

Local Ownership in a Language Development Program: Will it Lead to Sustainable Use of Scripture?

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Abstract: This article reports on a study looking at the relationship between local ownership and sustainable use of Scripture to determine if more local ownership of a language development program leads to more sustainable use of Scripture. Other issues were also studied in order to more fully understand their relationship with ongoing Scripture use. In the end, it was discovered that indigenous language learning by expatriate language development program workers, capacity building for indigenous language development workers and the length of time since the completion of a language development program were important indicators of sustainable Scripture use.

1. Introduction

Bible Translation organizations for too long operated under the false assumption that if the Bible was translated, people would be changed by its message. This theory, while rightly acknowledging the power of the Holy Spirit, neglected a full understanding of other factors leading to life transformation. Personally, I am not only interested in people having access to God's Word in the language of their heart but I am more interested in them applying it in their lives for the long term and having a flourishing relationship with God. I believe that in order for that to be fully realized, the local churches or language community must not view the language development program as belonging to the expatriate or sources outside the community. Rather, local churches or communities themselves must invest significantly in it. I have found myself wrestling with the degree to which local ownership in a language development program affects the sustainable use of Scripture in a community. Does local ownership in a language development program directly affect the sustainable use of Scripture? If so, what level of local ownership is needed to ensure the sustainable use of Scripture? I decided to conduct research within Lutheran Bible Translators (LBT), my own organization, to determine the degree to which local ownership affects ongoing use of vernacular Scripture.

To my surprise, local ownership was not found to be as significant as I had expected it to be. My research, however, highlighted some important factors associated with local ownership. Decisions made by members of the indigenous community greatly influenced their ownership of the language development program. More significant were the findings which showed that vernacular language learning by expatriate language development workers, indigenous capacity building and length of time since the end of a language development program had the most impact on the sustainable use of Scripture. Although there were few statistically significant correlations compared to the number of hypotheses tested, this is not surprising due to the explorative nature of my study.

It is important to understand what is meant by Scripture use. Although Scriptures may be read or spoken during certain events, genuine Scripture use seldom occurs apart from conscious involvement by the audience. Merely coexisting with Scripture does not constitute Scripture use. The Holy Spirit uses Scripture in an effort to change human will, but most often, humans need to have conscious interaction with it in order for it to have a life altering effect. Scripture use can take place in the home, at work, at church, or in any location. It can be initiated as deliberately as

a Bible reading in church or as veiled as a blessing to a neighbor. In short, Scripture use happens when people hear God’s Word, take it to heart, and apply it in living their life, despite hardships.

Because the term Scripture Use has been used for decades and has been widely accepted throughout the Christian mission community, I have chosen to use it in this paper. However, it does not adequately convey the relationship that takes place in the dialogue between God and man. There are other, more meaningful ways of describing what happens when God relates to humanity and vice versa. James Maxey (personal communication, 2008), from my own organization, explains LBT’s rationale for using the term *Scripture Engagement*:

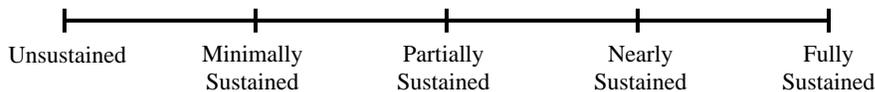
Scripture Engagement begins with God. God comes to us; God seeks to engage us in deep, transformative ways. In response to God’s activity, we are given opportunity to respond to God; we seek to engage in God through a variety of ways, including but not limited to: the sacraments of Holy Communion and baptism, confession, prayer, interaction with the written Word of God, the Bible. All such activities occur within the context of community. Scripture Engagement without a flourishing community is muted....

2. Definition of terms

As alluded to earlier, the problem of my study was to determine whether or not there is a relationship between local ownership in a language development program that gives emphasis to the translation of Christian Scripture and the sustainable use of that Scripture and, if possible, to indicate the relative importance of local ownership. In order to do this, it became necessary to define certain terms in an effort to clarify the research question(s).

Local ownership happens when indigenous people not only have interest in an idea or program, but when they personally and institutionally invest in it through active decision making and contributions of time, money, or gifts-in-kind, to enhance the possibility that the idea or program is successful. In an effort to hone the survey questions for my research and to indicate the degree of local ownership, I came up with five types of language development programs: Externally Owned, Limited Partnership, Equal Partnership, Assisting Partnership, and Internally Owned.

Sustainability happens when the products (Scripture, literacy skills, literature, capacity-building, etc.) of the development program are being used year after year and have a sustained impact. Similar to the five types of language development programs, I came up with five levels of sustainability – Unsustained, Minimally Sustained, Partially Sustained, Nearly Sustained, and Fully Sustained – even though the concept of sustainability is more like a continuum rather than having discrete points.



3. The study

While my overall claim was that the degree of local ownership correlates positively with the sustainable use of Scripture in a language development program, I realized that there may be

other factors that influence the sustainable use of Scripture in a language community. These factors, in the following list with no particular order, were used as sub-hypotheses in my research. It should be noted that some of the sub-hypotheses are somewhat related to T. Wayne Dye's *Conditions Necessary for Scriptures to be Used* (2003).

3.1 Sub-hypotheses

Scripture use within a language community is less likely to be sustainable:

1. When a language development program is started and run by an outside organization.
2. When the total population of a language community is large.

Scripture use within a language community is more likely to be sustainable:

3. When members of the language community are involved in language development program decision making.
4. When members of the language community contribute time, money, or gifts-in-kind.
5. When there is a key, motivational person(s) within the language community.
6. When there is an active Christian church(es) present in the language community.
7. When speakers of the language have a positive feeling about their language.
8. When substantial attention is given to literacy work.
9. When substantial attention is given to training and capacity building in all aspects of a language development program.
10. When expatriate language development program workers/advisors learn the language being developed.
11. When expatriate language development program workers/advisors have frequent formal and informal interactions with members of the language community during their tenure.
12. When expatriate language development program workers/advisors appear to be mature adults when beginning a language development program.
13. When a considerable amount of time and effort is put forth in Scripture promotion by both members of the language community and outsiders.

3.2 Methodology

In order to better understand the issues leading to sustainable use of Scripture, two surveys were created and given to 26 language development programs associated with LBT, which represented 100% of those that fit the criteria of being completed five years or more ago. The first survey, given to language development advisors (most of whom were expatriates from the United States with a background in linguistics), focused on the language development program from its inception until the dedication of the New Testament. The second survey, given to language development program managers (many of whom were expatriates from the United States with a background in linguistics), focused on the current state of Scripture use within the language community. A total of over 50 questions, which were closely mapped to the hypothesis and sub-hypotheses to ensure that only necessary and appropriate information would be gathered, were asked in order to obtain a general representation of LBT Scripture use motivated language development programs. The surveys were sent out to the respondents via e-mail and could be completed either electronically or by printing them out and manually filling in the

answers. All the surveys were returned within two months of being sent out, except for one of the language development program manager surveys, which was never returned.

3.3 Conclusions

Since this study was largely exploratory in nature, it is not possible to arrive at definitive end results for the main hypothesis and the various sub-hypotheses. Vernacular language learning and indigenous capacity building, given their correlation strengths, should certainly be given a closer look. Most of the other suppositions need further in-depth study in order to fully understand their relationship to sustainable Scripture use. In the following pages, I will discuss the meaning of the results and some of the implications connected with them.

4. Local ownership

The expectation was that there would be a strong relationship between Scripture use and local ownership. Although there was a positive correlation between local ownership of a language development program and the ongoing use of Scripture, the correlation ($r = .279$; $p = .168$) is suggestive but does not provide strong statistical support for the overall hypothesis of this study.¹ However, the fact that the correlation is positive indicates that local ownership of a language development program certainly does not thwart enduring use of Scripture.

Besides the discovery that there is not a strong correlation between local ownership and enduring Scripture use, it was also somewhat surprising to me that the best predictors of local ownership were those that dealt with indigenous people making decisions rather than the investment of resources in the language development program. Decisions of indigenous people to begin a language development program and to determine what kinds of literature (not only the choice of topics but also the choice of genre) to develop were clearly the two strongest predictors ($R-sq = 96.6$) of local ownership. The fact that decision making seems to be the best predictor of local ownership – in contrast to church or community contribution – seems to suggest that decision making by members of the language community should be a high priority as one seeks to build local ownership in a language development program.

My expectation was to find that contributions of time, money, or gifts-in-kind from local individuals, churches or the community were more important than the decisions they made. My speculation is that it is easier to make decisions about resources that are not your own. If the investments given for a Scripture use focused language development program were personal or locally corporate, indicating ownership of the invested/donated wealth, then the decisions made by the indigenous people would indicate strong ownership in Scripture use. Although the statistics from this study do not show it, that may in fact be what happened. As members of the language community invested in the language development program, the decisions they made may have reflected their level of commitment, thus showing decision making about whether or not to begin a language development program and decisions related to literature development as two of the best predictors.

Having one or more key, motivated people within the language community only ranked as fourth in the list of best predictors of local ownership. Again, this was surprising since many anecdotal accounts from language development program advisors indicate the impact that such a

¹In order to be statistically significant, the probability (p) must be .05 or below. Any value above that is not considered to be statistically significant.

person(s) has on the acceptance and follow through of a language development program is great. It is possible that the anecdotal importance of such a person has more to do with completion of the language development program than with engendering local ownership. It may also be that as members of a language community are inspired by a key, motivational person, they make positive Scripture use decisions, which if verified through interviews or sustained participatory observation techniques would indicate that decision making is a strong predictor of local ownership.

Nearly half (43%) of the 26 language development programs studied showed that decisions were made primarily by outsiders or in a partnership where outsiders assumed the lead role. Perhaps if members of the language community had more involvement in the language development program decision making, the correlation between the local ownership of a language development program and sustainable Scripture use would have been much stronger, maybe even significant.

4.1 External initiative

The expectation that an externally run language development program would have a negative correlation to the sustainable use of Scripture did not occur. Actually, it turned out to be a positive correlation ($r = .324$), but it was not statistically significant ($p = .107$). The best predictors ($R-sq = 98.3$) of external initiative were when outsiders performed key language development program functions, such as literature development, linguistic analysis, and Scripture promotion, as well as made important decisions, such as the location of the language development program office. Upon further reflection, this is not surprising since all 26 language development programs in this study were started by an outside organization. Those of us who are members of an outside organization can take great comfort that this hypothesis was not supported. It shows that outside organizations can effect change, specifically in the area of ongoing Scripture use.

4.2. Population of language community

The relationship ($r = .118$) between Scripture use and the population of a language community was not statistically significant ($p = .581$). The slope changed from positive to negative ($r = -.232$) if the outlier within the population data was not discarded. Because the inclusion or not of this one case has a significant impact on both the strength and direction of the correlation, it is impossible to reach any conclusions regarding the effect if any that population size of a language community has on enduring use of Scripture.

4.3 Decision making

Given the importance of indigenous decision making in the Local Ownership Index, it is quite surprising that it does not have a greater significance ($p = .189$) on its own. While it does have a positive correlation, it is not very strong ($r = .266$). As with the Local Ownership Index, the two best predictors ($R-sq = 96.4$) of decision making were decisions about whether or not to begin a language development program and literature development. This finding may reflect the historical reality that many of the language development programs in this study did not make local decision making a high priority.

It makes sense that a major language development program decision such as whether or not to begin a language development program would be a strong predictor of decision making. But, what is really interesting is that in two relationship tests, the decision regarding literature development was the single best predictor, $R-sq = 90.7$ in the Local Ownership Index and $R-sq = 86.9$ for the Decision Making Index. That is a significant finding and one worthy of further research to better understand its significance. It would also be interesting to determine if similar results would be true of decisions regarding content of audio or video materials.

4.4 Internal contributions

To more fully understand the possible consequences of funding sources, two correlations were run, one looking at internal, local contributions to the language development program and the other looking at external contributions, which characterized 84% of the language development programs surveyed for this study.

The correlation for internal contributions was positive ($r = .134$), but it was not statistically significant ($p = .509$). The best single predictor ($R-sq = 83.1$) in the Internal Contributions Index was contributions from local individuals. On the one hand, this is not very surprising since it is much easier for one person to decide to contribute than for a group to come to a consensus regarding resource contributions for a language development program. However, it is disappointing to note that giving from local churches was the worst predictor of internal contributions, with 81% of the respondents of this study reporting that 5% or less of the language development program costs were covered by contributions from the local churches. This may be because, as Holman and Holman (1990) and Kawala (2005) illustrate, language development organizations have not historically worked well with the churches or expected them to take responsibility for Bible translation. If local churches were recognized by both themselves and outsiders as being the owners of vernacular Scripture, it might increase the resource commitments from them and may in turn strengthen the relationship between sustainable Scripture use and internal contributions.

It is interesting to note that the best predictors of external contributions ($R-sq = 93.3$) were when an outside organization provided funds for members of the language community to be able to purchase, watch or listen to Scripture materials. However, when those were the only predictors compiled to form a composite for testing against the Scripture Use Index, there was a healthy negative correlation ($r = -.367$). With that being the case, it seems to indicate that caution should be exercised by outside organizations before they finance Scripture materials for members of a language community.

4.5 Internal motivational person

As with the previous hypothesis regarding contribution, this hypothesis was tested using two correlations. The first dealt with a key, motivational person(s) within a language community ($p = .850$) and the second dealt with a key, motivational person(s) from outside the language community ($p = .450$). Surprisingly, although statistically insignificant, both correlations showed a negative slope ($r = -.045$ and $-.158$, respectively). This could be a result of having only one survey question making up the index for each of the correlations. Since it seems both counterintuitive and goes against anecdotal accounts provided by respondents for this study, this

should be studied more closely, perhaps through interviews with members of the local community.

4.6 Active indigenous church

The compilation of questions that made up this index overlapped heavily with those used in the Scripture Use Index, which this composite was measured against. Therefore, the resulting correlations are not a reliable test of the hypothesis. It is unfortunate that this relationship could not be fully examined because the writings of Federwitz (1985), Holman and Holman (1990), Kawala (2005), and Wendland (2006) certainly emphasize the important role the church plays in Scripture focused language development. For this reason, a future study must be made to further investigate the relationship between an active indigenous church and the sustainable use of Scripture.

4.7 Positive language feelings

As with some of the others, this hypothesis was tested by using two different correlations, one focused on positive language feelings ($p = .186$) and the other focused on negative language feelings ($p = .773$). Neither one turned out to be statistically significant, which could be indicative of the difficulty in measuring attitudes and feelings by surveys alone.

4.8 Literacy

It has already been pointed out that the majority of the language development programs were begun approximately 35 years ago in an era where literacy skills and printed materials were seen as necessary for accessing Scripture. For this reason it is quite surprising that the correlation ($r = .292$) between sustainable Scripture use and literacy is not significant ($p = .149$). However, this may be a result of the wording used in the survey to elicit current literacy trends. The survey asked if literacy classes were being held in 50% of the language communities. It has been suggested that having literacy classes in 50% of the language communities is a very high standard so it is little wonder then that the data reflect a relatively weak correlation between Scripture use and literacy. However, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that if literacy is to be a desired skill, it should be available to at least half of the language community population in an ongoing manner.

Those that advocate abolishing the literacy effort altogether in favor of oral/aural forms should do so cautiously given that, storying ($r = -.355$) and audio-visual methods ($r = -.472$) had strong negative correlations as predictors of Scripture use. Only five survey respondents felt that vernacular audio Scripture listening groups and vernacular Biblical video showings will continue in a sustainable way. However, 85% of the respondents thought vernacular Scripture readings will continue, and 73% of the respondents felt that vernacular Scripture songs will continue for the long term. Before vernacular literacy is abandoned and oral/aural techniques are completely embraced, more study is needed to determine the relationship between these methods and sustainable Scripture use.

4.9 Training and capacity building

In order to test this hypothesis, it was broken down into two parts, training and capacity building. Unfortunately, the research did not show a significant correlation ($p = .365$) between ongoing Scripture use and training in general.

Interestingly, however, building the capacity of members of the language community to perform the necessary language development program components had a strong correlation ($r = .401$) to sustainable Scripture use. Although it was not statistically significant, indigenous capacity building was very close, having a significance level (p) of .058. I believe that had the sample size been greater, this correlation would have moved into the level of significance.

These findings indicate that a strong emphasis should be placed on indigenous capacity building. It supports the old adage, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime”. It is not surprising that there is a relationship between enduring Scripture use and capacity building. Both Aryeetey (1997) and Kawala (2005) make it clear that former mission efforts at capacity building were largely inadequate and failed to harness the potential zeal and excitement of the African church. If indigenous people are trained in the functions and technical aspects of a language development program, they will be able to fulfill those long after outsiders leave the language community, thus sustaining the processes that lead to the use of Scripture.

4.10 Indigenous language learning

The most significant correlation of the entire study was this one, the relationship between Scripture use and vernacular language learning by the language development program workers. The level of significance ($p = .008$) was high, along with a very strong positive correlation coefficient (r) of .522. In 96% of the studied language development programs, the expatriate worker/advisor made some attempt to learn the language of the community in which they worked, while over half of the expatriates learned the language at a professional working proficiency or better.

The results of this hypothesis confirm what Landin (1990:17) found, that the use of the language of the community by church and mission workers was one of the factors that led to the acceptance of vernacular Scripture. When you use the language that the people themselves use, you identify with them. You are letting them know that they are valuable, not only worth something to you, but also worth something to God, whose Word you make available to them in their own language.

It is important then for language development organizations to make vernacular language learning a priority for their members if the goal is for members of the language community to use the Scriptures. One way for this to be seen as a priority is for a language development organization to establish a significant amount of time dedicated for its members to learn the indigenous language. It appears that any level of language learning is better than none. However, if this activity is ignored, there is the potential that it could greatly jeopardize the desire of the language community to use vernacular Scripture.

4.11 Frequent conversations

Most (62%) language development program workers had eight or more conversations per week with members of the language community in which they worked. The frequency of conversations was a way to quantify the relationship building opportunities afforded to each expatriate worker. However, there was no significant ($p = .746$) correlation ($r = .063$) between ongoing Scripture use and frequent conversations. This is surprising because it is a commonly held belief that building relationships with members of the indigenous community is the best way to encourage the use of vernacular Scripture, either by new converts or by mature Christians. Perhaps the expatriate language development program workers were not using their relationships for the purpose of encouraging Scripture use. It could also be that frequent conversations do not indicate meaningful relationships, especially if the conversations are happening with many different, randomly selected people, or groups of people.

4.12 Age of language development program advisor

This was the least significant ($p = .992$) of all the hypotheses studied and does not indicate anything of consequence.

4.13 Scripture promotion

A natural assumption would be that Scripture use correlates directly with the level of Scripture promotion. This was not found to be true for the language development programs in this study. Not only was the correlation for this hypothesis far from being significant ($p = .772$), it did not have a positive slope. Instead, it had a negative slope ($r = -.063$), which goes completely against all expectation.

Because of the surprising negative nature of the trend line on the scatter plot, a closer look is warranted. The two best predictors of Scripture promotion deal with outside organizations providing funds, directly or indirectly, for members of the language community to be able to access Scripture material in audio, audio-visual, or printed formats. These are the same two best predictors for external contributions. Again, if those were the only predictors of Scripture promotion, there would have been a healthy negative correlation ($r = -.367$) between Scripture use and Scripture promotion. This draws into question the wisdom of providing outside funding for indigenous people to access Scripture content. This finding was a major surprise as it clearly runs contrary to current strategic thinking about promoting the use of Scripture in language development programs.

5. Time: an important element for scripture use

A significant issue that characterized this study was the importance of time for using Scripture. The observation that indigenous people use Scripture years after the New Testament is dedicated and the consequent validation of that observation through a Chi-square test ($\chi^2(1) = 9.458, p = .002$) suggests that sustainable Scripture use takes time. A common trait of language development programs that did not show ongoing Scripture use was that it had been less than ten years since the language development program had been completed.

Since this was only an observation and not the main focus of this study, it needs a more thorough examination. After Scripture materials are created, it is likely that indigenous people need to sample them and see that they are beneficial for themselves and the community. Language development organizations and their members need to be patient while waiting to see the outcome of their work.

6. Summary

This research study explored the issue of local ownership in a language development program and several other topics associated with ongoing Scripture use in language development programs associated with Lutheran Bible Translators. There were few statistically significant correlations, but considering the explorative nature of the study this is not surprising. Of the significant findings, vernacular language learning, indigenous capacity building and length of time since the end of a language development program, appeared to most impact the sustainable use of Scripture.

Local ownership was not found to be as significant as it was expected to be. However, this work suggests some important principles. A characteristic of local ownership is decision making by members of the language community. Ensuring that local people make language development program decisions is an important step towards local ownership.

Internal contributions were found to have a positive impact on sustainable Scripture use while external contributions did not show a correlation with the Scripture Use Index. Unfortunately, although internal contributions generally had a positive effect on enduring Scripture use, it was found that local churches did not contribute to language development work. Also, having an outside organization provide funding for indigenous people to access vernacular Scripture content correlated with a negative effect on the ongoing use of Scripture. There is a real need for local churches to take a more active role in Scripture focused language development programs. There is also a need for outside organizations to better understand the relationship between continuing support and ongoing use of Scripture.

7. Further research needs

It is hoped that what was learned through this study will be used as a springboard for future research. Many of the findings in this study are only preliminary and need to be thoroughly investigated in an effort to more clearly determine their importance for enduring Scripture use. Following is a list of areas that need further research.

- **Priority:** Determine if there is a relationship between enduring Scripture use and Scripture promotion activities.
- **Priority:** Investigate the relationship between an active indigenous church and the sustainable use of Scripture.
- Find and study Scripture use focused language development programs that were initiated and fully run by members of the indigenous language community in order to see if they resulted in a stronger positive correlation with ongoing Scripture use.
- What is it about the decision regarding what kinds of literature to development that makes it noteworthy? Are there similar results for decisions regarding other media content, such as audio or video?

- Discover the impact on the sustainability of Scripture use by both internal and external contributions of time, money, or gifts-in-kind.
- Are key, motivational people important to the success of a Scripture focused language development program?
- Are communities with positive feelings about their language more likely to use vernacular Scriptures?
- Is there a relationship between ongoing Scripture use and vernacular literacy? If so, what is it?
- Is there a relationship between ongoing Scripture use and oral/aural methods? If so, what is it?
- Discover to what degree the population size of a language community affects the enduring use of Scripture.
- Why is the length of time after vernacular Scriptures are made available so important to ongoing Scripture use?

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