

Speaking the truth in love

A program for presenting Scripture effectively in audio

Part A—The rationale

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(The author carries the full responsibility for the views expressed.)

There are more than 1900 languages in the world in which no meaningful sentence of Scripture has been translated. Given the difficulties of travel to the areas where the people live who speak those languages, it is likely that any translations will be accomplished by native speakers of those languages. We are suggesting that they can best do that by beginning with oral translation and distributing audio files.

We should consider ourselves very privileged to live in such a time as this. God has given our generation gifts that no other generation has known in the combination that we have:

- A widening expertise for exegeting the Scriptures.
- A self-permission to communicate the Scriptures meaningfully.
- A recognition that majority of every language group in the world will never respond to the Scriptures through reading.
- A widening access and use of hand-held audio devices all over the world.
- A widening blanket of access to the internet.
- An availability of economically feasible equipment for recording and editing audio files.
- A widening knowledge of how humans communicate and of how individuals convince others of new ideas.

Many instruments of literacy have been developed:

- In the distant past, God's message was written on scrolls of parchment, then scrolls of papyrus.
- A fantastic invention was the 'codex' which allowed a user much easier access to any individual text.
- After centuries, moveable type, with improved papers, allowed faster, more economical production.
- Typewriters facilitated the work.
- In our time, the first computers came into being, rapidly growing in utility and ease of use.
- Next came the internet
- and then digital display on mobile devices.

All these inventions built themselves on earlier inventions. With those earlier inventions came traditions.

Now in our times, there are many developments in the reproduction of sounds and thus the possibility of humans communicating with other humans by means of speech has flourished. I am suggesting that it is now time to begin A RADICAL NEW EPOCH in Bible translation—the epoch of ORAL COMMUNICATION of God's message. I do not use the word "radical" lightly. We all should recognize that our helping oral learners to respond to God's invitation will require a radical approach and new thinking for us literates.

Oral communication of God's message is radical BECAUSE IT IS MORE THAN TRANSLATION. The mode of communication matches better the mode of learning and thus it has a better possibility of being accepted as valid.

It is very important to properly translate God's message, but it is more important that the message be accepted as valid. Every human has his or her personal worldview to which he or she relates in the whole gamut of life-experiences. Every human resists changing that worldview and will change it only when a credible and more

advantageous view is offered. By the messengers communicating orally, they are facilitating the message reaching any given people more early than any print oriented method. More importantly, an oral message penetrates more deeply.

All effective communication is between one human to another. In audio media, the speaker is a fellow human, one of the listeners' language group. The sounds of one's own language imply legitimacy for the message. Legitimacy of the message facilitates the listeners' decision-making faculties, especially in regard to their worldviews.

An audio version of Scripture has two special qualities that make it effective:

- it is very natural in its style and vocabulary; and
- the listeners are learning in their natural, accustomed mode of learning.

An audio message communicates in ways that requires minimum mental processing on the part of the listeners, whereas reading requires several mental processes.

It is important that communicators recognize that **EVERYONE IN THE WORLD LEARNS BY MEANS OF WHAT THEY HEAR**. Not only that, but most people **PREFER** to learn by listening. Most people are also visual learners.

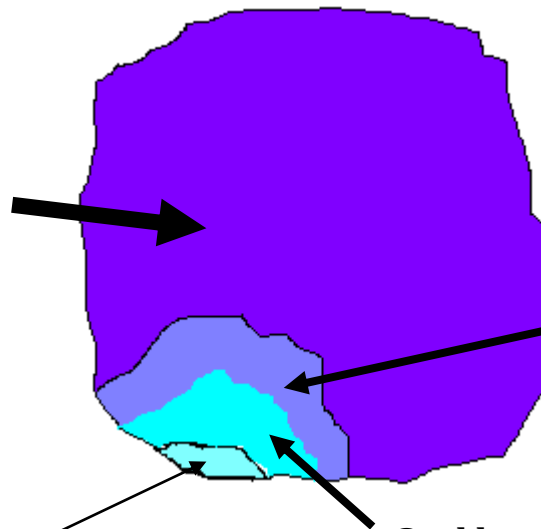
A small portion of people, in some societies, have learned enough about symbols to recognize signs, not as communicating messages, but geographical guides for travel (similar to the large rock or a broken tree). They learn to recognize the labels on manufactured products, largely by the prominent color of the label. They learn to recognize numbers and thus understand the prices on placards.

A much smaller group in a society advance enough to own a cell-phone and thus they learn to press the proper sequence of buttons to be able to talk to people. However, those people never read a book, a magazine or even a comic book. They understand icons well, but they cannot read full sentences.

A very small percentage might actually know how to read, to read and write letters. Even in the so-called literate societies, perhaps only 5% of any population enjoy reading. They use books, computers, newspapers and magazines as sources of information. Even the most sophisticated readers learn from hearing and seeing.

All people are oral learners

**Oral learners
who yet have no
desire to read**



**Oral learners who read
only street signs, food
labels and might use
cell-phones**

**Oral learners who enjoy
reading and learn from
reading**

**Oral learners who read short articles
and sing hymns from a hymnal**

When we translate orally the Scriptures in audio media or when we oralize a printed text for the audio media, we do so because we recognize that the majority of the people who speak that language respond to new information **from messages that they hear**. They learn from listening. When we present the Scriptures in an audio media, we are communicating in the familiar style of learning of the majority in a people group.

Oral learners who read only street-signs, labels or might use cell-phones

Some people in a language group venture out of their comfort zone to interact with people of other cultures. Some immigrate to cities where they must orient themselves to the cultural patterns of others, such as knowing the street where they live or where they might beg or work. Mostly, they learn to recognize labels on manufactured products by the major color of the labels. Some of them advance economically, even to the point of owning a cell-phone or a television. All those people continue to learn through hearing messages and seeing visuals. They never read a newspaper or even a legal document.

Oral learners who haltingly read the Scriptures and songs in a hymnal

A few will learn to read hesitantly, sounding out the words. Their focus is on the process of recognizing the shapes of the letters. Reading is hard work. Learning is minimal. However, they learn to find the right hymn by the number but they sing the hymns largely from memory, rather than from recognizing the words.

Oral learners who enjoy reading and who learn from reading

When we communicate the Scriptures in print media, we must recognize that we are communicating to only a very small minority of the receptor group, although they are usually the powerful among that group. Even in those groups where there is a strong church, the printed Scriptures will be utilized only by a few—the pastors and lay-workers. Yes, it is legitimate that we develop ways to teach people to read, so that the minority increases. We must use every device possible. It is urgent that we reach beyond the few.

Oral communication is radical also because the listeners are comfortable in their normal mode of learning.

One hundred percent of the world's population (hearing-impaired persons excepted) learns for what from what they hear, often from many sources. Within even the most literate societies, perhaps only 5% desire to learn through reading. The majority prefer to hear and see. Even those who know how to read respond more deeply to messages that they hear and see. The key factor for a person accepting of a new concept or idea is the *credible source*.

If we want to reach the present generation with a credible message, we must present it in a mode in which they are comfortable and with voices that the listeners trust.

Oral communication is radical because any communication in the oral media is very different from communication in the print media.

Oral media	Print media
➤ The short term and final goal is to communicate God's message. ➤ The focus is on the audience, how they learn and how they respond to information. ➤ The focus is also on facilitating the listeners changing their worldview to the Christian worldview. ➤ The method is to communicate the concepts in a way that a living person speaks to another person. This facilitates learner re-presenting to others, person to person, with minimal special training. We recognize that people accept new information as valid only when they hear it from a credible person. ➤ The procedure is to present learnable chunks of information in an incremental sequence. We recognize that people learn by increments.	➤ The short term is to distribute the encrypted message to deeply interested people (less than 10% of any population). The long term is to present a standard of faith that is trustworthy. ➤ The focus is on protecting the message so that it can be trusted as unchangeable, from generation to generation. ➤ The method is to present a book that people will honor. ➤ The procedure is to print books and distribute them to whoever is interested. ➤ Even when we produce audio recordings of a printed text, we expect that the users will listen to the recordings as if they were hearing someone read the text.

Oral communication is radical also because the translation process is different from the process of drafting texts.

Accuracy in oral translation	Accuracy in printed translation
➤ The translator hears an audio recording of a meaningful accurate version in the Language of Wider Communication. In such a version, most of the abstract concepts and ambiguous issues are explicated. We will carefully minimize some unimportant issues. We will leave implicit (to be communicated in Level 4) We make "native" the foreign names or communicate them in a general way. ➤ Some accuracy is tested in community checks and a different person back-translating the audio recording. ➤ More accuracy is verified by an experienced consultant reviewing the back-translation and discussing issues with the team.	➤ The print translator is trained in principles of communicating in writing and translating in print. ➤ He or she bases the communication on several printed texts and as many exegetical helps that are usable to him or her. ➤ Some accuracy is tested in community checks and a different person back-translating the text. ➤ More accuracy is verified by an experienced consultant reviewing the back-translation and discussing issues with the team.

It will be radical also because we will facilitate translators learning to communicate the message instead of training them to create documents.

Facilitating exploration sessions

- We suggest that new teams present to their audiences selected passages that focus on a topic. The selections are short, germane to the audience and appropriate for oral learners.
- We suggest to the teams that they introduce the passage with a personal comment or recommendation, so that the listeners are able to recognize that the new information is coming from a valid member of their community.
- We suggest that the teams finish each session with a provocative message that challenges the listeners to learn more or to make a decision about the concepts they have heard.
- We further recommend that the listeners talk to someone about the concepts they have heard. (The process of talking to another person deepens the talker's understanding of the concepts and it likely will pique the other person's curiosity about the message.

Training in workshops

- Workshops generally focus on the exegesis of a given document of the New or Old Testament.
- Workshops facilitate the teams in their attempts to communicate the meaning of the sentences and paragraphs of the document in focus.
- Most workshops are based on a schedule of lectures. There is generally an expectation that the lectures will enlighten the translators about the whole text of the document in focus.
- There is an expectation that the teams will complete their translation of the document in focus, and that they will complete it before beginning to translate another document.

Our facilitation of translators is radical also because it will be constructive instead of instructive

We expect to encourage teams to experiment,
finding the ways to record on a hand held recorder/player,
recognizing the techniques of communication through voice modulation and stress,
recognizing the differences of effectiveness from using or not using idioms and
talking together on their learning.

The facilitator anticipates, as much as possible, the learners' conceptions about translating and communicating, and attempts to guide the activities toward the desired conceptions, helping the learners to increment their abilities.

Our facilitation of translators must be radical also because we want it to be replicable by the teams we facilitate.

We expect the team that we facilitate will deepen their own abilities by their facilitating others to learn some of the skills they have learned by guided discovery. Not only do we anticipate the teams facilitating others, we expect that the oral translations that they develop will be readily usable by the people who hear them, not only for personal use but also for talking with others.

Since the oral communication of God's message is so radical, we ought to use a different jargon to talk about the concepts.

We are literates who are fomenting the process of oral translation. We have all been raised the printed-translation culture and we continue to live in the literate culture. We come from different parts of the physical world and we have different levels of expertise in the printed translation world. As we develop a new thing, would it not be well that we all learn a new jargon? It would be a kind of equalizer. Not only that, if our jargon is descriptive, it will be easier to transfer into any Language of Wider Communication. It will then be easier for the teams whom we facilitate to communicate the concepts in their languages to their people.



Now check out your attitude toward communicating the Scriptures orally, in audio recordings:

- IF YOU STILL CONSIDER THAT PRINT AND DIGITAL TEXT ARE THE ONLY LEGITIMATE OR FEASIBLE WAYS FOR COMMUNICATING THE SCRIPTURES, you should discontinue reading. Any of the other articles will not convince you.
- If you have recognized some value in communicating the Scriptures orally (audio recordings), IF YOU ARE NOT YET CONVINCED that oral translation is feasible, you should reread this article.
IF YOU ARE NOT YET CONVINCED about the urgency, you should reread this article.

If you are convinced that oral translation is **legitimate, feasible** and **urgent**, you may proceed to **Speaking the truth, Part B, A proposed strategy for presenting audio Scripture.**