

Audio-Based Translation: Communicating Biblical Scriptures to Non-Literate People

Julian Sundersingh

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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....

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