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Lorinda Bruce

Avondale College of Higher Education, lorinda.bruce@avondale.edu.au

Steven Thompson

Avondale College of Higher Education, steve.thompson@ozemail.com.au

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Does it really matter? Choosing a Bible translation for use in schools

Lorinda Bruce

Lecturer in ICT and Mathematics in the School of Education at Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW

Steven Thompson

Formerly senior lecturer in Biblical studies, now supervisor of higher degrees by research at Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, NSW

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Abstract

There are numerous versions of the Bible in print and e-copy, each of which has been thoughtfully translated by qualified persons using reliable source documents and reference works. Due to the complexities of translation and the backgrounds of readers, no single version ‘tells it all’. Each one, a product of the methods of its translators, and the readers targeted by its publisher, accomplishes some parts of the translation task, and meets some reader needs, better than others. Which Bible translation is best for your school or classroom, and how can you make use of digital versions of the Bible? This article will discuss these issues and help your school make a choice, informed by each school’s heritage and needs of its constituency. It also looks at the use of digital translations, and outlines the clear advantages and disadvantages of e-Bibles.

Introduction

Choosing an English Bible translation was once a simple task. For Protestant adults it was the Authorised King James Version (KJV or AV of 1611, latest revision 1769) or the New International Version (NIV 1978, latest revision 2011). For children, the Good News Bible (TEV of 1976, renamed Good News Bible, GNB of 2001). For Catholics, either the Douay-Rheims (1582–1610, latest revision 1750), the Revised Standard Version (RSV Catholic version of 1966) or the New American Bible (NAB of 1986). The choice could be made during a brief visit to the nearest bookshop on the way home after school. Those days of limited Bible choice have ended. The scene has changed dramatically with the appearance of a tsunami of recent translations, plus

revisions of some older ones. There are now more than 400 English Bible translations, according to the *Encyclopedia of English Bible versions*, and another thousand or so of parts of the Bible (Taliaferro, 2012, p. 1). What motivates this tsunami of translations? In the words of linguist David Crystal (2006), religious texts such as the Bible,

have to satisfy two criteria, which are always incompatible, because one looks backwards and the other forwards. First, the translation must be historically accurate... Secondly, it must be acceptable to the intended users of the translation—which, in practice, means that it must be intelligible, aesthetically pleasing, and capable of relating to current trends in religious thought, social pressure, and language change. No translation can ever satisfy the demands of all these factors, and all translations are thus to some extent controversial. (pp.471–472)

This article provides information, which may help guide in the choice of an appropriate translation for school use. It will do so, first, by introducing the two methods of translation employed by translators, and by illustrating some of the gains and losses that result from their efforts to work within the incompatible criteria of accurately presenting message from the past that conforms to the parameters set by present readers. It will flag efforts by publishers and translators to target particular user groups. Finally, it will suggest ways schools can harness the benefits of widely available digital Bibles. But it will start with insights into Bible translation, and suggest what might lie behind that tsunami of recent English translations.

Translation—definitions and aims

What is a translation? For the purposes of this article “translation” (from Latin *translatiōnis*, “handing over, bringing over”) expresses the translator’s basic task to “bring over” meaning from a written text across the

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gap separating the text's language and culture into the recipient language and culture. Translators make "there and back" journeys, bringing what they find, expressing it in their own language with minimum distortion. A related Latin term, *interpretātiōnis*, carries the work of translation a step further by expanding what is meant by "bringing out meaning." In the words of translator Edith Grossman, "The most fundamental description of what translators do is that we write...in language B a work of literature originally composed in language A, hoping that readers of the second language...will perceive the text, emotionally and artistically, in a manner that parallels and corresponds to the aesthetic experiences of its first readers" (as cited in Nelson, 2010, p. 22). Bible translation consultant Stephen Pattemore defines translation's goal as an extension into another language of one group's wish to "change the mental state of another group by means of a coherent text" (2011, p. 265). Crystal (2006) declares that a translation aims "to provide semantic equivalence between source and target language" (pp. 417–418).

Translation—methods

How do Bible translations bridge the gap to achieve this "semantic equivalence" of meaning? They are divided over what they believe to be the correct answer. Some would call for what is known as a formal or word-for-word translation, which attempts to bring over into the receptor language the *form* of the original, translating a noun with its equivalent noun, a verb with a verb, and so on. Others believe a so-called dynamic or thought-for-thought translation brings across the meaning most effectively. Both methods have been employed and their merits debated since antiquity (Brock, 2007, p. 875). Both continue to be debated and employed by Bible translators.

Word-for-word, literal translations?

It is important to understand that no Bible translation in wide use today is literal, word-for-word. Such would be partly unreadable. Genesis 32:20 contains a Hebrew idiom "I will cover his face with the present" which the KJV paraphrases "I will appease him with the present." This and hundreds of similar Hebrew idioms, if translated literally, would so complicate the task of the English Bible reader that much sense of the flow and fluency of the Bible's message would be lost. Neither ancient Hebrew nor ancient Greek had a specific word for the colour blue. Modern Bibles paraphrase with "blue", ancient words that refer to a range of colours between what we know as green and black, without alerting the reader to the linguistic "gap" behind

the English word (Deutscher, 2010, p. 43). Words in isolation potentially express a range of possible meanings. Only when embedded in sentences and larger discourse units do words make a precise and specific contribution to meaning. This is why sentences, rather than words, are the basic carriers of meaning in written texts.

Formal translations

Translators using the formal method believe their task is to bridge the language gap by bringing across not only individual words, but also the forms of which they were part. Formal translations attempt to reflect not only the words, but the sentences and other literary forms of the original biblical languages, while at the same time making sense to readers of the receptor language. Readers of formal translations are expected to become engaged, mentally selecting from among the options the contemporary meaning that best fits the biblical writers' expressions. This can be illustrated by the story of the confusion of languages at the biblical Tower of Babel, Genesis 11:1, 6–7. A literal translation would be something like:

It happened all the land lip one and words the same...And YHWH said...Come, let us go down and mix up there their lips so that a man cannot hear the lips of another.

The English Standard Version (ESV) of 2001, a formal translation, reads:

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words...And the LORD said...Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so they may not understand one another's speech.

Note here that Hebrew "lips" becomes either "language" or "speech" depending on the meaning required by its place in the sentence. Formal translations tend to preserve an archaic form of English as part of their faithfulness to the atmosphere of the original languages (Alter, 1996). They also tend to employ without explanation theological words such as grace, iniquity, justification, righteousness.

Dynamic translations

It is clearly the translator's task to bridge the language gap. But should the culture gap also be attempted? Or should that task be left to the reader? Translators who attempt to go beyond bridging the language gap and bridge the culture gap produce what are known as dynamic, or thought-for-thought translations, whose goal is to

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identify and employ the contemporary expression which prompts in the reader the cognitive and emotional response intended by the ancient author, even if quite different words are employed. The apostles Paul and Peter instructed believers to “greet one another with a holy kiss” (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14). J.B. Phillips bridged the cultural gap between the first century Roman empire and mid-twentieth century England when he replaced the holy kiss with “Give each other a hearty handshake all round.” (*The New Testament in modern English*, 1958). In the New Living Translation (NLT of 1996) “holy kiss” becomes “in Christian love.” Other recent translations insert “kiss of peace”, familiar from the concluding ritual in some worship services. This gives modern readers the impression that Paul referred to an early Christian worship service in Romans 16:16. The context does not support this. This illustrates the major strength of dynamic translations—they fit our culture! It also illustrates their potential weakness—the contemporary “meaning and message” selected by the translator may not be what the biblical author meant.

“*For ancient Hebrews, God examined a person’s kidneys as well as heart to determine their inner moral state*”

For ancient Hebrews, God examined a person’s kidneys as well as heart to determine their inner moral state: “the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins” Psalm 7:9 KJV (“reins” meant “kidneys” in 17th century English). See also Jeremiah 11:20; 12:2; 17:10; 20:12. While contemporary readers may react uneasily to the image of God scrutinising a human kidney to discern its owner’s deepest convictions, apparently ancient Hebrews did not. Nearly all recent translations, including the formal ESV, replace “kidneys” with “mind”, without linguistic justification, but justified on the basis of cultural equivalence.

Greek *logos*, which most informed Bible readers assume should be translated “word”, did not usually mean simply “word” to ancient Greeks. *Logos* could express for them “gathering”, “calculating”, or “reckoning” and more commonly, “narrating.” Prior to the New Testament era, *logos* came to refer, generally to “the giving of an account”; “a narrative”; “a speech”; “statement or discussion based on and guided by reason.” This meaning is behind the “saying” or “statement” in Mark 7:29 ESV, NRSV, World English Bible (WEB, commenced 1997–ongoing; online only). Other translations employ “answer” for *logos* at this point, but not in the sense of an answer to a question, since there was no question. Rather, “answer” in the sense of “a good contribution to a dialog or debate.”

There are no purely formal Bible translations on the market, nor are there any purely dynamic ones. All are products of a mix of both methods, to some degree. Sometimes the presence of doctrinal bias is cited as a factor influencing translation choice between a formal and dynamic translation. While Bible translators’ deep religious convictions can impact their work, no translation reviewed for this article stood out due to doctrinal bias. By definition, Bible translations are produced by groups, while individual translators produce Bible paraphrases. The checks and balances provided by groups producing bona fide translations work against doctrinal bias that more easily appears in paraphrases.

Non-cognitive elements of texts

So far, what might be called the cognitive, factual meaning conveyed by texts has been this article’s focus. But non-cognitive components of texts also influence meaning. Grossman considers non-cognitive elements to be just as important as cognitive ones. She hopes “that readers of the second language...will perceive the text, emotionally and artistically, in a manner that parallels and corresponds to the aesthetic experiences of its first readers” (as cited by Nelson, 2010, p. 22). Two of these, which are relevant for Bible translators and readers, are triggers of emotions, and literary artistry.

Triggers of emotion

Some translations deliberately aim for an emotional impact on readers: “[the Bible’s] living language... has an emotive quality that will make an impact on the listener.” (*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*, 1996, p. xliii). This may be subtle. While most translations of Psalm 30:9 read “if I go down to the pit, can the dust praise you?”, the NLT changes “the dust” to “my dust” without Hebrew justification, personalising “dust.” While the New King James Version (NKJV of 1982) translates John 8:7 “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first” the NLT’s “the one who has never sinned throw the stone!” heightens the moral qualification for potential stoners of adulterous women!

Social scruples

Translators must decide whether to shelter modern readers from the naming of body parts and bodily functions, which in contemporary polite English discourse are unmentionable, or wrapped in euphemism. In Galatians 5:12 the apostle Paul wished that persons troubling gentile Christians by urging on them circumcision, might have

something of similar consequence done to them in return. According to the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV of 1989) Paul wished that “those who unsettle you would castrate themselves!” The Revised English Bible (REB of 1989) avoids the surgical term but names its consequences with “make eunuchs of themselves.” The NLT leaves open the precise nature of surgery Paul wished upon the troublemakers: “I just wish that those troublemakers who want to mutilate you by circumcision would mutilate themselves.”

The KJV translates 1 Samuel 5:9 quite literally “the hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction: and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts.” These haemorrhoids disappear from nearly all modern translations, formal as well as dynamic, and are replaced with “tumours.” Most recent translations likewise omit reference to the private parts of the body targeted by that particular haemorrhoid plague.

The “filthy rags” of Isaiah 64:6 [Hebrew vs. 5] is a euphemism for a Hebrew expression designating a cloth to catch menstrual blood, or a garment worn during menstruation. Contact with menstrual blood rendered ancient Hebrews unsuited for worship until they had undergone a purification ritual. This feature of everyday Hebrew life was transformed here by the prophet into a visceral simile for hearers and readers.

Literary artistry

The Bible is rich in literary artistry, which can convey considerable meaning. Like all literature the Bible contains a range of literary devices, which do not always cross the translation bridge intact.

Alliteration

Alliteration is embedded in the Tower of Babel narrative in the Hebrew expression *niibenah lebenim* “let us make bricks” (Genesis 11:3). Note how the consonants *n*, *l*, *b* in the first word are repeated, but partly reversed, in the second word: *l*, *b*, *n*. There is also alliteration in verse 9 where *babel...ballal* means “Babel” and “mixed up”. This latter passage also plays on the close proximity of “Babel” to “mixed up” introducing the Babel (a shortened form of Babylon) motif as source of confusion, trial and hardship for God’s chosen people. New Testament alliteration is prominent in Hebrews 1:1, where five of the 12 Greek words begin with the letter *pi*. It is difficult to argue that such a feature contributes to the cognitive message of the Bible, but this is another example of literary artistry, which is lost in translation.

Sentence length

Sentence length is a feature of style that challenges translators. Formal translations usually reflect sentence length in the original. Translations aiming for easy readability employ shorter, simpler sentences. One of the New Testament’s longest sentences is Ephesians 4:11–16 which the KJV dutifully preserves. The RSV and ESV break the sentence into 2, the REB, NIV and Today’s New International Version (TNIV of 2005) into 4, the NLT into 6, the Contemporary English Version (CEV of 1995) into 7, and the New Century Version (NCV of 2001) into 9.

Register

Register is a term used by linguists for insider language—the departures from standard language used by, or about, social sub-groups to mark their partial separateness from mainstream society. The KJV expression “any that pisseth against the wall” in 1 Samuel 25:22 (see also 1 Kings 14:10) is a Hebrew expression for human males who customarily emptied their bladders in public, facing any convenient wall, instead of retiring to a more discreet place. Nearly all recent translations replace this with “male” or “men” instead of a register-appropriate term such as “layabout.” The WEB Bible preserves the Hebrew expression, leaving the reader to choose the appropriate register.

“Insider” language

The most extensive and obvious register marking an “insider” group in the New Testament is the Jewish dialect of Greek used in the first three Gospels. One prominent feature of this “insider” language of Jewish communities living in the wider Greek-speaking world lies behind the “beholds” so familiar from traditional translations. “Behold” opens narratives, tags shifts of topic, and introduces new elements in reported speech. Native Greek speakers rarely used the word this way, so the greatly increased frequency of “behold” in the first three Gospels indicates that the reader has, figuratively speaking, “entered” a Jewish ghetto, where the language, though still Greek, is of a different register, that of a close-knit ethnic and religious minority. The ESV has preserved all 5 “beholds” in the announcements of the birth of Jesus in Luke 1:20–44, while the NLT has replaced the first one (vs. 20) with “and now” and the third (vs. 36) with “what’s more” while omitting those in verses 31, 38 and 44. This “smoothing” of narrative and dialog by dynamic translations may accelerate reading and comprehension, but at the expense of removing a

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marker that the Evangelists used to take the reader “inside” the Jewish subculture of this and other Gospel scenes.

Needs of today’s readers

Meeting the needs of today’s Bible readers challenges translators and publishers, who respond by updating translations to reflect changed word meanings, language usage, and reading habits. These changes in turn influence marketing of the Bible. Changing social attitudes and values exert pressure on translators and on Bible reading communities.

Changed word meanings

English words can disappear or undergo change of meaning through time. The “wimples” and “crisping pins” of Isaiah 3:22 KJV have become “capes and purses” and “sottish children” of Jeremiah 4:22 are now “senseless children.” “Gay clothing” of James 2:3 has become “nice clothing” or “fine clothing.” “Fall upon” (Judges 8:21; 15:12; 1Samuel 22:17) has become “kill” while “prevent” (Job 3:12; Psalm 79:8) has become “receive” or “meet.”

Reading habits

The experience of reading the Bible aloud in a group can be impacted by the translation. Partly for this reason translators retain traditional expressions in very familiar passages. In the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:12) the ESV and even the TNIV retain “debts” for “sins.” Psalm 23 remains quite close to its familiar KJV form in current translations. Formal translations, because of their heritage, are considered better suited for group reading in formal worship settings, and the REB translators acknowledge this. Groups with limited English however, may benefit by reading dynamic translations that use a more restricted vocabulary

Bible publishers—“publish or perish?”

Bible publishing is business. This has been the case from the time scribes were paid by the line for producing manuscripts. The Bible used to be marketed, like the Model T Ford, in the colour of the customer’s choice, so long as the customer chose black. That sombre binding has now been replaced by a rainbow range of covers appealing to differing sub-groups of potential readers. Publishers issue an increasing array of editions targeting children, youth, women, men, and other groups. Revenue from sales of some Bibles is huge. Do publishers commission translations in hope for a best-seller? Could this contribute to the tsunami of translations on the market?

Sensitive social and religious conventions

Inclusive language and correct designation of gender occupy considerable translator attention. Gender expressions, which were current in ancient, male-dominated cultures, are reflected in the Bible’s original languages. Some of them sound decidedly insensitive today, and if not handled effectively give readers a sometimes-unwarranted impression that the Bible itself supports gender inequality. Translators moving within the limitations of their craft make minor adjustments such as replacing “mankind” and “man” of older translations with more inclusive “people” or “human beings” when context allows or supports. In matters of gender it is vital to separate the Bible’s message from the Bible’s medium, its language. Numerous biblical passages seem to subvert rather than support a subordinate place for women in patriarchal society, and grant surprising freedoms to certain biblical women. This parallels the manner in which another convention of patriarchal society, the privileged position of first-born sons, is repeatedly subverted in the Old Testament in order to favour younger brothers.

So, which translation suits my school?

Crystal (2006) concludes his discussion of translations by asserting, “there is no such thing as a ‘best’ translation. The success of a translation depends on the purpose for which it was made, which in turn reflects the needs of the people for whom it was made” (p. 418). What are needs of schools and students? The authors of this article avoid endorsing any translation, and encourage those making a choice to carefully compare currently available translations. This task can be initiated by use of the online resource BibleGateway.com which places side by side a range of many (but not all—the REB is absent) currently-available English translations. The next step is to read through the complete text of the Introductions to a range of translations. Unfortunately most of these are not available online, so a visit to a well-stocked bookshop may be necessary.

Reading comprehension level and vocabulary ceilings

Some recent translations impose ceilings on their vocabulary and literary complexity. The NLT’s ceiling is “the reading level of a junior high school student” (*Holy Bible: NLT*, 1996, p. xlii). The NCV likewise limits its vocabulary in accordance with guidelines that inform authors for the *World Book Encyclopedia* (*The Everyday Bible: New Century*

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Bible, 2001, p. vii). Translators of the CEV cite research indicating that, “almost half of U.S. adults have very limited reading and writing skills.” The CEV is therefore “a text that an inexperienced reader can read *aloud* without stumbling, that someone unfamiliar with traditional Biblical terminology can *hear without misunderstanding*, and that everyone can *listen to with enjoyment* because the style is lucid and lyrical.” (*The Bible for Today: Contemporary English Version*, 1995, p. 1628).

Limited vocabulary Bibles are not for everyone, and young readers can grow and thrive on the challenge presented by more literary translations. Philip Davis, professor of English at Liverpool University, recently argued “Serious literature acts like a rocket-booster to the brain. The research shows the power of literature to shift mental pathways, to create new thoughts, shapes and connections in the young and the staid alike” (as cited in Henry, 2013, p. 2). The most literary contemporary translation is the REB. Its language is described by the chair of its translation committee as “fluent and of appropriate dignity for liturgical use” (Coggan, 1989, p. ix).

Use more than one translation

No single translation can capture the complex riches of the Bible’s meaning. “Literary work requires a sensitive consideration of form as well as content, and may prompt several translations, each of which emphasises a different aspect of the original” (Crystal, 2006, p. 418). A formal translation, good for reading aloud, and for insights into the ancient form of the Bible, can be supplemented with a dynamic translation for its greater sense of immediacy. Comparing their readings would reveal differences, which could spark useful discussion and stimulate further study into the Bible’s culture and message.

Getting the most out of digital Bible formats

The Bible has taken many forms over the generations, and many versions.

Early Christians changed from scrolls to papyrus. From the mid 15th century Gutenberg and then Luther helped transfer rare manuscripts from the hands of the priests into the hands and minds of many people. Today, digital Bibles are fulfilling an age-old vision of distribution and dissemination.

In the 1960s, publishers began to repackage the black leather standard with more modern, contemporary designs. Editions range from mass-market paperbacks to ‘Teen’ designs with the aim of reaching a younger demographic who would otherwise not pick up a Bible. Today, there are still beautifully bound versions of the Bible in print, but

you are just as likely to see Bible students reaching for a computer, iPad or smartphone to access the Word of God (Neff, 2012). In the 21st century we have moved from the printed version to the digital.

What are the benefits of using a digital Bible?

Many people prefer ‘real’ books over their digital counterparts. The digitisation of the Bible has many advantages however that make it an attractive option for use in the classroom. To choose paper over digital does not need to be an either-or proposition. They can be used in conjunction with each other. Some of the advantages are:

1. Annotations

Annotations, note taking and highlighting are easier and more manageable than print. Unless it is your own personal Bible, with your own annotation and highlighting system, annotating or marking a physical copy of the Bible is usually frowned upon in educational circles. Unless it belongs to the individual student, a class set or library edition of the Bible would look a little worse for wear with multiple students making notes in the margins. Many Bible apps and online editions let you highlight, annotate, bookmark and cross reference at the click of a button. This can be saved on the device, as well as online, thus syncing across multiple devices (ie. tablet, phone, and online). Whether shared, or listed as private, you can store your favourite verses and associated notes on Bible apps such as YouVersion (www.youversion.com). This can serve as an individual or collaborative tool for shared annotation (O’Neill, 2010).

2. Convenience and cost

Digital versions of the Bible are quick and easy to access on a range of hardware. Your school will already be equipped with a range of digital devices ranging from laptops and tablets to desktops and projectors. Harnessing the powerful capabilities of e-texts is usually cost effective and convenient. They will usually take up less space, can be searched quickly, font size can be adjusted for your younger or older readers, and multiple versions can be used to suit reading age and vocabulary level. Online bible portals such as Bible Gateway (<http://www.biblegateway.com/>) and YouVersion (<https://www.bible.com/>) help you to tailor your experience to enhance reading, study, and devotions. YouVersion is available for both online and mobile devices, and offers more than 150 different Bible translations in 45 languages. And all for free (Nelson, 2011).

“*Serious literature acts like a rocket-booster to the brain. The research shows the power of literature to shift mental pathways*”

3. Research

Digital texts such as the *Glo Bible* (www.globible.com), let users explore the text through five different lenses: Bible, Atlas, Timeline, Media and Topical. Each of these lenses enhances the user experience by harnessing touch screen and visual interaction. A user can do 360-degree virtual tours, access videos, artworks and reference information. As is the case with many Bible apps, some of the information is free, whilst other modules or content requires an additional cost or 'in-app purchase'. A multimedia rich experience is more likely to engage today's digital learners.

4. Engagement

Particularly for the secondary religious studies student, a digital version of the Bible will provide a more engaging and practical platform for research. But it's not just multimedia enriched Bibles that enhance engagement with the word. Even simple Facebook pages such as "The Bible" ([Facebook.com/TheBibleUBS](https://www.facebook.com/TheBibleUBS)) have 8.6 million followers and counting. The founder, Mark Brown says his "Bible engagement strategy" is "to be where people are. You need to learn their language—the culture, the nuances, and the particularities. With all of that, you start to build a community. And then I try to get their attention by finding out what will capture them. I know what gets them talking" (Crosby, 2012, p. 36).

5. Collaboration

Most digitised Bibles harness the social capabilities of the Internet. It is easy to download more versions, upgrade to new features, or to share passages or comments on Facebook or Twitter. These apps and websites also make use of the "cloud" or an online repository where you can store information, notes, bookmarks or other elements (Martin, 2011).

YouVersion Live can also provide your classroom with shared passages and notes through the app, and can encourage interaction by note taking or responding to online polling or prayer requests. Use of the "cloud" means that an app or website can be used at home, school and on multiple devices whilst syncing your notes, bookmarks, annotations and reading plans.

Disadvantages of using digital versions of the Bible

Whilst the benefits of using e-versions of the text are numerous, there are some disadvantages to take into consideration.

1. The display removes the chosen verse from its textual surroundings

If verses are presented on large screens (PowerPoint in church or chapel) or on very small screens (phone apps), it can decontextualise the verses being shared. The interpretation of those texts relies heavily on the presenter of information; particularly in the case of large screen projection. This may be seen as an advantage for the lower grades in school, as the ability to highlight, enlarge and fill the whole screen, will aid very young readers to focus on the text at hand rather than be intimidated by a sea of text. But for older grades and for adults, this can detract from the message. Alan Jacobs (2011) in his essay on *Christianity and the future of the book*, points out, "screens that allow only minuscule chunks of text to be displayed at any one time—and that effectively remove from perceptual awareness context, sequence, and narrative—do violence to the book qua book. If Christians forget, or forget more completely than they already have, the integrity and necessary sequentiality of their holy Book, and of the story it tells, that would be a catastrophe for Christianity" (p. 36).

2. Distraction from the Word becomes too easy

Many students believe that they are expert multitaskers. According to Maggie Jackson (2009), they juggle six hours a day of nonprint media content, and a quarter of that time they are using more than one medium. "Nearly a third of fourteen- to twenty-one-year-olds juggle five to eight media while doing homework" (p.18). Today our virtual split screen, and nomadic era is eroding opportunities for deep focus, awareness, and reflection. To access a Bible on an electronic device will increase the opportunities for multitasking. This in turn may have an effect on how focused they will be on studying the word. We want a quick fix for everything. But when do we stop, be still and know that He is God?

3. Materiality of the text is lost

Some people just prefer the paper rather than a digital copy of the Bible. But is this just because they are used to the physicality of their Bibles, or does it go deeper than this? If the Word remains constant, then a digital version of the Word undermines the philosophy of the Bible. Digital versions focus on fragmentation, hypertextuality, movement, fluidity, ease of navigation, resizing, realigning and are changeable. What does this digital manipulation of the text do to the way we interact and perceive the Word of God? Over time, this digitisation may give a message of transience rather than longevity and stability for our students.

“Screens that allow only minuscule chunks of text to be displayed at any one time effectively remove from perceptual awareness context, sequence, and narrative—doing violence to the book”

4. Instant access can devalue

A physical Bible is more personal. It's yours. A digital Bible can be bought, downloaded, skimmed, or deleted quickly.

Even though the Bible is more accessible now than at any other time in history, students still struggle to read their Bibles. Many students spend much more time using screen media (TV, games, computers) with 83% of young children averaging 117 minutes per day. The time that young people spend with electronic media far exceeds that spent with parents or teachers. From 1999 to 2004, the average amount of time that students aged 8–18 spent on media was 44.5 hours per week, or the equivalent of a full time job (Callahan, 2007, p.253).

Even though some Christian teachers believe strongly that the Bible is the word of God from Genesis to Revelation, few will read it from cover to cover. Just because you have instant access to multiple versions, devotionals, concordances and multimedia, does not mean that you will pick up your iPhone and read the Bible over playing 'Angry Birds'. Perhaps the best version, app or Bible website is the one that you consistently read.

Conclusions

There are numerous versions of the Bible in print and e-copy, each of which has been thoughtfully translated by qualified persons using reliable source documents and reference works. Due to the complexities of translation and the backgrounds of readers, no single version "tells it all." Each one, a product of the methods of its translators, and the readers targeted by its publisher, accomplishes some parts of the task, and meets some of the needs. A choice informed by a school's heritage and the needs of its constituency, should be the goal. The digital versions can offer many added opportunities to explore the Word in education. For example, many apps have concordances, thesauruses, maps, concordances and cross referencing capabilities. Many teachers and students use the annotation features to enhance their study both as individuals, and in collaboration with others. The Word of God will always be the Word of God. It transcends time, generations, formats and versions. The love letter that God has penned for His children is the same, whether it is on paper or a screen. If the digital format can engage and inspire 21st century learners to delve into the word and get to know God, then teachers need to embrace these new methods of presenting the Word. **TEACH**

Resources

Primary and early childhood apps:

- The ABCs of God (iPad) (<http://goo.gl/TkVfe>)
- Adventure Bible Memory HD (<http://www.adventurebible.com/>) (iPad)
- The Beginners Bible App (<http://app.beginnersbible.com/>) (iPad)
- Children's Bible (<http://goo.gl/NIFf7>) (Android)
- Toddler Bible (<http://goo.gl/asg1t>) (Android)
- Kids First Bible (<http://goo.gl/WGfqy>) (Android)

Secondary apps and websites:

- Olive Tree (<http://olivetree.com/m/>)
- YouVersion (<https://www.youversion.com/>)
- Logos (<http://www.logos.com/iphone>)
- Bible.is (<http://www.bible.is/apps/>)
- BibleGateway (<http://www.biblegateway.com/>)
- Glo Bible (www.globible.com)

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