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Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

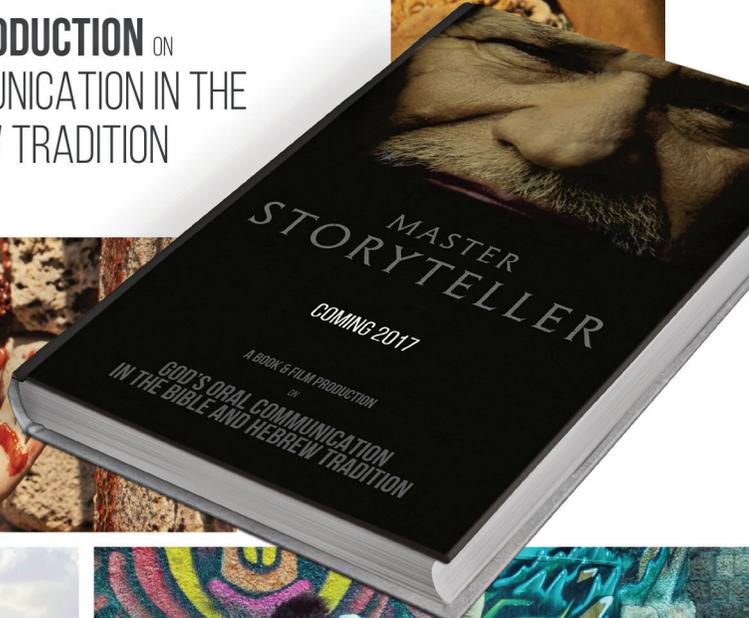
"Reformation: Five Hundred Years of Orality, Media and Memory"

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

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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.

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Editorial Email: oralityjournal@gmail.com

Website: www.oralty.net

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

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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.

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

Paul Konstanski

Paul Konstanski's work as a project specialist with Cru has given Paul widespread exposure to a variety of approaches in ministry in many different settings. These experiences, combined with his unique blend of administrative skills and creativity, have often helped him lead people to think outside the box, yet in a way that is tied to practical application and getting things done. He has a degree in Leadership Communication Studies from the University of Minnesota, has been a lifelong learner of new technologies, and has always been an advocate of the key principles called the "lean start-up."

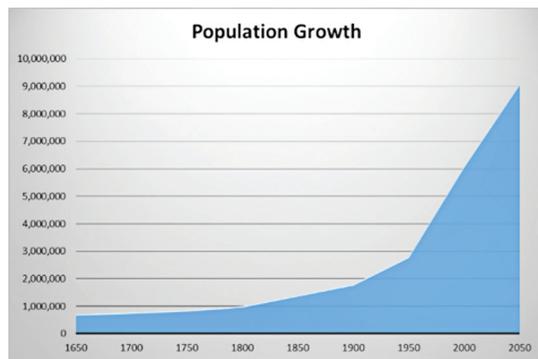
The earth has seven billion inhabitants. Did you know that two-thirds of them are oral learners? The number of cell phone subscriptions exceeds the earth's population. Orality and technology are interacting with each other at a mind-bending pace. Digital orality began with cutting-edge ideas like solar-powered cassette players. But today, nearly every living person on the planet is within digital reach. When oral principles are applied to the digital world, you establish a clear connection with the hearts of people. You teach in the way they learn best.

On the eve of World Water Day, the United Nations World Health Organization offered a sobering statistic: According to a recent study, more people on earth have access to mobile phones than they do to flushing toilets.¹

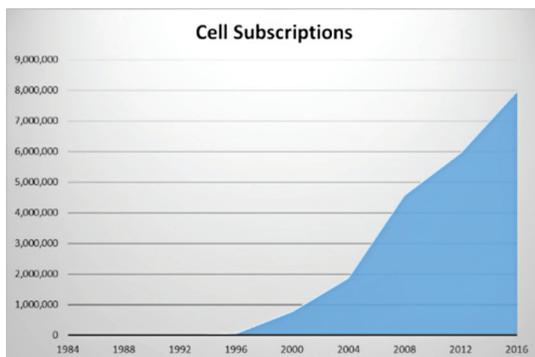
The following three graphs illustrate this concept.

The first graph shows the growth of world population over the past 350 years,

reaching one billion people on earth around 1800. The second billion came 123 years later. But then it exploded – currently adding a billion people every 12-15 years.²

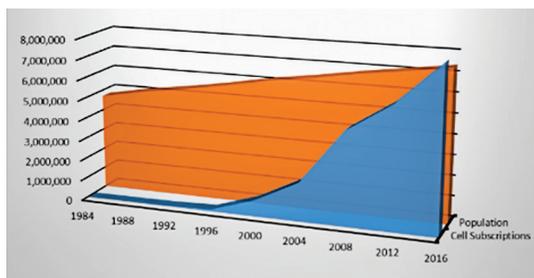


The **second graph** shows cell phone subscriptions for the past 30 years.³ It took a while to reach one billion subscriptions. But for the past ten years, it now only takes about three years to add another billion.



The **third graph** combines these two for the past 30 years. It clearly shows that the number of cell subscriptions has surpassed the world's population.

That does not mean that everybody on earth has a cell phone. A lot of people have two phones and there are all kinds of monitoring or text services that use a subscription. But what it does mean is that the world that you knew as recent as ten years ago is no longer the same.



For thousands of years, the routes of the Bedouins were determined by where the oasis was located. But in the past ten years, the routes are determined by where there is cell coverage. As long as you have cell coverage, you just call for someone to bring water.

The explosive growth of mobile phones continues to add to an information explosion in staggering

proportions. When you are holding a cell phone in your hand, you are holding a small computer. It has been rightly called a "brain in the hand." It can store information, take photos, and hold data.

Every day, the world's seven billion people send 500 million tweets⁴ and upload over 100,000 hours of video to YouTube⁵ (*see below sidebar for more impressive stats*).

Digital Footprint

Moving past these staggering numbers and bringing it down to daily life, the term "digital footprint" describes the trail of activity stored in electronic form. Every tweet, Facebook comment, and email you write (even website you visit) adds to this digital footprint. In the truest sense, your digital footprint is not limited to your online activities. It extends to the files you keep on your personal computer as well. Even if the file is never transmitted anywhere, it is still part of your footprint. Not limited to words, your footprint includes the videos you shoot and the audio recordings you make.

This is the definition for a "digital footprint." But what about the second half of the title of this article—orality. What is that?

What Is Orality

Orality is not a common phrase, and when you say it to someone not familiar with the concept, he or she may ask if you mean morality, or he or she may think you're talking about dental hygiene. For those new to this term, here is a one-minute definition developed to explain it visually.

One-Minute Orality Definition

If asked to define these shapes,

Did you know ...

By 2018, video will account for 2/3 of mobile usage?

More people own a mobile device than a toothbrush?

If Facebook were a nation, it would be the largest on earth?

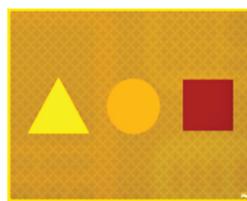
1 in 3 marriages start online?

The fastest growing demographic on Twitter is grandparents?

Every second, 2 people join LinkedIn? They just lowered the minimum age to 13.

Stats taken from Erik Qualman Socialnomics video on YouTube.

you would most likely say that they are a triangle, a circle and a square. For those of us who read and write, this would make sense.



We would use the geometric definition of the shapes. The recognition of shapes is a pre-skill to reading.

But for the two-thirds of the world who are oral learners, and especially those who do not read, they think in relational terms. To them, this becomes a mountain, sun, and a house. They think about how things relate to daily life. Oral learners define what they see in light of what they experience and what they understand.



Most often, when hearing this definition, people shake their heads and say, "Okay, I get it..."

Wikipedia defines "orality"⁶ this way: *Orality is thought and verbal expression in societies where the technologies of literacy (especially writing and print) are unfamiliar to most of the population.*

Walter Ong was a professor at St. Louis University who did a lot of study on orality. He even came up with another dimension called "Secondary Orality,"⁷ which is when a person who can read and write expresses him or herself orally. An example would be a newscast. The anchor is most often reading from a script, but sharing orally. For years, that has captured well most oral theory.

Oral Preference Learner

In recent years, a new phrase has come to the forefront: oral preference learner.⁸ This is a person who has the ability to read and write, but he or she prefers to learn orally.

It is estimated that two-thirds of the world's population are oral preference learners. For many, they have no other choice. But even in very highly literate societies, this same stat holds true. The difference is for them it is a choice. Even though they can read, they choose to learn orality. Within the International Orality Network, the phrase "Orality by Choice" is used to describe this group. They choose to be oral.

This preference for orality is beginning to have a profound effect on society.

Remote Control

One of the most influential inventions that changed how we told stories was the television remote control. Many under the age of 40 have never used a knob to change the channel on a TV. The idea of getting up to change the channel does not make sense to many.

It may seem that that was just an invention of convenience, but it

was a game changer that paved the way for the rapid and wholehearted embrace of orality by choice.

Prior to the remote, you typically watched programs in a very linear fashion. When a commercial came on, you would sometimes step out of the room, but there was constant.

Then, along came the remote control and the viewer was instantly empowered. If you did not like what you saw, a quick press of a button or two and you were instantly transported to a whole new genre or location. People were no longer tied to a linear story.

Present Shock

This non-linear approach even began to change the way people's brains function. In the book *Present Shock*⁹, author Douglass Rushkoff explains: "*Our society has reoriented itself to the present moment. Everything is live, real time and always-on.*"

He continues to explain some of the implications by saying this:

It's why kids in school can no longer follow linear arguments; why narrative structure collapsed into reality TV; and why we can't engage in

meaningful dialogue about last month's books and music, much less long-term global issues.

You can now find out about what is happening in some remote part of the world before CNN can assemble a camera crew to get there.

Those alive today and living in a culture that—as Qualman¹⁰ shows us statistically and Rushkoff points out historically—is radically different than 25 years ago. Even as literacy rates rise worldwide, we are becoming more oral in how we think and function. And this has major implications for how we seek to reach people for Christ and help train them in their faith.

Why This Matters

Two major themes are now established. The first theme is that people are living in a rapidly expanding digital world where personal information produces a digital footprint. The second is that people live in an oral world. Orality goes beyond the spoken word into a whole new way of relational thinking.

This article is about connecting those two worlds. Digital orality. How is that accomplished?

Whole New Mind

Author, speaker, and former speech writer for United States President Bill Clinton, Daniel Pink also wrote a book called *A Whole New Mind*.¹¹ In the book, he presents an idea that has shaped the thinking on this topic. Pink claimed that society is entering the "Conceptual Age." This concept provided the glue that brings digital and orality together.

It is the way to connect your digital footprint to the world's oral learners.

The Ages

History has commonly taught that society has gone through a series of ages—major blocks of time when human activity was dominated by a common theme.

Anthropologists traditionally start with the Stone Age, where humans were developing tools from their natural surroundings and they were primarily hunters and gatherers. The Agricultural Age followed, in which humans took control of the natural environment for sustenance. Jumping forward a few thousand years, people experienced the Industrial Age, which began to change the status quo. The world's population exploded. Cities began to grow

as people moved off the farms and into production. Life was no longer dominated by simply trying to find food and shelter.

The last half of the twentieth century ushered in the Information Age, also known as the "Digital Age." In the same way that machines transformed society, now information changed lifestyles. In the general sense, the world is still in the midst of the Information Age—we are accumulating information at an overwhelming pace. This has brought about a subtle societal change. It is no longer what you know; it is what you do with what you know.

Power Brokers

Before the Internet, the power brokers of society were doctors, lawyers, politicians, and educators. They had access to knowledge that the rest of the population did not have. As a result, they used that information to make decisions and to separate themselves from the masses. But today, with the abundance of information available at your fingertips, the Internet leveled the playing field.

It used to be that only the doctors and pharmacists could fully explain the potential risks and side effects of medications. But now, a simple

search on Google will bring you a wealth of information about the medicine you are taking.

Look also at how politics and news have changed. For example, compare the difference between what happened in Rwanda 25 years ago as contrasted to recent world events. In Rwanda, it took weeks for information to get out and for the world community to react. Leaders could withhold information or bias information in a certain way. Today, atrocities are being recorded and published to YouTube and Twitter in real time. The hashtags about an event quickly move to the top of the social media outlets within minutes. Governments can no longer wield the power of withheld information to control or manipulate people as easily as they could in the past. The Arab Spring clearly demonstrated what happens when people are empowered.

It is no longer just the doctors, lawyers, and educators who are the power brokers. It is the people. Information is king and the masses have been empowered.

Everybody Has a Voice

There is a flip side to this as well. Everybody has a voice. So how do you separate yours? How do you get your message to stand out from

the masses? What helps you get heard in the midst of all the noise?

The Conceptual Age

The idea of trying to get your message heard is the idea behind the "Conceptual Age." This is the connection between digital and orality. Pink explains that the Conceptual Age is where we take all of this information and make sense of it. It's where we put it to use.

There is a lot of competition to get people's attention. If you have a message to get out, you want people to hear what you say. How do you do that? How do you set yourself apart to influence people? What is it that makes the difference with why some ideas take off and flourish and some die? Why do some brands struggle to become profitable and others almost go viral on their own?

Six Fundamental Human Abilities—The Six Senses

Pink explains that in the midst of an information overloaded world, people who employ and use six fundamental human abilities or conceptual senses are the new power brokers. They are the ones that get noticed. These six ideas can provide a framework on which to connect your digital world to the oral world.

The six abilities are: Design, Story, Empathy, Symphony, Meaning, and Fun.

If there is one main thing to get out of this article, it is to develop the habit of always asking yourself the question about how well your idea, presentation, website, film, radio program, or whatever you are using implements these six senses. Are you drawing *oral preference learners* in with these six ideas?

Design

The best way to think of Design is to ask, "How does it look and does it work?" Have you noticed how websites have changed in just the past few years? Websites used to follow a standard pattern. A top header, a left menu, a navigation bar, a right body, and a footer that contains all the legal stuff. But now you are getting sites with full page photographs, interactive menus, a lot of white space, and most importantly, they look good on a mobile phone.

Who would have ever dreamed 20 years ago that we would be willing to pay for a single cup of coffee at a price where just down the street you could get a whole breakfast? It is not that the coffee costs that much; you are paying for the experience.¹²

A few years ago, a coffee chain determined that they could save millions of dollars by moving the coffee grinding operation out of their stores. A move into a central facility would have no negative effect on the taste of the coffee. But within days of this move, customers were complaining. They missed the smell of fresh ground coffee when they walked in the door. So, at a loss of millions, they brought back the local coffee grinding. It is all about the design and presentation—how it looks and how it grabs people.

Story

Apple is a company that understands these conceptual senses. Clearly, they understand Design. Their products are sleek and they please the eye. But Apple founder Steve Jobs also understood the importance of Story. He would not just give you the numbers; he would tell the stories of people's lives that were changed. Over the past 30 years, a major shift has occurred in how a corporation presents their annual report to shareholders. It used to be pages of stats and data. But many reports are now stories of how people's lives have been affected by the company's products.

At the Sochi Winter Olympics, Vladimir Putin had a woman next to him at the opening ceremony.¹³ It was a total surprise to her, but a calculated move on the part of Putin. She had a story that was heartwarming. In light of the action he was about to take in Crimea, it was brilliant. It made him look very personable.

In a phone conversation with Daniel Pink back in 2006, he said that in using Story, the Church was way ahead of the curve. That makes sense. Jesus has been telling stories for a long time. It is easy to imagine that the stories Jesus told—whether the sower and the seed, the cursing of a fig tree, or the shepherd and his sheep—were stories that were born out of the surroundings in which Jesus found Himself.

There is still a place for teaching and education in a very linear fashion. But what many teachers do not realize is that they are not connecting with nearly two-thirds of their audience who prefer to learn orally.

Why is it that you can be so captivated by a film? It is because you are brought into the story. In the same way that the idea of Design is used to ask how it

looks, the question with Story is, “Who does it involve?” Can you make the same point telling a story rather than just presenting the facts?

Empathy

This goes beyond simply telling the story and viewing it as an outsider. Empathy places you into the story. How much does the listener or reader feel that you know what he or she is going through?

On a website, you have ten seconds to convince the visitor that you can help meet a need in his or her life. When giving a talk, the listener needs to feel that you care about what he or she is going through. If the listener feels you have an agenda to present rather than to meet a need, you will lose him or her.

Empathy grabs at the emotions. Think for a moment about a time when you borrowed something and either lost it or returned it damaged. How did that make you feel? Do you want to face that person? When you share something that the listener can identify with and place themselves into the story, you gain empathy.

That is what you need to do with your presentations. That is how to

connect the digital footprint to the oral preference learner.

Symphony

This is where it all comes together. People like it when the dots are connected.

The musical instrument of an oboe by itself can sound obnoxious. But when you combine that painful, high-pitched squeal with the powerful brass, the delicate strings, the pounding percussion, and other mellow wind instruments, you make beautiful music.

Recall this statement from a few pages ago:

Two major themes are now established. The first theme is that people are living in a rapidly expanding digital world where personal information produces a digital footprint. The second is that people live in an oral world. Orality goes beyond the spoken word into a whole new way of relational thinking.

This led to the premise that this article was to bring those two worlds together. That is being accomplished in two ways.

First, there is a frequent review of the six senses. They are the core

of what you need to understand to join these two worlds. Second, you are asked the question about how you are using these six senses in your digital footprint. As you interact with people, places, and things, are you using all six senses? It is not about what you know. It must be about what you do with what you know. That is how it all ties together. But it is important to go past just tying it together. It must have meaning.

Meaning

The baby boomer generation was characterized by trying to be better off than their parents. The pursuit of wealth, power, and prestige were the desired end. Steve Douglass, President of Cru, tells the story of when he graduated from one of the world's most respected schools.¹⁴ He graduated near the top of his class and as he was walking up the steps to receive his degree, he felt as if each step he took was saying, "So What, Big Deal, Now What?" How often have you heard a very successful person say that he or she spent his or her entire life climbing the ladder of success, only to find it leaning against the wrong wall?

That is Meaning. Everyone looks for it and everyone want it. Many in today's younger generation are not pursuing the dream of being

better off than their parents. They are pursuing the dream of making their lives count.

Like Story, this is an area where the Christian community has also tended to be leading the charge. When Christians keep to the central message of the good news of Jesus Christ, they bring Meaning. But it is very important that we don't dilute the meaning by chasing irrelevant issues.

As you digitally engage people, bring some Meaning.

Fun

There is a flip side to Meaning and that is Fun. You need to be careful to not get so caught up in trying to make things meaningful that you fail to bring some laughter to life. There is a whole movement that is gaining ground that calls for people just to laugh. It is called "Laughter Yoga."

Medical doctor Paul McGhee says, "Your sense of humor is one of the most powerful tools you have to make certain that your daily mood and emotional state support good health."¹⁵

Research is showing tremendous health benefits to laughter and having fun. It boosts your immunity,

lowers stress, decreases pain, relaxes muscles, and prevents heart disease. Over 30,000 runners participate in the Indianapolis half-marathon of 13.1 miles each year. The course is lined with entertainment. Near the seven-mile point, there are some high school cheerleaders holding up placards with jokes on them. It gives the runners a chance to laugh and get a boost of energy for the remaining six miles.

Fun can bring the mental benefit of adding joy and zest to life, improve your mood, and enhance resilience. Socially, having fun strengthens relationships, makes you more attractive, and can defuse conflict. In a world filled with bits and bytes of information, make sure that you do not get so focused on your task that you do not have fun doing it. You can even incorporate Fun into some of the other senses. As you Design, add a fun picture or quote that will make people laugh.

When you tell your Story, share something funny that happened to you. Show people your Empathy by listening to what they say and including that in your presentation. Quote somebody you just met.

Fun also does not have to just mean laughter. It might even be better to think of it more broadly

as pleasurable enjoyment. If you were giving a tribute at someone's funeral, it would not be appropriate to share a joke. But you can include something about that person's life that brought a smile to your face.

So, when you have more serious topics, you can put people at ease, be personable, acknowledge the elephant in the room, and do things that release rather than increase tension.

As Applied to this Article

One of the things that is helpful to do when working on a website, preparing content for a talk, or even interacting with oral-relational people is to ask yourself this question: "How am I doing with these six things?"

As an exercise, this was done with this article.

Design: The layout is attractive. Relevant visuals were included. The paragraphs are short and there are subtitles that help with the flow. That was all by purposeful Design.

Story: Stories about Apple, Putin, Steve Douglass at Harvard, and the coffee grinder were shared.

Empathy: Some reflective questions were included, as well as things that could stir up some feelings. For example, Putin and the woman along with the Arab Spring, which is a story of emotion.

Symphony: Two terms that on the surface seemed like opposites were used: Digital and Orality. Your thinking was expanded to see the connections which was tied together with this focus on the six senses.

Meaning: Each person has a digital footprint and this article provides a way for you to better connect your digital world with the oral world that most people prefer to live within.

Fun: The illustrations and reflective questions were designed to make it a more Fun and positive experience. Points were broken up with some good stories.

The interesting thing is that on the first pass, it became clear that there was not enough Fun. So, a portion of the article was rewritten. As an example, the story about the half-marathon cheerleaders was added.

Use Same Approach Everywhere
This same approach could be used with websites, radio programs,

video presentations, mobile training, and other resources you develop. When you first start pulling your thoughts together, have these six elements in mind and look for places to build them into what you are doing.

Then, as you move along in your preparation, take a moment to do

what we just modeled by looking for specific places where these six senses appear.

If you do that, it will help to go a long ways towards moving you in the direction of connecting your digital footprint to the world's five billion oral learners.

¹<http://newsfeed.time.com/2013/03/25/more-people-have-cell-phones-than-toilets-u-n-study-shows/>

²<http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>

³<https://www.statista.com/statistics/262950/global-mobile-subscriptions-since-1993/>

⁴<http://www.internetlivestats.com/twitter-statistics/>

⁵<http://www.jeffbullas.com/35-mind-numbing-youtube-facts-figures-and-statistics-infographic/>

⁶<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orality>

⁷Walter J. Ong. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (2nd ed.; orig. 1982). Routledge, London and New York, 2002.

⁸Grant Lovejoy, ed., *Making Disciples of Oral Learners*. Lima, NY: International Orality Network, 2005.

⁹Douglas Rushkoff. *Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now*. New York: Current, 2013.

¹⁰<http://socialnomics.net/erik-qualman/>

¹¹Daniel H Pink. *A Whole New Mind: How to Thrive in the New Conceptual Age*. London: Cyan, 2006.

¹²<http://www.foxnews.com/story/2008/03/20/starbucks-to-fend-off-tailspin-with-new-coffee-grinding-beans-in-stores.html>

¹³<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2014/feb/07/putin-elegant-surreal-sochi-winter-olympics-opening-ceremony>

¹⁴Stephen B. Douglass, and Al Janssen. *How to Achieve Your Potential and Enjoy Life!* Singapore: IMprint Edition, 2009.

¹⁵<http://www.pbhm.com/Home/News/tabid/83/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/32/Laughter-Is-The-Best-Medicine.aspx>



How Will We Speak? On Film, Memory, and Mimicking God’s Communication Style

Psalm Araujo and Ricki Gidoomal

In this article, film director Psalm Araujo and producer Ricki Gidoomal reflect on the films, memory, and God’s manifold ways of communicating His wonders to us.

Scheduled for a 2017 release, *Master Storyteller* is a book and film production on God’s oral communication in the Bible and Hebrew tradition, authored by Dr. David Swarr, Ricki Gidoomal, and Psalm Araujo. Three short films—“In the Beginning,” “Remembering,” and “Through Us”—were created as a complement to the book. The films address key themes in the book, such as orality in the Bible, starting with creation, and the question “How does God speak?” before moving on to how God helped an oral people remember His truth, teaching them to pass these truths on through the generations using oral methods.

Introduction

During the planning process of *Master Storyteller*, our team discussed how we could best share our reflections on God as an oral communicator. Our study of God as a master of communication opened our eyes to the rich ways that God chose to speak to His people, and then to the practical ways that He taught His people to remember.

In the first chapter of the book, David Swarr writes, “The creator of the universe is a God of media!” It was strongly felt that since our subject matter is God’s use of multimedia, that we, too, should start the project in this

way. We therefore had the joy of directing three films that glance at communication in biblical tradition and beyond. The three films were designed to visualize and highlight several key themes from the book, and provide points of connection and ways to engage with the stories and aid in memory. We began with the simple question, “How does God speak?” and went on to look at three aspects of how he has communicated across time.

The first film, “**In the Beginning**,” is set in the Garden of Eden and highlights the significance of how God shows His character in the world and in nature. In the first words of Genesis, we see creative

communication in action. God speaks creation into being in Genesis 1, and walks and talks in the garden with Adam and Eve. We then see through this story how He teaches about His own nature: He demonstrates relationship, discipleship, creativity, beauty, order, variety, authority, truth, consequence, and power. Even beyond the scope of the garden, creation continues to speak.

The second film, “**Remembering**,” considers how God reveals Himself through biblical history and symbolism, depicting both ancient and modern rituals of celebration. For example, the portrayal of Hebrew feasts from the Old Testament not only shows how they were practiced, but also provides insight into how such traditions grow into a shared history and collective memory of God’s actions.

The third film, “**Through Us**,” set in the present day, is about how God shows Himself in culture and creativity—through traditions, song and dance, and expressions of celebration. It is a call to action to use everything that we have been given and in all segments of society to play a part in communicating God’s way.

Even though we began with the question “How does God speak?” as a starting point, as we entered into each of the stories through its various elements, we asked ourselves, “How is God speaking to me?” Now, as we join with the Master Storyteller as co-creators, the question becomes, “How will we speak?”

We know that media is an important aspect of orality, and the power of the medium of film is a synthesis of many different media. Film is a medium that has the ability to create an experience that goes beyond the literal, by combining the story with the individual’s triggered experience and memory. Through the *Master Storyteller* production, we hope to emphasize the richness of God’s oral communication, and what part film can play in opening a door to the heart and imagination.

IN THE BEGINNING

Memory in the Garden

As a child, before I could read I watched the BBC TV adaptation of C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*. I remember I was terrified by the White Witch who made the once beautiful land of Narnia an eternal winter, full of darkness and punishment. I

recall the excitement I had when the children, led on a secret mission by a beaver, saw shoots of green grass and flowers breaking out of the ice. "*Aslan is on the move...*" said the Beaver.

And then the story went on:

...now a very curious thing happened. None of the children knew who Aslan was any more than you do; but the moment the Beaver had spoken these words everyone felt quite different. Perhaps it has sometimes happened to you in a dream that someone says something which you don't understand but in the dream it feels as if it had some enormous meaning—either a terrifying one which turns the whole dream into a nightmare or else a lovely meaning too lovely to put into words, which makes the dream so beautiful that you remember it all your life and are always wishing you could get into that dream again.¹

As those who are familiar with the story will know, Aslan is a powerful but humble lion who shows the children their true identity, and through his sacrifice gives them back their reign as royalty in the land of Narnia. Although not told by my parents, I understood

that Aslan was like Jesus, and this shaped my perception of the character of God from an early age. Even now, when the sun shines and the first trees begin to bloom after a cold winter, I feel a sense of awe, hope, and even redemption as I think to myself, "*Aslan is on the move.*"

C.S. Lewis' Narnia is allegorical of the Garden of Eden. When we first began exploring how God communicates orally in preparation for writing the book *Master Storyteller*, David Swarr shared the following meditation about how God communicated through the Garden of Eden.

God took meticulous care in creating the garden and placed in it all forms of life, not only plant life but animals, fish and fowl. And it was beautiful with lush arrays of color, scintillating sound, smells and textures beyond measure, each unique and varied. It was teeming with life. The entire ecosystem was life giving and sustaining. While immensely diverse it was at the same time ordered and balanced. It was completely harmonious with no hint of death or destruction of any sort. It was simultaneously a place of power and of peace.

Through this garden, God communicated his passion for beauty, his endless creativity, his care for order as well as diversity, and so much more. God's creation is not bounded as man's to time and space. No snow flake or human eye is the same as any other. Every sunset changes before our eyes, the next different from the last. The chorus of the birds at sunrise is never repeated exactly, nor the patterns of the waves or clouds.

The garden also communicated his love for humankind in that it was for Adam and Eve to enjoy—the fruit, the living creatures that moved on land, and in the sea and sky, the ever-changing environment, and one another. Like many gardens since, he also designed it as a place of meeting and intimacy. It was a gift home for meeting and fellowship, a place for communication to take place between God and humankind, for their enjoyment of one another.²

As I heard him, a picture of God as the ultimate artist and poet grew in my mind, and my thoughts went to the story of Aslan in Narnia that had enchanted me as a child. I remembered the images of a garden

and forest: first beautiful and then cold and dark; its wonder, awe, and all that had been taught through it now forgotten.

These were a few of the inspirations in creating the first film, "In the Beginning," in which we evoke images of the Creation story and a sense of memory. The script took the form of the following poem, told from the perspective of Adam and Eve:³

There were trees. They were very old. None of them were the same. One I called Ilan. It moved slowly, and bowed often. All around me the trees stirred in their leaves and called out, "Stay awhile." The light flowed from their branches, and they called again, "It is simple." They said, "And you too have come into the world to do this: go easy, be filled with light, and shine."

I was there when I heard the Maker speak to us, "Come, let's walk together." I called him friend. I was naked, and I felt no shame. We named the mountains and the small seeds. We stood on the rocks and on the water. Sometimes we would sing.

When the fruit became bitter in my mouth, the blood rose in

my heart and the sand brushed like fire against my skin. He covered me. Oh, my son. When the offering was broken, and blood cried from the ground, I heard him in the wind say—“There is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease.”

Now I have grown old. I move among the trees and listen. Through the branches I hear the Maker say, “Stay awhile.” I know his voice. And like Ilan with its heavy branches, I move slowly, and I bow often.

The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is one that evokes memories of discovery, joy, loss, and redemption. The story is familiar to us in many ways, as it is like the cycle of life. We are born into a new world, awed by the delights and amazing beauty around us, excited by new relationships, and in our innocence expecting only good things. Then, we experiment with forbidden things, turning away from the wisdom given to us by those who know more. We are hurt and experience the pain of sorrow and even death. Looking to God, however, we experience hope—wisdom that comes through memories. We hear again His word

and see Him evidenced in new creation: “...the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Memory of the Senses

While working on a media project in the village of Tongwa, Zambia, I sat next to a young woman named Marjorie as she rocked her baby in her arms. Children gathered around to see us, their small faces reflecting their shy wonder. Above us stood a large cliff side vaguely resembling a pig’s head. I was told that this was where humans used to be sacrificed.

“What is your favorite Bible verse?” I asked Marjorie. “God created man and woman in His own image,” she said. “When I heard that I knew that I, too, as a woman, have dignity.”

Marjorie and her husband, Moses, live in a village where women and children are considered mere property, too often discarded. For generations, much of the culture has been built on animistic rituals involving shamans and blood sacrifice. The value of human life can be exchanged for the favor of the gods, if superstitions are followed. But when the word of God came to them spoken in their own language, its transformative power began to work in visible and life giving ways.

Marjorie and Moses had the first Christian marriage in their village. Their love and care for one another, their value of their son, and their home showed a marked difference to those around them. Although ridiculed and harassed to keep the 'standards' of others in their culture, they were brave and secure enough in their redeemer to follow in His ways. A few others in the village also came to faith.

"Was there any particular verse in the Bible that changed you?" we asked the villagers. Over and over again the response was, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The creation story established the authority of God and answered their questions about the foundation of life. It was the bedrock for the rest of the story in which they could now participate.

The creation story is also a story about how God communicates His own nature to us, how He speaks to us. Swarr writes in *Master Storyteller*:

The Garden was the first orality school, and what a school it was! It was God's show and tell class and has had no rival since. God's method of instruction is what

is referred to in educational circles today as the Total Physical Response approach. It involved all the senses. Adam and Eve learned by observation, participation and application. But God did not leave them to learn solely on their own. Daily He came and modeled the way to relate among themselves and to care for creation. Just as in any culture's socialization process today, in the Garden values were caught as much as taught. In it He communicates value for humans by the environment he created for them. By giving them authority over it, he communicates his plan and calling for them. Through involving them in naming the animals, he allows them to take part in the creative process.

We know that children begin to learn through their five senses at conception, and that by age five, 85 percent of their intellect and personality are developed; all 85 percent of this learning falls in the category of "oral learning." Children learn through seeing and modeling others' behavior. They discover the world through the five senses. Most of the memories we have before age five are not in

our conscious memory, and what we think we remember is usually a powerful emotional reaction to something that happened to us—or in today’s society, something that is recorded in pictures or video.

Often, when we are older, it is the memories that evoke strong emotion that come back to us. We remember our first impressions of God, the awe with which we viewed the world and the reverence we had for relationships. We often wish to return to the beginning and rediscover the delights and innocence of that pain-free world.

Jesus says, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:2-4). Perhaps this means humbling ourselves—going back to the beginning, learning again through trust and experience, and using all of our senses.

“What the soul cries out for is the resurrection of the senses,” Lewis writes in *Letters to Malcolm*.⁴ “Even now,” he goes on, “matter means nothing to us apart from our apprehension of it through the senses. And we have already a glimpse of dead sensations being raised from the dead, through memory.”

REMEMBERING

Rituals of remembrance through media and collective memory

I remember as a teenager, arriving into school after the weekend when a new blockbuster film had been released. Every conversation heard was about this film—what was good, what was bad, what was unexpected. The best moments would be relived and reenacted, the worst would be ridiculed. Either way, our peers’ reactions would enter into our communal memory as much as the film itself, and for those unfortunate enough to have missed the showing, the suspense had been ruined and the film’s secrets revealed.

Unlike a book, where reading is more personal, and handled at the reader’s own pace, a film can be an event, engaging a wider audience simultaneously. At the campus of Cru, the JESUS film is documented, including footage of an audience jointly engaging with the joys and sorrows of watching Luke’s account of Jesus’ life for the first time: the community weeps together at Jesus’ death and rejoices together at His resurrection. An individual’s memory of the film does not only include the story seen, but also the feelings that this showing evoked, as well as the surrounding atmosphere.

In today's world, film, like many storytelling media, is a communal ritual of storytelling in which we join in the dialog of how events, symbols, and narratives interact and give meaning to our lives. Now in this digital age, film is a medium that allows a mass audience to engage in this ritual.

Cultures are formed by collective memory or history—practices, rituals, and repetition. In the Old Testament, we learn about how God used oral practices to create a culture and teach His ways. The second film, "Remembering", illustrates how God's instructions are passed from generation to generation and the deep memories that are created through their repetition.

The film leads with the *Sh'ma*, which talks of continual daily communal interaction with God's word:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your

house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:4-9)

God was very specific in His command to the Hebrew people to "remember." He also gave them clear instructions as to how to do this, whether with appearances at Jerusalem or specific customs. These commands have been so well kept that the same feasts that commemorate events from several thousand years ago are celebrated almost universally in observant Jewish homes around the world today. According to Swarr and Gidoomal in *Master Storyteller*,

God instructed Israel how to establish numerous ceremonies for daily, weekly, and monthly practice designed to enhance relationship with God and one another. These ritual practices involved experiential and visual depiction of the requirements for healthy personal and community life. The entire system, operating on the solar calendar, had little textual input and where text was used it was shared orally with the public . . .

. . . God invoked times for the community to gather together for corporate celebration and learning. The festivals were communal, commemorative, educational and prophetic. They drew the nation together to celebrate and commemorate as they retold the stories of what God had done in their common history. The observance of the specific festival practices educated the people in understanding sin, judgement, forgiveness, as well as faith and trust in God as provider and deliverer. They were prophetic in that they foreshadowed a future greater fulfillment of all that the feasts themselves symbolized.

One of the greatest successes of these festivals as a communication tool is the inclusion of the family. The young and old are involved in each tradition, whether through the reading of scripture, decorating, playing games in the tabernacles booth, or the youngest in the family being required to ask certain questions in the Passover meal. The children wait with anticipation for the end of the meal when they are to search around the house in hunt for the *Afikomen*. The whole family takes part, and each individual engages with the customs in different ways across his or her lifetime.

In “Remembering”, a modern family comes together to prepare for two feasts, Sukkot (Tabernacles) and Passover. We also see a father and son from “ancient times,” the father teaching his son to paint blood over their doorposts and cut down palm branches for their *sukkah* or booth. These actions, though adapted by culture, have remained across generations. These *interactions* are as much written into our memories, if not more so, than the actions themselves, and it is these community memories that God so clearly wanted His people to engage with.

In the same way, so much symbolism was and continues to be used in the feasts that the preparation process can be as much of a memory experience as the event itself. This was highlighted in the script: “This is not just a meal; the Passover is written into every element.”

Every individual element comes together to tell a story. The bitter herbs are cut that represent the suffering of slavery. Parsely is washed and placed on the table, symbolizing the renewal of life and the hope of redemption. Four cups of wine are poured for the four promises from God: “I will bring you forth,” “I will deliver you,” “I will redeem you,” and “I will take you” (Exod. 6:6-7).

It was out of the Passover meal itself that Jesus instated a new tradition. When He said, “Do this in remembrance of me,” He was handling the Passover elements. These elements, which spoke to the disciples of freedom from slavery and to salvation, were used as *symbols* in the Last Supper when Jesus spoke the words, “This is my body.”

God shows Himself through symbols built into biblical history and passed down to remember and tell the story of what He has done. Jesus, the Word made flesh, is the ultimate symbol. The greatest show on earth has been told from the very beginning, and the Master Storyteller was manifest in the greatest character—*the Word made flesh*.

Arie Bar David, a well-known Israeli tour guide and Bible teacher, describes the physical land of Israel as “the 13th disciple in that it is so integrally part of the understanding of Jesus’ teaching.” He illustrates how even the translation of one word without knowledge of the culture and setting of the story could change or devalue the meaning. Nazareth Village in Israel uses their parable walk tour to demonstrate how Jesus used His visual surroundings to tell His

stories. We are able to gain greater understanding of Jesus parables when we stand in the first-century context in which He taught among the olives trees, in the vineyard, or on the threshing floor.

Imagine Jesus before a crowd, perhaps even there in the middle of Jerusalem, looking around at the trees and stones, using the visuals of his surroundings as the ‘set’ to tell a story. How theatrical He must have been! “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up...” (Luke 8:5).

Jesus used His culture, context, and creation to illustrate Himself and His truths, not only telling the facts of a story, but using a dramatized illustration that people could remember. We are part of this divine theater, and through media, technology, and other tools, we have opportunities that have never existed in any other generation. Using media, we can emphasize and use symbols to teach and pass on stories. As Jesus did, we too can bring together audio and visual elements to illustrate truth in a matter that sticks. In the case of film, a screening in a public setting can also be used to shape a community’s memory of both

the content and each individual's interaction with it.

Restoring God's culture and ways to our society will mean a conscious embrace of all types and means of storytelling with remembrance of God's word for our children, families, and society. Swarr and Gidoomal in *Master Storyteller* remind us:

Too often those most impacted by the last move of God are also those who resist the next fresh thing that God does. We become so comfortable with that which touched our hearts that we hold on to the patterns and symbols that we associate with God's activity among us, and therefore limit God in our midst and don't allow Him to be who he is, the Master Communicator who speaks to the hearts of every generation . . .

Are we going to take back the disciplines of oral communication, ritual, ceremony; Are we going to celebrate God's diverse creativity in our cultures and be those who initiate new expressions of his beauty and glory? Will we be the culture shapers that bring good news of God's wonder and creativity expressed through culture?⁵

God is the Master Storyteller. The breath of God blows into being all that exists. And His word is the story.⁶ Our God is unlimited in time and space. He has been speaking from the beginning through His creation, He has built into our history symbols and rituals that give us ways to remember and speak His story. He has given us Himself and made us in His image with the ability to communicate His truths in all segments of society.

THROUGH US

Beyond Factual Memory

I once had a friend who had grown up believing that Christianity was a religion full of law, hypocrisy, and power, and that grace was a concept used to cheapen the idea of God and to sell its own agenda. We would often talk about faith as it related to art, as he was a musician and filmmaker. Although rejecting religion, he still expressed to me his desire for God. At that time, we were working on the arrangements of a few songs I had written, and we would play them at places in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Although not overtly Christian, most of the songs had themes and stories about my faith—for instance, one was based on God speaking in the desert and throughout time; one was about Elijah waiting on the mountain to hear God's voice.

While practicing the first song: “*Who I am, I am again! What’s to be, it all has come! And it will echo in the wind, what’s to win has all been won,*” my friend kept asking me what it was about. “There is something in this song,” he said. “I don’t know what it is exactly, but there is something there I know to be true.”

We began discussing the stories of the Bible, of creation, and of who I knew Jesus to be. I decided to talk to him about the character of God and of Jesus through the lyrics of the songs, and without talking about the religion of Christianity. After many such conversations, he told me that he wanted to “know about this Jesus” and was open to reading the Bible.

In the third film, “Through Us”, a young man who is disenchanted and desensitized through un-truths in the media sits in front of his computer and longs for something more. Suddenly, something seemingly magical happens and draws him outside where he appears to be pulled by an unseen force from the trees and sky as he walks through the city. He stands in the middle of an old amphitheater and looks around. The narration begins: “A storytelling event is happening. Just beyond the borders

of this event are those who hear God’s voice through signs—in the sky and wind and trees, but are still straining to hear the whole story.”⁷

The young man sees various people using their own cultural and artistic expressions—expressions of creativity, history, and symbols of freedom—that draw him into discovery—music, art, dance, and sport. Such things are all written into us by a multimedia Creator: “He has crafted these expressions into who we are. We have been made in His image.”⁸

We chose film to express the themes in *Master Storyteller* because it involves both audio and visual and is therefore the closest medium we have today of how God speaks and creates our memories. In scripture, He speaks in a still small voice, in the thunder, in the heavens, through signs and wonders, through writing on a wall and tablets, and in poetry—all evoking emotions.

Art and media can impress new meaning upon the human spirit by interpreting anew what has been known before. It may be outside our current experience but faintly reminds us of something that we desire to experience or remember fully.

As Samuel Bellow said in his Nobel lecture on science and art:

Only art penetrates what pride, passion, intelligence and habit erect on all sides –the seeming realities of this world. There is another reality, the genuine one, which we lose sight of. This other reality is always sending us hints, which without art, we can't receive. Proust calls these hints our "true impressions." The true impressions, our persistent intuitions, will, without art, be hidden from us and we will be left with nothing but a 'terminology for practical ends' which we falsely call life.⁹

Psalm 42:7 says, "Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me." We hope to go beyond factual memory to create art in which "deep calls to deep," where deeper truth and emotions invade our memories and "sweep over" and into our souls. C.S. Lewis called this "deeper magic":

It means that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her

knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation. She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards.¹⁰

In Narnia, the Deep Magic is like the laws of the created world and of sin. Deeper Magic is the Word made Flesh, and the reversal of sin, restoring all of creation.

How will we use all that we have been given and be co-creators with God?

"Creatures, I give you yourselves," said the strong, happy voice of Aslan. "I give to you forever this land of Narnia. I give you the woods, the fruits, the rivers. I give you the stars and I give you myself."¹¹

How will we speak? Hopefully, with a roar.

¹C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Macmillan, 1950), 35.

²David Swarr and Ricki Gidoomal, *Master Storyteller* (in press, 2017).

³Psalm Swarr Araujo, *In the Beginning* (2016): *Some lines taken from Mary Oliver, "When I am among trees," Thirst: Poems* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2006); also inspired by Job 14:7.

⁴C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (Harvest Books, 1973), letter 22, par 13.

⁵Swarr, Gidoomal, *Master Storyteller*.

⁶*Through Us* (2016).

⁷*Through Us* (2016).

⁸*Through Us* (2016).

⁹Samuel Below, Nobel lecture (Dec. 12, 1976), transcription: http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1976/bellow-lecture.html

¹⁰Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 38.

¹¹Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 118.



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.

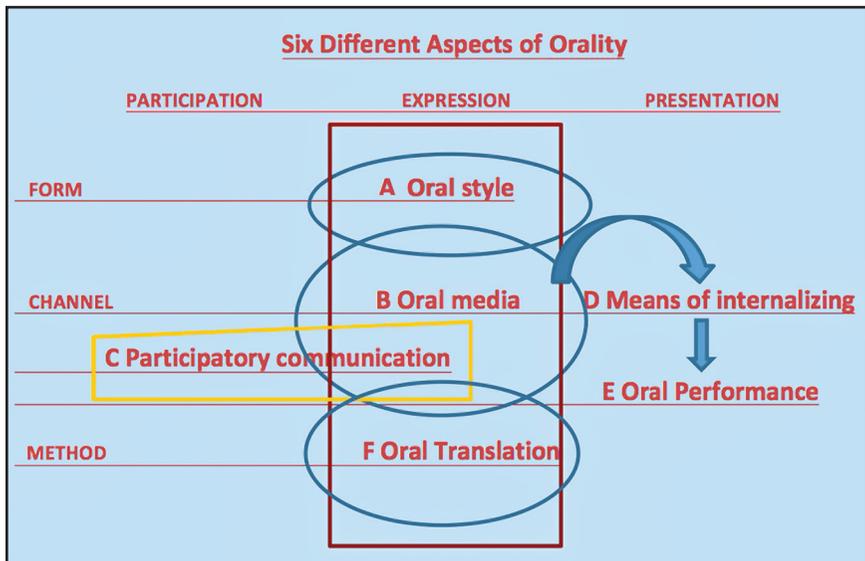
Bible Translation and Orality

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

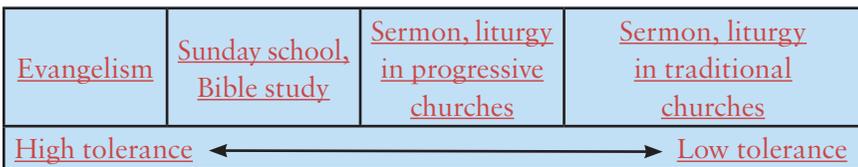
story that was told by followers of Jesus a long time ago, and then it was written down by an author whose name was Mark, and who was a companion of the apostle Paul.” In other words: is there a need to make explicit that this is a story that has been passed on for many generations, through oral and 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.”



The Art of Natural Translations

Matilda Blackwell and Justin Randolph

Matilda Blackwell was born in the U.S., but grew up in the Middle East. She completed her M.A. in World Arts in 2015 at the Center for Excellence in World Arts at the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics. Serving with Pioneer Bible Translators, she is passionate about helping cultures learn how to use their artistic forms for evangelism and community development, with a specific focus on trauma healing.

Justin Randolph serves as an Arts Specialist and Arts Coordinator for SIL Eurasia. A member of the International Council of Ethnodoxologists, Lausanne Arts network, and Lausanne Younger Leaders network, he also has an M.A. in World Arts from the Center for Excellence in World Arts at the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics.

The Story

Prince Salim and Anarkali were working with the Sumrit on their oral translation project. Each held distinctly different ideas concerning the role of the arts in the process of translation and about the artistic structures of poetry in particular. Anarkali thought that the Sumrit, like many other groups, did not value a distinct poetic style, so she planned to translate the Book of Psalms as prose. By contrast, Prince Salim knew that the neighboring language utilized its own poetic style that required rhyming. In testing whether the Sumrit used the same feature, Salim discovered that they particularly valued the distinct rhyming feature at the ends of lines. As a result, they

decided to translate the psalms as poetry, using the indigenous poetic style.

Since then, all members of the translation team (translators, checkers, tech, and others) each contributed to the work of the poetic sections. The village checkers found that comprehension greatly improved and interest was heightened due to the poetic additions. More people gathered to listen, and everyone, including children, laughed at the funny parts.

The Question

Was Anarkali right? Did it really matter one way or the other? Prince Salim and Anarkali were debating a common question. Translators, arts workers, literacy

specialists, and orality workers at any given time and place all strive for a common goal—namely, to convey the gospel message in the most appropriate means relative to their area of expertise. While the benefits of engaging with literacy or orality may seem clear, the advantages of incorporating local artistic forms of communication early in the translation process rather than later might be a little less obvious. Dick Kroneman’s article in the current issue of the *Orality Journal* describes issues, principles, and values of those in the translation domain. In response, we present this article as dialogue regarding how local forms of communication, both written and oral, might be used in tackling translation issues while still achieving the four principles of translation, thus resulting in a better product over a shorter period. To address the debate that occurred between Prince Salim and Anarkali, we must first briefly review the relationship between the oral and written backgrounds of the Bible.

Oral and Written Elements of the Bible

Andrew Hill describes the first stage of the canonization of the Old Testament: “authoritative utterances,”ⁱ as divine revelation

both delivered and passed on in oral form. Phrases such as “hear the Word of the Lord” or “this is what the Sovereign Lord says,” quite prevalent in the Old Testament, provide clear indications of God orally conveying His word. Centuries passed before these utterances were preserved in written form, and still more time passed before they were considered holy and inspired. Furthermore, during the passing of centuries prior to canonization, we should not assume that all parts of the written Bible were read in synagogues and churches.

As late as the Westminster Confession of 1647, the debate among Christian denominations surrounding the canon of scripture still unfolded. Thus, Kroneman’s statement that “oral communication in the Bible was supported and complemented by written communication” is true; writing enabled the canonization of scripture. Had the whole of scripture not been written and published in centuries past, the world would not have access to a Bible today. Kroneman accurately states that we know the Bible as a written book; however, stylistically, the finished product contains countless oral elements and influences from the original cultural

context. The written aspect of the Bible, although vital, is writing's only major contribution to the text. Oral transmission remains an essential means of communicating the scriptural message.

Natural Communication

Inevitably, humans seek to apply meaning to new information they encounter—how much more so the gospel message! Whether received by sight or sound, humans process new information by many more filters than just language before assigning meaning. Consider tone and pitch, for example. Non-verbals comprise a larger part of an overall message given communication, but in fact can often be overlookedⁱⁱ. Features like intonation play just as strong of a role in assigning meaning. Brian Schrag notesⁱⁱⁱ that using art forms involves more parts of the brain and increases the chances of deep-seated understanding. Therefore, the gospel is far too broad to be constrained to spoken language. Rather, artistic expression and spoken languages converge to convey the message of the gospel, and the significance of their combined synergy cannot be overstated.

The synergy of varying components aids effective translations in

achieving a balance of accuracy, naturalness, acceptability, and clarity. However, achieving naturalness simultaneously with the other principles remains one of the biggest challenges facing translators. In the Sumrit illustration above, Prince Salim correctly assumed that elements related to other modes of communication, such as poetry, should be considered languages in their own right. Expanding this concept to include artistic forms means that stories, riddles, parables, and proverbs also represent distinct forms of communication. Considering art forms as languages leads to the belief that translating the artistic elements of scripture in addition to translating the words of the language offers the potential to greatly improve the naturalness of a passage without sacrificing the principles of accuracy, acceptability, and clarity.

The arts, specifically singing, offer the potential to aid naturalness in translation if used as a means of checking scripture (e.g., in the psalms or other song portions^{iv}). Traditionally, the approach to translating biblical poetry took one of two forms: either a literal translation still featuring the Hebrew forms, not considered natural in the new language, or

a translation in prose featuring poetic-looking lines with no poetic features. However, many cultures ascribe high regard to poetry, and failing to translate these sections as such severely hampers scriptural understanding and engagement.

As Murray Salisbury puts it, “The medium is an essential part of the message”^v; the message becomes much harder to engage if divorced from the medium. Conveying the message through the appropriate artistic form allows the reader to capture the essence of the message in addition to magnifying the power of the message. Just as simply reading a script instead of watching the play would divorce the message from the medium of theater, so translating the singable portions of scripture as prose would divorce the message from the medium of song and poetry. Checking the singable portions of the Bible for naturalness by first singing them in poetic form ensures that all components of the message remain intact, together preserving the power of the message.

Salisbury discusses designating a team member for research into a culture’s artistic forms as a component of his approach. It should be noted that although important, this is not vital. Rather,

anyone asking the proper questions of local artists can discover the necessary information. The local artists deeply understand their traditional arts, so asking ethnographic questions that probe their knowledge can guide them toward redeeming their traditional arts. Questions such as, “What kind of things do you do when someone has died?” will likely include descriptions of artistic forms used in funeral rites. The most appropriate ethnographic questions are familiar to anyone with basic anthropological training.

In addition to aiding naturalness, translating the biblical artistic form into a meaningful form in the local culture may also encourage broader community involvement. In the Sumrit’s orally-run translation project, only one member of the team needed to be literate. Allowing for translators’ oral preference significantly expands the pool of potential translators and greatly increases community participation.

Using arts also helps to impart the background knowledge necessary for conducting a translation project. Depending upon the parameters of a given project, the translator, the exegete, or both will need to know enough of the Bible’s cultural context to explain necessary

concepts as the translation unfolds. Whether translators are literate or not, muddling through an academic article or theological commentary might prove quite challenging. In the case of the Sumrit, they used the Jesus Film as a base of understanding while translating the gospels. A potential caveat with this method is that sometimes the non-verbal elements of the film need to be translated as well, not just the language. Either way, the arts significantly contribute toward painting much of the original Biblical picture.

Conclusion

In closing, this discussion shows that arts should be viewed as

integral to the translation process itself (oral or otherwise) and not just reserved for later scripture engagement activities. Translators focus on conveying the gospel message in the most culturally appropriate form, and rightly so. As the above discussion shows, arts offer the potential to enhance this goal because using local artistic forms of communication results in a naturalness hard to achieve otherwise. The use of the local arts serves both translators and orality workers' goal of conveying the message in a lasting and powerful way. In order to capitalize on this potential, we suggest integrating the arts into the translation process from the very beginning.

ⁱAndrew E. Hill, and John Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009. Loc 7923, 7942, 7957, 8033, 8049.

ⁱⁱWalker, Michael B., and Antonietta Trimboli. “Communicating Affect: The Role of Verbal and Nonverbal Content.” *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* Vol 8, Issue 3-4 (2016): 229-248.

ⁱⁱⁱSchrag, Brian. *Creating Local Arts Together: A Manual to Help Communities Reach Their Kingdom Goals*. Edited by James Krabill. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2013.

^{iv}Murray Salisbury. “Translating the Psalms by Singing Them: Promoting Heart-Engagement and Poetic Power.” Paper presented at the Bible Translation Conference, Dallas, Texas, October 16-20 2015, p. 2-4.

^vIbid, p. 7-10, 20-21.



Creating Indigenous Film

Ben McClure

Ben McClure has been working in the field of producing audio-visual resources for missions for twenty years. He comes from the United States, where he studied Film at Bard College in New York. For many years he has made his home in Australia. He serves as the director of Create International Perth, a ministry of Youth With A Mission, which focuses on producing films and other media for unreached people groups. His media work has taken him to places as diverse as China, Turkey, Mongolia, Indonesia, Nepal and more, but he always enjoys coming home to his wife and three children in Australia.

In 2 Samuel 12, Nathan the prophet is given an unenviable task: to confront David, his king, about an area of sin. This was a risky activity, as the King's power was absolute, and he could have easily responded unfavorably. In that moment, Nathan was led to confront David using a story, and the impact of that story was significant.

David saw himself in the narrative. He recognized aspects of his own life that he'd been blind to. His guard was brought down so that he became open to new information and new revelation of his own sin.

If David had been confronted by a direct rebuke in that situation, by a theological teaching, or by a list of reasons why what he did was wrong, then his response may not have been the same.

Stories have the capacity to draw us in and to allow us to be taken on a journey in someone else's shoes. They enable us to identify with people and situations outside of ourselves, and to see ourselves from a new point of view.

They lead us, in essence, to lower our guard. As others have said, they bypass our minds, and if effectively communicated, speak directly to our hearts.

Nathan's story challenged and inspired its listener, giving him clarity that he was lacking. Similarly, Jesus' stories, which we call parables, drew His listeners in and used simple, understandable terms to challenge His audience to engage with deep spiritual truths that couldn't simply be explained, but had to be revealed.

Jesus, Nathan, and other figures in the Bible didn't tell stories in order to impress their listeners. They weren't trying to impress them with how clever their narrative techniques were, or to win them over into buying a product. They were trying to engage their audiences with the truth in a way that would grip their imaginations and be remembered because it had impacted them on a deep emotive level, appealing to their sense of imagery and story.

Stories & Audio-Visual Media

Today, as we look at the task of world evangelization and the needs of the many unreached peoples, part of our approach must be to use the advantages of audio-visual media to capture the message. Many of the unreached are oral storytellers, and God wants to use every approach to give people the opportunity not just to hear the propositional truths of the gospel, but to encounter personally the story of a loving creator in a way that will be easily retained and reflected upon for months and years to come.

Since I came into my missions call nearly 20 years ago, I have worked with Create International, a frontier mission media ministry of Youth With A Mission. Most

of my work has involved helping create evangelistic dramas that share the gospel in a meaningful way to the least-reached people on earth. Our emphasis has been on the production of indigenous-style media resources that remove unnecessary cultural hurdles from understanding the gospel.

By putting these presentations into audio-visual media pieces, we want to allow our audiences to connect with the message in a way that they might never do if they only heard the story in the form of traditional preaching.

Seeking the Impossible

How is this done? Over the years, I have gained a confidence that as God makes a way, we can produce movies in a manner that honors Him. More and more, this confidence begins with a simple precept, which is that what we have set out to do is impossible.

It is impossible that I should be able to successfully communicate to the heart of a people whose language I do not understand. It is impossible that I should be able to do this through a film, often written and produced in a matter of weeks. It is impossible that I should expect any film, no matter how well done, to actually change a person's life.

All of these things are impossible, except as God enables it.

So God has called us to these impossible tasks. As we produce these films, the cultural differences we encounter along the way highlight our need for Him—a need that God often fulfills through strategic partnerships in the Body of Christ.

A key to the success of these projects is the role played by our project partners and cultural advisors.

Project partners are missionaries, strategy coordinators, and long-term workers who have a vision for a particular people and audience and who partner with our ministry team in terms of finance and logistics to see projects accomplished. They are often strategic thinkers who have seen the need for clear and effective media tools to serve their vision for their people.

Ultimately, they represent the primary users of the completed films. In business terms, we might call them clients, but to us they are partners because we both come to the table with the burden to see effective presentations produced, and share the responsibility for guiding the vision together.

Cultural advisors are members of the target culture who work closely with us during the scriptwriting, pre-production, and filming of our projects to ensure that nothing we are doing will hinder our audience from identifying with and remembering the stories we are sharing. They are the ones who can tell us just how a Prodigal Son would walk away from his loving father, how a reunited family would enjoy a meal together, or how a new believer would say her first prayer to Jesus.

They are usually involved in the translation of the story and help to shape the cultural elements through the process and are critical to the success of these projects.

Together with these partners, we have produced resources which have become part of evangelistic strategies, been shown to large crowds, been distributed freely on DVD or digitally, and been shared in the context of close friendships.

The Practicalities of Audio-Visual Media Production

So how does it all happen? Every project is different. Sometimes, the missionaries we are working with have a whole story mapped out that they want us to use. Sometimes, they've just got an idea that we have

to adapt and work with, write and rewrite to get correct. Sometimes, all they know is that they want to make a movie.

Sometimes, when we arrive on the field, we have a full script. Other times, we have merely a paragraph. Once face to face on the field, it's time to meet with the advisors, hear their experiences, pray a whole lot, find the story of the people that God has on His heart, and turn it into a screenplay.

The goal is to find a story that the people can relate to—real-life characters from their culture dealing with real-life problems, and showing how Jesus is relevant and speaks into those problems. We want to present a God who has been present and active in their culture and history all along. In essence, we want to find 'the story of the people' as God sees it, and as God dreams they would see themselves. Often, this has involved making use of indigenous art and music, dance, even puppetry, to share the message. We take the opportunity presented by their love of these familiar forms to connect with their hearts.

One of my favorite projects was in Kyrgyzstan several years ago. Before we arrived, we had little

idea of what the film would be like. When we got there, we met with our advisors and listened to various church leaders tell moving personal tales of times that they or someone they knew had come to faith.

After hearing these testimonies, our team came together. It was clear that there was one story in particular that we were going to build our script around. It was a challenging tale about a life full of great pain, but which was transformed by a greater grace. It dealt with homelessness and despair, and it spoke into those areas of shame and heartache with the love of God.

Building Bridges in All Contexts

Whoever our audience is, the goal is to build a film that will serve as a bridge that people can cross to come to an understanding of the gospel message, and into relationship with Jesus.

Often, this has meant borrowing from parables and other stories in the Bible, developing them dramatically, and adapting them into the local context, either integrated into our main narrative or as a story within with the story. Every project has resulted in a unique approach.

In Bali, for example, because of the culture's obsession with the afterlife, the decision was made to use the story of Lazarus & the Rich Man, as found in Luke 16. The Balinese highly regard art and dance, especially during cultural and religious ceremonies, so these popular forms of storytelling were utilized to share the gospel message. A story line was developed in which a dance student discovers the truth of God through a dance about this parable. An explanation of a painting illustrating the biblical story by a highly respected dance instructor also enhances the story.

The film we produced in Thailand for the Isaan people utilized a variation of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). In it, a young man is lured away from his village home, family, and girlfriend by the promise of fortune in the big city. However, he ends up involved in drugs and crime. In his darkest moment he is helped by a friendly man who cares for him and nurses him back to health--drawing in elements of the Good Samaritan story from Luke 10. When he is finally willing and able to return home, he has to face both his girlfriend's family and his own. The Isaan admonished us to make it a "sweet and sour" gospel presentation. Because of the intense drama, lots of humor and

jokes were added to the scenes in order to balance the emotion. The audience could then stay focused and digest the story.

The Good Samaritan influences are even more obvious in the film we made for the Banjara of India. That film was about a newly appointed leader of a village who finds that his community is full of strife and brokenness. On a quest to seek help, he runs afoul of bandits and is left for dead. However, the people from a neighboring village that his community has had an ancient feud with stop to help him, nursing him back to health. Our hero discovers that the village that he had once rejected have turned to Jesus, and their care for him inspires him to return home with a new approach to addressing problems.

Once a story is developed, a screenplay is quickly but carefully written, with each beat and line of dialog checked for cultural accuracy, and with each element of the presentation of the gospel considered carefully. Years before I was part of this ministry, we learned from Gospel Recordings a simple technique for doing media production in a language we do not speak: assign a number for every line of dialog, and cue each take clearly with the relevant

information. That has helped to make it clear for us in editing what precisely is being spoken.

Media that Relies Upon God

While the script is being translated, we often move into an accelerated pre-production process—casting actors, scouting locations, sourcing props, and developing a schedule.

Our actors are usually non-professionals; they are members of a local church who are just excited to be part of a film that God wants to use to bless their people. At times, they aren't even Christians. We have to remind them to not to look at the camera, to keep in character until we cut the scene, and other basic things that go with bringing a performance to life. We have often formed deep friendships with our actors, and more than once we have seen people come to faith in Jesus while or after being part of one of these projects.

When it's time to shoot, our small team shares all the roles one finds on a big set—running a camera, setting up lights (at least, when we have access to electricity), recording

sound (and trying to keep it clear when we are competing with animals, traffic or excited children),

sorting out costumes, fixing make up, checking for continuity, taking care of our actors, and getting things ready for the next scene.



The crew is small, the budget is low, the schedule is hectic, and the hours are long, but the rewards are great and it all works towards a purpose that our whole team is passionately committed to—culturally relevant gospel presentations produced for the least-reached peoples on earth.

There are always a myriad of challenges. Often, they are the most memorable part of a project because inevitably we see not only the difficulties, but also the grace and creativity of God to overcome each one. At one point, for example, we only found our final actress at the last possible moment of the shoot.

Another time, we found ourselves quarantined when there was a suspected (though erroneous)

outbreak of a serious disease. And another time, we were told that a significant supporting actor who we had finished shooting with had to be completely removed from the project. And all of these things happened on the final day of shooting, and yet each time God showed us a way forward so that those films could be successfully completed. He has always proved Himself faithful.

Sometimes, however, in spite of our best efforts, we haven't gotten everything right and the cracks in our production value have shown through. Still, God calls us to move forward. And I believe that one of the reasons for this is that the nations can't wait for us to get it all right. God doesn't want to wait; He wants to reach people today. Our skill and experience are an important part of that equation, but it's our willingness that makes it possible.

There is an enemy who opposes these projects, who wants a people lost in darkness to remain a people lost in darkness. When we engage with the nations in this way, then spiritual pressure comes in terms of

circumstantial difficulties, sickness, equipment failures, people actively opposing the work, and attacks on our team in whatever area we're vulnerable.

But through it all not only does God enable us to get the work done, but He calls us into deeper levels of trust and reliance upon Him. More than once, our projects have simply failed to move forward in spite of our best efforts until we invested the time and energy in worship and prayer. There are films in which it was only after God led us into a deep crying out for breakthrough that we saw things start to happen. He's teaching us not to be just filmmakers who believe in God, but men and women of faith who will obey Him in the area of film, creativity, and in the nations.

God is calling us to carry His dreams and passions in our hearts, and to be willing to use our abilities as audio-visual storytellers, combined with the insight and knowledge of our partners and advisors, to see resources produced, missionaries equipped, people touched, nations transformed, and the Kingdom of God advanced.

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.



Back to the Future Pedagogy

Joe Handley and Craig Parro

Joseph W. Handley, Jr. is president of Asian Access. He is a contributing blogger for the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism's EvangelVision blog. He also serves on the International Orality Network leadership team and the board of PacificLink. Joe is pursuing a PhD in Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary. He strives to develop leaders who multiply churches that transform nations. To learn more, see www.asianaccess.org/handley

*Craig Parro joined Leadership Resources International in 1989 to direct its international ministry. Since January 2010, he has served as President. Leadership Resources equips and encourages pastors around the world to teach God's Word with God's heart. Craig is a stimulating teacher and has equipped and encouraged pastors and churches throughout the Americas, Africa, Eurasia, and the South Pacific. Craig also serves on the Board of Directors of TOPIC (Trainers of Pastors International Coalition), an association of pastoral training organizations focused on accelerating pastoral training worldwide. Craig has authored articles appearing in several magazines including, *What Really Happens When We Train Leaders?* (EMQ, January 2012). He is also co-author of the book, *Finishing Well in Life and Ministry*.*

As I review various models of orality in leadership development, I look for stories that both compellingly and tangibly demonstrate the importance of orality in their training. As you'll see in the story below, the life change that occurs when experiencing the scriptures can be powerful.

Craig Parro from Leadership Resources International presents a wonderful framework of the importance of using adult education models and a pedagogy that utilizes

oral forms of communication rather than the typical teaching models seen so often in hermeneutics and expository preaching and teaching.

It is not easy to utilize orality in teaching textual-based learning. Below, Craig navigates not only the way forward in this type of instruction but also shares a tremendous story from real life which shows the importance of why experiential education and orality are so important to seeing real change!

Read Craig's story unfold...

A co-worker and I were ensconced in a hotel room for several days in an Asian country that is hostile to Christ and His Church. Every morning, seven tribal pastors arrived one by one, stayed into the evening, and then left one by one, a few minutes apart.

Together, we were wrestling with 1 and 2 Corinthians. One particular aspect of these letters gripped us: Paul's passionate, personal engagement with these believers.

He had spent 18 months with them, in their homes and their synagogue. After his departure, Paul sent co-workers to further serve and encourage them. He also sent these long, detailed letters. In every way, Paul embraced these dear saints even though they had caused him great heartache.

He *praises* them, "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and

knowledge..." (1 Cor. 1:4-5). He *pleads*, "I appeal to you brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree..." (1 Cor. 1:10). He *chides*, "But I brothers could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ..." (1 Cor. 3:1). He *admonishes* (see 1 Cor. 4:14) and boldly rebukes, "And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn?" (1 Cor. 5:2).

And so the letters continue, full of pointed, even harsh critiques, yet at the same time, self-effacing *vulnerability*, even more surprising given his strained relationship with the church: "For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself" (2 Cor. 1:8). Paul admits to struggling with deep discouragement, perhaps even depression. We looked at 2 Corinthians 12 in which Paul boasts of his weaknesses: "So the power of Christ may rest upon me... for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

But this embrace of weakness is only expressed after Paul is driven to boast at length about his accomplishments and apostolic credentials in order to counter the sniping criticisms of the so-called “super apostles” (2 Cor. 11-12).

Paul engages them at a heart level, his emotions never far from the surface. “For I wrote you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears...” (2 Cor. 2:4). He pleads with them to reciprocate. “We have spoken freely to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also” (2 Cor. 6:11-12).

What is this strange amalgam of emotion and reason, boasting and humility, warnings and affirmations, sarcasm and love? And to what end? What is Paul’s larger purpose? What shepherding intent is he pursuing? For Paul is not merely

transmitting information or theological truisms; he is seeking to provoke Spirit-empowered, word-mediated transformation in their lives.

These observations from the Corinthian letters led our small group into a profound discussion about pedagogy. The educational model in their country is typically Asian: information download from the all-knowing professor to the uninformed student. Rote memory, repetition, and regurgitation of facts are standard educational fare.

But how do we break through this cultural model? “It’s impossible!” some would say. “The top-down model has been used for millennia. The country’s educational system is too deeply engrained to change. The overweening respect for the honorable teacher would never allow for a more engaged, more egalitarian approach to learning.” We all soon discovered that the standard educational model wasn’t so standard after all!

I had remembered that one of the pastors was also a carpenter. “Please stand up, Kueyo. Would you be willing to teach me how to build a chair?” I asked him. His look of puzzled embarrassment spawned a gaggle of giggles. But Kueyo soon warmed to task. “Would you just lecture me?” I asked. “No, of course not,” he answered. “Well then, how would you teach me? And remember, I know nothing about carpentry.”

Kueyo began to describe the process he would use to educate this uneducated westerner. First, he would show me a well-crafted chair. He would have me sit in it and then study it...by lifting it, turning it, feeling it. Next, he would show me the various tools and explain the unique purpose of each. He would place each tool in my hand and cover my hand with his in order to show me the proper way to hold and wield each tool. He would have me practice using some of the tools on scrap pieces of wood, until at last I had demonstrated a minimal level of competency.

The real work of building the chair began with Kueyo, the master craftsman, demonstrating the process. After measuring and cutting the first piece of wood, he would shape and refine it with rasp and file and sandpaper. My turn. “No, that’s not quite right. Try this. Yes, that’s better. No, no, you’ll gouge the wood. Yes, much better. Ah, notice which way the grain runs. Good, you’re getting the hang of it.” Thus, the chair would slowly take shape, with the master providing less direction and more encouragement over time.

What just happened? This man, steeped in a traditional education system, intuitively knew that the most effective way to teach me to build a chair was the classic apprentice-training model. It came naturally to him, for it was the way that he was taught. It was the way that he had learned.

This conversation prompted a question which seemed to float about the room: “What does this suggest about how you as pastors might better

teach, shepherd, and equip God's people?"

I then asked another pastor, "When I go back home, I want to tell my wife 'I love you' in your language. Please teach me to do that." Again, there was more embarrassed laughter, but then a revelation came: "We never tell our wives 'I love you.' Instead, we communicate love with our eyes and with our tone of voice." These tribal men already understood the priority and the power of non-verbal communication. It was already rooted in their culture.

"Please, help me learn," I responded. After a few more bemused twitters, one of the pastors stood up and demonstrated the 'love look.' "Like this?" I asked after my pathetic attempt to mimic his facial expression. More laughter. "Is this better? How about this?"

Finally, I asked, "If you catch a thief in one of your villages, how do you teach him to stop stealing?" Another revelation came: in the old days, the

village elders would prepare a bed of hot coals and force the offender to walk over them barefoot. Yikes! Nowadays, the elders are more likely to sit the thief down and give him a "talkin' to." If necessary, they castigate him publically with the hope that he will bow to the pressure of the community. This tribal group had long ago discovered the power of experiential learning and small group dynamics.

"Think about what you've just told me about your culture," I told them. "You use a wide variety of teaching methods, don't you? To be sure, your formal educational system tends to be uni-directional with little or no personal engagement. But in the rest of life...in your real world...your teaching process is highly relational and hands-on. It's full of *praxis*: action followed by reflection and correction followed by more action and reflection."

These oral-preference tribal leaders realized that passionate, personal, experiential teaching and

learning were already embedded in their culture. They already embraced an adult-education teaching model in the everyday out-

working of village life. They discovered that a life-on-life teaching approach is congruent with both their culture and with their Bible.



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

Joshua Foer

Reviewed by Shivraj K. Mahendra

This celebrated book is a significant resource on how to enhance the capacity of your memory to make it remember more than the average person. Written in the style of a fascinating non-fiction novel, Joshua Foer takes the reader on an adventurous journey with his personal exploration on the terrains of memory building. Foer carefully utilizes his expert journalist skills in tracing the socio-cultural history of remembering, illustrating the narrative with examples from master champions of memory and highlighting the possibility of becoming mental athletes for most, if not all, people.

The title, *Moonwalking with Einstein*, refers to a mnemonic memory device that Foer used in the U.S. Memory Championship to memorize a deck of playing cards. In his own words, Moonwalking is about “the scientific study of expertize,” about “how mental athletes train their brains,” and “how memory techniques can be used” in daily life (pp. 17-18). Although Foer does not want to call this a self-help book, he does not fail to introduce the reader

to the world of memory practice and thereby seek to improve one’s capacity to remember more.

In Chapters 2-4 we read the curious stories of two extremes: the person who remembered too much and the person who remembered nothing. Taking us through great excitement of the possibility to remember almost everything, as well as the scary tunnel of forgetting everything, Foer presents his first two methods (the how to) of memory building. The first is called “chunking”, which is “a way to decrease the number of items you have to remember by increasing the size of each of item” (p. 61). The second method is called “pattern recognition.” This is illustrated from the context of the game of chess (p. 63ff).

The remaining three methods (building a memory palace, repetition and reflection, and continuous practice) are explained in Chapters 5-8. Foer robustly talks about constructing a “memory palace” (p. 89ff). This is about creating a center of information with imagination (even erotic),

visualization, and the planting of objects to memory so that one can travel through the entire building and remember everything in it. It is about transforming information into memorable data. Next, we are advised to follow a good routine scheduled with exercise, food and drink, relaxation, and fellowship. During the entire time we need to practice repetition and reflection of what we want to remember. Foer illustrates this in the context of remembering a poem (Ch. 6).

The fifth key method described in Chapter 8 is an instruction: “Do not forget to remember” (p. 163). Here, the practitioner of memory is warned about the danger of an “OK Plateau”—the stage where one feels that there is no need for further improvement and that success has been achieved. This is a call for non-stop practice of

memory building! Additional instructions include the need to follow the formula of “greater processing of the world gives better memory of it” (p. 209)—that is, being more mindful and paying extra attention to details, etc. Foer concludes, “Remembering can only happen if you decide to take notice” (p. 268). And the reward for memory training is the ability to remember more!

While there is no shortcut to memory building, there is certainly a solid hope to achieve success through hard work and practice. What does this book offer to those focused on orality? Orality is at the heart of this material. Stockpiling more information in the memory means sharing more from the memory and thus being more oral. How do we do it? By moonwalking with Foer!



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

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

Reviewed by Irene M. Kabete

Three scholars—Peter C. Brown, a writer and novelist; Henry L. Roediger III, Professor of Psychology at Washington University in St. Louis; and Mark A. McDaniel, Professor of Psychology and Director of the Center for Integrative Research on Cognition, Learning, and Education at Washington University in St. Louis—carried out a research study on strategies of learning. Using their knowledge and skills of storytelling and psychology, the authors argue that, “Most effective learning strategies are not intuitive” (p. ix). The authors seek to explore learning strategies they feel “... constitute a growing science of learning: highly effective, evidence-based strategies to replace less effective but widely accepted practices that are rooted in theory, lore, and intuition” (p. ix). In a creative twist, Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel choose to use stories from participants to report the results of the research instead of simply sharing the research.

The authors emphasize that the purpose of the book is not to reform education policies or school

system, but to inform individuals on how to learn and remember things for a longer period of time (p. xi).

To give the reader inspiration, the authors organize the eight-chapter book in a way that captures the reader’s attention. The first chapter describes “illusions of learning” (p. 15) as the central theme of the book, noting that “a great deal of what we think we know about how to learn is taken on faith and based on intuition but do not hold up under empirical research” (p. 21), concentrating on what the authors call “learning misunderstood.”

The next seven chapters examine the suggested strategies of learning and the stories related to the strategies. For example, in chapter 2 (“To Learn, Retrieve”) the authors allude to the significance of retrieving knowledge from memory, citing two types of retrieval: effortful and repeated retrieval (p. 43). Chapters 3 (“Mix Up Your Practices”) and 5 (“Avoid Illusions of Knowing”) compare massed [1] practices and retrieval. The authors prefer reflection and

the use of quizzes to test students instead of having them cram for tests. Chapter 8 (“Make It Stick”) outlines and explains different learning styles, mostly reinforcing what is in the previous chapters but also suggesting three keystone study strategies—namely, “practice retrieving new learning from memory, space out your retrieval practice, and interleave the study of different problem types” (p. 203).

By using live laboratory through storytelling on day-to-day

activities, the authors do a good job of comparing the old and new ways of learning, thereby helping not just teachers, professors, and students, but also policy makers involved in education. *Make It Stick* is an instruction book that explains how to make learning stick using methods that lean more to the concept of *orality* for example—the use of mnemonic devices in the process of retrieval. This is a good book for both the lay and the academic reader.



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