Audio-Based Translation:
Communicating Biblical Scriptures to Non-Literate People
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From the preface:
This study arises from my many years of ministry in Christian media in India, wherein I have seen the great need to communicate the Bible to non-literate people. With eleven years in Christian radio (Far East Broadcasting Association of India) and ten years in media work with the United Bible Societies in Asia, my entire working career, in one way or another, has been related to audio communications. This has made me sensitive to the need for creative approaches to communicating scripture to non-literate people, since print media are beyond their reach.

This study is a slightly revised version of my PhD dissertation for Fuller Theological Seminary, California. In it I employ a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding how to most effectively use audio media in Scripture communication to non-literate people, testing my theory through field research involving 150 interviews in rural Tamil Nadu, India.

The fundamental characteristic of the translatability of God's Word demands that we cut across barriers and make God's Word available to people in understandable forms. Print-based rules seem to be inadequate to guide communications that use non-print channels. Therefore, Scripture translations prepared for an audio presentation will need to be not only meaning-based but also audio-based.

In an aural translation of Scriptures, analysis of the differences between the spoken and written language is crucial, and the orality-textuality issues need to be taken seriously. The field research has verified that rural listeners of audio Scripture presentations prefer an aural text better than a literary text. Based on the theoretical analysis and my field research, I reiterate the need to develop an audio-based translation in communicating biblical Scriptures using audio media.

Inasmuch as the meaning-based translation from one language to another grapples with the form-meaning composite, the audio-based translation grapples with the conformity-appropriateness composite. In an audio Scripture program, appropriateness of the translated text to the receiving medium is an integral part of defining fidelity since a less appropriate use of the medium violates the very basis of communication. When expected rules of a medium of communication are ignored, that very act of violation attracts attention to itself more than the communicational value of the message it seeks to convey.

The basic thesis of my study then is that an audio Scripture program which seeks to be effective in communicating the Word of God has to be faithful to the Scriptures, relevant to the audience and appropriate to the medium used….

Contents
(Presentation of outline adapted for this website presentation)

1. GOD'S WORD FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT READ
The Role of Bible Societies
Assumptions and Delimitations

2. GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS TODAY
Information Revolution
South Asian Context
Implications for Scripture Communication
3. THE MEDIA SCENE IN INDIA
General Profile of India
Socio- Economic Profile of India
Mass-media in India
   Television
   Cable TV and Satellite Television
   Cinema
   Print Media
   Audio Media
Implications for Audio Scriptures

4. THE URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE IN INDIAN MEDIA
The Urban-Rural Divide
   The Urban Context
   The Rural Context
Urban and Rural Impacts
   Traditional Media
   Rural Audiences and Television
   Access to Media
   Regional Variations
Implications for Communicating Scripture

5. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES IN MEDIA COMMUNICATION
The Triune God in Communication
Creation and Communication
Human Beings in the Image of God
   Breakdown in Human Communication
   The Purpose of God's Communication
   God's Communication in Human History
   Prayer and Human Dependency
Incarnation in God's Communication
   Receptor-Orientation in Incarnational Communication
   Scripture in Incarnational Communication
Contextualization and Communication
   Contextualization and Christian Communication
   Contextualization in Jesus' Communication
   Contextualization and Translation
   Translatability of the Bible
Implications for Communicating Scriptures Using Audio Media...
   Pitfalls to Avoid
   Non- Literate Audiences..
   Translating Scriptures from One Medium to Another
   Text Versus Hypertext
6. THEORETICAL ISSUES IN MEDIA COMMUNICATION

Communication Models
   Lasswell's Model
   Shannon and Weaver's "Mathematical Model
   Osgood and Schramm's "Circular" Model
   The Uses and Gratifications Approach
   Søgaard's Model for Christian Communication
   The "Relevance" Theory of Communication

Audio Media in Scripture Communication
   Radio
     Limitations of Radio
     Possibilities of Radio
   Audio Cassettes

Implications for Scripture Communication

7. ORAL-TEXTUAL CONTINUUM IN THE BIBLE

Orality, Textuality, and the Bible
   Oral and Written Torah
     Oral Torah
       Method of Transmission
       Memorisation
     Written Torah
   Oral and Written Gospel
     Oral Gospel
       Oral Characteristics of Stories
       Social Context
     Written Gospel
       The Compulsions of Writing
       Features of the Written Gospel

8. SPOKEN AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR AUDIO-BASED TRANSLATION

Definition of Language
Features of Spoken Language
   Intonation and Rhythm
   Punctuation
   Complexity

Differences Between Spoken and Written Languages
   Process
   High - Low Variety
   Lexical Density of Language
   Variation in Language
   Social Context

Implications for Audio-Based Translation
9. ORAL CULTURES AND NON-LITERATE PEOPLE: ISSUES FOR AUDIO-BASED TRANSLATION
Origins of Orality- Literacy Studies
Characteristics of Orality
   Mnemonic Devices in Orality
   Realism in Orality
   The Presence of Audience in Orality
Characteristics of Textuality
Non-Literate Audiences
   Non-Literate People During Jesus' Time
   Rural India and the Non-Literate
Implications for Communicating the Bible to Non-Literate People
   Communicating Scriptures in Media Other Than Print
   Audio Scriptures for the Non-Literate

10. LINGUISTIC FACTORS IN TRANSLATION FOR AUDIO
Linguistic Issues
   Form and Meaning
   Characteristics of Language
      Within a Language
      Across Languages
   Surface-Level and Deep-Level Structures
   Explicit and Implicit Information
Principles and Implications for Pri!lt- Based Translation
   The Priority of Meaning Over Form
   Translation as a Two-Step Process
   Implied Information
Implications for Scripture Translations for Use in Audio Media

11. TEXTUAL FACTORS IN TRANSLATION FOR AUDIO
Semantic Issues at the Micro Level
Discourse Considerations at the Macro Level
Principles and Implications for Audio Scriptures

12. CULTURAL FACTORS IN TRANSLATION FOR AUDIO
Cultural Issues
   Worldview
   The Translation Context
   Culture Types and Sub-Systems
Principles and Implications for Audio Scriptures

13. TESTING THE THEORY: RURAL TAMIL NADU, INDIA
Text Selection Procedure
Development of an Aural Text
   Oral Characteristics in the Source Text
   Oral Characteristics in Tamil
Development of Test Materials
Instrument and Sample
Data Collection
14. RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM TAMIL NADU
Demographic Profile
Preference on Text
Preference on Format
Analysis of Difficult Words
  Difficult Words in the Print-Based Text
  Difficult Words in the Aural-Based Text
Cross-Tabulation of Data on Text Preference (Stage )
Cross-Tabulation of Data on Format Preference (Stage )
Cross-Tabulation of Data on Format Preference (Stage )

15. TOWARD AN AUDIO-BASED TRANSLATION
Summary of Issues
  Contextual Issues in Communication
  Theoretical Perspectives in Communications
  Biblical Perspectives in Communication
  Text Versus Hypertext
  Spoken and Written Languages
  Orality and Textuality
Toward an Audio-Based Translation

16. CONCLUSION

Appendix A: Instrument Used in the Research for Data Collection
Appendix B: Back Translation of the Print-Based Text of Mark : from Tamil to English
Appendix C: Literal Translation of the Print-Based Text of Mark : from Tamil to English
Appendix D: Back Translation of the Aural Text of Mark : from Tamil to English
Appendix E: Literal Translation of the Aural Text of Mark : from Tamil to English
Appendix F: Count Report of Research Data References Cited

Index