The dimensions of
Communicating God's message

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

Abstract

The effectiveness of any communication is in direct proportion to the amount of effort that is related to the anticipated needs and desires of the receivers. The more we condition our communication to the receivers, the more effective the message will be: that is, the more the receivers will adopt the message.

Introduction

We Christians consider that we have a mandate to communicate God's message to the peoples of the world. There are various opinions about how that should be done:

- Some Christians consider that communicators should translate the written documents that God's people wrote and that has been handed down to our generation. Many of the proponents of such translations consider that their mission is to distribute the printed Bible and the New Testament. They seem to assume that the printed Scriptures have a magical quality about them, which penetrates deeply into the souls of whoever might read them. They scatter printed Bibles and portions far and wide. They are satisfied with only a very small effect on a few people.
  - Some consider that the dictionary meaning of every word in the original documents should be communicated (somehow), lest some error might be communicated. The NASB and Young's translation are something of examples of such an opinion.
  - Some consider that the meaning of phrases and idioms should be communicated in a new translation with corresponding phrases and idioms of the receptor language. The translators mostly choose to communicate also the form or literal meaning of certain phrases and idioms (in order to maintain continuity within the Bible. They affirm that God used the same meaning in all occurrences across the centuries. Some choose to apply their opinion in more passages than others while others some choose to apply it in fewer places. That is why there is the range of translations in English:

ESV	NIV	NLT	TEV, CEV	MSG
Maintained the form of most phrases and idioms	Maintained the form of most phrases and idioms, but fewer than ESV	Maintained the form of only some phrases and idioms	Maintained the form of some phrases and idioms, but fewer than NLT	Maintained the form of only a few phrases and idioms

The ESV-type versions appeal to the theological trainers in seminaries and Bible colleges, to pastors and to church workers. Those people are readers; they are avid readers; and they are very interested in the dictionary meanings of words, phrases and idioms. They are very desirous to follow the concordance of words, phrases and idioms, as well as the grammatical forms. Their mindset is based on the assumption that language in the Bible does not change because God does not change. They desire to interpret every segment of meaning for themselves and for the people they are teaching. Most of such people will want a minority language translation that will be much like the ESV.

However, no matter how large a percentage of a population is literate, relatively only a few will personally use the ESV-type versions (not enough to count as a faction of 1%) and a slightly higher percentage will use the NIV-type (almost 1%). Probably the highest percentage (possibly 2-3%) will read the NLT, TEV or CEV types. The MSG-type might be read by up to 4-5%. Yes, the churches might use KJV or ESV type (likely in Language-of-Wider-Communication versions) in their services. (The pastors find it difficult to

abandon the LWC version if they have learned their theological views in it and if all their sermons have been based on a LWC version.)

The stark truth is that the great majority of people will likely learn from God's message and apply it to their daily lives though communications that they hear with their ears.

○ Some consider that the meaning of any passage is strongly affected by the context and structure of each phrase, each sentence, each paragraph and each topic. The structure sometimes emphasizes, sometime amplifies and sometimes complicates. Altogether, the meaning is expressed in the whole. Translators who review all such factors usually produce 'dynamic equivalent' translations or 'meaning-based' translations. Most of the translations produced in minority languages in the last 30 years are of this type.

- Some consider that producers should record someone reading a printed translation and in that way, they publish them in audio files for a listening audience. They assume that listeners will respond to audio recordings of someone reading a printed translation in the same manner as if those listeners were reading the text themselves. They assume that the recording should be presented to a listening public as REPLICAS of the printed documents. Thus, most Bible recordings on mobile devices are recordings of someone reading aloud the printed text. Such recording are accessed in an index that is based on the printed copy—with searches on 'Books', 'Chapters' and 'Verses'. Some have searches on 'Topics' or 'Section headings' as well.

> The distributors of such audio files affirm that they are serving non-readers with God's message as if they could read. They assume that everyone will appreciate the traditions that are now a part of printed Bibles. The problem of such an assumption is that most listeners are not that interested in reading and likely never will be interested. The problem of such distribution is that most listeners tire quickly of listing to someone read aloud and the total result is that ONLY A FEW LISTENERS ACTUALLY LEARN THE MESSAGE, even though they enjoy hearing the sentences in their languages.

Another dimension

Some of us suggest that there is another dimension to communication. We can understand that dimension by recognizing that effective communication is accomplished by credible humans communicating to accepting humans. There seem to be four factors in this dimension:

- First of all, we should recognize that the effectiveness of a message is minimally in the content of the message. Rather, the effectiveness is largely in the interactions of the communicator and the listener.
- Secondly, we should recognize that the less distance there is between the communicator and listener, the greater likelihood there is for acceptance of the message.
- Thirdly, we should recognize that the more the listener is comfortable about the communication situation, the more value he or she will give to the message.
- Fourthly, we should assume some resistance to any change of worldview. There is always inertia that resists change. When a person first hears a new message, he or she may not recognize that it might require a change of worldview. Listeners will likely consider the new message only as entertainment. However, at some point, they will realize that the message implies some obligation to change their worldview. At that point, each person might accept some change toward a new worldview; or the person might resist changing but continue to listen. Some persons might stop listening because they perceive the message as too conflicting with their worldview.

At one or more crisis points, the person will adopt a pattern for himself: acceptance, postponement or rejection. Effective communication helps the listeners to continue listening through those crisis points to final acceptance.

Application

Everyone must recognize that the Story Producer app (SPapp) is not a human. At most, it is a surrogate for a human. Even though it facilitates a human (the voice that speaks the translation) to communicate to fellow humans, it will always be only an interface (a linking) between humans. It is a digital device as close to human to human communication as we can get at this point in time. Its worst weakness is that the speaker cannot interact with the listener, nor can the listener interact with the speaker.

Some humans might use the SPapp in their conversations with other human. In such situations, the human presenter can interact with the listeners somewhat, strengthening the message where it is weakest. However, the

developing team cannot assume such situations. Instead, they should attempt to overcome the weakness in other ways.

Robin has explained to me the concepts of the Story Producer application (SPapp). She explained that translation teams will be trained to orally translate the stories that have been adapted from the Bible Story Video Templates (BSVT) series. I suggest that some further thought would facilitate a greater effectiveness in the audience for which the Story Producer app is developed.

Firstly, I ask that the SPapp team to recognize that there is a close resemblance between the processes that created the **BSVT** slide sets to the processes that created the NLT New Testament. The **BSVT** team adapted the printed **Read and Grow** text to a more meaningful script with less jargon. We could call such adaptation 'dynamic equivalent' translation. However, that adaptation continued to resemble the printed text and the pictures were the same as those in the book (except that some faces were darkened). As explained to me, the SPapp team desired to facilitate translators in communicating orally that dynamic equivalent of the **BSVT** story sets.

Then Robin asked me to assist her in creating an even more focused script for the stories. However, it is important that the team recognize that even the story sets of the **BSVT** remain the same in their core as the **Read and Grow** script: *They are communications intended for readers.* It seems that there was an underlying assumption that *the listeners want to learn as if they were readers who want to learn*. I suggest that such an assumption is mistaken and is likely to mislead the team into decisions they will regret.

The SPapp team should recognize that all listeners are initially resistant to new information. Some resistance continues, but hopefully diminishing, during the whole communication process. Even believers have inertia innately built into them. Since much of the script and pictures was styled and shaped by the information of the original documents, it is rather inefficient in eroding the resistance to change. It is something like trying to dig through a river levee with a spoon.

Proposal concerning the selection of sets

Robin implied to me that the intention was to eventually prepare all the **BSVT** stories for the SPapp. From her explanation, it seems to me that this intention was caused by an anticipated cost of development would require minimum effort in modification of script. She also mentioned that there might be some categorization and prioritizing.

I suggest that **categorization and prioritizing is essential and urgent**.

- o The first set of stories must be basic and simple. They build a circle, with the second building on the first.
- o Each story should be more or less the amount that a learner can handle well, and the sets of stories should be kept fairly small so as to facilitate learning the large story by increments.

I suggest that we think of the app as a well from which people can draw water by a series of stairs. Think of the listeners as beginning at the bottom like a woman who has collected water. The natural gravity pulling on her body and the pot of water is like the natural resistance of the listeners to new ideas, especially the new ideas present a different worldview. If the stories of first set are short and focused, the listeners learn easily, comparable to the ease with which the woman ascends the first round of steps. The second set is like the next higher round of steps. The listeners are able to understand new information because they have heard the first 'round' of stories. Then, as they listen to the third 'round', they are able to internalize it also. As they continue to listen, their natural resistance to a new worldview is no less, like the gravity is no less on a woman as she gets closer to the surface. But the listeners become energized by their new knowledge, as the woman is motivated by her knowing that she will soon reach a resting place.

I suggest that **selection is also essential**.

I suggest that reducing that number of stories for the app will allow the staff to create a better app. More sets can be developed in a later stage. (Many of the BSVT stories should never be offered in the SPapp. I refer to the stories of the conquest of Canaan. Anyone who wants to know about those events might ask someone to read about them from the printed book.)

Proposal concerning the length
The length should not exceed 24 slides.

Proposal concerning the communication of recurring concepts (often called "Key terms" by literate workers)
At the outset, we would do well to determine the ways in which we designate in the scripts those concepts that we recognize as occurring in more than one story. In some stories, the meaning is the same, but in others, a different phrasing will help the translators to communicate well in that context.

Proposal concerning the visuals
I suggest that the first round of stories should be as easy to understand as possible. Any cost in its production will worth it, for the greater facilitation to the communication process. If the images in the pictures are simplified to become more focused, they will likely be helpful to both the translators and the users of the app on smart-phones. We must be careful to avoid the original assumption of the **Read and Grow** book and the **BSVT** series, that *new audiences are potential readers*. We especially must avoid an underlying corollary: 'The sooner they begin to read, the better'.

o We should keep in mind that the smart-phone is a window. When the viewer sees a visual in half of that frame, they are seeing a small window in a window. If the viewer sees a visual as they appear in the Read & Grow book, the whole is small and the background detracts from the intent of the visual. However, if the sky and other background images are removed, the view has more of a feeling of looking through only **one** window and thus the visual is lest distracting to the listeners in their learning from the oral message.

o If the visuals are simple and focused, users of the app will be able to explain the visuals and stories more easily to their friends and families. The most valid evidence of the success of this app will be in some people communicating the stories to other people.

o Even though the users have the capability of enlarging a picture or focusing on a part of a picture, the more effort they must put into learning, the less likely they will want to continue.

o The present pictures were presented in a book, where readers had the opportunity to look and look. I suggest that, even though details in visual are useful in books, most of those details are distracting to a listener, one who is processing the message coming through the ears.

o The translators and users of the translator will have the option to enlarge or shrink the visuals and to shift the focus to various areas of the visual. However, the greater simplicity of the visual promotes recognition and understanding. Along with that, it would seem that we ought to avoid creating change merely for change sake by reversing a picture for a following slide. (Such reversing of a visual might not be distracting if it were placed several slides later, but not immediately.)

I recommend that we reshape the script to make it easier for the translators to speak it orally. We might call the process "oralizing" the script and pictures. If we do that, the translators will likely produce more effective messages. For example: When Ruth affirms her allegiance to Naomi, the translator should hear a script that facilitates Ruth's deep emotion. When Naomi complains about her bitterness to the women of Bethlehem, the translator will hear a script that helps him or her to utilize natural complaint forms of women in that language. When the women celebrate Naomi when she adopted Obed as her son, the translator will have a script that hints that he or she should use the joyous outbursts of women of that language.

o The more that we facilitate the translator to communicate in the styles of a human speaking the message, the more he or she can communicate it effectively to the human listeners. I suggest that it is well worth the time to suggest a script that facilitates the translators in speaking in natural idioms and forms in their languages, a script that implicitly gives them permission to use the oral power of their language.

o We should recognize that the process of writing condenses human speech. That process makes implicit a very large amount of the oral power of the original speeches in the original situation. Even more will have been lost in the transfer from the original written language into the Languages of Wider Communication, to which we project the use of this app.

These are early costs in development, but I suggest that they are well worth it, since we will be giving the translators an instrument that they can use effectively.