Introduction to the Eight Conditions Model

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Scripture engagement research has increased greatly in the past two decades with dozens of doctoral dissertations and case studies, both formal and informal, contributing significantly to the understanding of the field (see bibliography). A result of these studies has been the identification of numerous elements that, when present, contribute positively to the impact of Bible translation. Many of these same elements, when missing, have been identified as inhibiting Scripture engagement.

As more factors that influence Scripture engagement have been identified through research, it has become necessary to categorize them within a system that can be used for both program analysis and instruction in Scripture engagement. The most comprehensive system to date is Wayne Dye's “Eight Conditions of Scripture Engagement” articles. The current version of this two-part article may be found online at the International Journal of Frontier Missiology (IJFM).


Wayne Dye's model describes around fifty factors that affect Scripture engagement, which he organizes into eight categories or conditions. When positively met, these factors promote engagement with vernacular Scriptures, but when a factor or combination of factors is not met, they are likely to inhibit Scripture engagement.

Fortunately, the Eight Conditions Model is not simply a descriptive article but a system for analysis that Dye has taught for over ten years in his courses at the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics (GIAL) in Dallas, Texas. The Eight Conditions Model functions as a qualitative analytical framework for assessing the relative health of a translation program in terms of Scripture engagement. Over the past ten years Bible translation personnel have been using this model to identify challenges and to propose context-specific interventions designed to improve Scripture engagement in their programs. This model is designed to be flexible enough to be used in any Bible translation context to identify challenges to Scripture engagement.

This issue of GIALens examines this particular model of Scripture engagement research. The first article, “The Eight Conditions Questionnaire” (Hatcher 2013a), provides a practical research tool for assessing the potential roadblocks to successful Scripture engagement. The questionnaire is both an elaboration of and an expansion of Dye's original model.

An essential component for applying the Eight Conditions Model is a previously published

1 This model is also taught in Scripture Engagement courses at CanIL and has been adopted by many translation programs, multiple comprehensive projects, and by Asia Area as part of their program planning process.
Far from being a simple numeric scale, the Welser Scale identifies what each specific rating means, explaining the likely implications of each level for potential Scripture engagement. The second article in this edition – “Complexities in Rating the Eight Conditions” (Hatcher 2013b) – expands some of the challenges involved in qualitatively measuring causation in Scripture engagement by explaining how each condition is rated somewhat differently. For example, Scripture access and certain missiological factors are measured very differently from the way other SE issues like partnership, distribution, sociolinguistics, church engagement, and others are measured.

The remainder of the issue contains three case studies in two very different Bible translation programs where the Eight Conditions Model has been applied – one Hindu and one with a Christian / animist mix. In addition to differences in religious background, each context has significantly different issues. One of the prominent strengths of the Eight Conditions Model is that it is designed to be applied effectively in a wide variety of Bible translation contexts. In these applications of the Eight Conditions Model, a three year plan is prepared with interventions targeted to address the weakest conditions that were identified in the analysis.

The first case study (Knott 2011) looks at the Vee² people, a Hindu group of South Asia. While a few people within this group are Christians, there is significant social pressure against converting to Christianity. This makes for a complex Scripture engagement situation.

The second case study (Smucker 2012) examines the Pouye people of the Sepik region of Papua New Guinea. While this is a dominantly Christian group, they still struggle with syncretism with their animistic religious practices. As a result, many of the proposed interventions focus on addressing this key area of Scripture engagement.

The case studies in this issue begin with an application of the Eight Conditions Questionnaire with each factor and each condition being rated using the Welser Scale. A three year plan of Scripture Engagement interventions is proposed to address the weakest conditions. Every Eight Conditions Model project also contains an extensive background study of the Bible translation program; the background information is found in the appendices of each of these case studies.

We appreciate not only the students who have shared their research projects but also the translation team personnel who allowed their programs to be analyzed. We are indebted to the many Scripture engagement personnel who have contributed so significantly to this growing discipline.
Abridged Bibliography of Scripture Engagement Dissertations and Theses


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