



Scripture Engagement and Bible Translation Project Management: The Case of Bono-Twi Bible Translation Project

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ABSTRACT

This article examined the intersection of scripture engagement and Bible translation project management. It explored various modes of scripture engagement, including literacy, local performing and visual arts, audio recordings, cell phones, and videos, and how these methods have evolved through different communication eras—from oral and manuscript to print and electronic. The paper identified key conditions for effective engagement, such as appropriate language, accessible translation, and the spiritual readiness of the community. It further investigated how the functionalist approach to translation can enhance scripture engagement by aligning translation strategies with the functional needs of target audiences. Through a comprehensive review of related literature, this research underscores the importance of integrating effective engagement practices into Bible translation project management to foster meaningful and accessible scripture use. In the process, the article makes reference to the ongoing Bono-Twi Bible Translation Project. The main argument is that integrating diverse methods of scripture engagement with a functionalist approach to translation management significantly improves the effectiveness and accessibility of Bible translation projects. The paper contributes to Bible Translation studies and translation management.

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INTRODUCTION

The core aim of any Scripture translation initiative is to witness the profound impact of Scripture on individuals' lives.¹ Achieving this objective hinges not only on the accuracy and quality of the translation process but also on effective Scripture Engagement strategies that ensure the translation resonates with and is readily usable by its intended audience.² Over time, translation methodologies have evolved, adapting to accumulated experience and changing global contexts. One notable evolution in translation practices involves prioritizing Scripture Engagement right from the beginning

¹ Isaac Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2022), 11-20.

² Beth Clark, "Micropublishing to Aid Bible Translation and Scripture Engagement," 2020, 1. <https://scripture-engagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Clark-B-2020-Micropublishing-to-aid-Bible-translation-and-SE.pdf>.

of a project and maintaining a continuous focus on promoting Scripture utilisation throughout the translation journey.³

Though an important process, Scripture Engagement has not been given adequate scholarly attention, especially in Ghana and other parts of Africa. This situation has prompted this paper which explores the concept of Scripture Engagement and the management of Bible translation projects, using the Bono-Twi Bible Translation Project as a case study. The paper outlines various approaches and strategies to Scripture Engagement and addresses how a Bible translation manager can effectively facilitate and manage Scripture Engagement as a vital component of a comprehensive Bible translation project plan.

The Bono-Twi Bible translation project is an initiative by the Bible Society of Ghana aimed at translating the Bible into Bono-Twi, a dialect of the Bono people of Ghana. The project began in 2017 and it is expected to be completed after ten years. This project is part of a broader effort to provide Scriptures in mother tongues to enhance the understanding and relevance of biblical texts for local communities. This project addresses the need for a well-planned and executed Scripture Engagement for the Bono-Twi-speaking community along the Bono-Twi Bible Translation Project.

The paper is a literary research that has no empirical component. Information was gathered from primary literary sources as well as secondary ones such as monographs, journal articles, and dissertations. The data gathered was then analysed conceptually to arrive at conclusions. The main argument of the paper is that Scripture Engagement is indispensable in Bible translation projects, more so a ground-breaking translation like the Bono-Twi project. Therefore, translation project managers must plan and make adequate budgetary allocations for it rather than gearing all their efforts toward the production of the translated text.

The Concept of Scripture Engagement

The expression “Scripture Engagement” is new to the vocabulary of Bible Societies though this concept has historical roots. This idea has been inherent since the founding of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) in 1804.⁴ Various organizations and scholars have proposed different definitions for this relatively new expression. A few of these definitions are outlined briefly below. The Forum of Bible Agencies International (FOBAI) defines Scripture Engagement as the act of providing access to the Word of God, fostering continuous encounters with it, and aiming for the transformation of individuals and communities into followers of Jesus.⁵ This means Scripture Engagement is a continuous process; it is not a one-day affair. For The Taylor University Center for Scripture Engagement Scripture Engagement is the process of interacting with the Bible so that, through the Holy Spirit, readers and listeners can hear God’s voice and recognise Jesus Christ’s unique claim on their lives.⁶ Gottschlich defines Scripture Engagement as the process of knowing God and interacting with his Word in ways that deeply transform and lead to a personal and communal Kingdom lifestyle through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.⁷

A few notes can be given on these definitions. The second and third definitions highlight the Trinitarian dimension of Scripture Engagement. However, in Taylor’s definition, the Spirit enables the text to speak for itself. In Gottschlich’s definition, the Spirit’s power is intertwined with the entire process, which includes the profound transformation of lifestyle. All three definitions underline the transformative effect of Scripture Engagement, both at personal and communal levels. Though one cannot say that Scripture Engagement automatically leads to spiritual transformation, there is evidence

³ Clark, “Micropublishing to Aid Bible Translation and Scripture Engagement,” 1.

⁴ Fergus Alexander James Macdonald, “The Psalms and Spirituality: A Study of Meditative Engagement with Selected Psalms amongst Edinburgh Students” (University of Edinburgh, 2008), 3.

⁵ Cited in Daryl M Balia and Kirsteen Kim, *Witnessing to Christ Today*, vol. 2 (OCMS, 2010), 257.

⁶ Cited in Richard P. Margetts, “From Scripture Access to Scripture Engagement What Facilitates and Hinders Scripture Engagement in the Minyanka Churches of Mali?” (All Nations Hertfordshire, 2013), 6.

⁷ Bettina Gottschlich, “Transformational Scripture Engagement among the Budu of Congo-Kinshasa” (Fuller Graduate Schools, 2013), 15.

of a strong link between the two.⁸ Spiritual transformation is the intended outcome of the interaction with God's word. This is the reason why Scripture Engagement is considered as important as, if not more important than, the actual translation process.

Based on the foregoing, the researcher proposes a working definition as follows: Scripture Engagement is the intentional and ongoing interaction with the Bible that (through the power of the Holy Spirit) leads to personal and communal transformative encounters with God. It involves a multifaceted approach to ensure that the translated Scriptures effectively connect with and impact the lives of the intended audience. To facilitate the realization of the desirable result, Scripture Engagement needs to involve contextualizing the Bible within the life and culture of a specific community. This means expressing biblical truths in ways that resonate with local customs and practices, effectively bridging the gap between God's Word and the community's daily realities.

Macdonald identifies five aspects of Scripture Engagement; namely, interacting with the Word of God, showing reverence for the text, experiencing transformative effects, facilitating encounters with God, and promoting a missional mindset for spiritual growth.⁹ He adds that Scripture Engagement cannot occur without the first two aspects. However, he considers the transformative impact and encounters with God as desirable outcomes, along with fostering a missional outlook.¹⁰

What are the means by which Scripture Engagement can be done? The next section takes care of this question.

Modes/methods of Scripture Engagement

In the modern age, media has become an indispensable tool for engaging people with Scripture. Various forms of media—from traditional oral storytelling to cutting-edge digital technology—provide unique and powerful ways to communicate biblical truths. These methods are tailored to fit the cultural contexts and technological access of different communities. This ensures that the message of the Bible reaches people in the most effective and meaningful ways possible. This section explores the diverse modes of media engagement, with particular reference to Dye's discussion on the subject matter.¹¹

Storying (Oral Bible Storytelling)

The early missionaries who came to Ghana and other parts of Africa considered literacy as the key to unlocking the Bible and encouraging Scripture Engagement.¹² In some instances, literacy was either officially or unofficially required for baptism and church membership.¹³ For Bible agencies, the printed Scriptures were considered the "ultimate objective".¹⁴ As hinted earlier, since the invention of the Gutenberg printing press, which made personal copies of the Bible widely available, Christianity has been closely linked with literacy.

However, while literacy continues to play a key role in Scripture Engagement (as explained in the next section), orality is also key to effect engagement with Scripture, especially in Africa which is predominantly an oral society.¹⁵ There has been a growing recognition of the importance of oral

⁸ Margetts, "From Scripture Access to Scripture Engagement What Facilitates and Hinders Scripture Engagement in the Minyanka Churches of Mali?," 8.

⁹ Macdonald, "The Psalms and Spirituality...," 187.

¹⁰ Macdonald, "The Psalms and Spirituality...," 188.

¹¹ T. Wayne Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 26, no. 3 (2009): 123–28.

¹² Isaac Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa: Implications for Rethinking the Great Commission," in *Rethinking the Great Commission: Emerging African Perspectives*, ed. Emmanuel Asante and DNA Kpobi (Accra: SonLife, 2018), 72–82, 85; Grace Adjekum, "Beyond Literacy: Function Equivalence for Scripture Use in Ghana" (Fuller Theological Seminary, 1989), 36.

¹³ Herbert V. Klem, *Oral Communication of the Scripture: Insights from African Oral Art* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1982), 37.

¹⁴ Gilbert Ansre, "The Crucial Role of Oral-Scripture: Focus Africa," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12, no. 2 (1995): 65–68, 65.

¹⁵ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 124.

communication methods over the last two decades. This shift has spurred interest in approaches such as chronological Bible storying, ethnomusicology, audio Scriptures, and audiovisual media.¹⁶

Orality in Scripture Engagement involves adapting Biblical narratives to culturally relevant storytelling formats, such as those used in markets, community gatherings, and educational settings. Storying is especially valuable for non-literate populations as it enables them to grasp fundamental Biblical concepts and teachings. With technology, the traditional story-telling approach can be supplemented with media like CDs and DVDs to enhance engagement.¹⁷

Literacy

Ever since foreign missionaries introduced formal education to Africans, literacy has played a key role in equipping people to effectively engage in biblical texts. Literacy is another essential mode of Scripture Engagement; it facilitates access to the written Word.¹⁸ While oral teaching methods are crucial, literacy enables individuals to read and interpret Scripture independently. Transfer literacy, which teaches individuals to read the local language based on their proficiency in a dominant language, is a common strategy.¹⁹ It empowers church and community leaders to introduce local language Bibles effectively. However, literacy programs must be inclusive, catering to both literate and non-literate adults, with church-based initiatives often proving more effective than community-based efforts.²⁰ Sustainability is key in the process and it requires ongoing support for literacy programs and the production of diverse reading materials in the local language.

Local Performing and Visual Arts

Local Performing and Visual Arts serve as powerful tools for communicating biblical truths within diverse cultural contexts.²¹ These traditional art forms, including drama, dance, storytelling, chants, poetry, and music, resonate deeply with local communities and can be tailored to convey God's story effectively. For instance, using local musical styles can enhance interest in the message and facilitate its adaptation to local linguistic and cultural forms. However, the appropriateness of these art forms must be carefully evaluated to ensure they convey the intended meaning without associations with other religions or inappropriate emotions.

Plays, passion plays, and storytelling through song are particularly impactful methods for oral communication of the gospel, often involving entire communities in the narrative. Local drama forms can also effectively portray Bible stories or address key barriers to the gospel.²² Similarly, visual arts, such as paintings and objects, can be used to communicate biblical truths and symbols and provide people with a tangible connection to Scripture.²³ Local artists may also create images that resonate with the community to make the message more accessible and relevant.²⁴ Additionally, chronological charts and locally commissioned pictures serve as valuable teaching aids, offer historical context and aid in memory retention. While these artistic expressions hold immense potential for engaging with the Bible, careful consideration must be given to their appropriateness and cultural significance.

Audio Recordings

Another means for Scripture Engagement is audio recordings.²⁵ Since the 1930s, organizations have produced audio Bible formats. Many missionaries now believe these societies need the entire translated Scripture in electronic audio form, sometimes bypassing printed books due to low literacy rates.²⁶ For

¹⁶ Viggo Søgaaard, *Communicating Scriptures: The Bible in Audio and Video Formats* (Reading: United Bible Societies, 2001), 1.

¹⁷ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 124.

¹⁸ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 124.

¹⁹ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 124.

²⁰ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 125.

²¹ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 125.

²² Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 125.

²³ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 125.

²⁴ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 126.

²⁵ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 126.

²⁶ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 126.

areas without electricity, battery, solar-powered, and hand-cranked audio players are available at subsidised prices. Users receive basic maintenance training. Distribution methods for audio content include MP3s and cassette tapes, ensuring tapes are priced to avoid repurposing.²⁷

Different audio formats suit varying levels of interest. Straight Scripture readings work for engaged audiences, while a mix of voices and music appeals to less interested listeners. In some regions, previously uninterested people have become regular listeners through Bible studies and dramatizations. Radio is highly effective where access is common and listenership is high.²⁸ Though it requires effort and investment, radio can successfully convey Scripture through dramas, dialogues, songs, stories, and interviews.

Cell Phones

In modern times Scripture Engagement can be done effectively through the use of cell phones. Dye rightly observes that distributing Scripture via cell phones using MP3 files is a recent and rapidly expanding method. He asserts that with over 60% of the global population owning cell phones and significant growth in less developed countries, this approach is highly effective.²⁹ MP3 downloads are cost-effective, require no maintenance, and need no additional training beyond existing cell phone use.³⁰ This method also offers user anonymity.

Videos

Videos enhance the communication of Scripture by combining visual and auditory elements, making messages more impactful. Producing videos requires more resources and effort, but the outcomes can be significant.³¹ The JESUS film is a key example, demonstrating Jesus' life and actions, which helps build faith. For Dye, though costly, it is especially effective when paired with direct teaching.³² Other valuable video resources include Bible story adaptations and believer biographies available on DVD or VCD. For the deaf community, videos are crucial, with over 119 sign languages worldwide needing video translations as their primary medium, similar to books in other languages.³³

Having considered the various modes that can facilitate Scripture Engagement, I now continue to consider how Scripture has been engaged in various epochs of the media history of the Bible.

Scripture Engagement and the Media History of the Bible

In his article titled "Why Everything We Know about the Bible is Wrong," Fowler elucidates the importance of tracing the development of media in the Bible. He presents a four-fold division of the media history of the Bible as follows: oral/aural communication, manuscript communication, print communication, and electronic communication.³⁴ In what follows, the researcher presents a summary of each era of the media history and then outlines how Scripture Engagement occurred in each era.

The Era of Oral Communication

The first era of Bible transmission emphasises its initial existence in oral form, passed down through generations before being documented. This oral Bible, as described by Fowler (2009: 6), highlights the fundamental role of oral communication in human interaction, where cultures relied solely on spoken word without written records. In contrast, written cultures preserved history and identity through manuscripts, with individuals like Suetonius, Tacitus, and Josephus dedicated to this endeavor. Paleanthropologists estimate human oral communication capabilities around 50,000 years ago, with

²⁷ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 126.

²⁸ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 126.

²⁹ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 126.

³⁰ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 127.

³¹ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 127.

³² Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 127.

³³ Dye, "Scripture in an Accessible Form: The Most Common Avenue to Increased Scripture Engagement," 127.

³⁴ Robert M Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance*, 2009, 3–20, 5.

the oldest portions of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament initially transmitted orally.³⁵ Ancient oral cultures, as noted by Fowler, valued flexibility and fluidity in communication, with no two performances being identical.³⁶

In primarily oral cultures, identity preservation relied on memory, prompting storytellers to emphasise memorable content tailored to the immediate context.³⁷ While written cultures might expect precise repetition due to printing press accuracy, oral traditions anticipate variations in storytelling with each rendition. Walter Ong suggests that repetition aids memorization, a notable feature of oral communication evident in biblical patterns like the genealogies in Genesis 5:1-22.³⁸ There is a repetition of a person's age at which he gave birth to a son, the fact that he gave birth to other children, the number of years the person lived after the first son was born, and the total number of years the person lived before he died. This fluidity in oral storytelling, adapting to the moment and audience, contrasts with the static nature of written records, illustrating the unique dynamics of oral culture and its impact on communication patterns.

In the oral communication era, Scripture Engagement primarily occurred through oral transmission. The Bible was orally communicated from one generation to another through storytelling, recitation, and communal gatherings. Individuals engaged with Scripture by listening to it being spoken by storytellers, elders, or religious leaders. This form of engagement relied heavily on memory, repetition, and communal participation. People absorbed biblical narratives, teachings, and principles through oral tradition, often integrating them into their daily lives and community practices.

Manuscript Communication Era

The manuscript communication era marked the transition of the Bible from oral tradition to written form. Writing systems emerged in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt around the fourth millennium BCE, leading to the invention of the consonantal alphabet in the second millennium BCE, popularised by the Phoenicians.³⁹ Despite these advancements, writing remained limited, with only a small fraction of the population able to read or write. Even when biblical texts were transcribed onto papyrus or parchment, they were not widely accessible.

In this era, manuscripts were typically dictated by authors to scribes and often memorised for recitation. This practice suggests that citations in the New Testament may have been from memory. Unlike the extensive translation efforts we are witnessing today, there were few translations of the Bible from its original languages.⁴⁰ The Septuagint—the first notable translation of the Hebrew Bible—was completed in Alexandria, Egypt. Manuscript Bibles were composed of various scrolls, with each manuscript typically containing only one book or portions of the Bible. Also, large manuscripts containing the entire Bible, like Codex Vaticanus or Sinaiticus, were rare due to the labor-intensive and economically burdensome process of their preparation.⁴¹

During the manuscript communication era, Scripture Engagement was done through reading. Although written copies of the Bible were produced, access to them was limited, primarily restricted to religious institutions, scholars, and the elite. Individuals engaged with Scripture by reading handwritten manuscripts in monasteries, churches, or private collections. This form of engagement required literacy and access to written texts, making it less accessible to the general population. Therefore, majority of the people still had to listen to the Bible read to them. This means that oral engagement with the Bible did not stop when handwritten copies were made.

³⁵ Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," 7-8.

³⁶ Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," 7.

³⁷ Paul A. Soukup, "The Structure of Communication as a Challenge for Theology," *Teología y Vida* XLIV (2003): 102–122.

³⁸ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 40.

³⁹ Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," 9.

⁴⁰ Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," 9.

⁴¹ Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," 9-11.

Print Communication Era

The invention of the printing press revolutionised the dissemination of religious knowledge by enabling the mass production of Bible texts.⁴² This breakthrough facilitated a rapid increase in vernacular translations of the Bible within a century of Gutenberg's innovation. This simplified and accelerated the production process compared to the labor-intensive manuscript copying of previous eras.⁴³ Consequently, the Bible became more accessible to the general population and yielded a surge in biblical literacy as individuals were encouraged to engage with the text independently.

The transition from manuscript culture to print culture marked a profound shift in communication methods, transitioning from oral presentations to visual-based communication with the advent of the printing press.⁴⁴ Despite the pervasive influence of print culture in contemporary society, its transformative impact on history and human communication is often underestimated.⁴⁵ Eisenstein outlines the significant outcomes of the printing press, including the mass production of books, the preservation of knowledge, the promotion of cultural movements like the Renaissance and Protestant Reformation, and the standardization of vernacular languages.⁴⁶ These advancements, which would have been inconceivable in oral or manuscript cultures, demonstrate the profound influence of print communication on both communication methods and human cognition.⁴⁷

During the print communication era, the mass production of books, including the Bible, resulted in a significant increase in literacy rates and greater access to and engagement with Scripture. With printed copies of the Bible readily available, people engaged with the sacred text within the confines of their homes, churches, and wider communities. The proliferation of printed Bibles facilitated personal study, group discussions, and the formation of religious communities centered on shared biblical understanding. This accessibility to Scripture catalysed a flourishing of Scripture Engagement, as individuals could now own and explore the Bible independently.

The newfound ability to study the Bible at one's own pace and in the comfort of one's home led to deeper theological awareness and religious fervor among believers. Families gathered around printed Bibles for regular readings and discussions, fostering a culture of spiritual growth and communal reflection. Moreover, the availability of printed Bibles in churches and public spaces encouraged congregational study and participation, further enhancing Scripture Engagement within religious communities. As individuals delved into the printed pages of the Bible, they encountered transformative truths and spiritual insights, enriching their faith journeys and deepening their connections with God and fellow believers.

Electronic Communication Era

The next significant phase in the media history of the Bible is the electronic communication era, which began in the 20th century and continues to evolve rapidly. The electronic communication era is characterised by a variety of digital mediums, including cell phones, laptops, radio, and television. While electronic communication is relatively new, it incorporates forms of communication that have been present throughout history. Fowler asserts that "When new communication comes along, the old media does not vanish."⁴⁸ When writing was invented, oral communication did not cease; when the printing press was developed, people still wrote by hand. Each new medium adds to the array of communication options, rather than replacing previous ones.

Electronic communication has expanded the ways people engage with the Bible.⁴⁹ Digital formats of the Bible, such as e-books, apps, and online platforms, have made Scripture more accessible than ever before. Individuals engage with Scripture through various digital mediums, including

⁴² Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," 13.

⁴³ Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," 13.

⁴⁴ Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," 12.

⁴⁵ Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," 12.

⁴⁶ Cited in Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," 12.

⁴⁷ Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," 12.

⁴⁸ Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," 13.

⁴⁹ Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," 13.

reading, listening, watching, and interacting with online communities. The internet provides a vast array of resources for studying, discussing, and sharing the Bible and this facilitates global access to Scripture and fosters diverse forms of engagement.⁵⁰ Social media, online forums, and multimedia content enhance interaction and participation, creating opportunities for deeper exploration and connection with the biblical text.

Conditions for Effective Engagement

Dye gives eight conditions necessary for the effect of Scripture Engagement. In this section, the researcher offers a summary of Dye's thoughts.⁵¹ The discussion considers cases from the Bono-Twi Bible Translation process where applicable. The findings from this section will later constitute a framework within which the Skopos theory (used as a representative of the functionalist model of translations) will be discussed in terms of its ability to make Scripture Engagement effective.

Condition 1. Appropriate Language, Dialect and Orthography

According to Dye effective Scripture Engagement requires choosing suitable language, dialect, and orthography for expressing Biblical truths.⁵² If a community views its language as inadequate, they are unlikely to use scriptures translated into it. Dye cites the example involving the Central Subanen community on Mindanao Island in the Philippines.⁵³ They held their own language in such low regard that when a missionary translator initially attempted to learn it, they objected. In communities shifting to an official language, local language scriptures may seem inappropriate, especially with high bilingual proficiency.

The case of the Bono-Twi Bible translation may serve to illustrate this point. Over the years, the Bono people have been using literature in other Akan dialects (especially Asante-Twi) because the Bono dialect of Akan was not developed into written form. As a result, most Bono people are at least bilingual (Bono-Twi, Asante-Twi, and other dialects). This situation made some people (including some native Bono) argue that the Bible should not be translated into the Bono-Twi dialect because the people can use Bibles in English (the national language) and/or any Akan version of the Bible. Here, the affinity of some Bono people to the national language and other Akan dialects comes into play in their thinking that they do not need a Bible in their dialect. This however does not mean that the people hold their language in low esteem. Though the development of this dialect only started a few years ago, the dialect is strong and continues to be passed on from generation to generation. The Bono-Twi dialect is held in high esteem and there is no one will feel that it is inadequate and inappropriate for God to speak it. Many Bono people are now proud of themselves because of the documentation of their language.⁵⁴ The Bono people are proud of their dialect but some of them (mostly for economic reasons) opine that feel that there is nothing wrong with them to use the English and other Akan versions.

Dialect choice is also crucial; people accept their own or the most prestigious dialect but may reject others. There is a need to conduct a sociolinguistic survey before the translation process begins. The Bono-Twi Bible translation provides an example to illustrate this point. Using the Bono-Twi Translation Project as an example, the Bible Society of Ghana conducted an extensive sociolinguistic survey in key traditional areas among the Bono people even before the team of translators was formed.⁵⁵ Like many other dialects in the world, the Bono-Twi dialect has sub-dialectal differences as one moves across the various traditional areas in Bonoland. The socio-linguistic survey not only

⁵⁰ Fowler, "Why Everything We Know about the Bible Is Wrong: Lessons from the Media History of the Bible," 13.

⁵¹ T Wayne Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 26, no. 2 (2009): 89–98, 92.

⁵² Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," 92.

⁵³ Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," 92.

⁵⁴ Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 27.

⁵⁵ Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 124.

helped the translation agency to determine the translation needs of the people but also to have an idea as to how the sub-dialectical differences may be dealt with. It is not usually easy to deal with sub-dialectical differences in translation projects. In the case of the Bono-Twi project, even though the translation team has adopted a “harmonised” (or “central”) Bono-Twi orthography for their work, some sub-dialectical traditions feel ignored and hence find it difficult to accept what has been written as their version of the Bible.

Condition 2. Appropriate Translation

According to Dye people will only use a translation if they believe it conveys the Word of God accurately and appropriately.⁵⁶ The “Acceptable Translation” category includes factors like translation style and the moral integrity of the translation team. Since Bible translation is a spiritual exercise, decisions about the project must involve prayer and consideration of local church expectations, as these influence acceptance. Translator behavior impacts credibility; moral failures can undermine a translation's acceptability.⁵⁷ Therefore, it is important to choose people of integrity who continue to play active roles in their local churches and are determined to live their faith no matter the circumstances they find themselves in.

Accuracy and doctrinal correctness are also crucial in determining appropriate translation. There has to be approval from local denominations with their representatives involved in the review process. For this reason, each translation project includes an external team of reviewers from various denominations and locations.⁵⁸ These reviewers are typically educated individuals, church leaders, and others appointed by local churches to assist in verifying the translation.⁵⁹ In the case of the Bono-Twi translation project, all the major denominational traditions are represented in the team of reviewers. The diverse background of the reviewers serves effectively to deal with inappropriateness in translation.

Another aspect of the appropriateness of translation is the style used.⁶⁰ Translation style should meet local preferences, whether adapting to local speaking styles or closely following the original grammatical structure. There is also the need for mission organizations and local leaders to agree on key biblical terms, using accurate and natural equivalents to avoid misunderstandings.⁶¹

Condition 3: Accessible Forms of Scripture

Another condition is accessibility.⁶² The translated Scriptures must be accessible to people groups; meaning individuals should be able to read the Bible, hear it read, or see it in drama or other communicative arts.⁶³ If the Scriptures are written, some people must be able to read. If they are presented in oral forms, then people must be able to tell Bible stories, or there must be electronic forms of Scripture available.⁶⁴ The focus of this condition is therefore on either increasing the number of people who can read (literacy) or developing avenues for making the Bible available orally or visually.

⁵⁶ Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 92.

⁵⁷ Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 92.

⁵⁸ Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 34.

⁵⁹ Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 4.

⁶⁰ Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 93.

⁶¹ Sam Smucker, “Scripture Engagement Analysis and Plan Done for the Pouye of Papua New Guinea” (GIALens, 2013), 3.

⁶² Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 93.

⁶³ Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 93.

⁶⁴ Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 93.

Because many minority group members do not read regularly if at all, the focus in the last decade has shifted to creative methods of oral and video Scripture products.⁶⁵ This shift in focus applies to many African societies, but more so, the Bono Society of Ghana where the level of literacy of relatively low. In the researcher's opinion, adopting the audio-visual format of Scripture Engagement will increase accessibility and make more people patronise the Bono-Twi scriptures.

Condition 4. Background Knowledge of the Hearer

Understanding the Bible requires background knowledge about its historical, cultural, and theological contexts.⁶⁶ Just as one might struggle to comprehend complex topics like theoretical physics without prior knowledge, many people find it difficult to understand the Bible due to a lack of context. Without this understanding, readers may misinterpret or lose interest in the text.⁶⁷ Again, for Scripture Engagement to be effective the readers need to have adequate knowledge of the Bible's primary teachings.⁶⁸ This knowledge is essential for the interpretation of the message of the Bible. In some cultures, the Bible is seen as a source of ritual power rather than a text to be studied and understood. To address this, there needs to be a shift in orientation towards understanding Holy Scripture.

Background information can be gleaned from the Bible itself, footnotes, study aids, artistic expressions, and sermons.⁶⁹ It is crucial for each language group to have access to such resources to make sense of translated Scriptures. Local churches play a vital role in Bible teaching, ensuring parishioners have the necessary framework for interpreting the text effectively.

Condition 5. Availability

For people to engage with Scripture effectively, they need access to copies or opportunities to hear it read aloud.⁷⁰ Distribution systems are crucial for making Scriptures available and informing people where they can obtain them.⁷¹ In one East African language group, the lack of awareness and accessibility hindered the distribution of local language New Testament books. Missionaries and pastors play vital roles in promoting Scripture awareness and encouraging its use.⁷² They should be knowledgeable about available vernacular translations and actively promote them. Sustainable distribution requires trained personnel, well-defined financial systems, and accountability mechanisms. Distribution efforts should extend beyond printed texts to include audio products and materials addressing felt needs.⁷³ In some regions, the Internet serves as a practical distribution platform. Ultimately, lives can only be transformed by Scripture when people are aware of it and can easily access it.

⁶⁵ Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," 94.

⁶⁶ Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," 94.

⁶⁷ Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," 94.

⁶⁸ Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," 94.

⁶⁹ Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," 94.

⁷⁰ Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," 94.

⁷¹ Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," 94.

⁷² Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," 94.

⁷³ Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," 94.

Condition 6. Spiritual Hunger of Community Members

The level of Scripture Engagement often correlates with the number of believers within a community and their spiritual hunger.⁷⁴ Typically, only Christians and those interested in Christianity will engage with the Bible extensively.⁷⁵ Therefore, increasing the number of Bible readers is closely linked to church evangelism efforts. Local language Scriptures serve as potent tools for evangelists in reaching out to new audiences.⁷⁶ However, church attendance, while an indicator of potential readership, does not always reflect genuine spiritual hunger. Many attendees may lack a vital faith or genuine interest in the Bible until they experience personal renewal.

One powerful method to demonstrate the relevance of the Bible is through “Good News Encounters”—instances where God or the Bible are seen to meet a felt need.⁷⁷ These encounters, often shared through biblical stories or examples, can have a profound impact on individuals and communities. They serve as informal witnesses, particularly effective in resistant or dangerous areas. As Christian workers address specific cultural needs with biblical answers, they help individuals recognise their need for God and foster spiritual hunger among not-yet Christians. It is important to adequately satisfy people’s spiritual hunger so that they will remain with the Bible rather than returning to their primal religious traditions.⁷⁸

Condition 7. Freedom to Commit to Christian Faith

According to Dye concept of “Freedom to Commit to Christian Faith” aligns closely with the discussion on spiritual hunger and Scripture Engagement in Bible translation.⁷⁹ This condition emphasises the importance of creating an environment where individuals have the liberty to explore and embrace the Christian faith freely.⁸⁰ In the context of Scripture Engagement, the freedom to commit to the Christian faith involves addressing barriers that may hinder individuals from fully embracing Christianity. These barriers could include cultural biases, misconceptions about Christianity, or lack of awareness about the relevance of the Bible to their lives.⁸¹

Moreover, providing access to Scriptures in local languages plays a vital role in facilitating one’s understanding and acceptance of Christianity.⁸² Local language Scriptures serve as powerful tools for evangelism by allowing individuals to engage with the Christian message in a way that resonates with their cultural context and linguistic preferences.⁸³ As Bible translators and other persons make Scriptures accessible they help individuals overcome barriers to commitment and make meaningful decisions to embrace the Christian faith.

⁷⁴ Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 94.

⁷⁵ Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 94.

⁷⁶ Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 94.

⁷⁷ Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 95.

⁷⁸ Smucker, “Scripture Engagement Analysis and Plan Done for the Pouye of Papua New Guinea,” 2.

⁷⁹ Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 95.

⁸⁰ Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 95.

⁸¹ Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 95.

⁸² Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 96.

⁸³ Dye, “The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect,” 96.

Condition 8. Partnership between Translators and Other Stakeholders

Partnership plays a critical role in the success or failure of Bible translation projects.⁸⁴ When these stakeholders are not actively engaged in Bible translation projects, the likelihood of their success diminishes significantly. Historically, Bible translation organizations have operated somewhat independently from local church communities; this has led to disconnects between translation efforts and community relevance.⁸⁵ To increase the likelihood of Scripture Engagement, translation teams must align their efforts with the visions of local churches and missions and seek partnership opportunities to support their ministries.

Local church leaders and missionaries should view vernacular Bible translation projects as collaborative endeavors that enhance their ministries.⁸⁶ They must actively participate in the translation process and promote it within their communities. By so doing they will gain a deeper understanding of how translation efforts support their work. This is key because ownership of the translation process by the community is essential for fostering Scripture use. When community members perceive translations as integral to their cultural and religious identity, they are more likely to engage with them.

The practice of the Bono-Twi translation team in ensuring credible partnership and acceptability of the Bible among the Bono-Twi-speaking people needs to be mentioned at this point. According to Boaheng, the Bono-Twi translation team maintains regular engagement with the target community, including influential figures.⁸⁷ For instance, the team pays regular visits to traditional councils and communities to gather feedback on key decisions. They also have regular meetings with the various local Council of Churches in various Bono-Twi-speaking communities. Additionally, literacy programs and community events foster interaction and sometimes, this leads to adjustments in the translation.⁸⁸ The team also embarks on field trips where they test the translated text within the community and seek feedback.⁸⁹

With these background notes, the study now proceeds to consider Scripture Engagement within the framework of the media history of the Bible.

Scripture Engagement and the Functionalist Approach to Translation

The question the study seeks to answer in this section is how the Skopos theory (a functionalist model) promotes Scripture Engagement through the activities of the various stakeholders in the translation process. The functionalist approach considers the function of language within a given society, taking into account factors such as social norms, cultural practices, and communicative purposes.⁹⁰ In the context of Scripture Engagement, this means translating biblical texts in a way that addresses the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual needs of the audience, fostering a deeper connection with the message of the Bible. For example, idiomatic expressions or metaphors in the original text may need to be translated into equivalent expressions that carry similar meanings and impact in the target language.

The Skopos theory, a concept from translation studies, provides a framework for understanding how to meet the conditions outlined above to enhance Scripture Engagement in Bible translation. A key document in the translation process, according to the Skopos theory, is the translation brief. Nord

⁸⁴ Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," 96.

⁸⁵ Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," 96.

⁸⁶ Dye, "The Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement: Social and Cultural Factors Necessary for Vernacular Bible Translation to Achieve Maximum Effect," 96.

⁸⁷ Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 17.

⁸⁸ Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 17.

⁸⁹ Boaheng, *A Handbook for African Mother-Tongue Bible Translators*, 17.

⁹⁰ J. A. Naudé, "From Submissiveness to Agency: An Overview of Developments in Translation Studies and Some Implications for Language Practice in Africa," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 29, no. 3 (2011): 223–41, 229.

explains this as the formal instructions for translators that are often specified by clients or initiators.⁹¹ These instructions detail the purpose, audience, timing, and function of the intended communication.

This document should provide information about the stakeholders involved in the translation, the organizations and churches participating in the project, the communities targeted for Scripture Engagement, the goals of the Scripture Engagement initiative, the translation philosophy to be used, the materials to be used for community and individual engagement, the preferred media formats for the users.⁹² These inquiries are essential for a Bible Translation manager for effective program planning, and they also align with Skopostheorie, which assists in shaping the translation process. According to Nord, these issues are elevated to the utmost significance to attain a successful translation.⁹³ Subsequently, the Skopos can be elaborated further in a translation brief, which comprises more specific instructions for the translator.⁹⁴ The Skopos theory emphasises the importance of considering the target audience's needs and preferences. In the case of Bible translation, this means choosing language, dialect, and orthography that resonate with the community. The translation manager needs to plan for a field trip to study the receptor community to identify their needs.

On the appropriateness of the translation, the Skopos theory emphasizes the appropriate for the target audience. Therefore, a project based on the Skopos theory will consider factors such as translation style, doctrinal correctness, and the moral integrity of the translation team. Choosing translators of integrity who are active members of their local churches helps build trust and credibility, further enhancing engagement. The team of translators is required to study the skopos of the translation and produce texts that best meet the needs of the community.⁹⁵ Adequate training should be given to both the translation team and the team of reviewers concerning the kind of translation that is to be produced for the community in question.

Another requirement for effective Scripture Engagement is the accessibility of the translated text. The Skopos theory highlights the importance of making translations accessible to the target audience in various forms. This could include written, audio, or visual formats, depending on the literacy levels and cultural preferences of the community. The choice of the forms in which to present the Scripture will be informed by the translation team's interaction with the receptor community. If the community says they want audio form, then that is what should be presented to them; if they say they desire visual formats, their choice should be respected. With this in mind, the translation manager needs to make adequate provision by recruiting and training people and resourcing them to transform the translated text into the required format for the recipients of the texts. It is also important to arrange for public "testing" of the translated texts from time to time. This means engaging school pupils, adults, the youth with the texts so as to get feedback from them to shape the ongoing process of translation.

Since the Skopos theory is reader-oriented, it focuses on providing the basic and necessary information needed to interpret and apply Scripture. Among such information are footnotes, study aids, or artistic expressions to help readers grasp the historical, cultural, and theological contexts of the Bible. As these are presented, readers will better engage with Scripture and more probably experience spiritual transformation, which is the intended outcome of Scripture Engagement.

Again, since the Skopos theory focuses on satisfying the needs of the receptor community, the availability of the translated Scriptures is key to the translation project. The translation manager is required to put plans in place to ensure effective distribution systems to make Scriptures readily available to the target audience. Translators should work closely with missionaries, pastors, and local church leaders to promote Scripture awareness and encourage its use within communities. This may involve leveraging various distribution channels, including printed texts, audio products, and online

⁹¹ Christine Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1997), 30.

⁹² Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*. 65.

⁹³ Nord, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*, 65.

⁹⁴ Jacobus A Naudé, "An Overview of Recent Developments in Translation Studies with Special Reference to the Implications for Bible Translation," *Acta Theologica* 22, no. 1 (2002): 44–69, 51.

⁹⁵ Naudé, "An Overview of Recent Developments in Translation Studies with Special Reference to the Implications for Bible Translation," 51.

platforms, to ensure widespread access to the translated Scriptures. The translation manager is expected to make the necessary arrangements for the publication and distribution of the translated text.

Satisfying the spiritual hunger of community members needs assessment of the spiritual condition of the people in order to make adequate provisions to address their needs. The Skopos theory recognises this close link between the success of Scripture Engagement and the level of spiritual hunger of individuals within a community. Therefore, it emphasises the need to assess the state of the receptor community. This assessment helps the project manager to know what programs should be organised to meet the spiritual needs of the people. For example, if the preliminary assessment shows the majority of the people as traumatised, the manager may organise a trauma healing program to address the situation. Again, the results from the survey of the spiritual needs of the people will inform how the translation team will deal with passages directly related to spirituality.

With the Skopos theory, the freedom to commit to the Christian faith is assured. This theory, as stated earlier, prioritises the needs and freedom of the recipient. It highlights the importance of creating an environment where individuals have the freedom to explore and embrace the Christian faith freely. With this in mind, translators should work to overcome barriers that may hinder individuals from fully embracing Christianity, such as cultural biases or misconceptions about the relevance of the Bible. This will be taken care of in the translation brief.

As effective Scripture Engagement requires a partnership between translators and other stakeholders, the Skopos theory will enhance this partnership through its emphasis on the need to involve all key stakeholders in the translation process. Translators must actively engage with local church communities and other stakeholders to ensure that translation efforts align with community visions and priorities. Through this, translators can enhance the relevance and acceptability of the translated Scriptures, thus promoting Scripture Engagement effectively.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing underlines that throughout the media history of the Bible, Scripture Engagement has adapted and evolved in response to changes in communication technology. From oral transmission to digital platforms, individuals have found ways to engage with the Bible, drawing inspiration, guidance, and spiritual nourishment from its teachings and narratives. Each era has brought new opportunities and challenges for Scripture Engagement, but the enduring significance of the Bible in shaping beliefs, values, and communities remains constant across time and media forms.

The findings from the paper show that Scripture Engagement is indispensable in Bible translation projects. Without effective engagement, translated Bibles are merely decorative or religious objects that fail to make a meaningful impact on the lives of believers. As such it must be planned and captured in the translation brief through adequate consultations with all key stakeholders in the project. Materials for Scripture Engagement must be prepared early in the Bible Translation project. This will ensure early engagement with the communities so that there will be enough time to adjust the process in case there is a need to do so. These may involve producing songs, topical Bible verses, Bible studies, or liturgy books in the early stages of the program, before translating large sections of Scripture. These steps are crucial to offer practical strategies for the translation manager to consider.

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