

**Translating Scripture for sound and performance: new directions in Biblical Studies**, by J A Maxey and E R Wendland (eds.), *Biblical Performance Criticism* 6, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.

This anthology represents Volume 6 of the series of *Biblical Performance Criticism* of which nine volumes were published by the end of 2013 under the editorship of David Rhoads. Volume 1 was published in 2009. Volume 7, which was published in 2013,

claims to be a second edition of the late J A (Bobby) Loubser's *Oral and manuscript culture in the Bible. Studies on the media texture of the New Testament – explorative hermeneutics*, but seems instead to be an exact reprint of the volume published by SUN Press in 2007.

The new field of Biblical Performance Criticism recognises ancient Israel and the early church as predominantly oral cultures. The traditions now in the Bible were originally experienced as oral performances. The claim is made that academic work on the Bible must shift from the mentality of a modern print culture to that of an oral/scribal culture and must reframe the biblical materials in the context of traditional oral cultures. It attempts to construct modern scenarios of ancient performances of the biblical text as a means to interpret anew the traditions of the Bible (Maxey 2012:2-3). This is important for Bible translation because it pertains to translations of performance (antiquity) and translations for performance (today).

The various articles presented in this volume underscore the foundational matter of Bible translation as understood from the specific perspective of Biblical Performance Criticism: if the Bible is not intended for silent reading, how then does the public performance mode of communication affect the translation of the biblical material? (Maxey 2012:15) In answering this question the articles by James Maxey and David Rhoads explore the dynamic relationship between translation and performance in general theoretical terms. Maxey narrates the epistemological move from sound to performance features such as movement, physical expression and gestures in orality studies and translation studies, that is, Biblical Performance Criticism goes beyond orality. Biblical Performance Criticism does not simply involve storytelling; it involves story creation through the performance event and presupposes a community as passed down through tradition. Rhoads insists that one of the fundamental shifts in Biblical Performance Criticism is that performance itself is one methodology of exegesis. When presented with two viable exegetical choices from a text, the act of performance can indicate which selection is more likely. In this way, choices of performance and exegesis inform a translation. In translation for print the focus is on the text rather than on an oral performance; more on a single meaning of a text than on the meaning potential; more on faithfulness to the original than on creativity in the oral register of the receptor language; more on the intention of the author or text than on the potential impacts upon an audience; more on an individual reader than on the collective experience of a gathered community; more on the cognitive sense made by a

reader than on the emotional experience of the listeners. The movement is toward an engagement model, which takes more seriously the potential impacts of translation on audiences. The other articles offer specific applications to particular Hebrew and Greek passages of Scripture. Dan Nässelqvist takes the methodology of sound mapping of the New Testament developed by Lee and Scott and applies it to translation of John's prologue by focussing on the oral/aural factor in sound play of the source text and the contemporary challenge of translation for performance. Lourens de Vries is critical of a universalistic approach to oral cultures. By investigating several Bible translations (seventeenth-century Dutch, twentieth-century translations for communities in New Guinea and the German translation of the Hebrew by Buber and Rosenzweig) he criticizes the "romantic" pursuit of an exclusively oral context. On the basis of research of David Carr, De Vries argues that the literary features of the biblical text serve as reminders of a complex interplay of oral and literary strategies of communication. In his paper Phil Noss presents a nuanced understanding of the role of orality and performance in Bible translation, with Gbaya examples that illustrate the diverse functions of ideophones. He illustrates how an engagement model of Bible translation, i.e., a model that goes beyond communication, is served by considering performance. Jeanette Mathews indicates how the text of Habakkuk can be translated for performance by starting with a literal translation aiming at lexical consistency with regard to verbal constructions, definite articles and particles to maintain the markers in the text for the audience who understands the depth of these expressions from a shared cultural background. She describes also the performance themes in Habakkuk: embodiment, process, and re-enactment. The letter of Jude is the focus of Wendland's comparative approach in which he explores a Greco-Roman rhetorical methodology while at the same time suggesting that a literary-structural methodology offers significant insights. It is subsumed in a discourse-linguistic approach to Jude that measures lexical and structural choices beyond the sentence level. He suggests several examples of the oral/aural contribution to the letter's rhetorical strategy. In her paper Jill Karlik demonstrates the creative trajectory of Biblical Performance Criticism by looking at the activity of interpreters of sermons in West African contexts in a case study of interpreter-mediation in the Guinea-Bissau language of Manjaku. The primary way people gain access to the Bible is by experiencing it through an oral interpreter as an oral performance of the text.

From these essays the following aspects can be deduced that are fundamental for performance translation:

Semiotics is a significant theoretical framework of translating for oral performance. Semiotics shows that all human communication and cultural construction make meaning using signs of one form or another. It implies that signs are interpreted and translated in terms of other signs, sometimes mixing and matching classes of signs and not only sign systems involve lexical choices as found in written or printed texts. There are many ways in which humans communicate across languages, cultures, and media, that is, the ways humans translate and interpret in non-print forms.

There are different views concerning the original contexts of performance (See volume 4 of the series *Biblical Performance Criticism Oral tradition in ancient Israel* by Robert D Miller). Hermann Gunkel, acquainted with Wilhelm Wundt's folk psychology, first suggested in the 1910s that oral traditions lay behind the written biblical tradition. This research led to a universal, dichotomous characterisation of oral cultures versus literate cultures, that is, a great divide between oral and written cultures and traditions. Since the 1930s this oral formulaic theory is associated with the work of Milman Parry and his student Albert Lord, as well as with the scholars Walter J Ong and Jack Goody. Rhoads (2012:26-30) has the opinion that like musical composers, originators of stories and speeches probably would have composed in their imagination or sounded out what they were composing and later transcribed it. They likely visualized their whole embodied performance-gestures, movements, and facial expressions-as they composed ahead of actually performing. The scrolls served mainly to assist a performer's memory to enable performances to be repeated on new occasions and in other locations, even though it is likely that compositions would also have passed in memory from oral performance to oral performance without the aid of a manuscript. The writings preserved in the New Testament are like fossil remains of oral performances. However, the simplistic binary of orality versus literacy has receded into the background and more nuanced theories have arisen. The evidence is that societies produced oral and written literature simultaneously. The oral and the written dimension are intimately connected, have many points of contact and coevolve. This interplay of written and oral dimensions is local in the sense that oral-written interfaces vary in time, place, context, and genre within communities. These evolving text traditions were in the minds and hearts. The oral performance or

recitation from memory is the proof of mastery of ancient traditions (long-duration texts), setting the performer apart from those who have not internalized the tradition. To be literate in antiquity means that someone has internalized ancient texts and therefore has the ability to recite them and to add to the tradition. Written copies of text stand as a permanent reference point.

In addition to the engagement model of Noss and the Karlik model of interpreter-mediation (both mentioned above) other oral approaches to translation for performance can be suggested. One is Wendland's oratorical-performative approach to translation as expressed in his 2008 book *Finding and translating the oral-aural elements in written language. The case of the New Testament epistles* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen). His assumption is that the original context for the writings in the New Testament was oral performance. Translations must facilitate oral reading/oral performance events in contemporary cultures in three areas namely meaning, style and the rhetorical effects that the oration may have had on an ancient listening audience, in an effort to replicate a similar impact upon a listening audience in a particular modern culture. In this regard four aspects play a role namely oral arts, sound, memory, and context. Another one is James Maxey's translation-as-performance model which was published as volume 2 of the series *Biblical Performance Criticism* in 2009 with the title *From orality to orality. A new paradigm for contextual translation of the Bible*. It contends that the New Testament compositions were initially performed and not restricted to individualized, silent reading. He seeks to understand the biblical materials in the imagined context of performance events of the early church, and at the same time he is seeking to place the translation in the context of performance events of a contemporary oral culture. Maxey facilitated an opportunity for storytellers from among the Vuté people to develop translations-in-performance. The end product is not necessarily a printed Bible to be reproduced and distributed, unless it is a working text that can change over time from performance to performance. Lourens de Vries (2012:87) proposes a local-written interface approach for Bible translation. Local-oral written interfaces emerge when a primary oral culture becomes partly integrated in the course of the years in the wider nation-state. This creates a small minority of indigenous literati that were exposed to education in the print-dominated environment of the national culture. These literati read out translated Bible texts to listening communities in a liturgical setting just as they read out and translate government announcements or price lists at shops. In other words, Bible translation projects should

be designed to function in those specific contexts.

The research about ancient literary culture has implications for understanding better how the Bible was spoken, written and passed on, especially with an eye to possible implications for the Bible's inspiration and authority. John H Walton and Brent Sandy address these issues in their 2013 publication *The lost world of Scripture. Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (Downers Grove, IL: IVPA). They utilise the operative contrast of hearing-dominant (traditions were passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation) versus text-dominant and differentiate the roles of documents (essential record keeping and solidified reference points to be read aloud and symbolic expressions of power) and scribes (produce documents and maintain archives and they were not the ones who would recite the traditions in public). These distinctions serve to nuance the categories of oral and written in important ways.

The authors of the essays have first-hand experience with the translation of biblical materials into non-European languages in communities who maintain a vibrant oral tradition. They contribute to the understanding of the complex interaction of sound, performance, and communication strategies in the attempt to effectively translate the Bible for contemporary audiences and offer thereby important perspectives on questions of fidelity and community. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the field of translation studies, Bible translation, the nature of the biblical text, hermeneutics and communication theory.

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