

Orality needed to reach Indigenous Tribes – posting you tube videos

By Jim Harries, November 2018

An explanation for my posting of you tube videos of Bible teaching in the Luo and Swahili languages.

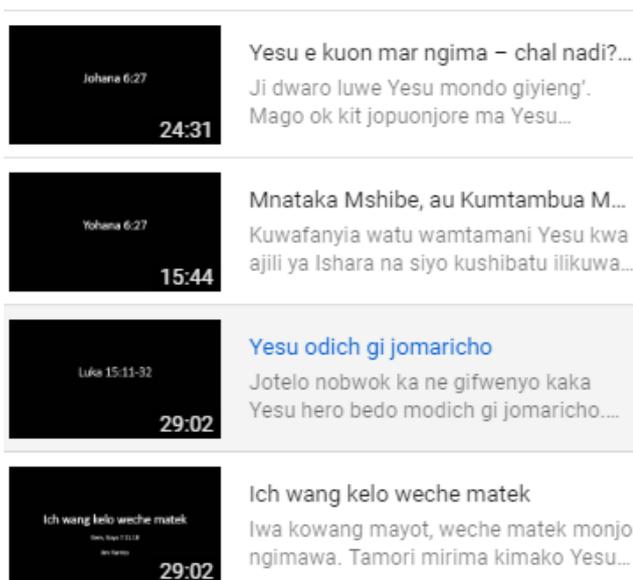
For the youtube videos, go [here](#). They are also accessible through academia.edu [here](#) and [here](#).

Having recently acquired a cheap smart phone and having got it functioning correctly, has given me the ability to clearly-record my voice while engaged in bible teaching in Western Kenya. I do this simply by putting my phone into my top pocket.

Over the years, I have frequently considered writing materials using the Luo and/or Swahili languages. I do have one or two articles posted in Swahili (see for example [here](#) and [here](#)). I have also been aware that, aside from the bible and from newspapers, many people in East Africa are not ardent readers. When they read, it is often in English, which cannot speak to their ‘deep culture’. It is hard to justify putting a lot of effort into writing materials that few would end up reading.

Discussion on the need for orality in mission has in recent years gained pace. Scholars have realised that, increasingly given new technology such as mobile phones, many people around the world are communicating orally rather than in written form. It therefore makes sense to endeavour to reach people orally. The rising prominence of smart phones means that more and more African people are able to easily access MP3 and MP4 files on the internet. Instead of writing bible-study materials, it seemed to make sense to record and then post my actual teaching.

Non-native speakers of the languages concerned (Swahili and Luo) will not be able to assess how good the quality of the recordings is. My self-assessment is, that my accent can make it difficult for Luo people to understand what I am saying. That is less of a problem with Swahili. Partly as a result of being



Yesu e kuon mar ngima – chal nadi?...
Ji dware luwe Yesu mondo giyieng'.
Mago ok kit jopuonjore ma Yesu...

Mnataka Mshibe, au Kumtambua M...
Kuwafanyia watu wamtamani Yesu kwa
ajili ya Ishara na siyo kushibatu ilikuwa...

Yesu odich gi jomaricho
Jotelo nobwok ka ne gifwenyo kaka
Yesu hero bedo modich gi jomaricho....

Ich wang kelo weche matek
Iwa kowang mayot, weche matek monjo
ngimawa. Tamori mirima kimako Yesu...

distracted by the thought that I am recording my own voice, I do make some errors in Swahili, which I frequently correct on the go.

I have long found that use of English in preparation of my messages tends to pull my thinking into the direction of European worldviews. Use of commentaries and other available bible-resources has the same affect. My preparation for the shared messages therefore uses bible translations into Luo (especially that of 1976) and Swahili (Union version). Having a limited understanding of New Testament Greek, I also refer to interlinear texts, which have literal translations of Greek (or Hebrew) into English.

I have frequently considered sharing messages that draw on Western knowledge, beyond the bible. The big negative here would be that, assuming that I find an audience, detailed understanding of what I communicate would require indigenous people to read the same books that I am drawing from. In short – I would be promoting Western culture. I would be pointing people towards the need for a Western education so as to understand what I am on about, rather than to faith in God.ⁱ

Some may ask whether I consider my own teaching, as a Western missionary, to be particularly worthy of recording? That is; why not record messages given by Luo speaking and Swahili speaking colleagues? One reason is that to do the latter would require 'asking of permission', which is not easy to do without raising suspicions re. one's motives, the question of payment, and so on.

I do think that a Western missionary has something to offer to East African theology, and that what I have to offer is distinctive. It is distinctive because my worldview has me communicate in ways that are different to my indigenous colleagues. Generally speaking, that difference disadvantages me, as I am less able to connect with indigenous people. On the other hand, I believe it can be helpful for people to hear the bible being taught from other world-view perspectives, if they so wish, so as to help them to expand their own worldviews. My use of indigenous languages to communicate, after living in local community for 30 years, offers a 'half-way house': It is inevitably much more contextualised than are alternative sources of theology coming from the English-speaking world, such as the curriculum of many bible colleges. It is less contextualised than indigenous people's own teaching and preaching.

The above can be illustrated with reference to the prosperity gospel, that arises from African holism. Broadly speaking, African cultures do not separate

the material from the spiritual. Hence African people expect spiritual blessing to take material form. It is very hard for many African people to grasp places in the Scriptures which challenge that association. My messages often do challenge it. It is easy, in my experience, for African people to write off such challenge as 'the White man's way'. It may be more difficult to 'write it off' when presented to them in their own languages.

I have chosen to post the messages in MP4 format on the basis that you tube seems to be better known than are podcasts. Having the MP3 files available, I could easily re-post them as audio files. Use of video has the additional advantage of enabling the giving of some explanations in written form, such as bible references. I have used PowerPoint to prepare the videos. I have not included more images in the interests of minimising time and effort used in production of the videos.

My main reason for avoiding actual video recordings of my speaking, is so as not to be intrusive. Having someone stand in front of me recording, or setting up my phone to take video, would be a much more complex affair than what I do currently, simply to have a phone in my pocket as I speak. It would presumably also require the use of an external mike, which would add to complexity. Simply recording my voice keeps things simple, straightforward, and inobtrusive.

I consider this practice, of posting you tube videos in indigenous languages, to be compatible with vulnerable mission (vulnerablemission.org). Recording and posting of videos is very cheap, requiring primarily time rather than money.ⁱⁱ

I invite discussion and comment on the above practice. I encourage and challenge others to do likewise.

ⁱ Inevitably, my speaking arises from my own (Western) worldview, so that even if communicated in the Luo or Swahili languages, deep understanding would require my listener to grasp my worldview. I believe however that by rooting what I say in indigenous languages and indigenous-language bibles only, without immediate reference to other 'Western' materials, that I minimise such effect. This is further helped by the fact that I am

engaging with indigenous people using their languages on a daily basis, often through long-term-relationships, as I prepare and present the above messages.

ⁱⁱ While it is cheap in terms of resources, preparation is relatively expensive in terms of time. Other Westerners can be of relatively little help, because they do not understand the languages concerned. Various worldview issues make it potentially difficult to find indigenous volunteers to help out. Dependency on foreign funding for local technical assistance would, I believe, introduce unhelpful dynamics into this kind of project.