

THE CHALLENGE OF PREACHING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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MEQUON, WISCONSIN

MARCH 2013

## **Abstract**

Preaching is hard work. Preaching in a second language is harder still. By looking at generalities about the preaching process, at the complications added by the difficulties of a second language, and at insights gleaned from surveys both of second-language preachers and of a second-language audience, this essay seeks to prove that the exercise of preaching in a second language develops in the preacher skills for preaching in any language.

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## **Introduction**

Preaching in multiple languages is a part of our history as a synod. Since the shift from German to English early in the 1900s, there has always been at least a handful of Wisconsin Synod pastors preaching in more than one language. Whenever our synod has engaged in mission work there have been opportunities for pastors to take on a second language through which to engage the mission field. The synod has had second-language preachers throughout the past hundred years.

Today, we are seeing an increase in the need for pastors capable of preaching in a second language. As international travel and communication become easier, cheaper, and more efficient, more and more diverse opportunities exist for mission fields than ever before. In America, the population is rapidly shifting with the influx of immigrants from the world over. It is clear that our synod wants to respond to these opportunities. Convention after synodical convention, we hear the call for continued dedication to mission work. Students on the path to become seminarians have opportunities to study Spanish and Mandarin at Martin Luther College. Opportunities abound for public ministers to learn to function in a second language.

Preaching is different from any other form of communication. Even in the realm of public speaking, preaching is unique. For that reason thousands of books have been written on preaching. The factors that play into it are manifold and can be explored endlessly. Similarly, the concept of a second language is much-studied and much-discussed. There is, however, next to nothing written on preaching in a second language. This study intends to be a small step towards filling that void.

## **Purpose**

Preaching in a second language is more complicated than is preaching in a first, yet all these complications stem from difficulties inherent to all preaching. In wrestling with the complicated issues of second-language preaching, the preacher becomes better equipped to deal with the challenges of preaching in any language.

Therefore, preaching in your second language can make you a better preacher. By “better” we do not mean “better than other preachers.” A study based on that type of comparison would not be helpful. Instead we mean to establish that preaching in your second language can make

you better than yourself; better than you would have been otherwise. By taking on the challenges of second-language preaching, a preacher learns skills that improve his preaching in any language.

## **Why This Study?**

### **Why Preach?**

The Church preaches. As members of the Church we want to preach and we want to preach well. Yet before we dig into the challenges of a second-language preaching in order to improve our preaching on the whole, we must understand why the Church preaches. In order to do that we ask, “What is preaching?”

The Greek word which is most often translated as “preach,” is κηρύσσω. Generally speaking, it is the work of a κήρυξ, a herald. Anyone with any message to publicize “preaches,” but the Bible helps us to narrow the field. In biblical usage, the object of κηρύσσω is almost always a message from God. The most common objects for the Greek verb are εὐαγγέλιον, the gospel<sup>1</sup>, and Χριστός, Christ.<sup>2</sup> The message that the Church heralds is the good news of Jesus. Our preaching is proclaiming God’s Word.

That being true, we can therefore say that preaching in the wide sense is the work of all believers. Any believer can preach. The only prerequisites are knowledge of the message and the capability to convey it. Not only do all believers have the ability to preach, but all believers have the command of Christ to preach. In Mark 16:15 Jesus says, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” Paul explains the importance of our obedience to Jesus’ command in Romans 10:14 where he writes, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” Not only can we preach. We must preach. God commands it, and God offers no assurance that he will work saving faith through any means other than the message he has given us to preach.

Recognizing the command to preach and how important it is that the message be preached, the Church has also recognized that believers are not all called to preach on the same scale. We

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<sup>1</sup> According to Logos Bible Software 4 (four times as the subject of a passive verb, and five times as the object of an active verb)

<sup>2</sup> According to Logos Bible Software 4 (once as the subject of a passive verb, and three times as the object of an active verb)

see this recognition in the Church's first years when Christians set up a division of labor so that the apostles could "give [their] attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."<sup>3</sup> It was seen as fitting and orderly that there be a division of labor. The early church chose some who would serve by distributing food so that those could serve as full-time ministers of the word (i.e. preachers) whom Christ himself had appointed to the task.

The early Church was seeking to act on Christ's command to preach in an orderly way. In no way did Christ limit that command and so we rightly understand that all believers are to preach in the wide sense. Yet Christ also called individuals to specific ministries. In Mark 3, Jesus "appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons."<sup>4</sup> Jesus called the twelve to be preachers in the narrow sense at the outset of his ministry. After his death and resurrection, when Christ called all believers to preach with the Great Commission, he was also expanding the narrow call of the apostles to include the Gentile world. Even after his ascension, Christ personally called Paul to preach saying, "Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles."<sup>5</sup> In these and other instances, Christ himself called specific believers to be preachers in what we call the public ministry.

Today, God does not appear to us and commission us to the work of preaching. Instead he calls preachers through his Church. Mentioned previously, Romans 10:14 explains the importance of our preaching. Romans 10:15 gives us the basis for continuing to call preachers. Paul asks, "And how can they preach unless they are sent?"<sup>6</sup> Although today it is the Church that visibly extends the call to preachers, God is always the one who calls, for "it was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers."<sup>7</sup>

As is true for all believers, the called preacher preaches in a variety of ways. Also just like all other believers, the called preacher preaches in ways that are unique to his office. Therefore, narrowing even further in our definition, preaching is the work of a pastor that we call a sermon

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 6:4

<sup>4</sup> Mark 3:14-15

<sup>5</sup> Acts 22:21b

<sup>6</sup> Romans 10:15a

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 4:11

or in other words: the public proclamation of God's Word by a called minister of the Word.<sup>8</sup> In this too, we are basing our practice on the examples we find in Scripture. Throughout the book of Acts one can find sermons that fit our definition.<sup>9</sup> Peter preached a sermon at Pentecost.<sup>10</sup> Stephen preached a sermon to the Sanhedrin.<sup>11</sup> Paul preached sermons at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch,<sup>12</sup> at the Areopagus in Athens,<sup>13</sup> and in Miletus to the elders of the Ephesian Church.<sup>14</sup> Following the examples of Peter and Paul whom Christ called to preach, and of Stephen who was called by the Church, our called preachers preach sermons today.

The sample sermons of the Bible show the variety that is required as distinct preachers preach to diverse audiences. Paul did not preach to the assembly of the Areopagus in the same way that he preached to the elders of the Ephesian church. As a result, we have two very different sermons. The different situations demanded that Paul's approach change. The former audience consisted primarily of Gentile unbelievers; the later, of converts to Christianity. At the Areopagus Paul was making the case for the Christian faith. At Miletus he was encouraging Christians in their faith. These and other factors influenced both the sermons that Paul preached and the way in which he delivered his sermons.

In our preaching we recognize the differences in situation. Not only are we preaching to a variety of audiences and for a variety of purposes, we are ourselves a variety of preachers. From the examples of Paul and the other preachers of the Bible we see the need for variety both in our preaching as a whole and in each individual pastor's preaching ministry. Preaching is not and can never become static. We need to vary our styles, our emphases, and our goals based on audience, situation, and preacher in order to continue to reach people with God's message which we herald. This need for variety is what has led to a need for second-language preaching.

### **Why Preach in a Second Language?**

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<sup>8</sup> Today we most often see sermons as the explanation of a text from God's Word for the encouragement of a congregation gathered in public worship, which tends to narrow our definition of "sermon" even further.

<sup>9</sup> The major difference being, of course, that the sermons of Acts were divinely inspired.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 2:14-41

<sup>11</sup> Acts 7:1-51

<sup>12</sup> Acts 13:16-41

<sup>13</sup> Acts 17:22-31

<sup>14</sup> Acts 20:17-35

Believers throughout history have recognized the importance of preaching in their first language. After exercising Legion, Jesus told the Gerasene demoniac, “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”<sup>15</sup> Our first mission field is those closest to us who share our homes, our culture, and our language. Yet this is far from being the Church’s only mission field. Believers throughout history have also recognized God’s desire that we carry his Word across the boundaries of language and culture.

God chose Israel. He separated them from the rest of the world to be his special people. From the time God called Abraham to leave his home and gave him the promises of land and a nation from his descendants, God set Israel apart. Through the time of slavery in Egypt, of wandering in the desert, and of the conquest of Canaan, God was establishing his nation. Moses reminded them of this in his farewell sermon. He says, “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.”<sup>16</sup> In their customs, in their laws, and in their worship the Israelites were to be different from their neighbors in order to call attention themselves and to their God.

From the outset, God was clear that he was setting Israel apart to be the nation from which the Savior would come. Although coming from Israel, the Savior was always to be a blessing for all people. Therefore, it was always God’s goal to use Israel to bring his good news of salvation to everyone. God promised, “Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.”<sup>17</sup> Speaking to the Messiah through Isaiah, God said,

“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant  
to restore the tribes of Jacob  
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.  
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,  
that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Mark 5:19

<sup>16</sup> Deuteronomy 7:6

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 18:18

<sup>18</sup> Isaiah 49:6



God's purpose in setting Israel apart was to call attention to the line of the Savior. God said through Joel,

And everyone who calls  
on the name of the LORD will be saved;  
for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem  
there will be deliverance,  
as the Lord has said,  
among the survivors  
whom the Lord calls.<sup>19</sup>

God's desire has always been that everyone, from every nation, who calls on the name of the LORD find the salvation and deliverance that came through his chosen people.

Jesus, himself, championed this goal of God's. In his ministry, the people that Jesus commended for their "great faith" were gentiles.<sup>20</sup> He took time to deal lovingly with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. In the Great Commission itself, Jesus calls his disciples to preach to all nations. Christ showed God's concern that all people hear of the salvation Christ came to win.

Following Jesus' command, the early Church delighted in the privilege of working toward God's goal. On the day of Pentecost and throughout the early years of the Church, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was displayed with the miracle that the Word of God which they preached could be understood by many people of differing races and languages. God was reemphasizing that it would be too small a thing for him to save only ethnic Jews. In a similarly concrete and miraculous way, Christ appeared to Paul and called him to be his envoy to the nations. God worked miracles in the lives of his apostles to ensure that all people could hear his message of salvation.

As part of the Church, we too take joy in the privilege of working toward God's goal of proclaiming his Word to all people. It is hard to imagine how this could be clearer than it is to American Christians. Descended from immigrants in a nation built by immigrants and daily inundated with more immigrants, who could appreciate the miracle that God's salvation was for

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<sup>19</sup> Joel 2:32

<sup>20</sup> The centurion of Luke 7. The Canaanite woman of Matthew 15.

Jew and Gentile alike more than we? We live at a time in which communities from every continent occupy the same city and international communication happens in the blink of an eye. When other than today have Christians ever been able to see such tangible opportunities to make disciples of all nations?

Here we see the practical need for such a study as this. We who are called to preach to all nations are daily finding all nations on our doorsteps and at our fingertips. In many cases, to communicate God's Word effectively will require pastors who can preach in a second language. In order to capitalize on the opportunities before us and to faithfully explore our potential to bring the good news of Jesus to the world, we must continue to produce preachers who are equipped to preach across the barrier of language.

Because we need second-language preachers, we need to understand the issues that surround second-language preaching. Just as it would be the height of naivety to deny the differences between preaching in English, German, and Mandarin, so also it is naivety to ignore the distinction between first and second-language preaching. These differences and distinctions, although undeniable, are not insurmountable. The linchpin that turns any potential problem into an opportunity is recognition. In recognizing and addressing the challenges that lie before us in our second-language preaching, we are equipping ourselves to embrace God's goal of communicating his salvation to all nations. The more we can chip away at the barriers of language, the more contact our hearers will have with God's powerful Word and his Holy Spirit. The more we can remove ourselves and our faults from their attention, the more focused their attention will be on their Savior. With that as our goal, we study the myriad challenges of second-language preaching.

## **Literature Review**

Even with a focus as narrow as the benefits one can derive from the struggles involved in second-language preaching, it is readily apparent that the factors contributing to these struggles are diverse. Because of this, this essay must take a rather superficial look at a number of topics. Instead of diving into one pool of study and satisfying our curiosity in exploring every nook and cranny, we must dip our toes into several pools only to test the waters and retreat, leaving unexplored a number of facets. It will be helpful to categorize these different dalliances with the

manifold issues of second-language preaching into the major categories of sermon writing, sermon delivery, and sermon reception.

## **The Sermon**

### **Sermon Writing**

In general, a sermon writer will strive for certain goals in his writing regardless of his language. Goal number one for any and all preaching ought to be that the sermon be textual. Gerlach and Balge write in their book Preach the Gospel, “Since the sermon is intended to proclaim God’s Word of salvation to sinners and to edify the saints, it must be based on and drawn from God’s Word.”<sup>21</sup> Regardless of the language, culture, or socio-economic status of either audience or preacher “the sermon must be scriptural. The Bible is not an optional resource but an indispensable source.”<sup>22</sup> This is the primary and universal goal of all of our preaching.

Second and connected to the first is the goal that every sermon “distinguish properly between Law and Gospel.”<sup>23</sup> In that the Bible distinguishes properly between the two, one could assume that all textual preaching should also properly distinguish them. However, it is necessary to make this explicit as a goal separate from the first. Distinguishing between law and gospel is not just one way to preach God’s Word textually. It is the only way.

The previous two goals of preaching are neither debatable nor changeable. The third goal, however, essentially demands change. Gerlach and Balge write that “effective preaching is always timely preaching.”<sup>24</sup> A sermon does not happen in a vacuum, nor does a preacher preach only to himself. “[The sermon] speaks rather to the specific needs of a particular congregation. It relates to people.”<sup>25</sup> As such, effective preaching necessarily changes what is changeable in order to be timely. The axiom of preaching textually is not changeable. Distinguishing properly between law and gospel is similarly mandatory. Yet effectively applying a text to people week after week will demand that style, delivery, and a host of other factors do change.

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<sup>21</sup> Gerlach, Joel, and Richard Balge D. *Preach the Gospel: A Textbook for Homiletics*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1982. (15)

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* (15)

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* (9)

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* (11)

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* (11)

For our fourth goal, Gerlach and Balge write, "The importance of structure in a sermon and the necessity for it are not topics open for debate."<sup>26</sup> To what degree a sermon is structured, and in what way, are changeable factors to be evaluated situationally, but that in no way devalues the goal of writing a sermon that has structure.

With structure comes unity. No sermon is a random coagulation of thoughts, because no text is. "Rather [the sermon] is an oral communication which develops that single thought which has been stated in the theme."<sup>27</sup> How that thought is developed or even how "single" it may be is subject to the situation, but a good preacher strives for unity of thought in every situation.

It should be obvious that a goal of any sermon is to be heard. This is the reason we strive for structure and unity: so that people can understand us. This is also why a good sermon is one that is artfully crafted to be interesting and to engage the audience. "To gain and hold the attention of your hearers so that they can be edified by the Word of God which you are preaching, your use of language must be precise, concise, interesting and fluent."<sup>28</sup> Gerlach and Balge write, "Some sermons a person can listen to; some he can't listen to; and some he can't help listening to."<sup>29</sup> Although they go on to attribute this listenability to the delivery of the sermon, they similarly maintain that great delivery cannot exist without good writing. Good writing seeks "to gain and hold the attention of your hearers" through language (any language) that is "precise, concise, interesting, and fluent."

If it is, in fact, obvious that the goal of the sermon is to be heard, it is likewise obvious that the sermon will be spoken. The spoken word varies tremendously from the written. "From the beginning of your work as a sermonizer, you will need to 'listen to' what you are writing while you write it to ensure that you can say those words in such a way that hearers can immediately understand them."<sup>30</sup> The goal of every sermon is to be heard and a significant facet of that goal is to craft the sermon to be delivered in a way people can follow.

As we descend the list of priorities of preaching, we can see that each is increasingly dependent on the circumstances surrounding the sermon. The circumstance of a second language

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<sup>26</sup> Gerlach and Balge *Preach the Gospel: A Textbook for Homiletics*. (36)

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* (65)

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* (95)

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* (111)

<sup>30</sup> Gerlach and Balge *Preach the Gospel: A Textbook for Homiletics*. (97)

provides ample opportunity to exercise flexibility in the ways in which we strive to achieve the goals of sermon writing.

### **Sermon Writing in a Second Language**

The seemingly simple act of writing to communicate your thoughts is complicated in the switch to a second language. As we have already suggested, though the axioms and goals of sermon writing are universal, the method of application regarding those axioms must vary from situation to situation in order to achieve those goals. Culture is a significant factor affecting the success of our communication, and culture's effects on language cannot be ignored. Good sermon delivery hangs on good sermon writing. Good sermon writing in a second language must recognize the interplay between language and culture.

This awareness starts with the individual words that a sermon writer employs. Take the example of word taxonomy. Christo van der Merwe, in his description of cognitive semantics, says that “humans tend to categorize the entities of the world in which they live in terms of categories at various levels, e.g. animals>fish>freshwater fish>black bass>large-mouthed bass.”<sup>31</sup> It is generally true that in every language the words of that language fit together into groups at different levels in order to describe the world around the speakers of that language. Yet these groupings and levels are not universal. Van der Merwe goes on:

Folk taxonomies tend to differ from biological taxonomies, because cultures differ concerning the attributes that they regard as the most salient in the classification process, e.g. a bat's ability to fly may be more salient than its ability to give birth, so that it would often be classified as a bird rather than as a mammal.<sup>32</sup>

Language is fundamentally practical. Because different cultures find differing distinctions to be important in categorizing the world with which they interact, words that translate from one language into another do not necessarily fit into comparable categories in both languages.

Not only are words categorized differently, but they may also operate differently within their category.

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<sup>31</sup> van der Merwe, Christo H. J. “Lexical Meaning in Biblical Hebrew and Cognitive Semantics.” *Biblica* Vol. 87 – Fasc. 1 (2006): 85-95. (87)

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* (87)

Categories tend to have fuzzy borders, e.g. they may include items that are regarded as good examples of a category and those that are less typical. In the case of the category of fruit, apples and oranges would be regarded by American speakers of English as good examples of the category, while pomegranates, lemons, watermelons and pineapples will be regarded as not such good examples. ‘Good examples’ are regarded as prototypes of a particular category. Definitions of categories are as a rule made in terms of the attributes that apply to its prototypical members, e.g. fruit will be described as ‘the soft and sweet edible entities that grow on trees and bushes.’<sup>33</sup>

Again, this concept highlights the importance of knowing more than just the first-language equivalents for your second-language vocabulary. Fluency requires not only an understanding of the definitions of words but also a culturally informed grasp on the way words work to convey shades of meaning.

These concepts of cognitive linguistics can make or break second-language writing. In her article describing her experiences writing poetry in both Chinese (her first language) and English (her second) Wang Ping says this:

True mother tongue soothes and nurtures like a cradle, but it’s also a pointing finger, telling me what to see, where to go, and how to think and feel. It provides the ground for my imagination while setting the boundary. It works subtly, unconsciously, and ubiquitously. I speak, write, and think in Chinese without a second thought, taking it for granted. It’s like going home through a forest path so old and familiar that I can do it with my eyes closed. And I often do; therefore, I no longer see.<sup>34</sup>

By learning and writing in a second language, Ping began to notice all the ways that fluency in her first language acted as an impediment to her creativity. She says that “three thousand years of Chinese tradition”<sup>35</sup> accompanies her Chinese poetry and it limits her to using words and concepts the way they are traditionally used. Learning and writing poetry in English woke her mind to this unconscious blindness to the way words could be used and enlivened her poetry in

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<sup>33</sup> van der Merwe, Christo H. J. “Lexical Meaning in Biblical Hebrew and Cognitive Semantics.” (88)

<sup>34</sup> Ping, Wang. “Writing in Two Tongues.” *Manoa*, Vol. 18, No. 1, (Summer, 2006), 12-16. (13)

<sup>35</sup> Ping, Wang. “Writing in Two Tongues.” (15)

both languages. Now she says, “The two tongues gnash and tear, often at each other’s throat, but they feed on each other, expand, intensify, and promote each other. They keep me on my toes.”<sup>36</sup>

This is just one example of the ways in which a second language complicates the simple task of writing. As we can see, because language is interwoven with culture, good communication is culturally informed communication. If culture affects language on a word by word level in the writing process, we can anticipate the effects it will have on communication when the sermon is delivered and actively engages the second-language audience.

## **The Preacher**

### **Sermon Delivery**

Because the act of preaching a sermon is the whole point of writing a sermon, the challenges presented in sermon-writing are not even half of the equation. Sermon delivery in general invites all of the challenges of public speaking, yet compounds these challenges by being a form in and of itself.

Public speaking presents certain challenges to any individual in any language. Richard Eslinger opens his book on Pitfalls in Preaching, with the observation that “language acts in remarkably different ways in one-on-one or small group contexts and within a larger group of persons.”<sup>37</sup> As Gerlach and Balge have already reminded us: “Some sermons a person can listen to; some he can’t listen to; and some he can’t help listening to.” Yet they follow the previous quotation pointedly by saying, “Probably more than any other single factor, delivery makes the difference.”<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps in a paper that has a far narrower goal than expounding upon all the factors of public speaking, it is best to say with Bryan Chapell,

The many aspects of professional vocal delivery can dizzy us with their intricacies, rules and exceptions. Basically one point is key: Fill the room, but speak to individuals.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* (16)

<sup>37</sup> Eslinger, Richard L. *Pitfalls in Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1996. (1)

<sup>38</sup> Gerlach and Balge *Preach the Gospel: A Textbook for Homiletics*. (111)

Learning how volume, variety and intensity of speech affect your speech will help you accomplish this goal.”<sup>39</sup>

It may seem overly simplistic to say, “Learn to do that, and you will be an excellent public speaker.” Public speaking is a vast and complex subject that has been and will continue to be studied extensively. Yet Chapell’s basic point is an excellent starting place for the preacher in any language. Learning to “fill the room, but speak to individuals” is the goal of good sermon delivery.

Although Chapell’s comment suffices to outline the similarity between sermon delivery and public speaking, a little must be said about what makes sermon delivery wholly unique. This uniqueness starts with the goal of the sermon. Chapell writes, “Excellent delivery disappears from the awareness of the listeners. Thus, the goal of a preacher is to get out of the way of the message, to deliver the sermon so aptly that its thought alone dominates listeners’ thoughts.”<sup>40</sup> The preacher’s unique goal is to deliver the sermon in such a way that the people are not thinking about how good he is at delivering sermons. This goal is unique to preaching because preaching uniquely values the message over the messenger.

Probably the easiest way to draw focus away from your message and onto yourself is to be disingenuous. Even people who do not know you can tell when you are putting on an act. People notice and when they do, they will dwell on it. Gerlach and Balge explain how a preacher’s being genuine is truly unique:

All rules and advice for the delivery of the sermon finally reduce to the simple exhortation: Be yourself! The Christian preacher is a person who willingly loses his life for Christ’s sake in order that he might find it (Mt 10:39). Then he is in a position to preach, not himself (2 Cor 4:5), but Christ crucified (1 Cor 2:2) Thus the exhortation to be yourself actually calls on you to lose yourself in what you say about your Savior. Then you will not be self-conscious as you speak for him.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. (332)

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* (331)

<sup>41</sup> Gerlach and Balge *Preach the Gospel: A Textbook for Homiletics*. (126)



The message is simple: be genuine. Genuinely be who you are as a sinner who has been washed clean in the blood of his Lord, Jesus Christ. That kind of genuineness actively seeks to put all the attention on Christ.

Bryan Chapell describes this concept of the unique genuineness of sermon delivery in this way:

Congregations ask no more and expect no less of a preacher than *truth expressed in a manner consistent with the personality of the preacher and reflective of the import of the message*. Today, pulpit excellence requires that you speak as you would naturally talk were you fully convinced that God had charged you to deliver a life-changing, eternity-impacting message.<sup>42</sup>

A preacher, who genuinely feels the cut of the law and the healing of the gospel is ready to speak God's message genuinely to God's people, not so that he can be heard, but so that God is heard through him.

Perhaps this is easiest to see in an aspect of good preaching that is traditionally downplayed in Confessional Lutheran circles: emotion. Frank Thomas laments this downplaying and writes in his book *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God*,

It is precisely because so much of Western preaching has ignored emotional context and process, and focused on cerebral process and words, that homileticians most recently have struggled for new methods to effectively communicate the gospel.<sup>43</sup>

Thomas so laments the "ignored emotional context and process" because he sees the impact those who do not ignore emotion can have on their hearers. His book is titled as it is to recall the story of a funeral sermon that so emotionally connected the preacher to his hearers that one layperson could quote sections of the sermon seventy years later.<sup>44</sup> Evaluating the emotional style he sees in Africa-American preaching, Thomas writes,

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<sup>42</sup> Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. (329) (Chapell's italics)

<sup>43</sup> Thomas, Frank A. *They like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*. Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1997. (5)

<sup>44</sup> Thomas, Frank A. *They like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*. (1-2)

Because most relationships are governed by this emotional field, paying attention to the emotional context is more important than the choice of the right words. Because communication is rarely neutral, there are natural limits to what words can accomplish.<sup>45</sup>

If we read Thomas suggesting here that accurately speaking God's Word is less important than speaking it emotionally, then he is overstating the point. Yet in doing so he arrives at something worth noting. If communication in general "is rarely neutral", how can the heart-to-heart communication of God's Word ever be? The emotion of a sermon must always be informed by the context, which will vary from setting to setting, from preacher to preacher, and from sermon to sermon. Ignoring our emotions entirely, however, will impede our achievement of the heart-to-heart communication that "pulpit communication must always be."

### **Sermon Delivery in a Second Language**

That delivery in a second language will be even more complicated is obvious from the fact that simply speaking privately in your second language is a challenge. Studies show that, for many second language speakers, second language situations engage the freeze/flight/fight instinct of the brain. Often the result is the "freeze" response known as language anxiety. "Language anxiety can be defined as the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning."<sup>46</sup> In an article on the subject of language anxiety Peter MacIntyre and R.C. Gardner describe an example of how this anxiety affects language processes:

In one such study, Steinberg & Horwitz... found that students who were made to feel more anxious tended to be less interpretive in the commenting on the ambiguous scenes [in pictures they were shown and about which they were questioned in their second language]. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) found that anxious students learned a list of

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* (5)

<sup>46</sup> MacIntyre, Peter D., and R.C. Gardner. "The Subtle Effects of Language Anxiety on Cognitive Processing in the Second Language." *Language Learning*, 44:2 (June 1994): 283-305. (284)

vocabulary items at a slower rate than less anxious students and had more difficulty in the recall of previously learned vocabulary items.<sup>47</sup>

Every student of a second language has experienced this anxiety to some extent. A student studies harder than all his classmates, yet finds his mind blank on a test. An excellent classroom student finds himself floundering in real-world communication with a native speaker. At some point in his second-language career, every student faces language anxiety.

When facing this anxiety, “The anxious person has his/her attention divided between task-related cognition and self-related cognition, making cognitive performance less efficient.”<sup>48</sup> Imagine the effect of this anxiety on the preacher, whose goal is to have his “self” fade from the cognition of the audience so that they can focus on the “task.”

One old study finds the root of anxiety and other challenges in studying the motivation behind the learning of a second language.

Gardner and Lambert (1959) developed an approach to motivation which has influenced various studies in L2 motivation to the present day. They made the distinction between integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. In their definition, integrative motivation is positive attitudes toward the target language group and a willingness to integrate into the target language community, whereas instrumental motivation refers to practical reasons for learning a language, such as to gain social recognition or to get a better job.<sup>49</sup>

Although it has more recently been recognized that this distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation is not as rigid as Gardner and Lambert originally posited,<sup>50</sup> they recognized a factor of language-learning that makes a very practically academic exercise into one that is emotional; often negatively so. A person could learn a language for the language’s sake, but far more often people learn a language in order to use it. Language study is fundamentally practical and the practical goal is almost always to be able to talk to people.

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<sup>47</sup> MacIntyre, Peter D., and R.C. Gardner. “The Subtle Effects of Language Anxiety on Cognitive Processing in the Second Language.” (284-285)

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid* (285)

<sup>49</sup> Hashimoto, Yuki. “Motivation and Willingness to Communicate as Predictors of Reported L2 Use: The Japanese ESL Context.” *Second Language Studies*, 20(2) (Spring 2002): 29-70. (30)

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*. (32)

For many people, people are intimidating. Communicating with people is not easy and one of the reasons is language. Dirk Geeraerts introduces his collection of basic readings in the area of Cognitive Linguistics with a description of just what Cognitive Linguistics is wrestling with as a science.

“We are not just biological entities,” he writes. “We also have a cultural and social identity, and our language may reveal that identity, i.e. languages may embody the historical and cultural experience of groups of speakers (and individuals).”<sup>51</sup> Language carries a tremendous weight. It allows us to “shape events in each other’s brains with exquisite precision,”<sup>52</sup> as Steven Pinker puts it. Yet, in its precision, language is incredibly complex. As a second-language-preaching student becomes aware of this complexity, he can quickly become overwhelmed by its implications.

One such implication that adds to the daunting nature of language is its inseparability from culture. Communicating in a second language is always communicating across culture. This is not easy because, as Milton Bennett describes it, “intercultural sensitivity is not natural.”<sup>53</sup> The unnatural nature of intercultural sensitivity is highlighted by the popular phenomenon of culture shock:

In the literature on culture shock there are three basic causal explanations: (1) the loss of familiar cues, (2) the breakdown of interpersonal communication, and (3) an identity crisis. All three disorienting states occur in adjustment to any new social environment. However, in a cross-cultural situation they are greatly exaggerated and exacerbated by cultural differences.<sup>54</sup>

Culture shock is something we most commonly associate with international travel. Yet people are finding more and more in this country that they are never more than a few hours away from a radically different cultural situation. Language anxiety could be described as a narrow slice of

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<sup>51</sup> Geeraerts, Dirk ed. *Cognitive Linguistics: Basic Readings*. New York: Mouton De Gruyter, 2006. (5)

<sup>52</sup> Pinker, Steven. *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language*. New York, NY: Perennial Classics, 2004. (1)

<sup>53</sup> Milton J. Bennett: “Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity.” Paige, R. Michael ed. *Education for the Intercultural Experience*. Yarmouth, Me.: Intercultural Press, 1993. (21)

<sup>54</sup> Gary R. Weaver: “Understanding and Coping with Cross-Cultural Adjustment Stress.” Paige, R. Michael ed. *Education for the Intercultural Experience*. (139)

culture shock due to the recognition that language has become not only a “new social environment,” but a “cross-cultural situation” that can easily disorient.

Sensitivity is not the natural response to being threatened by a cross-cultural situation. Indifference is. Cultural indifference, the natural response to facing a different culture, is the essence of the phenomenon we call ethnocentrism. Bennett defines ethnocentrism as “assuming that the worldview of one’s own culture is central to all reality.”<sup>55</sup> This manifests itself in variety of interesting ways. “Operating from an ethnocentric assumptive base, the meaning a learner attaches to cultural difference will vary from total denial of its existence to the minimization of its importance.”<sup>56</sup> Ethnocentrism is the monolithic barrier that impedes all cross-cultural communication. Applied to language, reaching back to the example of word taxonomy, an ethnocentrist might devalue the distinctions between the categories held by his culture and another, or he might ignore the distinctions completely.

As we delve into the cultural aspect of communication, we need to consider the people that bring culture into the equation. Certainly the preacher is operating within a culture: his own. Yet the preacher’s culture is not the main source of tension. It is the culture of the audience that presents the greatest challenges to the communication of preaching.

## **The Audience**

### **Listening to the Sermon**

The things that make the event of the sermon unique in the realm of public speaking have as much to do with the audience as with the preacher. Similarly the pitfalls of second-language communication impede the listener just as they impede the speaker. In this final area of study, people are the factor that must be weighed in second-language preaching. Because people are going to be listening to our sermons, it would be naïve to study the act of preaching without looking at the work involved in listening. Although we cannot exhaust the topic, it will suffice to look at a summary of the way people process the sermon.

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<sup>55</sup> Milton J. Bennett: “Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity .” *Education for the Intercultural Experience*. (30)

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* (30)

Ronald J. Allen, in his book Hearing the Sermon, summarizes the ways people process a sermon with three categories:

...ethos, logos, or pathos. Ethos is perception of the character of (and relationship with) the preacher; logos refers to the content of the sermon and how the preacher develops it; pathos bespeaks feelings generated by the sermon and how they orient (or disorient) the listener towards the sermon.<sup>57</sup>

These categories represent the basic rules for human engagement in the reception of information from another. Naturally, these categories interact with each other to bring information into the brain. Allen gives an example:

For some listeners, ethos is the setting through which the listener usually receives logos and pathos. A sense of relationship with (and respect for) the preacher enables them to take seriously the content of the sermon; they *feel* (pathos) connected to the preacher and the sermon.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly logos or pathos can be the primary filter for the other two. Simply put: listening to a sermon involves the interplay of the relationship, the message, and the emotion that exist between the preacher and the audience. These factors apply to some degree to all people but are informed by the experience and culture of the individual to filter and refract each other differently for each listener.

Considering these categories for processing the sermon is daunting enough, but the second-language sermon compounds the issue. Again, it is primarily a question of the effect of culture on communication.

### **The Cross-Cultural Audience**

No other section of this essay is more affected by culture. The previous sections of study certainly had aspects of culture, but we were able to speak in the generalities of language in general affected by culture in general. This section affords no such generalities. How the preacher perceives and is perceived by his audience is culturally specific. In fact, the audience is

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<sup>57</sup> Allen, Ronald J. *Hearing the Sermon: Relationship, Content, Feeling*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004. (5)

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* (11)

what brings culture into the discussion: every way in which culture affects second-language preaching is firmly grounded in the audience. Since every culture affects communication differently, there are very few generalities when it comes to the second-language audience.

Therefore, we will content ourselves with the two key problems for intercultural communication as outlined by David S. Hoopes in his chapter on “Intercultural Communication Concepts and the Psychology of Intercultural Experience.” Hoopes’ problems are similar to the issue of word taxonomy above. We might call it behavior taxonomy.

In our own culture we make a vast assortment of distinctions among people; distinctions in the way they look, in the way they dress, in the way they move, in the way they sound. These subtleties of distinction are necessary because members of our own culture are those, normally, on whom we must depend for physical, social, and economic security. We distinguish carefully in order to provide for ourselves.<sup>59</sup>

As we naturally put words into categories in order to direct how we will use them, so to we put people into categories to direct how we will interact with them. The more familiar you are with a culture, the more minutely you are able to categorize its people to understand and rely on them.

Problems arise when we confront the unfamiliar and do not have categories for what we find.

[The first problem] is that when our experience doesn’t fit our categories, it produces ambiguity...When we encounter values, behaviors, communication styles, ways of thinking which don’t fit our categories of meaning but fit, instead, the categories of some other culture group, communication is likely to break down.<sup>60</sup>

Cross-cultural communication fails when I am unable to make what works for your behavioral taxonomy fit into mine.

Yet when I try to categorize your culture in order to understand and rely on its members, I put myself in danger of falling into Hoopes’ second pitfall: stereotyping. As I meet new distinctions of behavior and classifications of people the “tendency is to categorize them in the

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<sup>59</sup> Pusch, Margaret D. ed. *Multicultural Education: A Cross Cultural Training Approach*. La Grange Park, IL: Intercultural Network, 1979. (16)

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* (15)

simplest way possible.”<sup>61</sup> We scramble to find a way to function with the unfamiliar and the tendency is to paint with the broadest strokes: to fit as many people into as few of categories as possible. That is an essential definition for a stereotype: an over-generalization that comes from a rushed attempt to interact with categories that are not my own.

These are the most fundamental elements of cross-cultural communication. They affect the interactions of every second-language preacher and every audience. The question is: how much do they affect the interactions of the individual preacher and his audience?

### **Evidence from the Field**

Having looked at the various issues involved in second-language preaching, we return to the proposition and ask ourselves in what ways does dealing with the various issues involved in second-language preaching better equip the preacher for preaching in general. If the second-language preacher takes the skills that he is forced to learn in order to preach in his second-language and applied them to all preaching, would he find himself with better sermons preached with better delivery to a better-understood audience? In order to answer this question, as well as evaluating the points gleaned from research above, we will analyze the results of a survey conducted asking forty WELS, second-language preachers about their preaching ministries.<sup>62</sup> We will also include the opinions of a Hispanic congregation that was surveyed after they listened to a sermon preached by a non-native speaker.<sup>63</sup> Following the pattern we have already established, we will look at the skills the second-language preacher acquires regarding the sermon, the delivery, and the audience.

### **The Sermon**

Culture has a profound effect on communication. Think back to what cognitive semantics teaches us about word taxonomy: culture affects language by affecting how concepts are grouped based on the culture’s interaction with the world. This concept is so fundamental that someone who speaks only one language could go their entire life without noticing it. A second-language

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<sup>61</sup> Pusch, Margaret D. ed. *Multicultural Education: A Cross Cultural Training Approach*. (16)

<sup>62</sup> Of the forty, nineteen responded. The questions asked are included in the appendix.

<sup>63</sup> Questions included in the appendix.



speaker, however, has an awareness of these concepts engrained on him which arises naturally from the learning process. From the first day of studying a language, the student begins to notice the ways in which this second language categorizes thoughts both similarly to and differently from his first.

We readily admit that this complicates the writing process. Of the nineteen survey responses, the majority mentioned word/phrase choice as one of the key difficulties in crafting a second-language sermon. The responses of the Hispanic congregation highlight the importance of this recognition, indicating that “good illustrations” (i.e. a good grasp of how concepts relate to each other in the taxonomy of words) were a key to over-coming the language barrier. For second-language preaching, understanding the categories of the language is both difficult and important.

Both preacher and audience talk in the surveys (although indirectly) about the issues of word taxonomy in second-language preaching because the second language brings it to the forefront. Yet every language deals with the concept. The preacher faces the issues of “good”/”bad” examples of categories in every language he knows. Yet by preaching in a second language he has become cognizant of them. He can weigh the examples (“good” and “bad”) and choose the one that will elicit the appropriate response. He can mention apples as a comfortable example of fruit for a North American audience, or he can use pomegranates as his “bad” example to make a point. He has learned to use a tool from his preaching toolbox that a monolingual preacher may not even know he has.

Or think back to Wang Ping’s discoveries in English poetry. Second-language writing freed her from the blinders put on her by her familiarity with Chinese. Now a sermon is not poetry, yet there is an element of art to crafting a sermon. Writing and preaching in your second language opens your eyes to the way in which you use language in general. This awareness can be a boon to your sermon writing in any language.

The pastors surveyed agree. One described how working in his second language gave him an advantage from the earliest stage of the sermon writing process, the text study:

There is always a temptation of glossing over common words in [my first language] that deserve additional thought. A word for word text study in [my second language] allows for more thoughtful consideration of each word and drove me back to the original more frequently.

The benefits continue as he outlines his thoughts for the sermon:

One who outlines in [his first language] can sometimes over-complicate. Thinking in [my second language] helped to simplify thoughts and comments. If I desired to “complicate” or advance thoughts later, I could do so in the simple structure already laid out.

A second language forces you to understand a concept simply and to explain it simply because your vocabulary is simple. A second language forces you to view yourself as a perpetual student: always trying to understand the language better. A second language forces you to recognize the way you think and organize an argument and to evaluate whether or not that works for the situation. From which of these practices could your first language preaching not improve? Seeking to achieve the general goals of sermon writing in your second language, equips the preacher to better achieve those goals in every language he knows.<sup>64</sup>

### **The Delivery**

We could boil down the section about sermon delivery in general to the axiom: “be heard and be genuine.” How does what a second-language preacher goes through in order to be heard and be genuine, equip him to do both in his first language preaching?

First of all, Frank Thomas addressed us with a challenge to genuine preaching: emotional context. To use the words of a responder to the congregational survey, our audiences (all of them) demand that their preacher *sepa el significado de cada palabra que diga*; “that he know the meaning of every word that he speaks.” “Knowing the meaning” of a word is more than “knowing the definition” of that word. One pastor explained it this way in his response to the survey:

[Second-language] vocabulary can be learned from a dictionary and from listening and reading, but the emotional connotations of some words may not be determined... I must

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<sup>64</sup> A bit of practical advice gleaned from this area of the surveys suggests a topic that deserves a thesis of its very own: read! Pastors who preach in their second languages find it invaluable to continually read well-written text (non-fiction and fiction alike) in their second language. This gives them a leg up on good writing by exposing them to diversity of grammar, vocabulary, and thought patterns. This applies to every language: if you are not reading good writing, how can you expect to produce well-written sermons?

remember that simply saying something in good Spanish does not mean that what I am saying is going to be heard as something that is relevant to the audience.

A second language makes the work of learning the emotional context of words obvious. A second-language preacher works to learn what words mean to his hearers in order to choose appropriate words and to inform the way in which he will deliver those words.

Spanish offers us a practical example. In Midwestern English I can and do talk freely about the devil. I can denounce Satan and his works with the same ease with which I would talk about Charles Manson or Adolf Hitler; the ease of talking about a real person who performed/performs real acts of horror and whom I would never care to meet face to face, but who holds no power to harm me currently. Latinos (typically) feel differently. They actively avoid thinking about the devil and will do what they can in conversation not to say the word, *Satanás*. This is something of which someone who preaches in Spanish as their second-language needs to be aware. It does not mean the preacher can never mention Satan. It does mean that the preacher ought to do so when appropriate and with the appropriate emotional context conveyed in his tone, pace, volume etc. As one pastor put it, “I have to make more of a conscious effort in [my second language], and that’s a good thing.”

One way second-language preachers find this conscious effort improving their preaching is the way a second language can force you to be more expressive. The reason is practical. One pastor wrote that second language “speakers in general tend to use more gestures as an attempt to make themselves clearer.” This generalization and the second-language preacher’s recognition of cultural norms for expression make expressing appropriate emotion a priority that they can carry throughout their preaching ministry. Another pastor described the change he noticed in himself:

I will tell on myself! For my first 9 years of preaching in the USA, I’m sure that I preached the saving truth of the gospel. BUT, the pulpit was never going to get away from my firm grip on the sides of it. Thanks to the Lord, my last 37 years have freed the pulpit from my firm grasp. The gospel is a joyous message to be preached after the severity of the law, and the body language can express that also.

Although second-language preaching can help a preacher come out of his shell in expression and emotion, we earlier looked at the research that suggests a second language often

drives the learner back into his shell with language anxiety and culture shock. In second-language preaching, the anxiety inherent in public speaking is compounded by the anxiety inherent in speaking a second language which is rooted in the anxiety of communicating with people who are different from you. Although we will hand off the cultural aspect to the section on the audience, we still must address the issue of language anxiety for the second-language preacher's sermon delivery.

Awareness of the anxiety of second-language communication can be an asset to the second-language preacher. Bryan Chapell wrote that “even the most skilled preachers experience some intimidation when they face a congregation (if you have no concerns about preaching, you have not fully comprehended the magnitude of the task).”<sup>65</sup> Although anxiety can be debilitating, in the case of preaching, a little anxiety is evidence that “the magnitude of the task” has been comprehended. A man who enters the pulpit utterly self-confident is at best naïve. Assuming the best, a preacher who thinks that he can casually stand before God's people and speak for God for the edification of souls does not have a full grasp of what is going on.

The second-language preacher has the advantage of being acutely aware of the anxiety of preaching on the level of communication. He must recognize and engage his anxiety in order to take himself off “self-related cognition” and to focus on the task of communicating. In doing this, he is poised to recognize and engage the natural anxiety that a clay jar should feel at being filled with treasure. Being practiced at recognizing with humility the challenge of speaking in a language not your own, equips you to become practiced at recognizing with humility the high privilege and responsibility of preaching the gospel.

The second-language preacher is also acutely aware of his own imperfection. Making mistakes and sounding stupid are an integral part of learning and operating in a second-language. A second-language preacher needs to learn very quickly to deal with his mistakes the way one of the survey pastors advises:

Most importantly, get over yourself! It's crucial for a second-language preacher to humbly learn to laugh at himself and not be afraid to make mistakes. Most people I met were very patient with me as long as I didn't take myself too seriously.

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<sup>65</sup> Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. (330)

Audiences pick up on this quickly. One responder to the congregational survey gave similar advice:

Remember that the Word of God is more important than our weaknesses in language and personality. God works in spite of our mistakes. What is best is to preach the Word faithfully.<sup>66</sup>

Said by both preacher and parishioner, the advice is really the same. Dwelling on your mistakes in preaching or trying to ignore them reflects a dangerous lack of humility that will interfere with your relationship with your people. Second-language preaching offers constant opportunities for admitting your mistakes, learning from them, and resting your confidence in your Savior.

This response to your second-language mistakes ought also to be applied to your first language. It is a part of being genuine. There is actually something endearing about a person who makes mistakes and owns up to those mistakes. No preacher preaches perfectly. Any preacher who pretends that he does will have trouble winning the respect of his hearers. A preacher who has and readily admits his faults has made a valuable step towards being respected by those to whom he preaches.

From emotion, to expression, to an appropriate awareness of our inadequacy, second-language preaching puts the preacher directly into contact with issues that every preacher faces, but not every preacher addresses. In this way, the tensions of second-language preaching challenge the second-language preacher to improve in ways that are more fundamental than just addressing a new language and culture. They challenge the preacher to confront himself and to peel away anything that might get in the way of being heard and being genuine.

### **The Audience**

The improvements mentioned above that are enabled by addressing the challenges of second-language preaching tend to show themselves in ways that are subtle. Careful word choice and conscientious humility tend to be most noticeable when they are absent. The following section can and does have a far less understated impact. It is regarding the audience that the

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<sup>66</sup> Translated from the following quotation: *Que la Palabra de Dios es más importante que nuestras debilidades de idioma o personas. Dios funciona a pesar de nuestros errores. Es siempre bueno predicar la Palabra fielmente.*

second-language preacher learns skills that affect his preaching most because the audience, more than any other factor, brings the issue of culture to the fore.

The barriers inherent in second-language communication force the second-language preacher to tune in to his audience on some level. One respondent to the survey noted one specific change he made to his preaching based on a cultural distinction he noticed:

My first sermons written in the seminary were truly “written sermons.” That is, I prepared them in the same vein as all the term papers I had written in college: for the eye more than for the ear, and for the professor more than for the parishioner. One benefit I feel I gained from preaching in a second language is that I was ministering to mostly uneducated people with little to no background in Christianity. I was forced to deliver my message at a lowest-common-denominator level which everyone present could understand. It helped me focus on content rather than cleverness.

Level of education and previous experience with Christianity do not necessarily rely on the language you speak, yet this pastor attributed his ability to pick up on these significant cultural factors for his audience’s reception of his preaching to the fact that he was working in a second language.

A second-language preacher is aware of the cross-cultural nature of communication in a significantly heightened way. Language highlights the differences in culture. People who speak different languages are virtually guaranteed to be from different cultures. The preacher who preaches in a second language prepares himself for a cross cultural experience in the pulpit. He learns what things his target audience finds culturally acceptable, what they will tolerate, what they will not understand, and what will offend them. He makes a conscious effort not to evaluate their culture in light of his own. He recognizes that many aspects of culture are not right/wrong but same/different. He does what he can to lay aside ethnocentrism and embrace the differences in order to remove the barriers of culture that would inhibit his communication.

A preacher who has learned to look for barriers of culture through practiced second-language preaching is equipped to watch for those same barriers as he works in his first. One respondent to the survey of second-language preachers wrote:

The most apparent challenge [of second-language preaching] is the immediate difference in getting to know a different culture, customs, expressions. At the same time, when I

moved from Iowa to a congregation in Kansas it was soon apparent that there were cultural differences that should be taken into account.

Two people do not have to speak different languages to be of differing cultures. Language is an obvious factor but it is not the only factor. Ethnic background, social status, family, geography, and a host of other factors play into the question of culture. All these cultural issues experienced by the second-language preacher also apply to the first language preacher. The all-encompassing question is: how is what I am doing going to be perceived by someone who is not me?

Knowing the question is only half the battle. Finding the answer is the other half. Here too second-language preaching helps. The second-language experience brings the preacher directly in contact with the question of cross-cultural communication, and the cultures themselves provide the testing grounds to find the answer.

Probably the most quantitative of all of the questions in the survey of second-language preachers was one asking whether or not the preacher actively seeks feedback from his audience about his preaching. About two thirds said that they do; one third do not.<sup>67</sup> Do you think that two thirds of first-language preachers in WELS ask for feedback to their sermons? It would be interesting to look into.

The point is that the majority of second-language preachers feel that they need to know how their audience is receiving their sermons. Why is that? One respondent wrote,

People appreciate and root for someone preaching to them in their own language. But you must remember they are putting a lot of effort in listening to what you are trying to say, and not the mistakes you are making.

An honest second-language preacher has to recognize that it is work for his audience to listen to him, no matter how fluent he may be.

Congregants agree. They were asked what mental changes they went through in order to prepare themselves for listening to a second-language speaker. One wrote, "I think about what

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<sup>67</sup> Those who said, "No," do not actively seek feedback for one of two reasons: either 1) they do not want to appear prideful or conceited in soliciting compliments or 2) they think that the culture of their audience would not allow them to honestly respond to the question. They do not ask the question because they already know the answer. Although we would want to assume the best, does this attitude not remind us of the definition of stereotyping which we discussed earlier? Every decision made in cross-cultural communication holds this tension: 1) we want use our knowledge of the culture to operate within that culture, yet 2) we do not want to confine people into patterns of behavior that fit what little we know about their culture.

his experience has been with my culture and I prepare myself mentally to ignore the fact that his experience was American and not Latino.”<sup>68</sup> Aside from recognizing the cultural rift, several others pointed out the most obvious hurdle of all: the accent. These are just two of the many difficulties that an audience to a second-language preacher must face.

The second language actually helps both preacher and audience recognize the work the audience is putting into listening. The difference in language prepares both audience and preacher for the differences in culture. Yet when the preacher and the audience share a common first language, it should not be assumed that they share a common culture. When you speak the same language as your audience you cannot assume that they can therefore listen to you preach without any effort. There may still be cultural, mental hurdles of vocabulary, emotional context, and even accent. A second-language preacher, who is forced to address these hurdles in his second-language preaching, is better equipped to watch for them in all of his preaching.

## **Conclusion**

Second-language preaching is harder than first-language preaching because a second language complicates every step in the process. Yet every extra ounce of effort that the second language demands refines and strengthens skills useful to preaching on the whole. This essay has discussed only a few of the ways that the challenges of second-language preaching prepare the preacher to address the issues of all types of preaching. From the desk to the pulpit to the very pews, second-language preaching challenges the preacher to write more clearly, to preach more dynamically, and to understand his audience more intimately.

There are undoubtedly a great many areas of study this essay has left unexplored. As we sprinted through the various areas of research, there are a number of issues that could not be addressed. The issues that were addressed could have received so much more time and study. With each topic addressed, we glanced a world of interests and possibilities and then proceeded to the next. This essay was never meant to be exhaustive. It was only meant to open a door into the relatively unexplored arena of preaching in a second language.

What remains is to explore further. The world is coming to our doorstep and bringing the wonders of language with it. As our neighborhoods look more and more like world mission

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<sup>68</sup> Translated from the following quotation: *Pienso en cuál fue su experiencia con mi cultura y me prepare mentalmente para ignorar que su experiencia fue americana y no latina.*



fields and as world mission fields become as accessible as our neighborhoods, the opportunities to preach the Word and to do so in the heart language of our hearers are only going to increase. The more we can learn about the barriers of language and culture and how to overcome them, the more we can do to be better preachers of the message of sin and grace.

That is what this study is all about. One of the more interesting questions posed to the Hispanic congregation of the survey asked whether or not they would prefer to be regularly listening to a Hispanic preacher. Not surprisingly, the typical response was that it did not matter to them.<sup>69</sup> Yet one respondent took advantage of the anonymity of the survey to be candid:

Earlier in my life, yes, [the nationality of my pastor] was very important to me...but now I have grown spiritually to the point that my relationship with the pastor helps me to receive the message for what it is: the Word of Life.<sup>70</sup>

This member recognized the effort a congregation has to put into connecting with a preacher who speaks their heart language as his second. This member also recognized that the barriers are not insurmountable and that in the end God brings congregation and pastor together in a relationship in order to bring both congregation and pastor into a closer relationship with himself. God does so in spite of the things that separate us from one another and by conquering the things that separate us from him.

*Solo a Dios sea la gloria.* To God alone be the glory.

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<sup>69</sup> *No, también los gringos hablan bien.* “No, the white guys speak well too.”

<sup>70</sup> Translated from the quotation: *Antes si era muy importante... hoy día he desarrollado espiritualidad al punto que mi relación con el pastor es lo que me ayuda a recibir el mensaje pro lo que es: ‘palabra de vida.’*

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## Appendix A: Survey of Second-Language Preachers

1. Describe the following. (Feel free to use over-generalizations such as "white, middle-class, Midwestern.") (Also feel free to be specific. So not just "Spanish," but "Puerto Rican Spanish")

Your First Language \_\_\_\_\_

Your Native Culture \_\_\_\_\_

Your Second Language \_\_\_\_\_

The Culture of \_\_\_\_\_  
Your Audience

2. How long since...

	Less than 5 years	5-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	More than 25 Years	N/A
you entered the public ministry?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
you began learning your second language?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
you began preaching in your second language?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
you stopped preaching regularly in your second language?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
you retired?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. Rate how you feel about the following (L1 is your first language, L2 is second):

	Awful	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Your L1 conversation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your L1 writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your L1 preaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your L1 connection with the audience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your L2 conversation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your L2 writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your L2 preaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your L2 connection with the audience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please explain any "Awful" or "Excellent" responses.

4. For each step/aspect of the writing process, how does working in your second language compare to your first?

	Harder in L2	Easier in L2	Same in Difficulty	Incomparably Different
Text Study	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Explain (please be specific)				
Outlining	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Explain (please be specific)				
Writing the Manuscript	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Explain (please be specific)				
Writing for the Ear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Explain (please be specific)				
Writing Logically	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Explain (please be specific)				
Word Economy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Explain (please be specific)				

5. For each step of the actual delivery of the sermon, how does working in your second language compare to your first?

	Harder in L2	Easier in L2	Same in Difficulty	Incomparably Different
Memorization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Explain (please be specific)				
Volume	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Explain (please be specific)				
Pace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



			any difference			
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Explain your choice and (if possible) give examples.

10. If you could go back in time, what would you change about the way you learned your second language to improve your ability to preach in it?

## **Appendix B: Survey of a Second-Language Congregation**

1. *En su opinión, ¿cuáles cosas hacen que un sermón (el mensaje) sea bueno?*
  2. *En su opinión, ¿cuáles cosas hacen que un predicador sea bueno?*
  3. *En su opinión, ¿es el sermón una parte importante de su vida cristiana? Por favor, explica su respuesta.*
  4. *¿Cuáles cambios mentales hace usted cuando escucha un sermón dado por alguien que no habla español como su primer idioma (por ejemplo, un americano)?*
  5. *¿Prefería usted escuchar a un sermón dado por un hispanohablante nativo? Por favor, explica por qué?*
  6. *Usted ya ha escuchado al sermón del pastor estudiante. ¿Qué quiere usted que él siempre tenga en cuenta cuando predica en español a hispanohablantes?*
- 
1. In your opinion, what factors make for a good sermon (message)?
  2. In your opinion, what factors make for a good preacher?
  3. In your opinion, is the sermon an important part of your Christian life? Please, explain your response.
  4. What mental changes do you make when you listen to a sermon given by someone who does not speak Spanish as his first language (for example: an American)?
  5. Would you prefer to listen to a sermon given by a native Spanish-speaker? Please explain your response.
  6. You have just heard the sermon of our Senior Assistant. What do you want him to always keep in mind when he preaches in Spanish to Spanish-speakers?