

# Comparing the Processes of Bible Translation and Bible Storytelling<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

In this article I argue that the process of translating all or parts of the Bible is fundamentally different than translating (and then telling) Bible stories that are based on all or parts of the Bible. I discuss this in some detail because many missionaries and theologians often consider the two as similar in a number of respects, particularly concerning recitation, source texts, views on inspiration, chronological accuracy, audience, methods of checking, and the training needed to accomplish the respective tasks. Another difference, which is more subjective and therefore difficult to examine—although equally important—is the claim that there is something “beyond” the Biblical text or the story, something that has more “reality” than the way the story is told or translated. How would this be determined?

## Introduction

Bible storytelling (sometimes called Bible storying) is a fundamental aspect of the strategies of a number of missionary agencies.<sup>2</sup> As with translations, the models used represent a continuum from the literal to the free. A literal model tries to reproduce as exactly as possible the “original” Scriptural story, as given in the Biblical languages, in the “target” language.<sup>3</sup> Literal translations are sometimes called “word-for-word” and the free ones are therefore called “thought-for-thought.”<sup>4</sup> Literal Bible storytelling might be called a “sentence-by-sentence” rendering, while free telling might be thought of as “adaptations” of Scripture. In either instance, the contrastive features of the two (translating and retelling) should be carefully compared and evaluated. In the

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a lecture given in the course “Oral tradition and Literature” at the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, November 23, 2011. For some of my published materials on orality see Franklin 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2009a and 2009b. I wish to thank Joice Franklin, Janet Stahl, and Carol McKinney for their helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup> There are numerous books and websites devoted to the issue. See, for example, Michael White (published April 1998 in *Frontline*) on the “Importance of the Oral Tradition.” He notes that before the gospels were composed, the followers of Jesus shared stories of his life by memory; see also the on-line article by Jon W. Quinn from *Expository Files* 20.2, February 2013.

<sup>3</sup> A number of caveats are in order: (1) We don’t have the original writings, so we rely on the “best” manuscripts available; (2) the military metaphor inherent in the notion of a target language comes from Bible translation experts such as Eugene Nida (2003); (3) the concept of the source language underlies many translation projects and refers to multiple examples of Bible texts, not only those in the Biblical languages, but also languages of wider communication, i.e. trade languages, education languages, and so on.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Fee and Strauss (2007:28) for a chart referring to some two dozen translations as a continuum between those that are, at the extremes, either word or thought based. The latter are also often called “dynamic” translations. For example, at the literal end is an interlinear text (such as Greek-English) and the KJV, while at the free end is *The Message* by Eugene Peterson.

remaining sections of this paper I attempt to do so, although admittedly in this article, my focus is more on storytelling than translation.

## Stories

The cognitive framework for stories is well attested by writers such as Coles (1989), Fauconnier and Turner (2002), Haven (2007), Lewis (1982), Schank (1990), Turner (1996), Shiell (2011), and many others. The Bible is a series of stories in various literary genres, such as narrative, poetry, genealogies, prophecies, songs, laments and prayers, proverbs, letters, and so on.<sup>5</sup> How the story is told differs from how it is translated.

## Examining the story

A Bible translation finds its written text in the Canon, the accepted set of texts in Hebrew and Greek<sup>6</sup>; a Bible story finds its source in some particular translation of the text. It follows that storytelling is a step further removed from the original text than Bible translating. The Biblical languages of the texts are Hebrew and Greek, as well as the Aramaic language in 250 verses (out of a total of 23,000) in the Old Testament, particularly in Ezra and Daniel. Jesus spoke Aramaic (and Hebrew and Greek), as did most of the apostles, so it is not surprising that numerous Aramaic words and phrases occur in the New Testament, as well as in personal and place names.<sup>7</sup>

Bible translators use various sources to interpret and translate the texts, including interlinear translations, dictionaries, lexicons, commentaries, and so on. Bible storytellers do not need to rely on as many secondary sources for in-depth analyses and studies because they are re-telling the story based on already translated and explicated texts.<sup>8</sup>

Bible translators exegete the source texts using linguistic resources, such as semantics, discourse studies, and pragmatics, as well as lexical and theological studies, to “uncover” the meaning of a particular text. On the other hand, storytellers retell the already exegeted story orally in a particular vernacular language. In so doing they use emotion, imagination, audience participation, music, drama, and other forms of art, to “show” what the story means.

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<sup>5</sup> For an overview to Biblical genres, see, for example, <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Genres.htm>; <http://loveintruth.com/interpret/7-survey>; <http://www.addeiglioriam.org/bible-study-guide/bible-genre.htm> (all accessed June 2017).

<sup>6</sup> For a collection of information on how the Bible came to have its present (Protestant) form of accepted (also called “genuine”) books, see: <http://www.anabaptists.org/history/howwegot.html> (accessed June 2017).

<sup>7</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aramaic\\_of\\_Jesus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aramaic_of_Jesus) for more detailed comments (accessed June 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Bible stories can be told at all stages during a vernacular translation; and how they are told would vary according to background knowledge, teaching, and so on. In many instances, however, there would only be a language of wider communication to depend upon for background and information when telling the Bible stories—and only literates would have access to it.

In Bible translation the source text is literal, exactly as revealed and written down, which is then interpreted and translated. Storytelling is an oral rendering of what was written down and may come from more than one source text.

What are some of the properties of an oral story?<sup>9</sup> For a start, consider the following: (1) adjusting formal features in the vernacular narrative, such as the lexicon used, the grammar, syntax, semantics, or the pragmatics; (2) the identification and use of key cultural analogies; (3) the utilization of appropriate cultural memory techniques; (4) the provision of background information as an avenue to comment on cultural aspects in the story; (5) the dramatization of the story, so that the audience is involved emotionally; (6) a focus on the main idea or theme of the story, as well as appropriately introducing and tracking the characters; (7) noting and encouraging audience reaction and interaction; (8) provoking and discussing imagination; (9) taking notice of creativity and spontaneity; and (10) ensuring narrative documentation by means of the story. I will examine each of these briefly and add some further comments on checking in section 11.<sup>10</sup>

### ***1. Formal features***

A storyteller may take the conclusion of the story, as given in the text, and foreshadow it in the oral version. Verses from the written text will then be in a different order, because the oral discourse structure of the vernacular language will be quite different from that of the source text. The structure of the story will depend on how the storyteller decides to tell the story, drawing on pragmatic features and a repertoire of lexical items, yet keeping the main points and theme intact. Tellers are not told to recite the story or text simply from memory, but rather to re-tell it according to their intuitive underlying grammatical and pragmatic constraints.<sup>11</sup>

### ***2. Cultural metaphors and analogies***

Jesus used analogies that were clear to people who lived in first century Palestine, but who were also familiar with the Jewish religious culture. On the other hand, most often when stories are told in the vernacular, the audience is unfamiliar with items like Palestine cultural features such as sheep, vineyards, and grain fields. They need cultural analogies to help place items like sheep in a taxonomy with animals that are similar in size (e.g. pigs in Papua New Guinea), vineyards as particular kinds of gardens, and cultural perspectives on the nature of grain (seeds), fields (open areas), and many other items. Analogies and metaphors are part of stories. A storyteller does not need to wait to the end of the story to help the audience understand the point of the story, nor many of its details.

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<sup>9</sup> Adapted from Franklin 2009a: 77-80.

<sup>10</sup> I recognize that many scholars see Bible storytelling simply as a form of evangelism and discipleship and do not recognize the power and form of the vernacular the story is told in. See, for example, E. Michael Kessler, in a blog called "What Bible storytelling isn't" at <http://fromtheologytomissions.com/2011/09/23/what-bible-storytelling-isn%E2%80%99t/> (accessed June 2017). He would allow no additions to "God's story" and has a set of procedures that defines the Bible storytelling process.

<sup>11</sup> Janet Stahl has pointed out that one example is repetition—this happens frequently in storytelling but is not usually tolerated in reading a text.

### 3. *Memorization and memory techniques*

Memorizing a verse or section of the Bible means repeating or reciting it exactly as in the text. In storytelling the teller bases his or her narrative on images seen in the story. The audience is an integral part of the story, because the listeners are interacting and building images of the scenes (e.g. “a dry and empty place where people did not live,” rather than “a desert”) and the characters (e.g. “the man Goliath, who was as tall as a mature banana tree and whose spear was the size of its trunk, but heavy like an oak”). Storytellers can draw upon cultural images to remind listeners of elements in the story and its sequence. This can be done without memorizing a text.

Audiences engage in what cognitive linguists call “conceptual blending,” where a cultural image of the listener is blended with the concept the teller is trying to encourage. For example, Mark Turner (1996) says that the story shows that the narrative imagining in it projects the story by means of mental patterns such as metonymy, emblem, image schemas, counterparts in imaginative domains, conceptual blending, and language. Turner cites the story of Nathan and King David in 2 Samuel 12 to show how Nathan wants to prevent David from resisting the projections that arise from the story. The focus on the audience, rather than memorization of a text, should be a crucial part of storytelling.

### 4. *Background and setting*

The longer we have lived in a place and the more people we know there, the more dominant the scene (the image schemas) will be in our memories. Mountain dwellers in Papua New Guinea will not find much that matches their cultural scenes in the setting of Lake Galilee, although the Jordan River may evoke parallels with local rivers. Storytellers can make such settings explicit (e.g. “the Jordan River, which is about the size of our Kagua River and also floods at certain times of the year”). These mental images help define similar places in the stories. Making connections with familiar settings is an important feature in engaging the attention of the audience. Without some background to point to, hearers become easily confused.

Even the mental image of a house or village will depend upon the cultural setting, so the storyteller will need to bring out crucial differences in the story that are implicit in the text. For example, in Mark 2:1-12 Jesus heals a paralyzed man that men have lowered on a stretcher through a hole in the roof of the house. It follows that the listener needs to know something about the construction of the houses (and even stretchers) at that time. In translating the text into a language and culture where the people build houses with small pitched roofs that one cannot stand up in, translators may insert a picture to clarify the setting. However, in telling a story about the text, the teller can explain the setting immediately within the story.

### 5. *Dramatization*

There is no dramatization in a static translation.<sup>12</sup> In storytelling, however, performance is expected on the part of the teller—effective tellers dramatize the story. In such cases, the teller may improvise, using props, gestures, or vocalization to make the story come “alive” to the

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<sup>12</sup> Of course the “Jesus story” on film, the stories of the Prophets on radio, and so on, are dramatizations of text and in that sense clearly are a story.

audience. Music, dialogue, and other methods can also be used to enhance the story and make it a part of the listener's imagination.

### 6. *The big idea*

The most important thing in a story may vary. It may be, for example, the theme, the interdiction, the violation, the consequence, or the moral of the story. The storyteller will vocally or dramatically underline it so that the listeners can better grasp why the story was told in the first place. The storyteller therefore tells the story with episodes that highlight the main idea and theme of the story, and this may entail changing some of its formal features. Translators provide the same effect with section headings, footnotes, and other literary devices (underlining, bold and italic fonts, quotation marks, em dashes, spaces, etc.).

In translations, characters are kept track of by grammatical (subject, verb, tense, mode, etc.) and syntactic markers (agent, object, patient, etc.). Storytellers, on the other hand, heighten the story by building up the dramatic entrance, performance, or exit of the character; by describing how the character looked ("he had a pale face, a pointed nose, and uneven protruding upper teeth"), what he wore ("a shabby cloak with long tears along the sleeves"), or even his temperament ("he scowled and stuck out his tongue to show anger"). Characters can also become vivid in storytelling when the teller enacts the character by shifting position or posture.

### 7. *Audience*

The audiences in translation and storytelling can be the same, but the interaction between them may well differ. When we read a text aloud to a literary audience, they may follow along, noting omissions, difficulties in pronunciation, or other faults. On the other hand, the storyteller's audience is more likely to enjoy the performance by keeping its attention on the teller. The reactions of the audiences are therefore different—the one is reacting to a reading and may indeed say "amen" here and there; the other is reacting to the performance and will cooperate and commiserate with smiles or tears when appropriate.

It is common in telling stories in Kewa (and other languages in Papua New Guinea) for the listeners—the "audience"—to interrupt and comment. This was also common in the performance of stories in the ancient world (Shiell 2011: 1).<sup>13</sup>

A storytelling audience often includes children, so the story may be adapted especially for them. However, as C.S. Lewis has said (1982: 33), "... a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story. The good ones last. A waltz which you can like only when you are waltzing is a bad waltz."

### 8. *Imagination*

Checking what the listener imagines upon hearing a story is easier than doing the same with a written translation. In the former case, the storyteller is expecting the listener to imagine scenes; in the latter case the translator does not want the reader to evoke scenes that are not clear from

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<sup>13</sup> See also his comments on "An early Christian performer's delivery" and "Roles of the early Christian audience," p. 40ff.

the text. Of course, this may happen; and when it does, many implicit meanings in the text will have to be made explicit, whether in the text itself or in footnotes. When Jesus sent the disciples out two-by-two (Mark 6:7-13), he told them not to take a bag, bread, money, nor extra clothing.<sup>14</sup> The storyteller can easily explain that Jesus wanted the disciples to depend upon the people they were visiting to care for their hospitality. The translator can fill in this information as well, but it will often overload the text, for example, a translation such as “Jesus wanted the people who heard the teaching of the disciples to give them the food and lodging that they needed” would probably be considered overloaded.<sup>15</sup>

### 9. *Creativity*

If translators become too creative (and no one can define exactly where the limit lies), what they have given their audience is a “paraphrase.” And even in a paraphrase, the translator is not encouraged to substitute a pig for a sheep or sweet potato for bread, regardless of whether the translation is in cultures where there are no sheep or bread. A storyteller can blend stories and use creative analogies to get the main point of the story across, for example by using an animal that the people find familiar. Creativity allows the listener to think and act outside of the normal mold (e.g. the “script” that we follow in most of our cultural activities, such as dressing, going to bed, showering, eating, driving, and so on). We all operate within certain cultural constraints, and we don’t usually deliberately upset our cultural guardians.<sup>16</sup>

Sometimes when a storyteller is relating a story, there will be an episode that provokes a spontaneous comment, especially when something in the story awakens the audience’s imagination. Of course, listeners can react spontaneously to a text that someone is reading by saying “amen,” gasping, clapping their hands, or showing some other spontaneous response. The storyteller should not be surprised by unprompted reactions to the story—such reactions are expected and show personal involvement. Of course, the responses may also show that clarification or adjustments to the story are in order.

### 10. *Documentation*

Finally, we can elicit stories to see how well people use and understand their language. For example, once we have recorded a vernacular story, we can record an additional track that interprets the original story, which can be done by another person. In this way, not only is the vernacular story preserved, but comments and interpretations of the linguistic aspects of the story, including its free translation of it, can be preserved as well. In fact, we can record a number of free translations of the same text by several speakers. When we translate a text we do not have the same degree of flexibility, depending as it does upon a translation of the original

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<sup>14</sup> The perceptive reader or hearer would note that Jesus said to take a staff in Mark 6:8, but not to take one in Luke 9:3. This would be a good reason not to conflate the two stories.

<sup>15</sup> Janet Stahl points out that it takes a while for storytellers to get a feel for which images are crucial to the main point and what extra information is necessary, avoiding excess so as not to ruin the story’s impact.

<sup>16</sup> Janet Stahl notes Lord (1974), who wrote that societies evaluate storytellers by the creative use of language—in particular, metaphors or flowery speech. In literate societies, people evaluate stories by the character or plot embellishments.

text. In other words, there are two different purposes for the documentation: stories preserve naturalness and interpretations; translations preserve features of a specific text(s).

### 11. *Some further comments*

Consultants who are checking translated passages in the vernacular rely on a literal back translation in which the vernacular is translated back into a language of wider communication. Because consultants generally do not speak the vernacular, they look for gaps in information, collocational clashes, and so on, that should show up in the literal back translation.<sup>17</sup> Checking stories does not need to be nearly as precise concerning the original text. Rather, we would expect stories to be restructured according to the cultural way that stories are told. Cultural metaphors and analogies would be introduced and the setting of the story would be provided. The main theme and content of the story would be apparent and remain intact, despite any creativity and dramatization. The audience would provide the feedback vis à vis interaction and participation and not by means of a back translation, although retold versions of the story by a number of hearers would be necessary to ensure accuracy.

If stories are checked simply by “back translations,” literalness is the outcome, not naturalness. On the other hand, by listening to an oral retelling of the story, vernacular speakers can note if something is lacking in the story and ask that it be inserted in the story before the next retelling. Vernacular audiences are the judge of how the story sounds, not biblical scholars who cannot speak the language.

The naturalness of a translated text depends upon how well a good reader delivers it, and a story depends on how well the teller relates it. In many cultures, including our own, a slow reader interferes with comprehension and the same will hold for a poor storyteller. Even with a competent reader, the emphasis is different than that given by a storyteller, especially including inflection and intonation.

The audience reacts immediately to a story, but hearers often don’t react when they listen to or read a text. That is why some missionaries don’t tell a story, but rather teach the story and its application. In such cases they believe they “know” what the hearer needs to learn and apply.

### **The etic and emic perspectives<sup>18</sup>**

A helpful perspective when examining a text or retold story is to consider its etic and emic dimensions. Etic and emic are two ways to view the same thing, resulting in two ways to

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<sup>17</sup> Further, a back-translation is meant to reflect as closely as possible the meaning and grammatical structure of the indigenous language text. This provides consultants, who do not know the language material, to evaluate how accurate and adequate the translation is. Consultants generally outline and pursue these steps: reviewer check, consultant check, exegetical check, consistency check, format and style check, proofreading, and oral read-through, involving various translators and review committees.

<sup>18</sup> For more of what I have said on this topic, see my article “Etic and emic stories” at GIALens 2009 Volume 3 No. 2, <http://www.gial.edu/gialens/vol3num2/>

describe it, providing, as Pike (1957) says, “A stereoscopic window on the world.” The detached observer has one view of a story, the native participant has another, but both are necessary. The outside observer is attempting to understand the inside viewpoint; and as he does so, he moves back and forth, from the objective etic categories of stories he has been trained to utilize, to a subjective understanding of what the story means—its emic nature. The etic view is alien and cross-cultural, because it is prepared in advance as a typological grid; it is somewhat absolute and created by the analyst. In contrast, the emic view of a story is domestic and mono-cultural; it is therefore relative and contrastive in reference to the system of stories discovered by the analyst. In Pike’s view, the analyst is attempting to move back and forth between etic and emic as he analyzes the data. See, in particular Pike’s textbook on tagmemics (1982).

By applying these criteria to stories (or translations), I suggest that we need to view each story simultaneously in terms of its etic and emic features. From the etic viewpoint we can view stories as contrastive units; for example, we would expect parables to have different forms and features than a poem. Each story that is told has a range of variation based upon its particular context. Any shared background and context between the teller and listener or reader will aid in interpreting the meanings, which are subsequently understood from that mutual perspective.

A story genre can be etic or emic, depending on how it is viewed, i.e. who classifies it. An emic set of stories will share enough features so that cultural insiders will understand and interpret them in much the same way. For example, in West Kewa (a language of Papua New Guinea), cultural insiders use the words *remaa* and *iti* to describe and contrast two different kinds of stories. One category might be called “real” or “historical” and the other “legendary” or “mythical,” although the definitions often overlap in practice. We have to also allow for the range of etic variation that happens—no two speakers will tell or hear the story exactly the same way. On the other hand, for a unit to be considered emic, the cultural insiders will need to negotiate and eventually understand the same meaning. Those kinds of stories that outside research “experts” agree have the same characteristics will constitute a derived etic set of stories, e.g. those that we classify as “legends,” “fables,” and so on.

In defining the features of an emic unit, such as a kind of story, the analyst should consider:

- if native culture participants judge the story as a perceptual unit and can define its appropriateness according to a particular context
- if a set of such units, e.g. a set of “legends” or canonical “texts,” is recognized
- if the story is identified by participants in the culture, e.g. as a “story” or a “legend”
- if (in some cultures) the story differs from another one in perception and usage, and if contrasting features, such as written vs. oral stories, are recognized
- if the story be related to cultural patterns of the society, such that it entails purpose and philosophical presuppositions (worldview values that arise from it)

Although both Bible translations and Bible stories are suitable in the context of a church or Bible study, stories are generally suitable to any cultural setting.<sup>19</sup> In either instance, the insider is the sole judge of the appropriateness of the story—its meaning, relevance, and application. For his postulates on the function of language, see Pike (1993).

Pike acknowledged that his linguistic theory had to be one that was philosophically valid: “I want a philosophy which I can *live* by, as well as *think* by” (1987: 77). He accepted as a given that there was an emic nature to known reality and that language and other behavioral structures have units that are emic. We likewise assume that a story has a reality within the culture. Such realities are “partly relative to that particular culture and are partly constrained by innate human characteristics and the relations of people to that part of the world which is outside them” (Pike 1987: 79).

### **Beyond the text**

The actions and plans of God lie “behind” the Biblical texts. That is, God has revealed himself by the texts, but not solely by them. Otherwise, how would illiterate people who have never had any portion of the Bible know anything about God? The Kewa people, for example, often expressed that they “knew” that there was a God, although he was given their particular vernacular name.<sup>20</sup> How did/do they know anything about God? The Kewa men expressed opinions to me that God spoke to them through dreams; they were also aware of his presence through various natural things, such as the flora and fauna that they interacted with every day, as well as floods, famine, lightning and thunder, and other “natural” phenomena.

When Biblical experts refer to the actions and plans of God, they assume a God who is not physical; indeed, we are told in the Bible that God is a spirit (John 4:24) and that he must be “worshiped in spirit and in truth,” both abstract concepts. This is despite the fact that throughout the Bible God is talked about in anthropomorphic terms.<sup>21</sup> Theologically, we know that God does not have fingers or hands, but metaphorically we use these physical properties to talk about the actions of God.

If their rituals were to be considered effect, my Kewa friends could have resorted to the aid of physical objects when they talked to or about traditional spirits. If they had, they needed magical stones, flutes, houses, pig’s blood, bones, and special languages, as well as other material objects. Just as a Christian can hold a physical wafer or a cup of wine to depict what Jesus said was his body and blood, the Kewa could hold a sacred stone to represent the essence and power

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<sup>19</sup> Some may argue that the use of cell phones and digital devices allows Bible translations to be used in any context. This may be true, but the nature of the Gospel is one of interaction and communication and not simply meditation. Digital devices are tools, like books, and depend upon reading ability for proper understanding.

<sup>20</sup> The Kewa people now have the NT in their language (in three dialects), but the majority of the people cannot read it. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of “people groups” that do not have access to the Bible in their own language. They rely on a second language, a language of “wider communication,” for any written information about God.

<sup>21</sup> For a study on anthropomorphism in God concepts, see Barrett and Keil (1996).

of his ancestral spirit.<sup>22</sup> All of these objects lie behind and beyond concepts about the actual Biblical text or the particular ancestral spirits.

I think when we refer to the Scriptures as “sacred,” we have to go beyond the text. In such cases, it is “active and alive” (Heb. 4:12), not only in application, but also in our thoughts—our mental images. None of this is theologically incorrect, but it affects the way Bible translations and Bible stories are conceived, discussed, and compared.

We know that when a text is translated or a story is retold, a wealth of pragmatic information accompanies the text or story. Storytellers and Biblical text performers make inferences apparent, so that when Felix “signals” Paul to speak (Acts 24:10), the signal can be actualized by the speaker making a motion with his hand or perhaps (as in some cultures) raising his eyebrows. The signal is beyond the text but it can be made explicit. Should the Greek word for “signal” be considered sacred because it represents something outside of the text? Have the interpreters now damaged it by making it plain? Certainly not in Bible storytelling!

## On training

Storytelling requires less training than translation and is potentially available to everyone. Training begins with mentoring, where consultants and coordinators pass on their skills to vernacular storytellers. However, at present the training is peripheral to the core curricula of schools like the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, because Bible translation is central to the core curricula. Even in cases of Scripture engagement, ethnoarts, and literacy, the notion of storytelling is at present marginal in the training.<sup>23</sup>

The value of stories in most societies is self-evident, but the training in the use of them is not. Most traditional societies do not have dictionaries or encyclopedias to serve as a reservoir for their knowledge—but they do have stories. A storytelling trainer should be knowledgeable about the stories of the culture.

There are a number of ways in which storytelling training would differ from training someone to be a Bible translator. Here are some of them:

1. The training would center on stories, including personal narratives of a biographical, cultural, and extra-cultural nature.
2. Biblical stories would be discussed and chosen on the basis of their assumed cross-cultural application; for example, The Prodigal Son and The Good Samaritan have main points that are relevant anywhere in the world. Of course, any Bible story would need

<sup>22</sup> Most Kewa men would probably not, in fact, hold magical stones in a church or Bible storytelling session because of their inherent belief in the potentially malevolent power of the object.

<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.gial.edu/> for details on the courses offered. At present, emphasis on storytelling is assumed mainly within the M.A. in World Arts (see <http://www.gial.edu/academics/ma-world-arts/#tab-1399566363-1-1>, accessed June 2017). Editor’s note: New courses include Oral Translation (Applied Linguistics) and Abrahamic Worldviews: Shared Stories (Abraham Center).

cultural adjustments due to interpretations, but insiders would judge some stories to be more relevant than others.

3. The choice of the stories would therefore be made by the cultural insiders. The outsider would present a list of possible stories, each with a summary of its theme and purpose; but the selection and order in which they were told would be up to the people.
4. The amount and content of Bible background would depend upon the stories chosen.
5. The chosen stories would be recorded or read (or both) in a language of wider communication—for example in PNG, this would most often be Tok Pisin. This would be both a part of the training process and an outcome of the training itself.
6. The participants (think students) would listen to the story several times, long enough to feel competent to retell the story. At this point the instructor/coordinator would ask how the participants learn the story—do they see, for example, pictures or images as they imagine the story? In other words, what processes are they using to help them remember the story?
7. A participant volunteers to retell the story with audience assistance. There is discussion on what seems to be missing or what has been added to the recorded story. For example, what additional background might be needed?
8. Two students from the same language group practice telling each other the story. When they are satisfied that they can tell the story to the group, they do so (in their vernacular).
9. After additional discussion on where and how the story can best be used, and practice for fluency in retelling, the story is recorded.<sup>24</sup>

Note that the structure of the training is highly interactive and informal. Written materials are kept to a minimum so that the more educated participants do not dominate the course. However, to preserve the stories they must be recorded and, where possible, written down for use in literacy classes. With very small language groups, literacy materials will most likely be limited.

### **A note on infrastructure**

The cost of a Bible translation is immense, but there are economic considerations for Bible storytelling as well. Well-trained translators and consultants are needed, as well as support personnel for communication, transportation, education, and medical needs; these costs can be substantial. In the case of isolated language groups, it is difficult for the translators to live among the people for any length of time, so some mission agencies have resorted to “hiring” nationals to do the work and supporting them in various ways.<sup>25</sup> But the primary factor is that any infrastructure will be of little use if, as experts predict, these small languages become moribund or extinct in the next generation.

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<sup>24</sup> This means that there are recording devices for the course and playback devices for the villages.

<sup>25</sup> For example, it wasn't long ago (accessed in December 2011, at: <http://www.oneverse.org/projects/all>), that the Seed Company solicited money in a program called “One Verse,” where donors were invited to sponsor a Bible verse every month for \$26.

## Summary

The policies and practices of the particular agency determine how much prominence Bible storytelling will receive. Unfortunately, given the present strategies, the needs of the very small languages will receive marginal attention for Bible storytelling, even when translators are not available.

The particular audiences of both the translated texts and the stories from the texts will determine their nature. For example, new literates will benefit initially more from narrative texts, just as storytelling audiences not acquainted with the Bible will benefit more from stories that are immediately cross-cultural, such as *The Prodigal Son* or *The Good Samaritan*.

In a roundtable discussion featured in an issue of *The Biblical Storyteller* (Special Outreach Issue 2012), several Biblical scholars discussed the oral presentation of Scriptures.<sup>26</sup> Although they performed using written Scriptures that they memorized and then retold, there was an overriding conviction that a focus on oral presentation brings the Word of God alive in a new way. The consensus was that the ancient texts were transmitted to an oral culture and that Biblical storytellers are following an ancient and established tradition.

In the same vein, the materials presented here suggest that Bible storytelling represents the practices of an oral culture, whereas a translated Bible, if read, requires literate readers.

However, it is reported that some seventy percent of the people in villages never learn to read, so their only access to the translated Scriptures is by means of hearing someone else read or retell the Bible stories.<sup>27</sup> Hearing them retold is certainly a simpler process and one that should be part of any Bible translation strategy.

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<sup>26</sup> The contributors were David Rhoads, Jin Han, Phil Ruge-Jones, Cynthia Park, Dina Ferguson, and Tim Coombs. Their scholarship represents various theological backgrounds, as well as Semitic and Egyptian languages and other areas of expertise.

<sup>27</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_countries\\_by\\_literacy\\_rate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_literacy_rate) for the UNESCO literacy rate of various countries. PNG is listed as having a 60.1% literacy rate, but the figures are from government sources and are unlikely to represent any formal testing. A report from the National Language Awareness Secretariat published in 2008 gives an estimated 25% literacy rate for the Southern Highlands and a rate of 56% for PNG. The 70% figure comes from the audiobook "Making Disciples of Oral Learners" of the International Orality Network.

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