



## | Finger Lickin' Good: The Importance of Contextualization

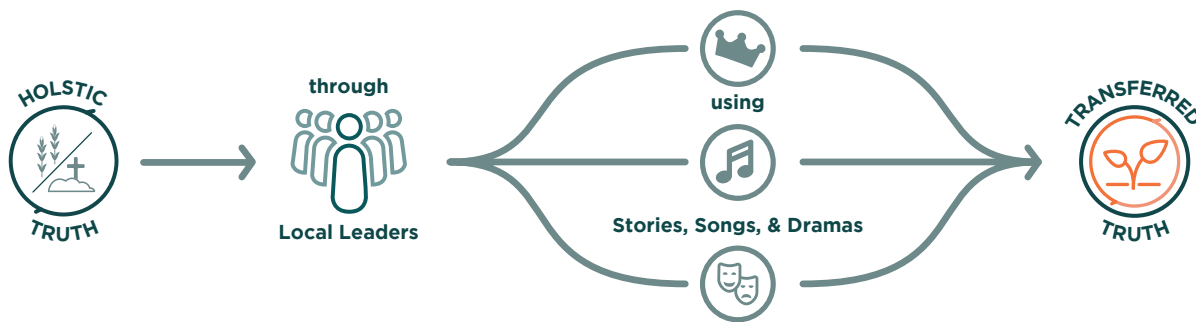
*In the US, KFC's slogan is "Finger lickin' good." The company used this same slogan when expanding into China, where unfortunately this phrase translates to "We'll eat your fingers off."*

*Gerber marketed baby food in Africa with a cute Caucasian baby on the label, not knowing that products there usually have pictures on the label of what's inside the packaging, as many cannot read. Consumers thought the food contained babies.*

These examples seem laughable now, but they cost millions of dollars and could have been easily avoided if the companies had learned about the culture and language in which they were hoping to influence.

Our last communication shared the challenge of requiring literacy in order to hear Truth. Due to the over-estimation of literacy numbers, the 5 billion oral learners around the world are often never reached using an effective method of communication.

Oral learners have a preferred learning style, just like all of us, which includes stories, songs, and dramas. When information is presented in these formats, the listener can understand, apply, and transfer the new knowledge.



Our goal is to deliver Truth in the context and manner that each community will be most receptive to hearing.

Now that we know the best way to reach oral learners is through trusted local leaders who use the preferred method of learning (stories, songs, dramas) in a community, how do we decide WHAT information to deliver and HOW to best present that information (without costly blunders like above)?

### Contextualize the information while retaining accuracy

— to place (something, such as a word or activity) in a **context**

— the **interrelated** conditions in which something exists or occurs: **ENVIRONMENT, SETTING**

God's Word,  
his love, his  
message of  
salvation is to  
be extended  
to people of  
every tongue  
and tribe in the  
language and  
in the living  
demonstrations  
that they can  
understand and  
receive without  
stepping out  
of their cultural  
clothing.

Quote from missionexus.org.  
<https://bit.ly/2KGUZeF>

## | Asking The Locals For Insight

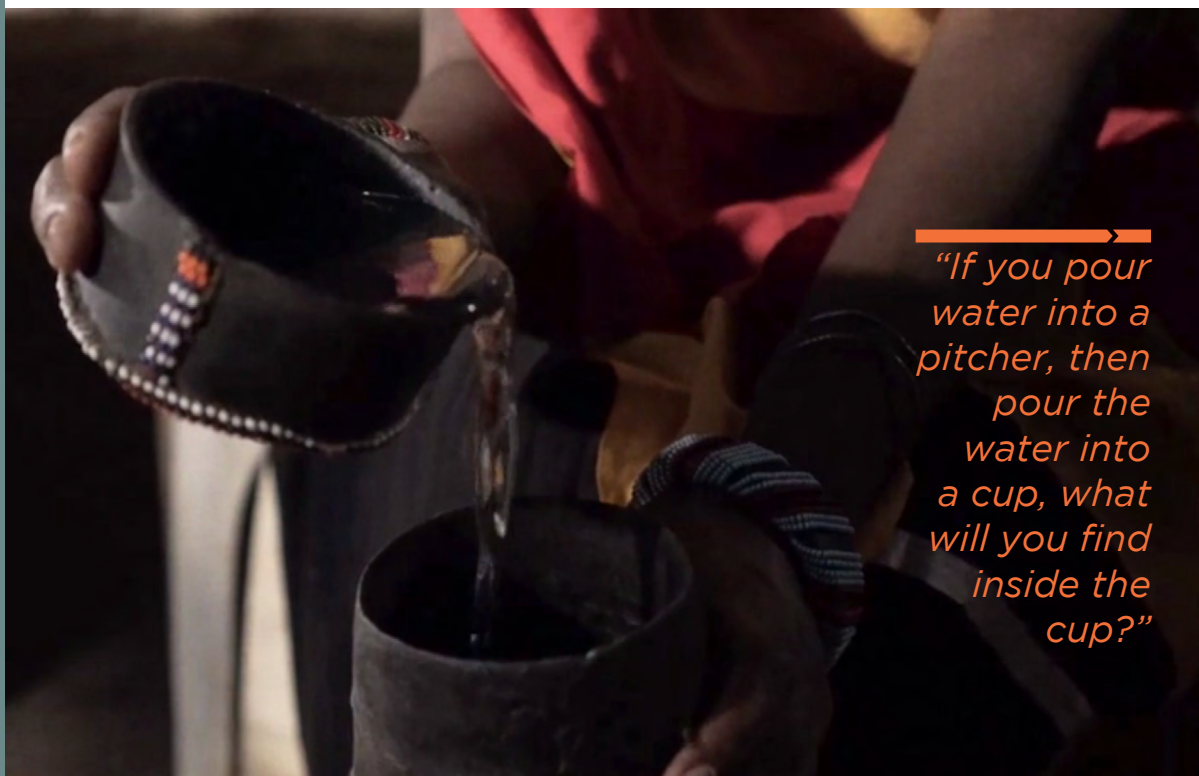
Contextualization is indeed a complex and ever-changing task, but it is crucial that we present our messages in a culturally relevant way. **Messages contextualized for individual communities must also retain Biblical Truth and factual accuracy.** To accomplish both contextualization and accuracy, we must utilize the knowledge of local leaders to understand what worldview, opinions, philosophies, and beliefs are present and use this information when selecting passages, composing songs, and scripting dramas.

As missionaries, the importance of contextualization cannot be underestimated. Just as we are responsible for delivering Truth in a manner easy for the listener to understand, we are also responsible for understanding their worldview and how they may interpret the Truth presented to them.

As we prepare to provide holistic Truth to a community, finding out what community development education is needed is of high importance. Do they struggle to provide clean water for their family? Are their farming practices sufficiently providing? **If we fail to ask what is needed, we are sure to provide information that won't be heeded.**

This desire for contextualization is not new. Let us not forget that Jesus arrived on earth. As a human. He lived among us. He ate with us. He shared his life with us. **Jesus presented messages that had cultural relevance in the location and time that they were being presented.** To farmers, He gave parables related to agriculture. To herdsman, He gave parables about guiding lost sheep. As presenters of Truth, we strive to do the same.

Missiologist David Sills reminds us, "Some mistakenly believe that contextualization means making Christianity look just like the culture. However, contextualization is simply the process of making the gospel understood."



“If you pour  
water into a  
pitcher, then  
pour the  
water into  
a cup, what  
will you find  
inside the  
cup?”

## | Spoken Speaks About Contextualization

Spoken partners and staff weigh in on why contextualization has been important in their work of sharing Truth with oral learners.



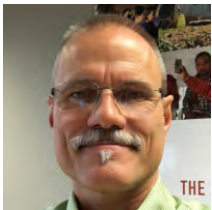
*“The contextualization of Biblical content and teaching style is important because it diminishes the distractions to the presentation of Truth that we inevitably bring from our home cultures and allows for a deeper change toward a Biblical world view. All the while making the transference of that Truth more rapid and expansive.”*

Tom Stout, Director, Pastor Development Programs



“Oral cultures respond to contents that are presented in ways that they can see themselves in, feel and hold their realities. Contextualizing provide that.”

Olumide Toluwase, Country Director, Nigeria



*“Every culture has some form of bread. We grow up with it and develop a taste and preference for it as part of who we are. When learning is presented in a fashion that matches the local context, it’s like serving our favorite bread. We already like it because it’s familiar and our attention and engagement level increases dramatically!”*

Dr. Ray, Director, Orality Coaching



“Every culture and every context learns in slightly different ways. When we bring an idea to teach others, and don’t pay attention to the way people learn, it is like shooting an arrow without knowing where the target is. We must not only contextualize the message, we must find the right ways to transmit that idea in a way that others grasp it as their own. When I see an idea expressed in a different culture and realize that it came from what I taught, then I know for sure learning has transpired, and understanding has been grasped.”

Timothy Eby, Missionary to Africa

## | What will you find inside the cup?

After years of preparation, a young missionary traveled to Africa. He was excited to be there, but he struggled to connect with the people. Out of ideas, he decided to talk with the village leader.

The leader told him, “Go. Find a woman in the village and ask her: ‘If you pour water into a pitcher, then pour the water into a cup, what will you find inside the cup?’”

The missionary felt he was about to be the butt of a village-wide joke. But, he went and found a woman in the village and asked: “If you pour water into a pitcher, then pour that into a cup, what will you find inside the cup?”

Amused, the woman shrugged her shoulders and replied, “Milk, of course!”

The missionary didn’t know what to think! Why were these people so confused? He went back to the village leader for an explanation.

The leader smiled and leaned forward.

“In our village,” he said, “people keep powdered milk in the bottom of their pitchers so when they are filled with water, milk is made ready for their children. Everyone in the village would assume that if you put water in a pitcher, you are making milk.”

The missionary took a moment, slowly realizing what was obvious to everyone but him: **It doesn’t matter how much you want to help or what you want to teach someone, if you don’t first understand how they see the world.**



## | Region Update: Northern India



TOTAL POPULATION OF **4.5**  
**NORTHERN INDIA:** MILLION

### Pastor Development Programs

**2** Ministry Partners

**6** Unique Languages

**28** Emerging Leaders

**30** Trained Disciple-Makers



## | Speaking of Context...

If you have been a partner of ours, the resulting fruit has come in the **context** of your sacrificial gifts and prayers. THANK YOU for helping us spread The Good News in this unique way.

If you are only just hearing about Spoken and these needs, please consider becoming part of our team.

We would appreciate your consideration of supporting a part of Spoken's **current needs** because we cannot do this work without you. Right now, Christian leaders need our help in Ethiopia, India, Kenya, and Myanmar. We need \$16,600/month to continue the discipleship programs until they are self-sustainable.

A Partnership Gift of:

**\$25/ Month   \$50/ Month   \$100/ Month   or   A One Time Gift of Any Amount**

would be an enormous boost to these ongoing programs that need our support today. You can give online at [donate.spoken.org](https://donate.spoken.org) or using the included card if you are able to give at this time.

Thank you for your partnership in helping us deliver accurate Truth in context, where written words can't go.

Ed and The Spoken Team