How to Use the Welser Scale

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Need for a Scripture Use Assessment Tool

When creating a Scripture use plan how do you get a grip on the pertinent conditions to be able to set goals and create a plan? Of the seven conditions that Dye identified to be necessary for Scripture to be used (spiritual hunger, appropriate language, acceptable translation, accessible/useable form, initial understanding, obtainable, and freedom to commit), which is the most important in this situation? A good assessment of the current situation is needed before a goal-oriented plan can be created. With limited time and resources, we want our efforts to hit the mark.

In 1999, one of the authors (Welser) took the description of the seven conditions that must be met for Scripture to be used[1], and developed a straightforward way to analyse the Scripture use potential of an ethnic group[2]. The basic concept is to consider each condition separately, and to evaluate the degree to which that condition is met in that ethnic group. A numerical score is assigned to each condition to summarize the degree to which it is met in each significant subgroup of the language group. Its intention is to facilitate comparison between different conditions so as to determine the condition(s) that need most work. The scale has been used a number of times, with the common result that intuitions are clarified and all those involved are more able to see the Scripture use activities most needed. Following recent custom in Missiology[3], one of the authors (Dye) has begun calling this the Welser Scale.

How to Use the Scale

Who participates in the assessment?

The assessment will be most effective if those who participate represent several perspectives. The ex-patriot translator and national translators would be the minimum to be involved. Literacy workers, local pastors and other mission partners could add further insight. Though each person could fill out the scale on their own, further insight can come forth from a well-moderated group discussion. The group process can help different partners see the needs and set goals together. It is therefore wise for all involved in making the decisions to decide about all seven conditions together,

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[1] 1999 Wayne Dye "Conditions Necessary for Scripture to be Used" in May 1999 Scripture Use Caucus CD

[2] 1999 Matt and Marcia Welser "Americas Group Entity Report" in May 1999 Scripture Use Caucus CD

[3] e.g. the Engel scale and the Gray Matrix, both named after their inventors

rather than dividing the work and asking different people to decide on different conditions. For the same reason, all the conditions should be considered during the same time frame.

Scoring each condition

The scale has ten possible levels, from zero, for a completely unmet condition to 10, for a condition fully and completely met. There are many levels in an intuitive scale in order to facilitate the judging process by having enough levels at both ends of the scale to avoid awkward judgment calls. Few people will be willing to say a situation is as good or as bad as it can be, so in practice the end points of any intuitive judgment scale are not useful. A ten-point scale provides enough levels for intuitive judgments. The original scale went for negative 3 to positive 3. In practise, we found that in some situations our national co-workers were hesitant to choose a negative number, even when the condition was obviously a problem. So to avoid this we have added levels and made them all positive.

This is an intuitive scale because it is not possible to even approach an objective, quantifiable evaluation. The scale intuitively evaluates two factors simultaneously: both the degree to which a condition is met and the percentage of the group for which it is met. In any group there is going to be a minority of people different than the whole. (This could include the rebels, the resistant, the rigidly traditional, or the totally indifferent individuals). It seems best therefore to think about only the more cohesive 80% of each group of people, ignoring the 20% of people who do not fit into the condition. See the appendix for a list of suggested meanings for each level of the scale.

Identifying subgroups

It is often useful to identify subgroups within the language group on the basis of obvious differences in the way the conditions are met. For instance, usually the Christian community must be considered separately from those outside their community. Other breakdowns might be between Christian traditions (e.g. Orthodox vs. evangelical) or between socio-cultural situations (urban-rural, educated-uneducated). These subgroups will emerge as the assessment discussion takes place. Participants will say things like, "You can't make a general statement about how acceptable the translation is because different churches see it from different points of view." Or "You can't make one general statement about how obtainable the scriptures will be because it is so much harder to arrange for sale of materials in the island regions." It is possible that different subgroups will be pertinent with each condition. In that case, you may need to customize the way the chart is laid out to label and list the various subgroups.

Drawing conclusions

After the group has scored each condition with it's various subgroups, it is time to look over the results. Even if your group has been overly optimistic (or pessimistic), the highest and lowest scores should be evident. Which of these conditions will be most

favourable for Scripture use? Which of these conditions are the greatest hindrances to Scripture use? Comparing the lowest scored conditions, how do these interact and which needs to be addressed first with the most resources?

From here to a plan

Identifying the problem areas is the first step. From here, set goals and begin to brainstorm possible activities to bring about change. Focusing your Scripture use activities to bring change to the areas of greatest hindrance will give you the best results for your efforts.

An example

At the end of the article is an example of a completed scale for the Aukan language of Suriname. The assessment was made in 1999 at a meeting with Scripture use consultants as moderators, the translator and two national co-translators. Each condition was discussed and scored with comments added. The four subgroups that were significant for that setting were the Christians that lived in town (the capital), verses the non-Christians in town and the Christians in the interior (very isolated area) verses the non-Christians in the interior. Even though the group found it hard to assign scores, in the end, the lowest scores became obvious in the areas of literacy, obtain-ability and freedom to commit. This assessment then became the basis for developing a Scripture use plan.

Suggested meanings for each level of the scale:

- +10 this condition is fully met to such a degree that it is no hindrances at all. It is a strong asset to the overall picture, even partially compensating for other conditions.

- +9

- +8 this condition is met to a significant degree. There is room for improvement, but it is unlikely that further improvement will make much difference in the level of use of Scripture.

- +7

- +6 some aspects of this condition are met and it is not a real hindrance to Scripture use, but usage is likely to improve if it were changed for the better.

- +5 this conditions is partially met and it is

- +4 this condition is poorly met and provides a slight hindrance to Scripture use, but not enough to block Scripture use if other conditions are positive.

- +3 this condition is poorly met and provides a considerable hindrance to Scripture use

- +2 this condition is unmet to the degree that it provides serious hindrances to Scripture use, though the situation could be worse.

- +1 this condition is unmet to the degree that it provides a major hindrance to Scripture use.

- 0   this condition is completely unmet and enough of a hindrance as to completely block the use of Scriptures there.

Assessing the cONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR SCRIPTURES TO BE USED

Rate each condition from a score of 10 (condition is fully met) to a score of 0 (condition is completely unmet) for each subgroup of the population you have listed.

Language Group Name   Date of Assessment

Those who contributed to the Assessment:

Name of subgroups: A: B: C: D:

1.

Partnership with Local Churches: The work of Bible translation and Scripture Use are carried out in close partnership with local churches, denominations, and missions.

    Score Subgroups: A: B: C: D:

    Comments

2. **Appropriate Language**: The language and dialect used is considered good for having the Scriptures in.

    Score Subgroups: A: B: C: D:

    Comments:

3. **Acceptable Translation**: The translation itself is acceptable.

    Score Subgroups: A: B: C: D:

    Comments:

4. **Understanding**: Most people can understand enough Christian teaching to make sense of the Scriptures, and they know how to learn new things from Scripture.

    Score Subgroups: A: B: C: D:

    Comments:

5. **Accessible/Useable Form**: Many people are able to read the Scriptures, or able to hear it read.

    Score Subgroups: A: B: C: D:

Comments:

6. **Obtainable:** Everyone who wants a copy of Scripture publications in its various forms can obtain one without too much effort or cost.

   Score Subgroups: A: B: C: D:

   Comments:

7. **Spiritual Hunger**: Most people in that ethnic group who want to know God better.

   Score Subgroups: A: B: C: D:

   Comments:

8. **Freedom to Commit**: Most people are spiritually free to follow Christ wholeheartedly, including turning from traditional religious practices when these conflict with the Bible.

   Score Subgroups: A: B: C: D:

   Comments:

Conclusions:

ASSESSING CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR SCRIPTURES TO BE USED

Rate each condition from a score of 10 (condition is fully met) to a score of 0 (condition is completely unmet) for each subgroup of the population you have listed.

Language group name: Aukan   Date of assessment: 2-11-99

Those who contributed to the assessment: SU consultants, translator, co-translators

Names of subgroups: A: Town Christian B. Town Non-Ch. C. Interior Ch.   D: Interior Non-Ch

Appropriate Language: The language and dialect used is considered good for having the Scriptures in.

   Score Subgroups: A: 6   B: 9   C: 4   D: 9

   Comments: A major shift is in progress toward greater pride and acceptance of the language by the people, especially since the two cultural nights have been held.

Acceptable Translation: The translation itself is acceptable.

   Score Subgroups: A: 7   B: 7   C: 7   D: 7

   Comments: There is only about a 30-year history of Christians, so there isn't a strong tradition of what words best describe key terms. The NT may bring some disagreement and a revision may be

needed after a short time. The style is not too 'tight.' There is a plan to include a tape with each NT to explain and promote the style that has been used.

Understanding: Most people can understand enough Christian teaching to make sense of the Scriptures, and they know how to learn new things from Scripture.

    Score Subgroups: A: 9   B: 9   C: 9   D: 6

    Comments: Team members, especially the Aukaners, felt that this was a very strong area. This should be examined carefully in the months following the dedication to see if people truly have enough background to understand the NT, or if additional help is needed.

Accessible/Useable Form: Many people are able to read the Scriptures, or able to hear it read.

    Score Subgroups: A: 5   B: 5   C: 3   D: 2

    Comments: There is no written tradition, so transitional literacy classes are needed for those who can read the LWC (many of those in town). Some primary literacy is needed in the interior. Non-print media can help reach the illiterates.

Obtainable: Everyone who wants a copy of Scripture publications in its various forms can obtain one without too much effort or cost.

    Score Subgroups: A: 6   B: 4   C: 0   D:0

    Comments: The NT will be available in stores through the SIL distribution arrangements, but more would see it if it were available in the markets. Some churches have book tables. There is no system to make the materials available in the interior.

Spiritual Hunger: Most people in that ethnic group who want to know God better.

    Score Subgroups: A: 8   B: 6   C: 8   D: 6

    Comments: There is probably more desire for spiritual things than there is action to seek them out.

Freedom to Commit: Most people are spiritually free to follow Christ wholeheartedly, including turning from traditional religious practices when these conflict with the Bible.

    Score Subgroups: A: 7   B: 7   C: 1   D: 1

    Comments: Those in the interior have a lot of social pressure not to commit to Christ, because that breaks up the ancestor worship cult. It is important for the whole village to participate in the proper burial rites. In town, they are removed from compulsory participation in ancestor worship, and are freer to commit to Christ.

Conclusions: Conditions for Scripture use in town will generally be positive, if transitional literacy and non-print media continue to be stressed. In the interior, however, obtain-ability and literacy are major weaknesses, coupled with stronger pressure to continue with the traditional religion.

Note: The scoring has been adjusted for this article from the original +3 to –3 scale to the 10 to 0 scale and the conditions have been renumbered to fit the present system.