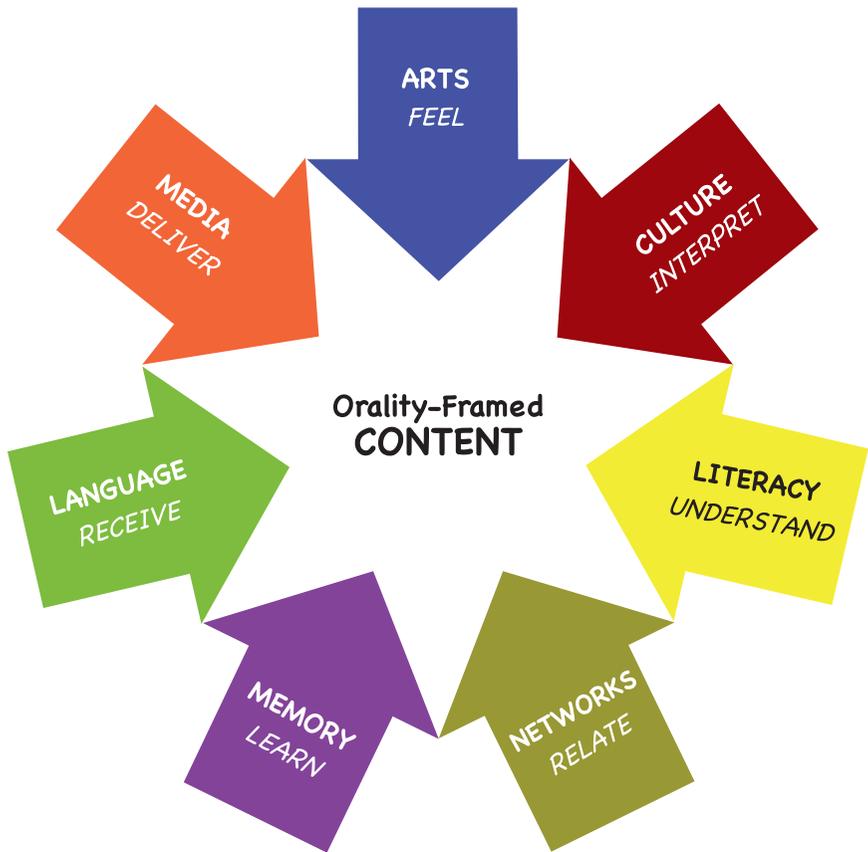
Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

Connecting Orality, Language and Culture

Gravelle • Wafler • Kwa • Arnett • Handley • Freeman

The Seven Disciplines of Orality



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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INTERNATIONAL ORALITY NETWORK

Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

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Cover Photo

Lausanne Movement, used with permission

*During an evening worship service in Jakarta, hundreds of participants at the Lausanne Young Leaders Gathering (YLG2016) brought forward rocks, each with a significant word that God had given the person. Piled together, the rocks created an altar, depicting the integrated power of both the literate **and** non-literate symbols within Christian worship.*

Additional Photos

Stan Wafler, used with permission

Kiem-Kiok Kwa, used with permission

"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

Isaiah 6:1-3 (ESV)

"And they sang a new song, saying,
'Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood
you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.'"

Revelation 5:9-10 (ESV)

Orality Journal

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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Co-Editors' Note

Samuel E. Chiang and William Coppedge

Connecting Orality, Language, and Culture

In August 2016, Samuel and I had the privilege of attending the Lausanne Young Leaders Gathering (YLG2016) in Jakarta, Indonesia. The Lausanne Movement is an international network committed to seeing the whole gospel taken to the whole world.

For this particular event, the Lausanne leadership brought together one thousand younger leaders from all over the world for one purpose: connection. The tagline for Lausanne, “*connecting ideas and influencers for global mission,*” captures the spirit of our time together as representatives from over 140 nations worshipped, dialogued, learned, and prayed together for each other, our families, our communities, our nations, and our world.

While such a missional event is worthy of consideration in its own right, upon reflection, the YLG2016 event was predominately and intentionally an oral communication experience. With the theme for this edition of the Orality Journal as language and culture, it seemed pertinent to offer an oral evaluation of such a multicultural and multilingual communication phenomenon.

Oral Communication Analysis of YLG

Upon arriving at the conference site, a sense of the oral came through enormous, brightly-colored banners that were dotted around the campus. The banners included a label (Create, Repent, Love, etc.), but what caught my eye was not the literate symbols, but the images of a green tree, a blue tower, a red cross, or a yellow flame.

There was a color and an image to go with each of the seven days of the conference; the depiction of these color-image combinations on conference brochures and name tags reinforced an oral-oriented message. It became evident that the YLG2016 leadership team was not relying on print to begin impressing upon us the themes they believed God had for all of us.

A second way that orality featured predominately in *YLG2016* was in the conference theme: *United in the Great Story*. By welcoming story onto center stage, an intentional space was created for the liminal possibilities that so often accompany narrative. This reminded all of us that what unites the Body of Christ, among other things, is a *story* of epic proportions. It is inviting each of us into our appointed roles in a divinely-authored drama.

Some within the orality movement today criticize storytelling, saying that it is not the primary means or purpose of orality. Yet clarification is needed here. An argument can be made that story is inherent in all oral communication. For example, many proverbs are but the synopsis of a larger story; similarly, song often invites us into a narrative, whether of love, loss, or worship. Drama is narrative-based, and dance is often the physical embodiment of a cultural narrative. These examples are more than story; however, story often plays an essential role in their development. Story, therefore, is the life-blood of orality.

The confusion seems to come when story is equated with oral storytelling. While story is a macro category, oral storytelling is itself a specific genre of oral communication, along with other genres like proverbs, ballads, and dance. Thus, equating orality to oral storytelling is drastically incomplete.

However, to dismiss *story* from orality is to dismiss the very power of orality. To reiterate again, story (or perhaps we should use *narrative*) is a macro category, while oral storytelling is a micro category, a particular application of oral communication principles. Such clarification allows us to appreciate the "oral-ness" of the *YLG2016* theme as well as several other story components throughout the conference without feeling like we are inappropriately elevating only one particular genre.

For example, story manifested itself in multiple ways. This was no more clearly seen than in the drama and dance team. Each day, their brilliant display of reader's theater provided an entry point into the biblical themes for the day. At first analysis, it would seem like reading scripted lines in a theatrical performance might be the antithesis of orality; yet, a wise friend observed that the text provides a point of reference—both for the dramatists and the audience.

This was not spontaneous ad-lib entertainment; instead, it was a performance that sought to uphold the value of the written biblical text even as the actors and actresses embodied the message. It was an integration of the strengths of oral and printed methodologies.

The conference program highlighted story in another creative way by prioritizing each participant's own *life map*, or personal journey. Each participant presented his or her life map to a small "connect group" of five or six people. After quietly listening for a few moments, the group's members would then share what they had heard God say in response to each personal story. This creation of a platform for story, the listening to God speak on behalf of another, and the sharing in a small community became not only the most meaningful experience for many, but also epitomized a holy oral communication event between both human persons and a personal God.

One other way that orality appeared, albeit it in a secondary oral fashion, was through the *YLG2016* Connector app. The *YLG2016* leadership team encouraged participants to utilize the app as a platform for engaging in vigorous discussion regarding things that were happening. Remarkably, the Connector app transformed the typical monologue plenary sessions into dialogue experiences, with participants sharing their responses and feelings with each other in real time. Print was present as many texted back and forth during these sessions, and yet the atmosphere maintained a high value-association on oral communication.

Language and Culture

To fully appreciate this oral communication analysis, we must realize the role of language and culture in attempting such a gathering from so many different nations. The *YLG2016* team made translation available in six major languages, including: French, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean, and Russian.¹ In addition, the worship team sought to incorporate other languages like Indonesian and Kiswahili so people had as many avenues as possible to praise Jesus in a familiar tongue. Furthermore, whether in different clothing styles, the proud national flags that were often displayed, the skin tone varieties, or the volume level of different groups' conversations, diverse cultural elements permeated the interactions.

But why raise the money and time (over three years to prepare for *YLG2016*) to bring together so many leaders from different language groups, representing so many cultural contexts? Particularly in today's age, why not hold a webinar or a virtual conference, whereby people can still hear and even see each other in real time? Surprisingly, part of the answer is found in orality.

The reason Lausanne wanted to bring everyone into a shared physical space was so that oral communication—personal conversation—could happen face to face. Those personal connections can happen virtually, but the trademark of orality is its face-to-face humanness.

Virtual relationships, at times, lend themselves to minimize cultural and even language differences. Technology allows for sites like Google Translator to overcome language obstacles. Likewise, social media, by definition, requires selection: what will be shared with others and what will not. Yet oral face-to-face conversation does not allow for easy avoidance of cultural and linguistic differences. We celebrate how technology has helped us overcome many of those challenges, and yet we suggest that it is precisely the unique language and culture differences that make orality beautiful.

For me, this was no more clearly experienced than when the worship team led all of us in the song *Holy, Holy, Holy*, for we sang it not in one language, but in multiple languages, all at the same time. I was reminded of Revelation 5.9-10:

And they (the saints) sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

Gathered with over one thousand saints from over 140 countries, we spent the days face to face, learning to listen to each other's stories and heart cries. Gathered around the throne of God, we turned our faces not to each other, but to the face that alone is worthy of our worship. In that anthem of praise, we brought our differences before the throne of God as offerings,

gifts of thanksgiving; for somehow in the divine mystery, we sensed that in the bringing together of all of our unique cultures and languages, therein could the truest reflection of the image of God be understood.

It is our hope that as you read this edition's articles, representing cultures as diverse as Singapore and Botswana, they might inspire and encourage you as you seek to recognize afresh the beauty of oral communication, even amidst the uniqueness and challenges of all our different languages and cultures.

Holy, Holy, Holy...

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Samuel E. Chiang', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Samuel E. Chiang
Arlington, USA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William Coppedge', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

William Coppedge
St. Andrews, Scotland

¹For a helpful video capturing the role of languages at YLG2016, see Supporting Languages at YLG2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQrlF5ubGuM>

What Do You Mean? Why Communication Breakdowns Happen

Gilles Gravelle

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George Bernard Shaw once said, “The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” Shaw’s irony is apparent when two people from the same language and culture converse over a seemingly simple topic, yet they interpret what is said differently. His irony is especially apparent when two people from different culture and language backgrounds attempt to communicate using a shared language. So often there is a communication breakdown.

A breakdown happens simply because language in general and word choices in particular are influenced by at least two things: experience and environment. No two experiences are exactly alike.

Environments may be the same, but experienced in different ways. People from vastly different cultures have vastly different experiences which influences how they process or make meaning.

Western rationalism operates on the idea that we have shared inborn knowledge. Experiences can activate this knowledge, but experiences do not provide knowledge. Knowledge has somehow always been with us.¹

The belief in innate knowledge led to linguistic structuralism (Saussure, 1857-1913). Simply put, all languages operate on a core set of universal linguistic structures and devices. On the surface, words are understood

according to the structures and devices used to communicate them. There is predictability, so communication should be somewhat seamless when words within linguistic structures are understood. If we know the structure of a target language, then we can export meaning to that language, and the recipients should understand things the same way we do.

However, we now know that language and meaning-making is not so predictable after all. On the contrary, from a cognitive linguistics perspective, “language is motivated and grounded more or less directly in our bodily, physical, social and cultural experience” (Rojo and Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2013, 11).

As Ricardo Muñoz Martín explains, “Natural language structures are taken to reflect cognitive features and mechanisms influenced both by experience and the environment” (2013, 75). Thus, meaning-making represents contextualized interpretation (Croft and Cruse 2004, 98). And contrary to rationalism assumptions, “Meaning creation is not deterministic or mechanical: it is human in every regard” (Halverson, 2013, 48).

Two Models of How People Try to Communicate

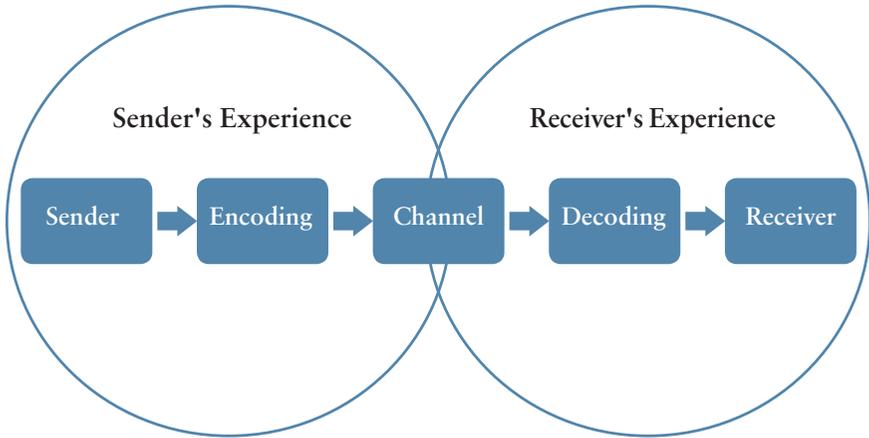
John Fiske presents two models of communication. The *process school* is one modern translators are more familiar with. It views communication as a process of transmission involving encoding and decoding,

...in which one person affects the behavior or state of mind of the other. If effect is different from or smaller than what is intended, this school tends to talk in terms of communication failure and look to the processes to find out where the failure occurred.

This is why it is referred to as "process" school (Fiske 2011, 2).

The process model assumes meaning is discrete and perceptible. Deborah Shadd (2016) points out how the intention of the sender, the encoder, is central in this model. It focuses on efficiency, accuracy, and effect.

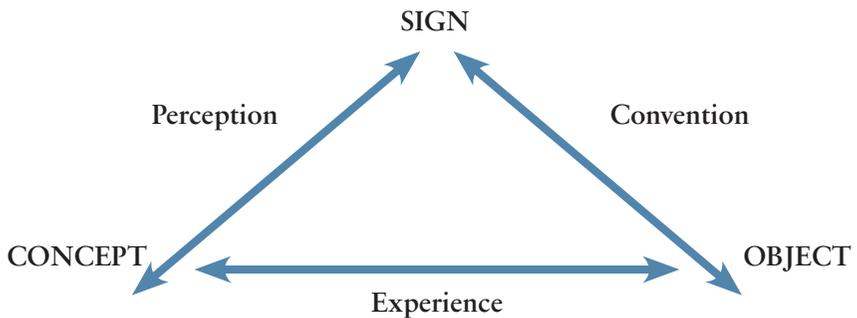
The process model is positivistic in that it assumes, with the right words and structures, the same meaning encoded by the speaker can be decoded by the hearer, even if they have different lived experiences in different environments.



The second is the *semiotic model*. As Fiske said,

It is concerned with how messages or texts interact with people in order to produce meanings....The semiotic school tends to draw upon linguistics and the arts subject and tends to identify itself to works of communication.

To understand communication is to understand the text within a culture.



- The process model focuses on a communication process (i.e., encode and decode).
- The semiotic model focuses on signs that produce meaning through interaction with the sign (i.e., words, symbols).

With the process model, miscommunication equals failure. With the semiotic model, miscommunication reflects difference. Importantly, when there is miscommunication, the process model seeks to improve the

encoding and decoding process, whereas the semiotic model sees miscommunication a matter of meaning that needs to be negotiated because of cultural differences. And as we will see, miscommunication is often because of experiential and environmental differences between communicators.

People Interpret

If knowledge is intuitive, then using what we suppose are commonly understood words should make for easy communication. It should produce unified understanding. But even within the same culture, people use words in well-understood (well-formed) linguistic structures in very different ways.

Someone who grew up in a sarcastic environment complains to a co-worker, "That's a fine way to deal with the problem." The co-worker, who didn't grow up in a sarcastic environment, says, "Thank you!" He interpreted his co-worker's words as a complement. Maybe he wasn't paying attention to his sarcastic tone of voice.

It seems simplistic to say one person speaks and the other person hears what they say. They do more than hear. They interpret what they are hearing based on their own unique experience and

environment. So contrary to a rationalistic understanding of knowledge, how people interpret one another may be subtly to radically different based on how widely divergent their experiences and living environments are. My own experiences with the Meyah people of Indonesia illustrate how people interpret what is said based on experience and environment.

The Meyah people I worked with were from a mountain culture until the government relocated a large number of them to coastal regions. Suddenly, they were thrust into a very different unknown environment. However, they naturally still interpreted communication according to their mountain experiences and environment, often resulting in bad outcomes.

A woman from another culture that practices hospitality was kind and friendly with a Meyah man. For the man, her word choices and behavior could only be interpreted one way; she wanted him as her husband, but she was already married. Therefore, he secretly killed her husband so she would be free to marry him. His wrong interpretation of her words and actions landed him in prison for some time.

The coastal Meyah could speak Indonesian with local government officials who were mostly from Java, but their frequent misinterpretations of supposedly commonly-understood words caused them a great deal of stress and trouble. The communication breakdowns were due to people from very different environments and cultural experiences trying to converse in a commonly understood language.

The story of Jesus talking with a Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42) provides a good example of how people from a similar experience and environment interpret one another. Judging by their word choices, it seems Jesus and the women are just talking about drawing and drinking water. However, because of their shared experience and environment, there is no communication break down here.

They are interpreting each other's words to mean something quite different than what the words mean on the surface. Grice¹ (1972) referred to this as implicature. Reading presumably the same words in a Central Asia translation will likely produce a very different interpretation.

The Book of Ruth provides another example of how words and events are interpreted by readers from different cultures. To a Japanese woman, the Book of Ruth is about mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships. To a central African woman, the story is about God's care for widows. To a rational Western reader, the story is an analogy of Christ. *How can this be if all three groups are reading the same words translated from Greek?*

People Presume

People do not presume things in a vacuum. Their presumptions are based upon their lived experiences and the cultural environment they grew up in. When I told Meyah friends I was out of kerosene, I presumed they would believe me because I come from a culture that teaches the value of truthfulness. But they presumed I was saying I didn't want to share any with them. That is what they tell each other if they don't want to share things, and everybody understands this sort of communication.

Underlying meaning is not what surface words suggest. People in unique cultural settings automatically presume certain things. Those presumptions produce meanings, even if the actual words

they use appear to mean something else. Surface meaning is simply a linguistic structure, a string of signs with associated meaning. Underlying meaning is what the culture interprets or presumes the speaker actually means. It is culturally conditioned, so if you are an outsider, as I was with the Meyah, underlying meaning is not apparent at all.

One day, a Meyah village headman gave me some bananas and pork. I offered to pay for it, but he refused. He said it was a gift, and I believed him because of my understanding of the word "gift." Later, I discovered he really meant it as a loan, which he would collect in the form of cash or a plane flight. Communicating only in surface forms was not serving me well!

Linguistic structuralism, like any other paradigm, operates on certain presumptions. As already mentioned, the operating presumption is that knowledge is innate and not based upon experience. This seemingly makes communication and translation rather straight forward.

But even when people from different cultures who speak the same language, such as Americans and British, try to communicate

on a simple level using the same words, communication begins to break down, says Benjamin Bergen, author of *Louder Than Words*. Different cultures have different experiences. Thus, American and British people can misunderstand each other over common words like napkin, bonnet, and driver's side.

Benjamin Bergan (2012, 153) illustrates a simple communication breakdown based upon language and experience in this fictitious dialogue:

SERGE: OK, now clamp it.

PETE: Are you telling me to shut up?

SERGE: No, just hand me the clamp.

PETE: I don't see a clamp here.

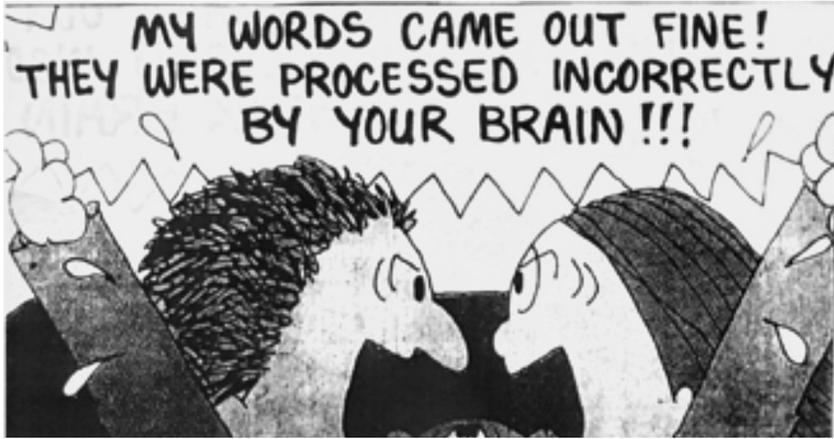
SERGE: It looks like a pair of scissors.

PETE: Oh got it. [hands Serge the surgical clamp]

SERGE: Thanks.

PETE: Is it weird that this is making me hungry? I've got two extra-large meat-lovers combos in my delivery car if you want.

Serge and Pete's different experiences led them to interpret basic words in very different ways.



2

Bergan’s simple definition of communication is that we express ideas in our heads by assigning words to communicate those ideas to others. Hearing those words, the hearer presumably extracts the same meaning and stores it in his or her head. But as Bergan says, there are a lot of assumptions at work here, such as:

- The speaker’s information is discrete and perceptible.
- The speaker is choosing what they think is the best set of words to convey the idea.
- The hearer will interpret those words in the way the speaker intends it to be interpreted.

But so often, the speaker’s word choices are not the best for the hearer if they lack similar experiences in life and environments. When the speaker restates things with another

set of words, the hearer exclaims, “Why didn’t you just say that the first time!” It’s as if the speaker should have known the right words to convey meaning more clearly based upon the hearer’s own experiences. Or as the cartoon illustration suggests, the hearer made a mistake in how he interpreted the speaker’s words. Communication has clearly broken down.

Communication among Opposites

Writing on worldviews and oral-preference cultures, Hannes Wiher says communication can be considered as a function of conscience orientation. Thus, communication styles can differ considerably between two different conscience orientations (2014, 114).

A partial list of Wiher’s communication style differences

between Western guilt-oriented societies and Eastern shame-oriented societies is given below with minor modifications for clarity. In simplistic ways, the list seems to generally correspond with Friske's two models of communication; process for Western cultures and semiotic for Eastern cultures.

question is: *Who compromises in such a communication confrontation?*

The answer to that question may have to do with the directional flow of information. In a way, I need to figure out how to translate myself to the opposite group if I

Process Western Guilt-Orientation	Semiotic Eastern Honor/Shame-Orientation
Directness	Indirectness
Discrete meaning precision	Meaning mutually worked out (non-discrete)
Clarity	Figurative
Low use of non-verbal signs	High use of non-verbal signs
Weak consciousness of context	Strong consciousness of context
Tell the truth	Maintain harmony
Linear logic	Non-linear logic

You can imagine what happens when a Western person interacts for the first time with an Eastern person, assuming both are not conscious of the differences in their communication styles. As George Bernard Shaw said, there is an illusion that communication is taking place.

Instead, there is a breakdown in communication when a process model meets a semiotic model of communication. If experience and environment influences meaning-making, then the

really want to get my information across. That means, I may need to use a non-process approach.

Piotr Blumczynski takes a phenomenological approach to translation and cognition as an embodied principle. Instead of innate knowledge, he says, "Knowledge emerges from a process of holistic experience and cannot be reduced to a purely intellectual analysis of facts and figures." Thus, he prefers to talk about phenomena rather than linguistic facts (2016).

He also argues that Western culture has put greater emphasis on product over process, thus the fixation on facts, figures, and outputs. His is a qualitative understanding of communication and translation. Communication is “strongly contextual and situated; things make sense *to us*, not just in general or to everyone, and what they mean cannot be separated from *how* they mean” (italics his).

If communication is qualitative, then how precise can we expect meaning to be, because the process model looks for precision? Blumczynski states that precision is no longer the holy grail of research where complex phenomena occurs. Indeed, other authors of recent works (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013) make the same case. Qualitative work always has some fuzziness to it, and that’s to be expected.

Having made the case for translation and meaning-making as a qualitative phenomenological and fuzzy endeavor, Blumczynski asks, “Can we argue for a qualitative proximity to translational issues? Bible translation, as we have known it for the last several decades, assumed precision. Using an “objective” linguistic approach would ensure the translated message would be the same for

the receiving audience. But the embodied notion of meaning and experience exposes that understanding of translation, and indeed communication, as overly simplistic (see Gilles 2013, 47-53).”

Blumczynski argues that, from a translation studies perspective, translation is not an object. It’s phenomenological and experiential. If we think in terms of translation as phenomenon, how would we then translate? It may require a hermeneutical approach to translation to grapple with the alterity and detail of the message being translated. It may require negotiation because few people see things exactly the same way.

Even within one’s own culture, there are a variety of experiences that shape embodied meaning. This, I believe, is what Blumczynski means by qualitative proximity to translation. The *how*, in this case, delivers the *what*: a more fully enculturated communication, as Blumczynski expresses.

Turning to translation as faith, Blumczynski says a qualitative phenomenological understanding “changes the abstract and universal towards personal and existential.” This is also about the *how*. “to translate is to ask questions, to

look for answers, to learn and develop.” Like faith, translation needs to be open to revision and improvement. It requires a “healthy dose of anxiety and humility.”

This is hardly the language of precision and fixity that we’ve understood translation and communication to be during the modern era. The how of intercultural communication, the qualitative understanding, and the faith to attempt translation, in spite of the lack of precision, should encourage us. It all lends itself to a community hermeneutical approach to translation in which meaning is close, approximate, but probably not as scientifically precise as our past methods have led us to believe.

Is Meaning Just Arbitrary?

By this point, it begins to dawn on some readers that meaning might be indeterminate, but I wouldn’t go that far. Perhaps it is not as precise and delineable as Western rationalism assumed it was. Maybe things are lost in the process. Certainly, audiences are adding their own meaning in the process. As Blumczynski says, if we look at meaning from a qualitative view, then perhaps we can move from the universal abstracts to personal and existential meaning.

We’ve discussed how a person’s experience and environment influence how he or she interprets a speaker’s words. However, we have not discussed how the speaker’s experiences and environment influence how he or she communicates information.

Whether doing formal translation or just trying to teach something in another language, one needs to be well-aware of how the receiving audience interprets them. Translators and second-language speakers are often unaware of how their own experiences and environment influence their communication choices. Deborah Shadd² provides a short list of things translators are usually not aware of, things they bring from their own context to the communication situation (2016b):

- Their own experience, culture, and worldview
- Their own translation norms and social expectations
- Ethics and ideologies (personal or professional)
- Conditions and context of work (including rate of pay, social status, image in public discourse)
- Organizational/institutional requirements
- Power relations (in the workplace or in society)

A speaker brings many things from his or her own culture and experience to a communication situation. The audience will interpret the speaker's communication according to his or her own culture, traditions, and assumptions. No wonder communication breaks down!

So many cultural and social factors can make cross-cultural communication unpredictable and even contradictory. Furthermore, as Lawrence Venuti points out how,

The notion of indistinct contributions still rests on the individualistic assumption that linguistic and literary form enables transparent communication by a single person, as opposed to communication determined collectively by cultural materials and social contexts. (1997, 63)

This is why the notion of negotiation is necessary if people are to understand each other well. The idea of negotiated meaning is difficult for someone whose experience shaped his or her understanding of meaning as something that is precise, delineable, fixed, and transferable.

Implications

The implications for oral Bible storytelling, Bible translation, and theological instruction are clear. Operating under a Western rationalism paradigm that treats meaning as fixed and transferable from one environment to another without loss will continue to cause communication breakdowns.

During the colonial era, it was important for people living under colonial rule to understand things the "right way." The receiving audience was to somehow take on Western experiential understanding to properly interpret the scripture text. Theological education focused on teaching core theological concepts from a Western understanding using the process model of communication. Negotiation of meaning between the communicators and receiving audience to make sense of the concepts in Majority World environments was generally lacking.

As a result, the colonial missionary translation that first occurred was only a partial translation because it lacked local cultural interpretation to complete it, says African theologian Gerald West (2016). West speaks about the complicating and compromising relationship between a colonial

period translated text and the interpretive practices of African culture. A complication was that missionary translators assumed the Bible could speak for itself through Western rational schemes and frameworks, and Africans would attain the same understanding the missionaries had of the Bible.

West helps us see the difference between the colonial translation and the African vernacular translation. Colonial translation viewed the Bible as rational knowledge that communicated a monolithic theology, but it was a theology of the West. There was little room for a hermeneutical process that would allow the text to be grappled with. There was no negotiation between communicators to make the communication successful. Therefore, translation could only be partially enculturated at best, making contextual interpretation and application difficult, if not impossible. This communication breakdown kept African theology from flourishing.

Missionaries did not recognize African experience within their own environment, let alone their preferred communication styles, such as storytelling, poetry, song, and drama. Colonial translation and theological education did not

allow Africans to theologize in truly liberating ways because biblical meaning wasn't embodied. It was distant and foreign, thus not very understandable or practically useful.

When the Host Becomes the Hostage

Writing on the notion of hospitality and Bible translation, James Maxey provides insight on why communication breakdowns happen, especially in cross-environmental situations. Maxey's definition of hospitality is as follows: *a host who chooses to receive a guest with generosity; and the guest who behaves with gratitude and respect toward the host.*

In view of the influence of Western rationalism and process-orientation in Bible translation in late modernity, it seems the roles of host and guests are reversed, but in a negative way. As Maxey writes, "...the host is obliged and becomes the hostage while the invited guest becomes the directive host" (2013, 5). Building on Maxey's metaphor, successful communication happens when communicators approach each other as welcoming host and gentle guest. There is a sense of mutuality where meaning is worked out as best as possible, given the differences between lived experiences and environments.

As Maxey points out, Bible translation, and I add, theological education, of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are not the same as today. Translation and theological education is localized in most places. Yet it appears that process-oriented translation and theological training still applies in Majority World contexts, especially if the local translators and teachers were trained in the West.

One student attending a seminary in Nigeria admitted that even though his instructors were all Nigerians, the way they communicated theological concepts and biblical principles was very difficult for him to understand. The instructors were trained in the West and were using the seminary's Western denomination curriculum.

Rather than a semiotic method of communication, they had to apply a process-oriented method because the text books were based on a linear, building block style of communication. It appears the directive guest in the form of rationalistic process-oriented communication was still present long after the colonial period had ended.

Why would a host tolerate such a bossy guest? Maxey gives us a hint in saying,

North American BT [Bible Translation] agencies imbued with political and financial power entering into the Global South contexts where host communities are obliged to accommodate their guests suggests a complex network of power relations.

For translation, oral storytelling and theological education to be more fully localized, and thus more useful, methods used to produce knowledge through these disciplines should take into account local communication styles and learning preferences.

Conclusion

Perhaps the pressure is off now that we realize how communication is by nature rife with potential pitfalls in terms of what one person wants to communicate and how the hearer interprets that communication.

Communication is challenging when a speaker's experiences and environment differ from the hearer and vice versa. It can break down when the experiential and cultural distance between them is broad. Even so, in work and ministry we shouldn't expect our audience to try and "get it." Rather, if we seek to understand their communication needs, we can at least negotiate

with them to arrive at a close approximation of what we want them to understand, knowing we can't control what they will do with it when we are gone.

In cross-cultural ministry, communication is hard work. It requires us to be aware of the assumptions that influence the way we interpret others. We need to be aware of what we bring to a communication situation. Perhaps not everything we bring is essential to the message.

Because cultural difference can be significant, a process-oriented communicator may need to broaden his or her tools of communication by employing other methods like art, dance, oral communication, drama, and repetition. In other words, we must utilize more of an inter-semiotic learning styles and methods of communication.

For example, silent dramas can communicate a lot. A local translator was trying to help his friend understand the story of the Good Samaritan so they could translate it into their language. The friend had no knowledge of Bible stories, and explaining the story in their common language wasn't helping. So the translator resorted to silently acting it out.

His movements, facial expressions, and body posture filled in the non-linguistic meaning that was missing for his friend. His acting method differed from how a Western person might act the scene out, but it made sense to his friend because of their similar experiences and shared environment.

A non-linear, inter-semiotic approach to communication may help get your message across in Majority World contexts. It may not communicate as perfectly as you would like, but that should be okay. We can seek to control what we want to communicate, and how we communicate, but it's impossible to anticipate every sort of culturally-influenced understanding from that communication.

Communicating something important without having it come out as something entirely different is still a valid goal. Meaning can be generally understood by both communicators in close, if not exact ways. Some mutual sense of understanding can be achieved. But it requires examining assumptions, being self-aware of what we bring to the communication, and being flexible by trying different styles of communication to ensure that the communication doesn't break down.

¹www.philosophybasics.com/branch_rationalism.html

²<http://sharondrewmorgen.com/miscommunication-the-reasons-the-cure-the-prevention/miscommunication-cartoon/>

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Mission from the New Testament

to the 21st Century

MISSION FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT TO THE 21ST CENTURY

Some Hindsight on Mission as we Know it Today

APOSTOLIC

ACTS 1.8, 30-100 AD

Mission meant calling Jews and Gentiles to come together in the kingdom of the risen Messiah.

STRENGTHS

Unity, boldness, spiritual power, focus on resurrection

WEAKNESSES

Jewish traditions and Gentile immorality both die hard



EASTERN ORTHODOXY

JN. 3.16, 100-600 AD

Mission meant calling people to adoringly enter the presence and life of a loving God.

STRENGTHS

Affirm the importance of life in this world and the church as God's community

WEAKNESSES

Lost its sense of urgency and much of its sense of mission as people got mired in philosophy.



MEDIEVAL CATHOLIC

LK. 14.23, 600-1500 AD

Mission meant calling people to enter the institution of the Church.

STRENGTHS

Attempt to create a Christian society and to require kings to act like followers of Jesus while monks serve as model servants.

WEAKNESSES

Politicizes its mission and rationalize violence with a focus on otherworldly salvation.



REFORMATION PROTESTANT

JN. 3.16, 1500-1800 AD

Mission meant calling people to center their lives on the Bible, being justified by personal faith.

STRENGTHS

Rediscovery of God as a gracious God, with emphasis on the Bible as central in Christian life.

WEAKNESSES

Church unity lost with little emphasis on taking the gospel to non-Christian areas.



MODERN ERA PROT. & CATH.

LK. 4.18-19, MT. 28.18-20, 1800-2000 AD

Mission meant making life in this world better and calling people to the hope of eternal life.

STRENGTHS

Christianity goes global with much sacrificial service.

WEAKNESSES

Western imperialism in theology, church, and culture.



POST-MODERN GLOBALIZED

MT. 13.23, 2000-present

Mission means reproducing our Spirit-given life in others

STRENGTHS

Local movements embody and spread the gospel as "mission" comes to everyone not just the poor, unsophisticated, or uneducated.

WEAKNESSES

Mission withers in former heartlands because of greed as technology replaces God.



CHART YOUR COURSE TODAY

Our predecessors in mission had their time to live, their world to win, their price to pay. We have ours.

- ✘ Looking back at these ways of doing mission, what do you see that will help you face your current challenges better?
- ✘ Read the six mission scripture texts devotionally, applying each to your own way of doing mission.
- ✘ For serious study of these eras of mission, read David Bosch's *Transforming Mission* or Stan Nussbaum's companion work, *A Reader's Guide to Transforming Mission*, including diagrams, tables, and reflection questions.



Sources listed at www.missiongraphics.com/mission-eras



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