

**Teams, Norms, and Levels of Engagement:
Communicating the Bible in New Media
(4/25/00 draft)**

I. Introduction

A. Background.

At the May 1997 United Bible Societies Triennial Translation Workshop in Mérida, Mexico, Kenneth a New Media Working Group organized a working session on the theory and practice of media Bible translation. The Group particularly focussed on the issue of faithfulness,¹ and at the end of the session, The Group formulated a predictive hypothesis, along with some practical applications, for producing Scriptures and Scripture-based products in media other than print.

The January 1998 issue of *The Technical Papers for the Bible Translator* published the results of this discussion as the “Report of the New Media Group.” In that report, the authors hypothesized that the work of new media translation producers and critics should include five levels of practical engagement. We called those levels: 1) concept generation, 2) treatment preparation, 3) scripting, scenario development, and storyboarding 4) rough cut evaluation 5) and final approvals.

At the 1999 CETRA summer seminar, I took this project to new level by combining it with readings in norm theory.

B. Confirmation and Revision

Three years have now passed, and I would like to revisit this hypothesis, first to confirm its general usefulness and second to suggest a set of revisions to it.

To do this, I will draw upon a single case study that involved these five levels of engagement. Specifically, I'll review the team-building process and team work done by scholarly members of the production team that oversaw the video translation of John 20, the story of the Resurrection. I will also examine this team-building and teamwork process in light of some recent research into norm theory.

C. Looking ahead: Conclusions and Recommendations:

There are five major findings for this paper. They include:

1. Hypothesis Borne Out.

During the almost 3-year history of the John 20 video production, the five levels of engagement did figure clearly in the work of the scholarly members of the teams involved in the filming of John 20. In this sense the hypothesis of 1997 is borne out.

2. Two more levels.

However, actual experience indicates that the hypothetical five levels do not suffice to cover all areas for which the scholars carry some responsibility. We need at least two more levels: product development along with marketing and distribution

3. Steps That Resisted.

Within each of the 5 levels of engagement the scholars found that certain steps threw up more resistance than others. The one step involved building lines of communication between scholars and creative members of the team and finding a common working language that each side could understand. The other had to do with conducting

meaningful audience research at each step, given the press of production schedules and the limits of budgets and staff.

4. *Dynamic not static.*

Our 1997 model proved too static. Actual production experience indicates that the levels of engagement overlap and loop back on one another, building rather a dynamic cline or continuum of engagement, rather than a linear progression of five separate levels.

5. *Understanding Norms.*

Some of the limitations of the 1997 hypothesis reflect a need to better understand the norms that govern the behavior of translators and translation teams at each level of engagement.

II. The 1997 Hypothesis.

A. *A Predictive Hypothesis: Five levels of collaboration*

The 1997 hypothesis foresaw five levels of engagement, each with a variety of steps to assure adequacy or faithfulness to the source text as well as acceptability or appropriateness to the target text and audience.

1. *Concept.*

At the first level, translators work out the formulation of the concepts and main ideas that will guide all future steps. Here they provide in-depth exegesis of the passage, with information on focus, characters, background, as well as key images and sounds; they must communicate this information at a level comprehensible to the creative and artistic members of the team. They are also responsible for audience research.

2. *Treatment.*

At the second level, translators help guide the development of treatments, the execution of concepts in terms of genre, location, characterization, medium. They are to make sure that treatments express the exegesis of the passage and carry forward the basic concept and main idea in a faithful way. They provide ongoing information about target audience and culture to make sure that treatments meet their needs and expectations.

3. *Script.*

At the third level, translators evaluate all scripts, storyboards, and scenarios for faithfulness at the level of word, sound, and image as well as for acceptability and appropriateness to target audience.

4. *Rough Cut*

At the fourth level, translators review and evaluate rough cuts, which deliver the first full presentation of the product. Categories and criteria for evaluation² include word, sound, image, purpose, genre, and centrality of Scripture. All suggestions for change should go to the production unit and testing should be done.

5. *Final Cut.*

At the fifth level, translators must sign off on the final cut and give their approval. Before giving approval, they check to see if all corrections have been made, if the final product is faithful to the biblical message, and if the input from field and audience testing has been considered. Finally, they should follow any testing and evaluation of the product after it has been released.

III. A Case Study: John 20³

A. *Overview.*

1. *The Teams*

The John 20 project spanned 3 years. It began at a June 1996 research team meeting at Bible House in New York City. It ended with the filming and editing of *Resurrection* in July and August 1999. Overall, the project required three separate teams or working groups: 1) a core or management team,⁴ 2) a research and development team with subject matter experts from a wide variety of fields,⁵ and 3) a film production and editing team with creative and scholarly members.⁶

2. *Levels of Engagement*

At the level of concept development, one key phase of work involved the drafting and discussion of a media translation or word track by Kenneth J. Thomas and J. Ritter Werner.⁷ This word track became the film's narration. Another key phase comprised the drafting and discussion of a text base or collection of scholarly articles to guide the creation of treatments and scripts.⁸

At the level of treatment and script, key phases of work required the drafting and review of over 5 different treatments, along with the drafting and review of shot lists and shooting schedules. The actual on set monitoring of the filming belongs here, too.

At the level of rough and final cutting of the film, the work involved reviewing three rough cuts of the film, vetting different musical scores by a composer, and then approving a final cut for handing off to product development and marketing colleagues.

Review and discussion of concepts, treatments, scripts, rough and final cuts took place during face to face team meetings, whenever practical; otherwise the teams depended on email, faxes, teleconferences, and an archiving bulletin board provided by the Research Center for Scripture and Media.⁹

B. *Teams and Functions*

As we just noted, three sets of teams lay at the center of the production of the John 20 video. Each team played a significant but different role.

1. *Core Team.*

Formed already in 1991 at the beginning of the New Media Translation Project, the core team provided liaison with the sponsoring organization (American Bible Society). It also gave overall and long term continuity, direction, and quality control across all the productions within the scope of the New Media Translation Project.¹⁰ In the three-year research, development, and production process for John 20, core team members participated in every level of engagement, from concept development to final approvals.

2. *John 20 Research Team.*

Formed at the June 2-3, 1996 research team meeting in New York City, this team comprised subject matter experts from a wide variety of fields (Bible, translation, art, design, music, media, communications). Additionally, staff members from the United Bible Societies¹¹ and the American Bible Society¹² belonged to this team as well. This team engaged primarily at the level of concept formation. It provided the above-mentioned media translation or word track for John 20, as well as the research for the scholarly articles that explained the meaning and background of John 20. Its work at the level of concept formation helped lay out foundational information on John 20's focus, characters, history, culture, genre, key sounds, and implied images and metaphors. Members also researched the foreground or later influence of the passage on art, music, film, dance, and other expressions of culture.

3. *Production Team.*

The production team came together for the first time in October 1998, at the second level of engagement--the treatment phase. It took up the second and all subsequent levels of engagement from the reviewing of treatments and scripts to the final editing and approving of the film. This team had both a scholarly and a creative side. To head up the creative side, the core team once again recruited award-winning script writer and film director Merle Worth, who also participated in the 1997 Triennial Translation Workshop via satellite television.¹³ Merle chose as her creative second-in command Greg Andracke, to work as director of photography.¹⁴ Together, Merle and Greg translated concepts and treatments into the grammar and language of film, and in so doing functioned as the native language speakers for the project. The role of the scholars on the production team amounted to reviewing and checking the faithfulness of treatments and scripts by "back-translating" film language into scholarly language

IV. *Modifying a Hypothesis*

As I have already noted above, the research, development and production experience of the John 20 video *Resurrection* confirmed the five levels of engagement but also raised points where the hypothesis might be modified in order to broaden its application and implications.

A. *Validating the Hypothesis.*

The actual behavior of our three teams validated the general lines of our hypothesis: they worked productively at all five levels.

At the level of concept, for example, they defined foundational concepts for the story. With regard to the narrative, they determined that John 20 turned on the key concept that the crucified Jesus was alive and, to the joy of his followers, appeared in variety of settings to them. With respect to fundamental visual concepts, they concluded that John 20 centered on the interplay between light and dark, as well as open and closed spaces. With regard to acoustic concepts, they found that the musical score needed to reflect the movement from ideas of loss and sadness to those of joy and peace, particularly after John 20:18.

When scripting and filming began, the scholarly members of the production team studied shot lists¹⁵ and shooting schedules, with a view to checking their fidelity to the meaning of the biblical text. Here, details demanded constant vigilance. During filming, the scholars compared the elocution of the narrator with the actual script. At one point the issue arose: should actor Jim Caviziel use contractions (v. 23: "But if you don't forgive their sins, they will/they'll not be forgiven.), or not. Caviziel felt contractions sounded more natural. Also, it turned out that Caviziel, a person of deep Christian faith, had memorized from childhood on large portions of the King James Version, and the scholars had to be especially watchful when actor Caviziel would unconsciously slide into KJV-isms.

In reviewing rough cuts, attention of the scholars turned largely to helping the creative team work out the connections between the film's visual and narrative track and the musical score. Research had shown them that there was a decided swing in mood after v. 18, when the tone of the story turns more and more to joy. The musical score by composer Brian Keane finally reflected this shift to an up tempo mood, but it took two revisions of the musical score for the composer to satisfy the scholars.

Tentatively approved by the scholarly team, the final cut of the film now awaits institutional approval as it undergoes testing and evaluation by product development and marketing departments within the American Bible Society.

B. Two More Levels.

Production experience on the John 20 project and the four others that proceeded it shows that five levels of engagement do not suffice to successfully complete a new media product. In addition to the five levels we hypothesized in 1997, I would now add two more: product development and marketing.

Scholars and product developers should team up and share responsibility in designing the packaging or study guides that go with a product. When they do, there is every likelihood that the claims made for the product will faithfully reflect the intent of the development team.

With regard to marketing, we cite a few lines from the July 1999 Chiangmai document "Statement, Report, and Recommendations from the UBS Audio and Video Distribution Consultation." According to this report "...a clear need for Bible Societies to pay more attention to both researching their markets and understanding the different audiences they have, came to the fore time and again. Without an adequate local exercise of market segmentation, it was too easy for some markets to be forgotten. And we have some way to go before research is an automatic part of our internal processes. Too often we do not identify the real needs with the right people and so do not achieve a need-oriented product range at an appropriate price."¹⁶

In the John 20 project, team members came together with production and marketing colleagues, for example at the June 1997 meeting in New York City. Product development and market plans also played roles in the decision to engage the services of up-and-coming actor Jim Caviezel to narrate the film. Scholarly and creative team members agreed that a household name would increase the visibility of the film and thus contribute to its marketability.

But as the Chiangmai report indicates, much remains to be done to integrate the work of research, development, and production with the areas of product development and marketing. Among the biggest challenges are opening lines of communication and finding a common language and vision for researchers, artists, product developers, and market specialists.

C. Steps That Resisted.

John 20 production experience indicated that within each of the 5 levels of engagement the teams of scholars found that certain steps threw up some resistance.

On the one hand, finding a common language understandable to both scholars and artists required patience and good will. Left- and right-brain thinkers simply learn, work, and communicate in different ways. Word, image, sound, evidence, emotion, reason, time, passion, and faith all weigh in differently depending on whether you are trained as an artist or a scholar. Compounding the communication challenge was the need for

scholars to focus on fidelity to a source text (adequacy norms) but the tendency for artistic team members to value artistry, esthetics, and appropriateness to medium and audience (acceptability norms).

On the other hand, the teams found it difficult to impossible to conduct any kind of systematic audience research given the press of production schedules and the limits of budget. True enough, at each level of engagement there were scattered bits of qualitative evidence of the anecdotal sort. But there was neither budget nor time for systematic qualitative or quantitative audience research prior to filming.

D. Dynamic not Static.

Our 1997 model proved too static. Production experience indicates that the levels of engagement overlap and loop back on one another, building rather a dynamic cline or continuum of engagement, rather than a linear progress of five separate levels. For example, two issues stayed with us throughout the research, development and production process: genre and narrative voice and time.

During discussions of concept, scholars raised the question of how many voices we hear in the text. They knew that recent scholarship indicates multiple voices, for example, an author, a first narrator, a second narrator, as well as Mary Magdalene and Jesus. The scholars also raised the question of the narrative time in which these voices speak. This issue of narrative time surfaced because the Greek text of John 20 uses famously the present tense on a number of occasions to replace the indicative aorist, for example 20:1. Conventionally, these present tenses are treated as historic¹⁷ presents and translated accordingly: “Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went...” (TEV John 20:1).

But some of the researchers argued a different point. They wanted the translation to stick to the present tenses and thus offer a narrative time of “here and now.” For example, Charles Hedrick, commenting on the word track said, “Maybe I ought to comment since I offered—not really an alternative translation—but what I wanted you to hear which was what the text really sounded like, a translation that was more print-oriented in the sense of being...more literal. For example, trying to capture all the historical present tenses gives it a certain breathless quality. It’s almost like you’re seeing it as its happening. And when we translate them all in the past tense that puts it somewhat removed from us.”¹⁸

At the treatment phase these conceptual issues of voice and time came face to face with the realities of budget. The production team was forced to look realistically and closely at how exactly a treatment could (or could not) turn their research on time and voice into a film. The production team originally envisioned a dramatic reproduction of John 20:1-31, shot on various locations with actors playing all the different voices and roles found in John 20:1-31. But the cost of casting and shooting in different locations soon dashed those hopes, and Merle Worth drafted a treatment for only verses 1-18, in an effort to contain costs. But soon the production team realized that even the cost of casting and shooting on several locations for verses 1-18 would break the budget.

After intense discussions, centering often on issues of fidelity to the source text, the team abandoned the plan for a dramatic reconstruction of verses 1-18 and decided to go to a single-voice narration of all the verses in John 20.¹⁹ In a final treatment, the production team committed to a film that would be shot indoors using the interior of a Jersey City, NJ store front church, and the more decorative exterior of a nearby beauty parlor. The film's scenario and premise centered on a memorial service underway in the

church. There a single narrator, imagined as a friend or relative of the deceased, would tell the story of John 20, as if remembering a favorite story of or about the deceased.²⁰ Mourners, consisting of actual members of the congregation and paid professional actors, would fill the church.

E. Understanding Norms.

1. Some Basic Information.

During the course of the John 20 production I began reading about norm theory, which studies the constraints and sanctions that govern human behavior, including translation behavior. Among other things, it dawned on me that there are important points of contact between our hypothetical levels of engagement as new media translators and some of the propositions of norm theory.

First of all, norms function as the constraints and sanctions that shape our decisions at every level of engagement. They also explain why we need to include product development and marketing in our hypothetical model of engagement levels. They help account for the overlap and resistance that characterize our levels of engagement. And finally, they offer a powerful analytic tool for translation criticism and assessment.

Norm theory entered the field of translations studies in 1980, thanks to the work of Israeli translation scholar Gideon Toury.²¹ Since then, norm theory has also figured in the work of Christina Schaeffner, Theo Hermans, Andrew Chesterman, Daniel Gile, and Anthony Pym.²²

One approach to norm theory combines norms with a source and target model of translation. Here, adequacy norms indicate the degree of faithfulness to a source text and culture. Acceptability norms indicate the degree of appropriateness to a target text and culture.

In another school of thought, norm theory combines with a more empirical, sociological approach. Here, we find institutional norms that describe the constraints and sanctions that flow from sponsoring organizations, publishers, distribution and marketing entities. We also encounter operational norms that direct the actual process and operation of translation, for example the constraints and sanctions inherent in a translator's workplace and social location as well as in a source language and text. And finally there are audience norms that bring to bear the expectations and demands of target usage, setting, culture, language, text, and market.

2. Theory of Norms and Levels of Engagement.

One of the clearest applications of norm theory to our levels of engagement appears at the point where we wish to expend the levels from five to seven. Among the most powerful constraints and sanctions faced by new media translations are the institutional norms that appear in distribution channels, product development, and audience expectation. Experience has shown that when a team develops a prototype or product without taking into account such institutional norms, it can meet a dead end. Experience shows the contrary as well: when a team already at the level of concept and treatment development anticipates the constraints and sanctions of a distribution channel or market, it can greatly increase its chance of success.²³

Another interesting application of norm theory lies in its ability to anticipate when, where, and why the levels of engagement will overlap and sometimes conflict with each other. In the John 20 production, for instance, the scholars as a whole prized adequacy norms over acceptability norms, while the creative team members as a whole prized

acceptability norms over adequacy norms. At the level of concept development the scholars' training and instincts constrained them to work as precisely and thoroughly as possible. They did not want to face professional sanctions for being sloppy or poorly informed. But at the level of treatment and script the artistic training of the creative team constrained it to winnow the encyclopedic knowledge of the scholars and to find an acceptable measure of information for presentation within a given budget and in the genre of film. The artists did not want to face professional sanctions from their peers for being boring or banal.

V. Conclusion

In his Preface to the Proceedings of the 1997 Mérida symposium on Fidelity and Translation, Basil Rebera wrote "...Bible Societies now recognize and acknowledge that the new media form--perhaps the most powerful and persuasive of the forces in the environment that shape people today and will continue to shape people into the future--is arguably the more effective communication medium for Scripture dissemination. Consequently, Bible Societies have collectively made a commitment at the World Assembly in 196 to make significant progress in the use of the new media for communicating Scripture to every audience."²⁴

Recent global trends in technology, literacy, pluralism, nationalization, and globalization make Basil Rebera's 1997 pronouncement even more urgent and relevant today. The 21st century into which the Bible Societies have so confidently stepped will require nothing less than a vision this grand and this prophetic.

To sustain this vision, individual Bible Societies and Bible translation teams must clearly articulate and teach the potential and limits of new media Bible communication and translation. Part of this articulation and teaching will involve grappling with fundamental issues in the translation and communication process, issues such as levels of engagement and the norms that define our translation behavior within those levels.

¹ This issue was taken up in detail at the symposium "Fidelity and Translation" that preceded the 1997 TTW. The collected papers have now appeared as P. Soukup, SJ and R. Hodgson, Jr., eds., *Fidelity and Translation: Communicating the Bible in New Media*. New York and Chicago, American Bible Society and Sheed & Ward, 1999.

² See K. Reiss, *Translation Criticism—Potential and Limitations. Categories and Criteria for Translation Quality Assessment*. Trans. by Erroll Rhodes. Manchester: St. Jerome's Press, forthcoming.

³ See F.L.Hagedorn, "Anatomy of a Translation Process: A Case Study of *Out of the Tombs* (Mark 5:1-20) in Soukup and Hodgson, eds., *Fidelity and Translation: Communicating the Bible in New Media*. New York and Chicago: American Bible Society and Sheed & Ward, pp. 29-45.

⁴ Core team members included Fern Lee Hagedorn, Bob Hodgson, Gregor Goethals, Paul Soukup, Andrew Seltz, J. Ritter Werner, Gary Rowe (until June 1997), and J. Ramsey Michaels.

⁵ Membership on the research team varied from meeting to meeting. Members present at the June 3-4, 1996 meeting in New York City included Charles Hedrick, Ann Johnston RCSJ, Howard Clark Kee, Chan-Hie Kim, John David Larson, Peter Leahey, Jeremy Murray-Brown, Adele Reinhartz, Ron Roschke, Jean-Pierre Ruiz, Brandon Scott, Susan Ward, Gale Yee; at the November 21-22, 1996 meeting in New Orleans members included Linda McKinnish Bridges, Charles Hedrick, Howard Clark Kee, Chan-Hie Kim, Amy Jill Levine, Adele Reinhartz,, Ron Roschke, Jean-Pierre Ruiz, Brandon Scott, David Trobisch; at the June 2-3, 1997 meeting in New York, members included David Barr, Joanna Dewey, Robert Fowler, Charles

Hedrick, Howard Clark Kee, John David Larson, Amy-Jill Levine, Phil Mullins, Jeremy Murray-Brown, J. Ramsey Michaels, Ron Roschke, Jean-Pierre Ruiz, Brandon Scott, Paul Soukup SJ, David Trobisch, Nathan Williams, Gale Yee, Artemio Zabala; present at the November XX, 1997 meeting in San Francisco members included David Barr, JoAnna Dewey, Robert Fowler, Ann Johnston RSCJ, Howard Clark Kee, John David Larson, Phil Mullins; at the June 1998 meeting in New York City, members included.....; at the November 1998 meeting in Orlando members included Charles Hedrick, Gale Yee, Adele Reinhartz, Jean-Pierre Ruiz, Brandon Scott, Ramsey Michaels, Joy Sisley, Patrick Cattrysse, Ron Roschke, John David Larson, Robert Fowler, Susan Ward, Chan-Hie Kim; at the June 1999 meeting in New York City members included David Barr, Bob Bascom, Patrick Cattrysse, Robert Fowler, Faith Harris, Charles Hedrick, Howard Clark Kee, John David Larson, Jeremy Murray-Brown, Ann Holmes-Redding, Adele Reinhartz, Brandon Scott, Loida Ortiz, Ron Roschke, Joy Sisley, Susan Ward, Gale Yee. Core team members and ABS staff attended all of the above meetings.

⁶ In addition to the core team members. this team included Jean-Pierre Ruiz, Adele Reinhartz, and John David Larson.

⁷ Thomas and Werner submitted a first draft word track on in June, 1996, and a revision in November, 1996. A final word track was approved in September, 1998.

⁸ Scholars began work on the text base in November, 1996; altogether the textbase includes over 50 essays.

⁹ <http://www.researchcenter.org>. Go to Webboard and fill out subscription form for admittance to John 20 conference room and discussion thread.

¹⁰ *Out of the Tombs, A Father and Two Sons, The Visit, The Neighbor.*

¹¹ Kenneth J. Thomas.

¹² David Burke, Steve Berneking, Lydia Lebron, Barbara Bernstengel, Debbie Atkinson, Erroll Rhodes, Charles Houser

¹³ Merle Worth scripted and directed all six ABS video translations (*Out of the Tombs, Father and Two Sons, Visit, The Neighbor, Resurrection, Nativity*)

¹⁴ Greg Andracke served as the director of photography for *A Father and Two Sons* and *The Neighbor*.

¹⁵ A shot list is a shot-for- shot account of every camera movement, every line of dialogue, and every change of location, lighting, and cast. Resurrection called for 31 different shots. A shooting schedule represents the actual day to day filming schedule which does not necessarily follow the sequence of the shot list.

¹⁶ "Statement, Report, and Recommendation from the UBS Audio and Video Distribution Consultation," Chiangmai, Thailand, 26-30 July, 1999, p. 10. Kenneth J. Thomas kindly supplied me with a copy of this report.

¹⁷ F. Blass, A. Debrunner, F. Rehkopf, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*. 14th edition. Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975, p. 265, par. 321.

¹⁸ Transcript (edited) of ABS Research Team Meeting, November 21-22, 1996, New Orleans, LA, p. 12.

¹⁹ See March 2, 1999 Memo from Fern Lee Hagedorn to production team (posted Bulletin Board of the Research Center for Scripture and Media's Web site (<http://www.researchcenter.org>))

²⁰ The narrator was played by actor Jim Caviziel, who played opposite Sean Penn in *The Thin Red Line*. The engagement of Caviziel showed an attempt by the production team to engage in some preliminary marketing and distribution efforts in the sense that they hoped a household name would add to the commercial as well as production value of the film.

²¹ Gideon Toury, *In Search of a Theory of Translation*. Tel Aviv. The Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, 1980.

²² See Christina Schaeffner, ed., *Translation and Norms*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1999.

²³ The *Kingsley's Meadow* series of animated Bible films is a good example of a product that had already at the conceptual level a clear idea of the constraints and sanctions that it would meet when it entered the market place.

²⁴ Basil Rebera, Preface to Paul A. Soukup SJ and Robert Hodgson, eds., *Fidelity and Translation. Communicating the Bible in New Media*. New York and Chicago: American Bible Society and Sheed & Ward, 1999, p. x.