

Volume 6, Number 2, 2017

ISSN 2324-6375

Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

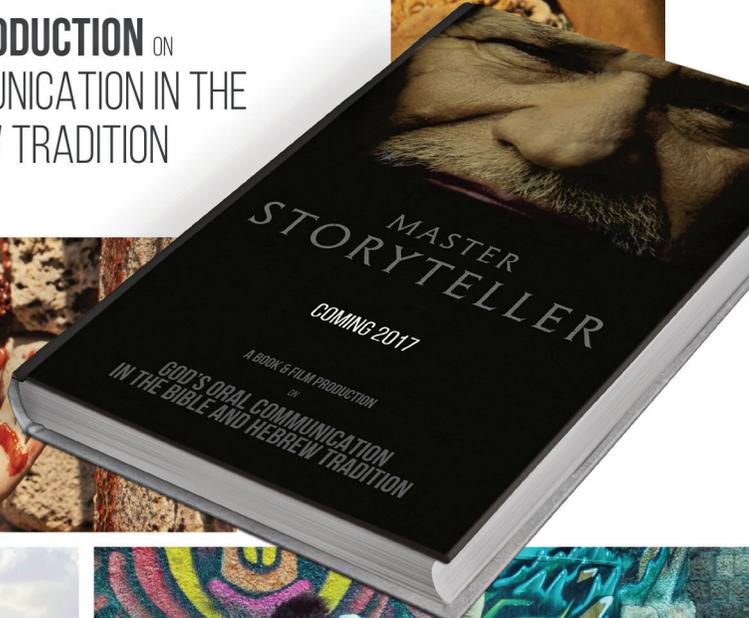
"Reformation: Five Hundred Years of Orality, Media and Memory"

**Konstanski • Araujo • Gidoomal • Kroneman • Blackwell •
Randolph • McClure • Handley • Parro • Foer • Mahendra •
Brown • Roediger • McDaniel • Kabete**

ON SALE - SEPTEMBER 2017

MASTER STORYTELLER

A BOOK & FILM PRODUCTION ON
GOD'S ORAL COMMUNICATION IN THE
BIBLE AND HEBREW TRADITION



HOW DOES GOD SPEAK?

MASTER-STORYTELLER.NET



Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

Volume 6, Number 2, 2017

ISBN 978-962-7673-38-5

ISSN 2324-6375

Cover Photo

All Saints' Church, (also called Schlosskirche or Castle Church), Wittenberg, Germany. Photo by Samuel E. Chiang.

It is on the door of this church where Martin Luther nailed his famous ninety-five theses.

¹⁶"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Romans 1:16-17

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Rev 1:3

"On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

¹²I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."

Revelation 1:10-16

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.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Co-Editors - Samuel E. Chiang and William Coppedge

Associate Editor - Laurie Fortunak Nichols

Assistant Editor - Joni A. Chiang

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIAL/ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Amos Aderonmu

Calvin Chong

Gilles Gravelle

Geoffrey W. Hahn

Mary Verghese

Hannes Wiher

Graphic Design: Cindy B. Morris

Cover Photo: Courtesy of Samuel E. Chiang

Editorial Email: oralityjournal@gmail.com

Website: www.oralty.net

Your Feedback is Very Important!

We welcome your comments, questions, and suggestions! Let us hear from you. Send your feedback to: oralityjournal@gmail.com

Please include your name and organization. Any letters or emails used may be edited and excerpted. Please keep all letters and emails to three hundred words or less.

Wish to Contribute

National Christian Foundation
A/C 429666
1311 Tijeras Ave. NW
Albuquerque, NM
USA 87102

Orality Journal Disclaimer: Articles published in Orality Journal are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the editors, or the International Orality Network.

ISBN 978-962-7673-38-5

ISSN 2324-6375

Copyright © 2017 International Orality Network
In cooperation with Capstone Enterprises Ltd., Hong Kong

PRINTED IN HONG KONG

CONTENTS

Co-Editors' Note: Memory and Media in Revelation, the Reformation and Digital Orality..... 7
Samuel E. Chiang and William Coppedge

Digital Orality: How to connect your digital footprint to the world's five billion oral learners..... 13
Paul Konstanski

This exploration investigates how to communicate in today's "Conceptual Age," employing digital media to connect with a predominately oral world.

How Will We Speak? On Film, Memory, and Mimicking God's Communication Style..... 27
Psalm Araujo and Ricki Gidoomal

A film director and producer recount their pursuit of seeking to understand how God speaks and how He, as the Master Storyteller, invites us to speak.

Translation, Literacy, and Orality: Reflections from the Domain of Bible Translation..... 41
Dick Kroneman

A senior translator probes the multi-layered nature of orality and its relationship with Bible translation.

The Art of Natural Translations..... 61
Matilda Blackwell and Justin Randolph

This article explores how incorporating local artistic forms into a Bible translation project enhances the naturalness of a biblical passage.

Creating Indigenous Films..... 67

Ben McClure

A cross-cultural filmmaker offers an inside perspective on the process of creating audio-visual media projects in Asia.

Back to the Future Pedagogy..... 75

Joe Handley and Craig Parro

Asian church leaders discuss the tradition of experiential learning set in their culture and its potential effectiveness for seeking Christian transformation.

Book Review: Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything..... 81

by Joshua Foer

Reviewed by Shivraj K. Mahendra

Book Review: Make it Stick: The Science of Successful Learning..... 83

by Peter C. Brown, Henry L. Roediger III, and Mark A. McDaniel

Reviewed by Irene M. Kabete

Co-Editors' Note

Samuel E. Chiang and William Coppedge

Memory and Media in Revelation, the Reformation and Digital Orality

The Church is having a great rummage sale. Phillis Tickle in her seminal book¹ suggests that every 500 years or so, there is a moving out of the old from the attic, decisions as to what to store, and movements towards embracing the new. This edition of the *Orality Journal* seeks to identify the nexus of relationships amongst orality, memory, and media. These articles, exploring topics like filmmaking, Bible translation, and digital orality, expose among other things the issue of integrating different modes of communication, whether oral, print, visual, or digital.

Written late in the same century that Jesus had sojourned, and in a "hearing dominant" culture where textuality was part of orality, the opening chapters of Revelation provide a fascinating example of integrated modes of communication. The Apostle John encounters "One like the Son of Man" (v. 13) and falls to the ground in worship. He is commanded to not fear but instead to write letters to the seven churches of Asia. At one level, this appears to be a straightforward literate method of communication as the Son of Man instructs, "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this." Furthermore, the refrain, "to the angel of the church of ... write..." appears no less than seven times and not incidentally, in the letter to the church of Sardis, the divine *Book of Life* is referenced (3:5 italics added).

However, the significant oral dimension to these early chapters deserves attention. John's encounter with the Son of Man does not happen via the medium of writing, but through the spoken voice. "Then I turned to see the *voice* that *spoke* with me... and His *voice* [was] as the *sound* of many waters" (1:12,15) Furthermore, after being commanded to write, every letter begins, "These *are the words of Him...*" The words are being written down as remembered, and to be remembered. The written letters

represent words that were originally spoken and to be disseminated to the appropriate audiences, and the entire prophecy is to be "read aloud...and bless are those who hear and obey..." (1:3)

The Apostle John found himself at the nexus of orality, memory, and media, as was the time of the Greco—Roman era, as he encounters the spoken word (orality) and is being entrusted with the task of remembering (memory), and consequently, delivering these sacred messages (media). Central to every culture's unique understanding of memory and media is this central question of reliability—is the memory of this information true (or accurate), and has its delivery, in whatever mode, been faithful to the intention of its originator?

In light of such inquiry, one of the Son of Man's self-designations within his discourse with John stands out in bold relief: "These things says[1] the Amen, *the Faithful and True Witness...*" (Rev. 3:14, italics added). This Son of Man, who is called holy, who has the seven Spirits of God, who calls God Father—He is faithful and He is true.

It is worth considering these familiar words in the context of communication. Jesus, the Son of Man, the Son of God, through the incarnation not only declares the message of God but also is Himself the message of God. Jesus, who speaks orally with John, is the embodied message of God. Being the faithful and true witness means, among other things, that the information communicated through Jesus is true or reliable and it is faithful or trustworthy according to the intentions of the Father as the original communicator. Therefore, an argument is made that issues of memory and media, far from being peripheral concerns, are actually theological categories as much as practical ones.ⁱⁱ

The history of the Christian Church is in many ways a history of people trying to navigate the theological and also practical issues of communicating God's personal message—Jesus Christ. A timely reminder of one such individual comes this year as 2017 is the 500th year anniversary of Martin Luther's nailing his 95 theses to the Wittenberg church door and thus, the traditional beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

For Luther, the Bible was the written word of God, the gospel was the spoken word of God, and Jesus was the personal word of God.ⁱⁱⁱ For Luther, Christ Himself was present or "re-presented" through scripture. Thus, when a person or persons encounter the Bible, they are encountering the presence of Christ Jesus Himself. However, receiving and understanding the communication of Jesus Christ through scripture is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luther's affirmation of the role of the Holy Spirit in the communication of Jesus Christ through the Bible is no more clearly seen than in the previously discussed early portion of Revelation. John is speaking with the Son of Man, Jesus Himself, but the final exhortation in all seven letters is not, "He who has an ear, let him hear me (Jesus)." Instead, Jesus points to the Spirit: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the *Spirit* says to the churches." To hear Jesus is to hear what the Spirit has to say.

To frame this from a different perspective, the Spirit takes the spoken words of Jesus, heard and then written by John, and translates them from written words into the spoken words of Jesus to be delivered and heard by the seven churches. Thus, the Spirit re-oralizes the written word so that it can be heard as the spoken word of Jesus. Furthermore, the same Spirit who enabled Jesus' words to be heard by the seven churches is the same Spirit who has enabled people down through the centuries (such as Luther) to have ears to hear.

Therefore, if the Holy Spirit is essential for the remembering and delivering of Jesus' spoken words through the written words of scripture, then one can suggest that the Holy Spirit is intimately concerned with our present-day understanding of the role of memory and media for sharing the good news. It is the Spirit who truthfully and faithfully translates the written biblical text, bringing it to life so that people today have to opportunity to choose to have ears to hear Jesus' offer of salvation.

Such integration requires fresh theological consideration regarding the dynamics between the spoken, the written, and the visual word even as pragmatic concerns regarding social media and the digitalized word beg for more attention and resources. In light of this tension, between

theology and practice, a tension at least as old as the Apostle John and experienced by none other than Luther, we offer this edition of the *Orality Journal*.

Sitting in the Wittenberg Cathedral where Luther nailed the 95 theses for the intellectuals and nobles of that time, and listening to the preacher exegeting Romans 1:16, my mind multi-threaded into what might we recover from the Gutenberg Galaxy so that we can live in the Zuckerberg Galaxy? For example, when we quote

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. (Hebrews 4:12)

We use this favorite verse about why people and cultures need the *printed* Bible. But do we think about the original context that when the New Testament writers referred to *the word* — the Greek term is *logos* — they *weren't talking about ink on a page*, nor digital pixels on a screen?

They were talking about a message that was spoken and understood. Even the phrase word of God, which Christians today use interchangeably for the Bible, literally means the orally proclaimed message of God. And, when John used *logos* to mean Jesus Himself, he was referring to the personification of that message.

As Luther experienced a changing of epochs with the Reformation, so mission communication today has witnessed the changing of epochs with the digitalization of the globe. The relevance of the relationship between orality and digital media is as near as our decision of what to post next on social media: a printed text, an image, or an oral recording. Perhaps in seeking to navigate such a complex communication environment, returning to Jesus' self-designation in Revelation can be a helpful fixed reference point, "These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True..."

Change happens, and here in the *Orality Journal* I wish to thank Billy Coppedge as co-editor. It has been a wonderful partnership where we both

learned and grew together. I want to extend my deepest appreciation to Billy Coppedge as it has been a deep privilege to put issues together. May the same Spirit who re-oralized Jesus' words for the first-century Christians and for Martin Luther continue to prick our own ears.

“Whoever has ears to hear,
let him or her hear
what the Spirit has to say..”



Samuel E. Chiang
Wittenberg, Germany



William Coppedge
Kampala, Uganda

ⁱPhillis Tickle, “The Great Emergence How Christianity Is Changing and Why. Baker, 2008

ⁱⁱWe tend to forget that even during the manuscript period, prior to the Gutenberg printing press, and especially in First and Second Century AD, the trust of memory was a way of life in the "hearing dominant society." Orality was the way of life, and textuality supplemented communications. In our current era where textuality is dominant, we tend to think orality is accommodated within the text. And we superimpose our frame and worldview of textuality back to First and Second Century AD. We should have a better understanding of the "setting"—which is orality is dominant and textuality is accommodated within the oral culture. See robust and deep research from John Walton and Brent Sandy, "The Lost World of Scripture," IVP Academia 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱDavid W. Lotz, “Sola Scriptura: Luther on Biblical Authority,” *Union Seminary Review* 35, no. 3 (1981): 262–63. While some may disagree with Luther’s theological differentiating of the word of God, one can appreciate his effort in trying to establish the necessity of the word of God for salvation.

Translation, Literacy, and Orality: Reflections from the Domain of Bible Translation¹

Dick Kroneman

Dick Kroneman serves as the SIL International Translation Coordinator (since December 2014). He has worked as a translation facilitator and translation consultant in Papua, Indonesia since 1988. He has a doctorate in linguistics (Free University Amsterdam 2004) and another one in theology (Evangelical Christian University of Papua, Sorong, 2013). His M.Th. (1987) and B.A. (1984) degrees are from the University of Utrecht. He served as the SIL Asia Area translation coordinator between 2008 and the beginning of 2015. Dick and his wife Margreet led a successful Bible translation and vernacular literacy program in the Una language (Papua, Indonesia) between 1992 and 2007, resulting in hundreds of fluent readers in both Una and Indonesian and over one hundred well-trained vernacular literacy workers from the Una people group. The Una New Testament was dedicated in 2007. The audio-version of the Una New Testament is nearing completion. Translation work on the Una Old Testament is still in process.

Introduction

Until recently, Bible translation was primarily associated with literacy and with the transmission (reproduction) of the written word of God into vernacular languages in print format.

In the process of linguistic analysis and subsequent Bible translation work, previously unwritten languages were 'reduced to writing' in order to better equip them to serve as a channel for the primarily print-based communication of the word of God. In traditional translation projects on the mission field, Bible translation work often went hand in hand with literacy work. This was

based on the assumption that the reading of the word of God was (is) the primary means of getting free, reliable, unimpeded access to the message and the meanings of the word of God.

Vernacular literacy projects often include(d) oral-aural components like reading aloud, oral retelling, and oral discussion of the content and the purpose of the texts that were (are) being read.²

Today, the traditional focus on the printed format of Bibles and on the literacy aspects related to Bible translations is no longer taken for granted by many.

Three factors seem to have played an important role in this development. First, there seems to be a growing dissatisfaction with the results of vernacular literacy efforts as a basis for vibrant, effective scripture use and scripture engagement.³ Second, there has been a growing understanding of and appreciation for the oral nature of communication among people groups who fall into the category of “primary oral communicators.” Direct oral communication of the scriptures, without interference of literacy-related problems of communication⁴, usually sparks a lot of enthusiasm and engagement among recipients in the South. In many cases, direct oral communication seems to be more effective than print-based communication.⁵

Third, there has been a growing appreciation in general of the variety of media through which the word of God can be communicated with various audiences (via video, audio, internet, smartphone, sign languages, and ethno-arts-based forms of expression).

Emphasis on and appreciation for the oral aspects of communication in general goes back to the landmark study of Walter J. Ong’s *Orality and Literacy*. Orality has

also become important in the work of biblical scholars and exegetes, especially those who are actively engaged in the domain of performance criticism.⁶

Likewise, in the domain of translation studies, some books and articles have started to appear on the topic of translation and orality.⁷

In terms of actual practices in the field of translation and scripture engagement, we have, on the one hand, seen a growing interest in storying and other oral approaches in scripture engagement. In many cases, the oral communication of Bible stories sparked the interest of many recipients in the Bible itself. The oral approaches functioned more or less as a bridge to a literacy-based form of communication in printed Bibles. On the other hand, we are now also seeing the beginning of a development where an oral approach is more systematically applied to the process of Bible translation itself. In oral Bible translation, an oral approach is no longer a mere preparation for Bible translation itself; nor is orality just a subsidiary aspect of the overall literacy-based task of translation, as it used to be in many traditional translation projects. In oral Bible translation, orality has become the very core of

Bible translation work itself, defining both the method of Bible translation (oral-aural communication) in every phase of the work and the primary outcome of the translation process (audio-based Bible).

The current emphasis on oral approaches to scripture engagement is, generally speaking, a laudable development. Since oral communication is indeed the primary means of communication for many people in the South, it is indeed natural and important to recognize the importance of oral approaches. However, this development also raises a number of questions that need to be addressed, especially in relation to Bible translation:

1. How do we define the concepts of literacy and orality? To what degree are they distinct, and to what degree do they have overlap?
2. What is the relation between orality and literacy? Are they in competition with one another? Or, should they rather be viewed as being complementary?
3. What can be said about the relationship between orality and literacy from a biblical theological perspective?
4. What can be said about the relation between orality and

literacy from a historical perspective?

5. What could be done or should be done in order to keep a balance between orality and literacy in Bible translation and scripture engagement projects?

Below, I will limit myself to the discussion of a few points related to the questions mentioned above. Hopefully, these questions will lead to a broader and more in-depth discussion of the underlying assumptions and implications of orality-based approaches as well as literacy-based approaches.

In light of the new emphasis on orality, translation scholars and practitioners need to rethink the implications of this new development for translation. In addition, it is important to think about specific insights that the domain of Bible translation can offer with regard to orality.

The Primacy of Orality

I recently had the chance to read “The Seven Disciplines of Orality” by Charles Madinger, et al⁸. I enjoyed reading the various contributions in this valuable journal of orality. Here, I will use this description of these seven disciplines as my main point of reference.

Orality is indeed very important in relation to mission work in general and with regard to Bible translation and literacy work in particular. In fact, oral communication is fundamental not only for illiterate people who live in remote areas of the world. It is also important for highly literate, well-educated people who lead a cosmopolitan lifestyle in the big cities of the world. The vast majority of people—no matter how high they rank on the scale of preference for print communication—learned to communicate orally at an early age, several years before they learned to read and write.

Nevertheless, many people in the North and the South often rely on both oral and written means of communication, depending upon the nature and the context of the communication. Apparently, literacy and orality in their various forms serve different communication needs and purposes. These functions may considerably overlap with one another depending upon the cultural and situational context, but they are not completely identical with one another. Especially in the context of globalization, education, and the growing Internet-based communication on a global scale, both oral-aural-

visual communication and print-based communication play an important role.

It is, however, important to recognize the significance of oral approaches in the context of Bible translation and scripture engagement in the South. A distinct advantage of oral-aural Bible translations is that illiterate people have more direct access to the message and the meanings of the scriptures without having to master reading fluency skills in their vernacular language or in their national language.

The importance of orality is already evident in the Bible and in the history of mission, Bible translation, and vernacular literacy. It would, therefore, be good to add **biblical studies & historical research** to the seven disciplines that are already mentioned in the journal of orality.

In addition, reflection on **hermeneutical and missiological assumptions** with regard to translation and communication—oral & literacy in particular—should also be added to the disciplines of orality. The role of **critical thinking**⁹ in oral approaches also needs to be researched: To what degree does the focus on

memorization and internalization¹⁰ in oral approaches either enhance or hinder the use and development of critical thinking skills of the participants? Finally, there is also a need for more reflection on the nature and function of criteria and procedures for **methodological, academically sound testing** of the various approaches.

The Seven Disciplines of Orality—Plus Five

ARTS, CULTURE, LITERACY, NETWORKS, MEMORY,
LANGUAGE, MEDIA

BIBLICAL STUDIES, HISTORICAL RESEARCH,
MISSIOLOGY/HERMENEUTICS,
CRITICAL THINKING

DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH & RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Oral and Written Communication in the Bible

Orality is at least as old as creation. In Genesis 1, the first recorded act of God is a speech act. God spoke, “Let there be light,” and light came into existence. The general pattern is that oral communication preceded written communication. God communicated with Abraham and the other patriarchs through oral communication (Gen. 15:1; 17:1, etc.). The Ten Commandments were not written in stone (Exod. 24:4, 12; 34:1) until after they had been orally proclaimed to the people of Israel (Exod. 20:1-17).

The Old Testament prophets proclaimed their messages orally before they were written down.

And Jesus taught His message about the coming of God’s kingdom orally. Jesus never wrote a book. It would take several decades before the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John, which recorded the life and the teachings of Jesus the Messiah, were available in written form.

Both facts are significant. Jesus never wrote a book, even though He occasionally quoted a book (The Law and the Prophets). His focus was on direct communication, connecting with the hearts and minds of the people He met with during his life on earth. Jesus’ followers initially also focused on the oral communication of the gospel of the kingdom.

But at some point, there was a need to write down the message in order to communicate the message to people in other place and to the next generations. Communicating the message in written form helped the authors to broaden the scope of the audience significantly. Books could be read by people in remote places without having the messenger present. When John was in exile on the island of Patmos, the only way he could relate to the churches in Asia Minor he was responsible for was by writing letters to them (Rev. 2-3). Written communication also helped to safeguard the integrity of the message, especially during times when heresy and syncretism were rampant (compare Rev. 22:18-19).

Oral communication in the Bible was supported and complemented by written communication. The written communication served several functions:

- It **validated** the message that had already been presented orally.
- It **preserved** the message and served as a constant **reminder** of the message that had already been presented orally.
- It served as the **basis for public reading and explanation** in the congregations.
- It **safeguarded** the message from being corrupted.

- It **amplified** the message by connecting with intended audiences and other audiences that were located in different places and who could read the message and/or listen to the message at a later time.

In other words: written communication was **not just an alternative, secondary mode of communication** that was inferior to oral communication. Rather, it functioned as a **complementary mode of communication** with the purpose of **preserving, validating, and amplifying** the message that had originally been proclaimed orally.

It would be hard to imagine the process of transmission, standardization, and canonization of the biblical texts without the process and tradition of their written transmission. It would be equally difficult to imagine that the extensive text collections of the Old and New Testament could have been memorized and successfully transmitted to future generations without the aide of written communication.¹¹

In some cases, the written communication even preceded oral, face-to-face communication with the primary recipients.

Paul's letter to the Romans is a good example of that. And in the case of John's letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev. 2-3), written communication was the only means of communication that was available to him at that time when he was in exile.

Biblical research of oral and written communication can help us keep a good balance between oral and written communication in mission work in general and in Bible translation in particular. In this context, it is important to look at the variety of ways the authors of the Bible refer to God's revelation in the Bible: In many contexts, they refer to the (spoken) word of God that comes to patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. In other contexts, they speak about the (written) scriptures. The written scriptures referred to the Old Testament canon at a time when the New Testament canonization process had not been completed yet.

Biblical scholars have pointed out that even though the Bible has been preserved in written form (medium), in many contexts it has still preserved the natural forms of oral language (style).¹² Many Old Testament stories, the Old Testament prophecies, the Psalms,

and Jesus' parables still bear the marks of oral language style, even though they have been handed down to us in written form.

The Bible also bears witness to the fact that written texts were read aloud to people in the congregation (Neh. 8:1-9; Rev. 1:3; 22:18). In other words, written communication was not only preceded by prior oral communication, it was also followed by oral scripture reading and explanation. The written word had an important function in an oral context.

In the history of the proclamation of the gospel, oral communication has played an important role. Apostles, evangelists, and pastors have proclaimed the gospel in oral form when they were reading the scriptures to their audiences and when they preached their sermons. Orality has indeed been around from the beginning of the Church, and even from the beginning of creation.

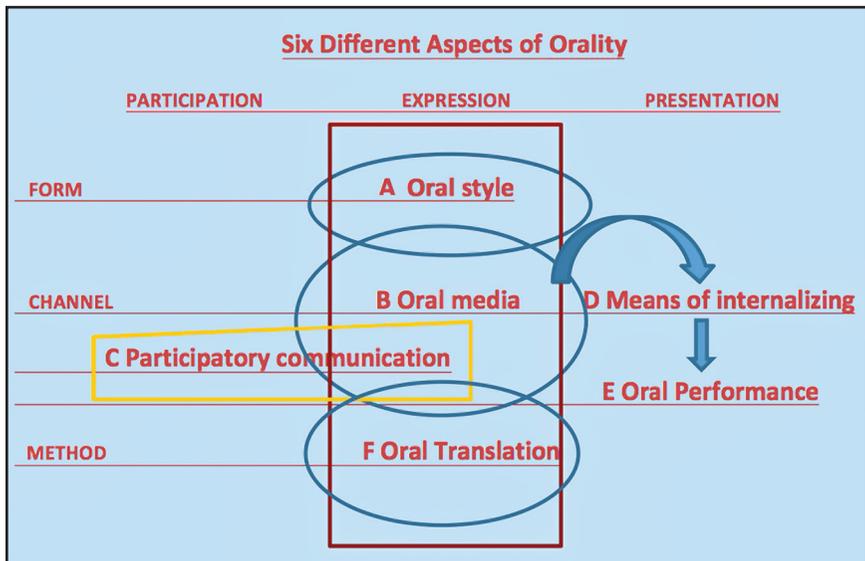
Bible Translation and Orality

When discussing the topic of Bible translation and orality, it is important to clearly define what we mean by orality. Orality is a multi-layered concept. It has a variety of dimensions.

The papers discussing the seven disciplines of orality do not give a clear definition of the meaning and scope of this concept.

For clarity's sake, it may be good to distinguish between six aspects of orality:

- A. Orality as a **style of communication**, which may also occur in print media
- B. Orality as a **mode of communication** (as opposed to print communication)
- C. Orality as a **form of interactive, participatory communication**
- D. Orality as a means for **internalizing** a story that is to be shared with others
- E. Orality as **performance**
- F. Orality as a **method of translation and translation checking**



The distinction between orality as a style of communication versus orality as a mode of communication is especially important. Without this distinction, it is very easy to fall into the trap of uncritically equating print-based communication with writing-style, book-style, non-oral,

unnatural communication. The Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament are great examples of ancient text collections that have retained many oral features. And many print-based Bible translations in the North and in the South contain beautiful oral features.¹³

In the history of mission in general, the aspects A, B, and C have always played a role. The gospel was often orally proclaimed, and listeners freely interacted with apostles, bishops, pastors, and evangelists. I personally remember many interactive sermons that were preached by eloquent Una pastors and elders in the Eastern Highlands of Papua, Indonesia, between 1989 and today. I also remember many sermons that were based on ad-hoc oral translations of Bible passages that had not been translated yet into the Una language. The rhetorical features exhibited in those sermons not only became the object of discourse analysis but they also provided the model for structuring the translation of New Testament hortatory discourse (sermons and epistles).

Orality as a style of communication (aspect B) has played an important role in meaning-based Bible (print) translation that has taken place in the tradition of Nida, Beekman

& Callow, Barnwell, and others during the past 60-plus years. During that time, the term orality was not used often. But there was another important concept/principle in translation philosophy that definitely implied the concept and practice of orality as a style of communication even in Bibles that were published in print form.¹⁴

The concept I am referring to is the concept of "naturalness." According to "meaning-based" translation principles, good translations are produced by following three (or four) important translation principles: Good, excellent, translations are **Accurate, Clear, Natural, and Acceptable**. As was mentioned before, the concept of naturalness clearly implied oral communication, since most of these languages had not yet developed a written style of communication that was clearly distinct from the common oral style of communication.

The four principles (or "legs") of Bible translation:

Accuracy

(reflects Oral Style of the Source Text)

Clarity

Naturalness

(implies, entails Oral Style of the Receptor Language)

Acceptability

In Papua, Indonesia, for example, many print translations of the New Testament do have oral features. Many printed translations sound like oral, conversational vernacular. Introductory vocatives, tail-head linkages, chronologically-ordered clauses and sentences, reduced information load in sentences and clauses, and embedded thought quotes and speech quotes are just a few examples of the oral style in Papuan languages.

Lack of naturalness in translation does occur, however, but this usually happens when beginning translators have not been adequately trained in proper drafting techniques. In such cases, the beginning translators tend to uncritically follow the forms of their source text in the national language without taking the time to carefully cast the meanings and functions of the source text into their own language.

Various strategies have been suggested by translation consultants in order to improve the naturalness of translations:

1. Include an oral (retelling) step before writing/keyboarding the first draft of the translation

2. Read the first draft aloud, while paying attention to sentence length and information load
3. Do discourse analysis of narrative genre and other oral genres and apply the principles learned in the actual translation process
4. Include reviewing: native readers read the translation aloud in order to improve its naturalness

So, even though the principal medium was in print form, in book form, the style that was being used was often an oral style. In addition, the translations in print form were complemented by audio-recordings.

What seems to be new in newer approaches to orality—in addition to using the cover term orality much more explicitly and frequently—are the aspects mentioned under D, E, and F:

- D. Orality as a means of internalizing a story that is to be shared with others (crafting and memorizing)
- E. Orality as performance
- F. Orality as a method of translation and translation checking.

| Preparation for BT | The BT Process | BT Output | BT Communication |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| <p>“Traditional”: Literacy, printed stories, reading to others</p> | <p>Print-focus w/oral style aspects</p> | <p>Printed Bible w/Audio-Bible?</p> | <p>Literacy, reading classes w/ oral components, Scripture Use</p> |
| <p>“Innovative”: Storying, Oral Bible Stories</p> | <p>Oral Bible Translation w/transcription?</p> | <p>Audio-Bible w/ transcript?</p> | <p>On phone, tablet Scripture Engagement</p> |

Orality is both relevant to scripture translation and to scripture-based products and processes. In SIL, the new focus on orality initially concentrated on scripture-based products (oral stories as a preparation for the reading of print translation). More recently, however, the oral approach has also been more explicitly applied to the translation process. In oral Bible translation, oral-to-aural translation is advocated as the primary method of translation. This makes it possible that even illiterate people can be involved in translating the scriptures.

Orality, Naturalness, and Acceptability

So far, discussions on orality seem to have mainly focused on the importance of naturalness. People in the Southern part of the world

are primarily oral communicators, so the important thing to do is to produce Bible stories and Bible translations in oral form. This kind of approach makes a lot of sense. By presenting the scriptures and scripture-based products in oral form, we reach a much broader audience by sidestepping the literacy barrier.

There is, however, another important aspect to translation and communication in general that is often overlooked. That is the aspect of acceptability. This aspect is very important, especially in the domain of communicating religious messages.

In many oral cultures stories are told by certain individuals who own the stories and who have the credibility to tell and own those

stories. The stories may be owned by senior clan members who have received those stories from their fathers and grandfathers.

In many churches, religious truths are passed on by ordained pastors and elders, especially in formal church settings, like church services (sermon, liturgy). Women are often not be allowed to pass on stories and messages in formal church settings. In less formal situations, like Sunday school and Bible studies, there may be a lot more flexibility.

In some contexts, the written word of God is highly valued as the truth, whereas traditional stories, which used to be orally transmitted, are now viewed as false stories. In such contexts, print-based communication is associated with authoritative, true messages, while forms of oral communication do not necessarily have this added feature of trustworthiness.

These are all important factors to be considered. How do cultural factors related to acceptability and credibility influence the choice of who can be, or should be, the storytellers? What are the perceptions the audience might have regarding various modes of

communication? Oral forms of communication are usually highly regarded. But oral communication that is not anchored to print-based communication of the Bible could be problematic in certain contexts.

When Western organizations come in and promote oral approaches to Bible translation and scripture engagement, they may think they are following local patterns of communication, and they certainly do so in important respects. But they sometimes miss some of the subtleties of the cultural context, which may entail specific expectations as to who can—or cannot—share oral stories in different communication situations.

A related, language-and-culture-specific question is: Is there a need for storytellers of new religious content like the gospel to explicitly establish the credibility of the message, or their credibility as story tellers, when they tell these stories in vernacular contexts? For example, do they have to include information about the origin of the story, like the following: “This is a story about Jesus that happened a long time ago and was then written down in the Bible, in the Gospel of Mark, chapter x, verses y to z.” Or: “This is a

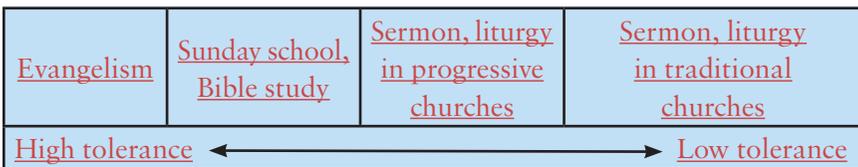
story that was told by followers of Jesus a long time ago, and then it was written down by an author whose name was Mark, and who was a companion of the apostle Paul.” In other words: is there a need to make explicit that this is a story that has been passed on for many generations, through oral and written communication, rather than a story that the storyteller has witnessed or experienced firsthand? Or, is this already clear to the recipients, even though it is not expressed?

The main point here is that we need to pay attention to both naturalness and acceptability, and to ways these two features are expressed in both oral and written communication. In written communication (print communication), it is usually clear that the reader is not the author of the story that is being read. The role of the reader is primarily receptive. In oral communication, it is usually much more difficult to determine whether the storyteller is producing the story (primary communicator; originator of the

story) or whether he or her is reproducing the story (secondary communicator; mediator of the message).

When checking the understanding of oral Bible stories and/or oral Bible translations, it is important to check the understanding of the audience in terms of their assumptions about primary and secondary communication. In addition, it is important to check the acceptability of the message, when told/retold by different types of storytellers (men vs. women; older men vs. younger men; ordained vs. not ordained; cultural role models vs. questionable people, etc.) in different contexts. Both the content and the situational context need to be checked for naturalness and acceptability.

Audiences may have different levels of tolerance with regard to allowing or favoring specific types of communicators in different contexts of situated language, depending on the objective and the level of formality.



Translation teams need to grapple with the role of literacy and orality in their Bible translation and scripture engagement project when they go through the process of developing, fine-tuning, and/or revising their projects brief together with the main stakeholders of their project. In many cases, it may turn out to be most profitable to use both orality-based communication and print-based communication.

Oral Bible Translation

Oral Bible translation is one of the new and promising developments in Bible translation. At this point, it is still in its experimental stages.

The development of the RENDER program is the most prominent advancement of oral Bible translation. One of the advantages of RENDER is that it forces translators and consultants to constantly keep the oral-aural aspects of communication in focus. This is a powerful tool, at least potentially, and especially if it is used in combination with powerful text-based tools like ParaText and Translator's Workplace.

Several SIL teams and translation consultants have expressed interest in RENDER as a tool for producing Bible translations that are more natural and that retain a higher

degree of orality. In some cases, the translation teams would like to use RENDER to produce an audio Bible translation as their main translation output. In other cases, the translation teams would like to use RENDER as a tool for ensuring naturalness during the drafting process (oral drafting), while they are still aiming for a print-based Bible translation, which is complemented by the audio-version.

More research is needed to find out in what kinds of contexts an oral Bible translation project would be the best fit and what the possible implications are for the training of translators and translation consultants.¹⁵

Technical Innovation, Methodological Assumptions, and the Need for Better Testing Procedures

We should be thankful for the many technical innovations that have helped to improve the quality and/or pace of Bible translation. The development of ParaText and Translator's Workplace are two examples of this. The development of RENDER, BLOOM, and other programs and apps that directly or more indirectly facilitate processes that result in better translated scripture products (oral and/or

print) and scripture-based products are all very important and much appreciated.

I do, however, have some questions and concerns about what seems to be a lack of critical examination of certain assumptions related to orality and literacy.

One of those assumptions might be that orality is perceived as a new phenomenon in the world of mission and Bible translation, and that there is a stark contrast, or even dichotomy, between orality on the one hand and literacy on the other. In actual practice, however, orality has already played an important role in more traditional Bible translation and literacy projects, often resulting in highly natural vernacular texts with many oral features, which were captured and preserved in print-form. What is new in the newer approaches, though, is that orality has now taken on a much more central role in the methodology of producing and transmitting scripture translations and of scripture-based products.

Another assumption might be that aural-to-oral translation is all that is needed for translation teams in the South, without any additional visual input. The addition of

visual and/or textual, print-based aides could, however, also enhance and enrich the processes of oral translation, oral back-translation, and oral translation checking.

Another assumption might be that mother tongue translators in the South are primarily oral communicators and that an aural-to-oral translation approach would necessarily yield better results than more traditional approaches that are primarily based on printed input. We must not forget, however, that many mother tongue translators are highly literate in both their national language and in their vernacular language, and that even in more traditional print-based approaches there is often an oral step/phase that is intended to enhance the oral style in print translations.¹⁶

We should certainly not rule out the possibility that there could be illiterate translators. But translators who are illiterate would be at a great disadvantage, unless they would have access to exegetical comments and translation notes in audio-form. The question is: Are there enough materials available in audio-form? Or, will they be made available?

Also, the fact that a project featuring an innovative approach

is successful in a number of cases does not prove that the method that is used in the process is necessarily better than more traditional approaches. The same group of translators might have done equally well if they had followed their usual, more traditional approach.

Relative success and failure of projects is usually the result of a combination of factors. The methodology that is used is definitely one factor, but the quality of the translators (their knowledge, experience, and critical thinking skills) is another factor. How do we (really) know that the success of an innovative project is the result of the methodology that was used rather than the result of the quality of the people who were performing the project?

Finally, there might be an assumption that a completely oral approach is the best solution for any translation project in the South. We should keep in mind, however, that Bible translation work is carried out in a wide variety of contexts. In some of those contexts, vernacular literacy may indeed be problematic, but in other contexts there is a growing number of people who are highly literate in their own language and/or in the national language.

It will be up to translation teams and the main stakeholders in those translation projects to decide which approach best fits their own context. It is one of the tasks of translation consultants to present the various options to translation teams so that they can make well-informed decisions in this regard.

More descriptive research, reflection, and discussion is needed in order to address the methodological issues mentioned above.

Conclusion

Above, I have outlined the importance of orality for Bible translation. I have shown that orality and literacy are very much intertwined in the Bible itself. And I have made the point that orality has also played an important—but often underrated—role in traditional literacy projects and translation projects.

In addition to the “seven disciplines of orality” I have proposed five more disciplines that also need to be studied. I have also pointed out that the concept of orality is multilayered. Attention was also given to the relation between orality on the one hand and the principles of naturalness and acceptability on the other.

Both oral communication and print-based communication have their own strengths. Oral communication is direct, face-to-face communication, which helps us to connect at an interpersonal and emotional level. As a result, spoken discourse often has a bigger impact on the audience than a book, an article, or another form of print-based communication might have.

Written communication, on the other hand, helps to preserve, validate, authorize, and/or amplify a message. Print-based communication also allows readers to digest the communication at their own pace, fast or slow. They can either read in linear fashion, or in non-linear fashion. They can skim the text, while they skip, fast forward, and/or back-track, according to their particular focus during the reading process.

Concern for naturalness in Bible translation is an important value that connects innovative approaches in orality with more traditional approaches in Bible translation. The strong connection between Bible

translation and orality is not something that is entirely new, as the following quote from Martin Luther illustrates:

[Translators] ... do not have to **ask** the literal Latin how we are to **speak** German, as these donkeys do. Rather we must **ask** the mother in the home, the children in the street, the common man in the market place. We must be guided by **their language**, by **the way they speak**, and do our translating accordingly. Then they will understand it and recognize that we are **speaking German** to them.¹⁷

Luther used orality-based meta-language in order to refer to the translation process even though he was talking (writing) about print translation. His translation of the Bible in German contains many idiomatic expressions. Conversely, the *Journal of Orality* uses a print-based form of media to discuss the topic of orality.

This clearly shows that, in actual practice, the distinction between oral and written language is very thin indeed, and rather a matter of degree than one of strict dichotomy.

¹An earlier version of this paper—under the title “Translation and Orality”—was presented during the SIL Inter-national Media Services Summit in Waxhaw, NC, on July 28, 2016.

²Reading of the Bible in the South was (is) often a social activity (both in formal and informal contexts). In various contexts (church, school, home) a more or less skilled reader would read (reads) the text to a group of other people. This was (is) in contrast with Western approaches, where reading is often perceived and practiced as an individual, silent activity, without audible oral components.

³So far, the expression of dissatisfaction with the results of literacy projects seems to be mainly based on the generalization of anecdotal evidence from unsuccessful literacy projects, and not on descriptive and analytical research of both successful and unsuccessful literacy projects. It would be helpful to do (more) research on factors that have helped and/or hindered success in vernacular literacy projects, and on the direct or indirect impact vernacular literacy projects have had on scripture use and scripture engagement.

⁴Orthography problems, lack of reading fluency, and a high rate of illiteracy are real or potential problems that are inherent to a literacy-based approach.

⁵Oral communication strategies seem to work very well in contexts where a literacy-based strategy of communication has not worked well in the past.

⁶See, for example, David Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—Part I.” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 36 (2006) 1-16. And, David Rhoads, “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies—Part II.” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 36 (2006) 164-184.

⁷See, for example, James A. Maxey. *From Orality to Orality. A New Paradigm for Contextual Translation of the Bible*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2009. Lourens de Vries, “Bible translation and primary orality.” *The Bible Translator: (2000) Technical Papers* 51:101–114. And Lénart J. de Regt, “Bible Translation and Orality.” *Journal of Translation*, Volume 9, Number 1, (2013), 17-22.

⁸Madinger et al., “The Seven Disciplines of Orality.” In: *Orality Journal. The Word Became Fresh*. Special Edition. Volume 2, Number 2 (2013).

⁹For a good overview of critical thinking skills, see Richard W. Paul and Linda Elder, *Critical Thinking. Tools for Taking Charge of Your Professional and Personal Life*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: 2002, especially the diagrams on the pages 110-111.

¹⁰Internalization of the content, meaning, and purpose of texts is not only important in oral approaches, but also in print-based approaches. More research is needed to find out to what degree oral approaches and print-based approaches overlap in this regard, and to what degree they are different.

¹¹See, for example, Paul D. Wegner, *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible. Its History, Methods & Results*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2006, p. 106.

¹²See, for example, Ernst R. Wendland, *Finding and Translating the Oral-Aural Elements in Written Language. The Case of the New Testament Epistles*. Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008.

¹³In many vernacular languages that have been 'reduced to writing' in the recent past and that don't have a long history of literacy, there is often no clear distinction between an oral style of communication and a written style of communication. It usually takes time to develop a written style of communication that is distinct from an oral form of communication.

¹⁴Eugene A. Nida, in *The Theory and Practice of Translation*(1969:12-13), articulated the need for natural equivalence and the significance of style in translation. He also made explicit (1969:14) that "the aural (heard) form of language has priority over the written form" in translation. In Nida et al. (1983:169) he makes the point that "In order to produce a rhetorically satisfactory translation, it is also essential to study the rhetorical features of the receptor language." Translations should be cast in natural language and not sound like translations at all.

¹⁵Brian Kelly, who reports to the SIL International Translation Coordinator, and who is being mentored by Ralph Hill of Seed Company, is currently doing research on oral Bible translation that is still in the process of being developed by Faith Comes By Hearing in cooperation with Seed Company, SIL International, and other interested partner organizations.

¹⁶Translators (= mother tongue translators) should not be confused with language informants or translation drafters, who are dependent on translation facilitators to provide them with exegetical information they need in order to do a good job in translation. Translators should be able to access exegetical information and to apply this information to the translation process. They should also be able to carry out various checks (naturalness checks, comprehension checks) and to correct or improve the translations.

¹⁷Martin Luther (1530), *Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen* [Open Letter on Translation]: “man mus nicht die buchstaben inn der lateinischen sprachen fragen, wie man sol Deutsch reden, wie diese esel thun, sondern, man mus die mutter jhm hause, die kinder auff der gassen, den gemeinen man auff dem marckt drumb fragen, und den selbigen auff das maul sehen, wie sie reden, und darnach dolmetzsche, so verstehen sie es den und mercken, das man Deutsch mit jn redet.”



ORALITY: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK

Sept 11 - 13, 2017



Colorado Springs, CO, Focus on the Family Campus

Southeast Asia Conference
Nov 28 - 30, 2017
Manila, Philippines



www.orality.net



OPERATION WORLD



THE DEFINITIVE PRAYER GUIDE TO EVERY NATION

JASON MANDRYK



ION

INTERNATIONAL ORALITY NETWORK

www.orality.net



ISBN 978-962-7673-38-5