

# **A Homiletic Investigation of Preaching with an Interpreter**

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## **Abstract**

Interpreted preaching embodies the Pentecost belief that all peoples should hear the good news in their heart language communicated through preachers empowered by the Holy Spirit. This paper argues that interpreted preaching is distinct from other forms of preaching. This paper is a summary of the author's doctoral work that is the first in theology to explore the historically overlooked event of consecutive side-by-side preaching with an interpreter. Interpreters have been of historical importance to evangelism and the global church, and continue to be utilised in churches and religious contexts. The biblical foundation of this paper is that God desires to communicate with people in their heart languages. A case study of SOMA, a short-term mission organisation that regularly uses interpreted preaching was undertaken. Qualitative interviews of preachers, interpreters, and bilingual listeners were conducted to examine the homiletic process before, during, and after the interpreted preaching event. Analysis of results demonstrates that there are significant differences in interpreted preaching from other forms of preaching. Interpreted preaching requires preachers to approach the task with a particular emphasis on nonverbal communication, establish a preaching rapport with the interpreter, as well as different methodology and praxis in preparation, delivery, and reflection. Interpreted preaching also significantly affects power dynamics and roles within the preaching space, with the interpreter considered a gatekeeper and co-preacher due to their linguistic, cultural, and theological fluency. These results confirm the hypothesis that interpreted preaching is a discrete homiletic.

## **Introduction**

This paper summarises the major findings of my doctoral thesis on preaching with an interpreter in multilingual contexts. My PhD topic was prompted by my own experiences of attending a bilingual Chinese church for 7 years where the sermon was interpreted. As well as my involvement in short term mission trips where I both spoke with an interpreter and witnessed others do it. I observed that when it worked well there was an amazing and incredible dynamic formed between preacher and interpreter that swept up the congregation. And when it didn't work it was jarring, with lots of halting, frustration from the preacher, confusion from the interpreter, and the congregation left waiting and feeling like they were missing out on the full message.

The purpose of this article is to provide a theological and homiletical exploration of this prevalent but overlooked act of preaching with an interpreter. It is only in the last decade that academic research has begun to explore this issue, at least in English. Conversely, bible translation has a prominent and logical place in theological research:

From the beginning of the Church, as it spread out from the Eastern Mediterranean, its expansion has been paralleled by Bible translation. Sometimes translation preceded and perhaps stimulated the planting of a new church; more often it followed. But translation into vernacular languages was, in most cases, so much a given, something that was simply understood as necessary to the life of the church, that it was rarely questioned.”<sup>1</sup>

However, spoken translation and the use of interpreters have been consistently overlooked. Taking into account the (presumed) accepted use of interpreters in gospel communication and their role throughout missionary history it is surprising there has been no research in English into this process.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps because the interpreter has always been considered a shadow or tool to the preacher, evangelist, or missionary they have been overlooked. Interpreting has (mis)conceivably been considered a functional role but not as noteworthy or skilful as the person bringing the message. Perhaps because interpreters have always been used and continue to be used no one has taken a critical or considered view of their role and the theological and homiletical implications.

At the heart of translation, including interpreted preaching, is that all cultures, with their languages, histories and beliefs, are worthy of God’s attention, and of hearing the gospel in their heart language. Sermon interpreting gives the preacher an opportunity to speak, via the interpreter, in the very heart language of the congregation. Preaching with an interpreter is an important task that deserves theological and homiletical study.

### **The Bible and Interpreted Preaching**

My research began by considering the scriptural foundation for interpreted preaching, which is both obvious and elusive. It is obvious because the bible is a translated text itself and full of stories of multiethnic peoples and languages. At the same time it is elusive because there are no concrete examples of interpreted speech, for example how did the Queen of Sheba speak to Solomon? Or Naomi to her Moabite daughters-in-law? Rather we have the assumption that

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<sup>1</sup> Philip C. Stine *Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church: The Last 200 Years* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), vii.

<sup>2</sup> There is no research but there are several short practical works largely based on anecdotal experience. Dennis Bills has a slim booklet: *How to Preach with an Interpreter: A Crash Course* (Eugene: Resource Publications, 2010). There are also the following two magazine articles that address practical issues of preaching with an interpreter: Jerry Schmalenberger, “Preaching Across Languages: Some cautions and suggestions,” *Ministry* 80, no. 1 (January 2008): 19-32; Mark Elliott, “Guidelines for Guest Preaching, Teaching, and Cross-Cultural Communication,” *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 10, no.2 (2002), 8.

somehow people from different language groups mentioned in the bible found a way to communicate with each other, either through a human interpreter or the Spirit of God.

One possible hypothesis for the silence around linguistics in the Hebrew Bible is that all the Semitic languages of the period were closely related which allowed for ease of communication. Sáenz-Badillos suggests that the shared origin of language is a possibility but not the only one:

...various modern scholars have argued that the linguistic unity of the different members of the Semitic family is explicable only as the result of a common origin. According to them, there is sufficient evidence - for example, common geographical habitat and unity of language, history, and culture - to regard speakers of the various Semitic languages as comprising a single people and perhaps even embodying a particular racial type.”<sup>3</sup>

Sáenz-Badillos acknowledges that it is difficult to argue about the veracity of these theories as they refer to historically inaccessible times. It could be argued that this would be like expecting that Tongans and Samoans understand each other because their language and geography is in close proximity. However, the Hebrew people were themselves not a homogenous linguistic group. In Exodus 12:38 we read that the generation leaving Egypt also included “a mixed crowd” (Neh. 13:3; Jer. 25:20).<sup>4</sup> Throughout the Hebrew Bible we witness that people were constantly interacting and absorbing peoples from other ethnicities due to marriage, war, and migration.

There are two examples of oral interpreters in the Old Testament. One example is found in Genesis 42:23 with Joseph: “They did not know that Joseph understood them, since he spoke with them through an interpreter.” Presumably Joseph’s use of an interpreter was subterfuge, as the reader imagines he retained the Hebrew language but spoke Egyptian in the presence of his brothers to keep them unaware of who he was. However, this example highlights that interpreters were conceivably used at the highest levels of government and diplomacy in the Ancient Near East.

One other possible example of interpretation is provided in Nehemiah 8:8 where Ezra the Priest arranged for the Hebrew Scriptures to be read aloud “with interpretation. They gave the

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<sup>3</sup> Angel Sáenz-Badillos *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> The reference to a mixed crowd refers specifically to Moabites and Ammonites but also has the wider implication to all foreigners and those of mixed race. (William Johnstone, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary Exodus 1-19* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2014), 239.)

sense, so that the people understood the reading.” Once again the reader cannot determine if there was a literal language barrier or merely a need for a broader commentary on what was being read so that the people could grasp the full meaning.

Moving from the Old to the New Testament the story of Pentecost stands out as an important account of language, and specifically translation by the Spirit of God to people in their own heart languages. It is a major text that supports a theology of translation that God wants people to hear the gospel in their own language. González and González write:

...what is new about Pentecost is not that they all speak the same tongue. They do not. What is new about Pentecost is that God blesses every language on earth as a means for divine revelation, and makes communication possible even while preserving the integrity of languages and cultures.<sup>5</sup>

From its beginnings Christianity has always focused on the hearer so that all may receive and understand the good news of Christ. A persistent philosophy of Christianity is that none should be bereft of hearing the good news of the gospel due to linguistic or cultural barriers.

Sanneh writes:

...Christians are unique in abandoning the original language of Jesus and instead adopting Greek in its “Koine” and Latin in its “vulgar” as the central media of the church. Except in extremist sectarian groups, Christians never made the language of Jesus a prerequisite for faith or membership in the fellowship. It is this linguistic revolution that accounts for the entire New Testament canon being written in a language other than the one in which Jesus preached. Thus it is that translation, and its attendant cross-cultural implications, came to be built into the historical make-up of Christianity.<sup>6</sup>

Acceptance of linguistic and cultural diversity is a foundational element of the early church. Jesus did not intend that his followers convert to messianic Judaism but join the Kingdom of God where all peoples and languages would give glory to God. For followers of Jesus this means embracing cultural and linguistic diversity because God does.

### **Interpreted Preaching in the Early Church**

The early church fervently took up Jesus’ call to “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.”<sup>7</sup> And thanks to the Roman Empire’s extensive reach and Greek

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<sup>5</sup> Catherine and Justo González, “Babel and Empire: Pentecost and Empire: Preaching on Genesis 11:1-9 and Acts 2:1-12,” *Journal for Preachers* 4 (1993), 24.

<sup>6</sup> Lamin Sanneh, “The Gospel, Language and Culture: The Theological Method in Cultural Analysis,” *International Review of Missions* 84 (1995): 47-64.

<sup>7</sup> Mark 16:15.

as lingua franca the gospel quickly reached the edges of the Roman Empire. But then how did the gospel continue to spread beyond the Greco-Roman world when the language was no longer that of the empire? Underpinning the spread of the Christian message is the assumption that those who shared the gospel spoke the language of the new regions or they had the assistance of someone who did. Interpreters would have been necessary partners for the evangelists bringing this new religion to “the ends of the earth” and to help pastor the newly formed churches.

While examples of oral translation are not abundant there is some evidence. One such example is given by Egeria who travelled through Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia and elsewhere in the East around the fourth-century. He recounts one church service where an interpreter is used:

And because in this province some people know both Greek and Syriac, and others know only Greek, and still others know only Syriac, and since the bishop even though knowing Syriac speaks only in Greek and never in Syriac, there is always a presbyter who translates into Syriac what the bishop has said in Greek. In this way all understand what is being explained.<sup>8</sup>

There are also examples of interpreters being used in the twelfth and sixteenth centuries by Latin speaking preachers:

In 1147 Pedro, bishop of Lisbon preached to English, German and other crusaders in Latin; interpreters then relayed his sermons to groups of soldiers in their respective languages. In Burgundy and Silesia, Giovanni da Capestrano delivered his sermons in Latin, and then interpreters translated them into the languages of the listeners. In 1503, Raymond Peraudi visited Lübeck, accompanied by an interpreter who translated Peraudi’s Latin sermon for the audience. Other priests and monks throughout the city repeated the translator’s words verbatim so that the preacher’s sermon could be heard everywhere.<sup>9</sup>

In the eighteenth century the evangelist George Whitefield wrote in his journal: ‘In my way to Philadelphia, I had the pleasure of preaching, by an interpreter, to some converted Indians...’<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence J. Johnson, *Worship In The Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources Volume Two* (Adelaide, ATF Press, 2009), 360.

<sup>9</sup> Beverly Mayne Kienzle, “Medieval Sermons and Their Performance: Theory and Record,” in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carolyn Muessig (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 109-110.

<sup>10</sup> John Gillies, *Memoirs of Rev. George Whitefield* (New Haven: Whitmore & Buckingham, 1834), 111.

Each time Christianity has been introduced to a people or language group the interpreter is involved in bridging the cultural and linguistic divide to ensure, as faithfully as they are able, that the truth of the gospel is transmitted to the people in expressions and cultural examples that they can understand and relate to. Interpreters have carried the cognitive burden of ensuring that people can hear in their heart language and interpreters recreate Christianity in a form that is recognisable to the local people.

### **Research Design and Method**

In this research I was interested in those interpreters who volunteer or who are volunteered to interpret. These are lay interpreters with no training. Rather, their communities have identified them as able to do the job or even have the spiritual gift of interpreting.

For mono-linguistic preachers there is a tendency to assume that because interpreters speak to them relatively fluently that the act of understanding and adapting a sermon into another language is as simple as the conversation they had when they first met. However, this is not always the case especially when preachers introduce theological and spiritual concepts that may have no equivalent terms in the host language or perhaps worse, misleading equivalent terms. For example there is currently debate in Mongolia as bible translators have used the same word for God that is used for Buddha which is seen by some indigenous Christians as misleading.

Interpreting is a discipline and a profession because of the complex and challenging nature of interpreting. Placing the burden of interpretation onto a volunteer and expecting a professional interpretation does not necessarily follow. Even individual dynamics between preacher and interpreter, such as accent and personality, can determine how successful the preaching-interpreter partnership will be. As Barnett states:

The lack of understanding of the nature of bilingualism and the variation in linguistic forms leads to non-appreciation of the skills involved in interpreting. Consequently, there is a lack of recognition of the need for training in these skills which, in turn, leads to unreal expectations of lay bilingual people as interpreters.<sup>11</sup>

For my research, I was less interested in the interpreters' abilities, and to give them their due they were mostly gifted communicators as well as ordained clergy or church leaders. Instead I was interested in the preacher who is bringing the message. Many preachers seem suspect

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<sup>11</sup> Sarah Barnett, "Working with interpreters," in *Working with Bilingual Language Disability*, ed. Diedre Duncan (London and New York: Chapman and Hall, 1989), 97.

of their interpreter and the interpreter's skill, and yet the preacher often has not examined their own homiletical process or what preparation and training they may require to successfully undertake preaching with an interpreter.

My research was conducted using SOMA (Sharing of Missions Abroad) as a case study. SOMA is a short-term mission organisation within the Anglican communion, conducting clergy and lay-leader conferences as well as other forms of renewal ministry. SOMA does not have any clear policies or training regarding working with an interpreter and it is up to each mission team leader to provide some guidelines to team members as to how to speak with interpreters. Challenges to working with an interpreter are compounded by the fact that as a voluntary organisation many team members are not only going on mission for the first time, but it may be their first real experience of public speaking, let alone speaking with an interpreter. More experienced team members have had to learn 'by doing.'

To gain enough data I was a participant observer on three SOMA missions trips. Two missions to Uganda with SOMA UK, and one mission to Vietnam with SOMA Australia. Research was conducted through semi-structured qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviews of preachers, interpreters, and bilingual congregation members were conducted with a total of 33 participants. Participants groups consisted of 13 preachers, 13 interpreters, and 7 bilingual listeners.

The following are a few quotes from participants to give a sense of their experience of interpreted preaching.

Some preachers found the rhythm of side-by-preaching a positive experience: "I actually found it quite calming because I was able to go the pace that I like to go and it actually gave me a bit of time to think, it gave me time to process I guess what I was about to deliver."

Other preachers had a hard time with the stop-start process involved:

...having to think ahead but at the same time actually stop so frequently and I found that it interrupted my thought pattern and I thought it made the whole thing sound a bit lumpy and disjointed.

The interpreters experience was largely positive and many felt like they not only spoke but preached, both to the congregation and themselves:

when you are interpreting for someone, what I've liked most is the words you keep them in your mind and...you recall and it is as if you are now receiving the message yourself.

I like it because one, much as you are interpreting you are also preaching and you're communicating, and I think as preachers and evangelists and prophets and, especially this calling, we are called to talk to people and bless them. So I like it so much.

the hardest thing, to me, I think, is that I am interpreting for someone who does not know what I have said. Because you may not be sure if what I have said is what you have said. So that one is also my worry, because you may feel, you may keep bias "really has he explained it well the way I wanted it?!" But because you don't know what I have said, to me also I think you may remain uncomfortable.

The listeners showed a strong degree of patience for the interpreted preaching event and especially liked when visual elements were incorporated.

...the congregation was interested in your words. So they had to be patient so they may hear a lot from you...And when we knew you were coming we were in fact anxious to receive the word of God from that end, so there was no problem with the time, even if, if it continues even if it exceeds tonight, we will still be there because of the anxious of the good news or the good words from you...

...there are other things you used, like instructional materials whereby you were making pictures, whereby you were using local materials like the three legs stool, from the local materials that was very important and people can understand more, for people cannot forget when they see!

Due to the exploratory nature of the research I analysed the interviews for themes and found three major findings.

### **Major finding 1 - Nonverbal Communication**

In an interpreted preaching setting the role of nonverbal communication becomes more significant than perhaps in any other form of preaching. Nonverbal communication includes body language, gestures, facial expression, vocal intonation, and movement both unconscious and deliberate. The bilingual congregation members emphasised the need for nonverbal communication most strongly, closely followed by the interpreters. Preachers also expressed the importance of nonverbal communication but stressed it less than the other two respondent groups and their focus generally revolved around avoiding gestures and body language that may be deemed offensive.

Some Ugandan interpreter responses included ensuring they embody the preacher in not just words but body language, vocals, and emotional intonation.

...when you are interpreting if someone cried you would cry as well, if someone raised up his hand you would raise up your hand because otherwise people would not understand. They would see someone raising up their hands, you are actually imagining that you are that person and whatever she says I am sitting and she sits and you remain standing it means she said 'I sit and you stand' and that would change the meaning. I always try to do by all means each and everything the speaker does. So that the other person if he raises the hand they may know why did he do it! And in communication body language takes even the highest percentage, so if you don't copy it you may end up giving half-baked information to the audience.

The Vietnamese respondents also agreed that nonverbal communication was highly important but within the boundaries of their cultural expression: "Yes we copy that gesture but in a less expressive way but we still have to do it but less expressive just make sure you don't over do it."

The preachers interviewed were more mixed in their answers regarding nonverbal communication, with quite a few unsure if they wanted to be mimicked or uncertain what body language may potentially give offense.

I can't decide if I'd like it if they copied my mannerisms and things... It's an interesting one I guess it comes down to how much you care about people receiving the word from you or from someone else wouldn't it? I don't know!

Preacher: "I'm not aware that that was happening, so I wouldn't necessarily expect it because I'm aware that gesturing in some cultures can mean another thing in a different culture."

Interviewer: "So did you try to avoid using body language?"

Preacher: "Yeah"

I really like the interpreter to move with me...if that's their style I'm not going to impose anything on anybody but I much more prefer it if they mimic me cause actually I think expression is a huge part of it ...I just think people are reading you not just what you're saying...

Ugandan congregants were emphatic that interpreters should copy the body language and gestures of the preacher. Given that for the majority of the congregation they cannot understand the English of the preacher an animated delivery holds attention and communicates in other ways. Some comments from the Ugandan listeners include:

“as the preacher makes all signs and gestures then the interpreter...”  
“...the interpreter is supposed to accompany him”  
“...and whenever you are moving, supposed to move after with you”  
“...to do everything that you do, do!”

The response from the Vietnamese congregants was slightly different due to cultural difference; however they expressed a preference for speech that contained more gestures and non-verbal language.

...culturally even when we speak Vietnamese, usually Vietnamese people do not know how to express by their body gesture. So that's why the children when they learn English they prefer to learn from westerners more than Asian people...

My research discovered an interesting differentiation between male and female preachers as highlighted by the interpreters. Interpreters observed that women use a lot more nonverbal communication and as a result were much easier to interpret for. This is an interesting observation and is suggestive of a range of factors. Potentially women from patriarchal cultures do not assume they will be listened to and may therefore make greater concession to other means of engaging their audience. It could be that the women who go on missions tend to be women who are more outgoing and expressive. Alternatively, they could be more aware, as one interpreter observed, that the interpreter's job is difficult and they want to make it as easy as possible. Conceivably, women are less represented and therefore the few women that do preach are memorable and tend to be good at communicating cross-culturally. Perhaps, women are more willing to be collaborative in their preaching and embrace sharing the preaching space with an interpreter. Clearly there is something occurring in interpreted preaching whereby women appear to be more 'natural' at the style of preaching required for stop-start side-by-side consecutive interpreting.

This finding does not discount those male preachers who are very adept at preaching with an interpreter. However, given that the ratio of women preaching on SOMA missions is noticeably less than men it is significant that they appear to have embraced the co-preacher model that helps facilitate effective interpreted preaching.

Interpreters experience of interpreting with women include the following responses:

Most women are good at gestures. Few men do the gesture part of it, yeah they're good at speaking. For them they're concerned of the points but the women are concerned of information, making the information stick and understood.

...it becomes even easier to interpret for a woman than to interpret for a

man. Because there is that facial expression, it makes it easier to interpret for a woman more than a man...a man says "so they have given me an interpreter I think he knows things, I start and speak" but a woman will always be conscious, "this is somebody of the language I can't hear but for him he is lucky to understand my language so I think I should be as simple as possible to make this person understand." I've seen that in so many women I've interpreted."

Another finding from the research that I've included with nonverbal communication is that preachers should also consider how to incorporate visual and creative elements into their sermons and teaching. Response from congregation members and interpreters was strongly in favour of using different elements in presentation. Incorporating different visual elements made the message interesting and related more strongly to people, especially if the visual aid was culturally relevant.

### **Major finding 2 - Interpreter-Preacher Dynamic**

The second strongest theme to emerge from the research was the preacher-interpreter dynamic that enabled or hindered the preaching rhythm. Some preachers and interpreters seemed to develop a good rhythm in the interpreted preaching setting. An effective rhythm was one with minimal clarifications required from the interpreter, a good pace between the preacher and the interpreter including mirroring of gestures, nonverbal cues, and animated delivery, even anticipating when one person was finishing and the other could begin to speak again. A number of elements appear to influence the establishment of this rhythm including trust, rapport, English fluency, timing, accent, speed, language use, and delivery.

One element that was identified as increasing the preacher-interpreter dynamic was trust. Building a relationship and rapport between the preacher and the interpreter before the preaching event and during the mission trip appeared to increase the sense of trust preachers had with their interpreters. Additionally, the interpreters became more familiar with the preacher's accent, sense of humour, and speaking cadence. Time spent building relationship included informal times such as sharing meals, engaging each other in conversation about each other's life and family. It also helped if both preacher and interpreter talked about their theological convictions and 'heart' for God and people. More structured times spent together sharing the sermon or teaching material including biblical passages and illustrations that would be used was thought to be very useful, although rarely done.

One of the major stumbling blocks to establishing a preaching rhythm with the interpreter is

where the pause is placed to allow the interpreter to translate. What is a 'pause' for the preacher is the time when the majority of the congregation finally get to hear the verbal content of the sermon transmitted through the interpreter.

While this 'pause' for the preacher can be a time of trying not to lose their train of thought or the passionate momentum they believe they have built, it is significant for the preacher to realise that this is the moment when the interpreter co-constructs the sermon. It is during this time that the interpreter demonstrates whether the preacher has indeed communicated clearly. It is during this time that the preacher has no control and generally has no idea if what they have said is being transmitted accurately. It can be a time of discomfort for the preacher and I often observed that even as the interpreter spoke the preacher would interrupt and want to add further clarification.

This is also the moment that the congregation is waiting for, they have been hearing sounds from the preacher, watched their animated performance, or lack thereof, and at last are able to piece together what has been going on by hearing in a language they are fluent in. The 'pause' is a crucial time in the interpreted preaching moment. It needs to be used with consideration and valued as part of the interpreted preaching dynamic.

Accent and speed individually represent the two highest ranked difficulties that interpreters have understanding the preacher. Interestingly, native English speakers often make no allowances for non-native English speakers, expecting that everyone who speaks English should be able to understand their English. The reality is often quite different with interpreters struggling to understand accents they are unfamiliar with. In comparison those speakers for whom English is a second language will often use simpler language that is understood by a wider range of non-native English speakers:

The non-native speakers, it turns out, speak more purposefully and carefully, typical of someone speaking a second or third language.

Anglophones, on the other hand, often talk too fast for others to follow, and use jokes, slang and references specific to their own culture...<sup>12</sup>

When unfamiliar accents are combined with fast rates of speech it can become especially difficult for interpreters to both comprehend and translate what a preacher is saying.

### **Major Finding 3 - Preparation, Training and Delivery**

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<sup>12</sup> Lennox Morrison, "Native English Speakers are the World's Worst Communicators," *BBC*, October 31, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20161028-native-english-speakers-are-the-worlds-worst-communicators?segmentId=22011ee7-896a-8c4c-22a0-7603348b7f22&emailid=56caea37cb56e61518751d61> (accessed March 26, 2017).

The third major finding from the research was the need for methodology and praxis around preparation, training, and debriefing.

The research found that preparation to preach with an interpreter ranged from no preparation, to at most, shortening material due to time constraints. Some preachers did try and make some adjustments while on mission after realising that there would be an interpreter. The reality is that this is not an intentional oversight but reflects a lack of awareness of the challenges of interpreted preaching and the great need for frameworks to be developed. As one bilingual preacher stated, “as preachers at times we take it for granted that since there is an interpreter then things will just work but I believe there is need for training.”

No training that I am aware of is currently available for how to prepare and deliver a sermon with an interpreter, or how to think reflectively on the process. Of those interviewed no preacher had received any formal training regarding preaching with an interpreter. However, all stated that some form of training would have been useful before their first time preaching with an interpreter.

Preachers and interpreters rarely have much opportunity to dialogue prior to the interpreted preaching event. Equally, after the event the preacher and interpreter do not discuss or reflect on what has taken place, what worked well, and what could have been improved. I believe the majority of interpreters and preachers would welcome such reflection and find it valuable to hear from each other about their experiences.

In interviewing both parties I observed that often when they reflected on an area of difficulty the preacher and interpreter had a very different understanding of what caused the challenge and therefore they have no opportunity to mitigate a similar occurrence in future events. Incorporating dedicated debriefing times between preacher and interpreter may also build the relationship and improve the dynamic if they speak together again. It is also valuable for the preacher who is unfamiliar with the host language and culture, to hear from the interpreter what elements of their sermon resonated with the interpreter and congregation. The preacher can incorporate these reflections into future preparation and gain confidence about what worked well.

## **Conclusion**

As preachers seek to think theologically about the task of interpreted preaching it is important that this is done from the earliest stages of the preaching process. Interpreted preaching

demands much from preachers from the very outset of preparation for the preaching event. It involves scrutinising their preaching for language that would not be understood by an interpreter, as well as finding stories, illustrations and examples that, as much as they are aware, are culturally relevant to the congregation. Finally, preachers should incorporate visual or creative forms of communication into their preaching, when appropriate, as this helps transcend language barriers, reduces boredom and engages the congregation, and assists the interpreter understanding of the preacher's message.

Another element of interpreted preaching that is unique to this homiletic is the shift in power to a shared preacher-interpreter dynamic. The preacher is beholden to their interpreter as the cultural gatekeeper through whom the sermon would not otherwise be understood. Preachers who recognise and respect the interpreter in the interpreted preaching dynamic are likely to have a more successful and enjoyable preaching experience. Congregants are also positioned to hear the sermon twice and while they may only understand the language of the interpreter they are still 'listening' to the preacher's body language, gestures, and witnessing the preacher's rapport with the interpreter.

In stating the case for a homiletic for interpreted preaching I have aimed to demonstrate that interpreted preaching is distinct from other forms of preaching. The added dynamic of an interpreter necessarily asks the question of not just who is listening but who is preaching. I propose that the interpreter is more than a mouthpiece for the preacher but is in fact a co-preacher as they help facilitate the sermon through linguistic and cultural fluency.

The interpreter and preacher are partners in the preaching event. This partnership embodies the Pentecost affirmation of God speaking to all people in the diversity of their language and culture. Both interpreter and preacher submit to the Holy Spirit's empowerment as they strive to communicate in a way that the congregation can hear and respond to.

The implications for homiletics from this research demonstrate that there is a biblical basis for interpreted preaching as well as a historical precedent. However, this homiletic is not theoretical but a live dynamic that has been occurring since the Early Church and continues in a multitude of settings around the world today. My research demonstrates that preachers should not be surprised to find themselves in a situation where they will be interpreted and to have the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge available to facilitate an edifying experience for preacher, interpreter, and listener, and ultimately God.

### **About the author**

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