Dr. George Payton, Bible Translation, Session 20, Translating Verbal Ideas, Part 2

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This is Dr. George Payton in his teaching on Bible translation. This is session 20, Verbal Ideas, Part 2.

We're continuing with our discussion about verbal ideas and how to translate verbal ideas. So, this is Verbal Ideas, Part 2, and I wanted to start with a review of what we covered in the first discussion about verbal ideas.

A verbal idea is some kind of concept that has a verb inherent in it, but it could be expressed by another part of speech. It could be a noun or a participle, which is the I-N-G form of words, like his singing. If we say, his singing drove me crazy, his singing is like a thing, but it's not really a thing. It's actually an action.

Sometimes, we have the verbal idea couched in an adjective, and we'll go through that to cover that the first time, but now I just wanted to reiterate those and cover what we discussed in the previous lecture. So, when translating verbal ideas by way of review, they're challenging to interpret because they don't tell us certain information. In other words, there are gaps in communication when you use a verbal noun, or a verbal adjective, or a participle.

What is missing? The one doing the action is not mentioned. So, if we say faith, someone is believing something. So the person who believes it is not mentioned; what they believe in is not mentioned, and it's couched in this noun.

So, the one doing the action is not there. It's not explicit in the word. The one who is receiving the action, one or ones receiving the action, are also not mentioned.

And if you don't know who is receiving the action, then it makes it hard to understand what's being talked about. And this is what makes, particularly the epistles, very complex. If you say salvation, who is saving? Who is being saved? And from what are they being saved? All of that is totally left out.

If we say, forgiveness, same thing. Sanctification is the same thing. And so, remember, what we're trying to do in this whole series is to focus on the gaps in communication because we want proper, clear, accurate, natural communication that draws people in, and this is enhancing their relationship with God.

That's what we're after. And we said that these gaps in communication could have been understood by the local people that received these letters and documents, but we're not from that world. We're not from that language.

We're not from that time period. And so, we don't have access to filling in the gaps in our own minds like people from that time period would have had. And so, if those gaps stay in our translations, then our readers of these translations won't understand those connections either, and they will come away perhaps wondering, what is being talked about here? I think I kind of know, but I'm not really sure.

Especially if a person is a new believer or especially if it's a community of unreached people. But even when we work in the church, even when I've tried to share some of these ideas with people here in America who've grown up in the church and who are well-versed in the scriptures, I still struggle with these things. So, this is what we're trying to do, and we're trying to remove any stumbling blocks, barriers, or hindrances to understanding if possible.

The process that we went through in the first lecture shows it is possible, not 100% in every case, but it is possible to improve on and remove at least some of the roadblocks, if not a number, quite a few of them. So, the one doing the action is not mentioned, the one receiving the action is not mentioned, and also, the action itself might be obscure. In addition, the function of the phrase may be unclear.

We used that expression, for example, yesterday, or excuse me, in the previous lecture. Coming to Jerusalem. Sorry, who's coming to Jerusalem? That's not mentioned.

Why is it mentioned in such a phrase with a participle? Coming is a participle, coming to Jerusalem, and it was simply a time phrase. Well, we need to realize this is not a process that's being described. This is a function of Greek where you can put that participle there to indicate when this happened.

So that's what we mean by function. What is the function of the phrase? And if you just read Coming to Jerusalem, Jesus cursed the fig tree, then it makes you wonder why they put it in a participle like that. So, such words can occur in complex phrases. Sometimes they have a genitive phrase, sometimes it's in a part of speech, sometimes it's a figure of speech, or an idiom, in a genitive phrase, and you end up with a really complex passage, a really complex verse, in a very short amount of time, space, and a very short number of words.

So, it can really be confusing. So, we want to try to break down that confusion, first in our minds as translators. Remember, we cannot translate what we do not understand.

And so we're talking about breaking down the text for us as Bible readers first before we move to the step of translation. By the way, all of this information, even if you're not a Bible translator, it can help you to understand the Scriptures in a different way,

and that can then enhance your teaching if you're teaching a Bible study or you're giving a message in church, or if you're just talking to friends about a particular passage. Okay, so what we talked about is to fill in the gaps as much as possible and fill in this implied information.

The process of discovery is there, as we said because the author did not say those things. All right, and many languages don't have abstract nouns, and it is impossible to translate like we saw that example from Galatians 5.22 and 23 in Papua New Guinea. If you say all of those words, it creates a zero in their mind, and it's just noise.

So that means we have to do something to adjust the biblical text before we translate it into the target text, to adjust the grammar, to adjust the vocabulary, from nouns to verbs, from adjectives to verbs. So, what we're trying to do is discover the meaning first before we go into the next part of the translation. Okay, so we mentioned three kinds of verbal ideas.

Nouns, and we would consider these abstract nouns. A concrete noun is a physical thing that you can touch, taste, see, hear, and feel. So, these are abstract nouns.

We have faith, obedience, baptism, repentance, salvation, righteousness, fellowship, otherwise known as koinonia. Then we have adjectives, the elect. He sent his angels to collect his elect.

Savior. Why do I call that an adjective? It is an adjective, but it's also something else. Sinner, apostle, servant, ruler, overseer.

In one sense, the person who is doing that, the person who saves, the person who rules, the person who was sent, the person who oversees. And if you think about it that way, then it moves from an abstract thing like faith to something a little bit more concrete, a person doing a particular activity. The third one is the participles, greeting.

We had that with Elizabeth telling Mary when I heard your greeting. Understanding. They were amazed at Jesus' understanding.

Beating. His beating was too excessive. Arriving.

Arriving in Jerusalem. Singing. The singing of Paul and Barnabas in prison caught the attention of the ruler.

Cleansing. The cleansing of the temple. Mourning.

Mourning the loss of his relative. So, we see that these are different words. The noun and that adjective are adjectival, if I can just say it that way, of the elect and Savior, etc.

Then, we will discuss the participles and the I-N-G words that we use in our language. And grammatically speaking, all of these things are nouns. They fill the noun position in the sentence.

They fill the subject slot of the sentence. So, grammatically, they're nouns. And grammatically, they're the subject of the sentence.

That is the problem because sometimes it doesn't make sense. Sometimes, languages can't even do that. And so we said, what are the steps? We identified the underlying verb.

We identified the participants associated with the action, and sometimes, those participants are inanimate objects. And we used the example of, I gave the book to Ted. "Book" is technically an inanimate object.

It doesn't do anything, but it's somehow connected to the action, so therefore, we call it a participant, for lack of a better word. But at least we have a category for saying, okay, we have three things involved in this action. We have George, we have Ted, and we have the book.

All right, so we identify the participants. Then, we try to restate the sentence, making the person doing the action, making the participants explicit, and stating it as a finite verb. A finite verb is a verb that has a tense, present tense, past tense, and future tense.

And it has a person doing it. I did it in first person, second person, and third person. So those are finite verbs.

So, we state it with a straight-up verb, a finite form, rather than an infinitive, which would be to go. We say, I go, or Ted goes. So those are finite verbs, whereas the infinitive is not a finite verb.

Participles are not finite verbs because you don't have those grammatical associations with the person, whether it's first, second, and third person, singular and plural, and we don't have a time reference of tense, past, present, and future. Okay, so then once we restate it with all of that information there, we try to translate the sentence that we created. It's kind of like a precursor, a pre-processing step that the translation team goes through so that they can mull over what this actually says. And once it's broken down, then it makes it much, much easier to translate.

What language do we do that in? Well, we do it in whatever language the translation team is using to communicate. So, if it's in Latin America, that common language with all the people involved might be Spanish. So, they talk about it in Spanish, formulate this sentence in Spanish, and then translate it from there into the target language.

It could be another part of the world, it could be Chinese, it could be Hindi. In East Africa, it's Swahili, and so we would talk about these things in Swahili, we would break it down, we'd write a sentence in Swahili, and then they would say, oh yeah, okay, we can say that in our language. Now that we know what it means, then we can just say it that way.

When I was in East Africa living in Tanzania, I got called to do a workshop on the Book of Romans and how to exegete and translate the Book of Romans. Pack a lunch, guys, before you do that because it's really a tough role. And so that's what we had to do, is we had to break down all of these abstract nouns, all of these participles and things, and we would write in English, and then once we got it in English, the translation team said, well yeah, we can do that.

One young man, a very intelligent young man, Richard, had been translating the Gospels, and he would do chapters every week. And he came to Romans, and he did like two verses a day, and he's going, this is hard. Once you went through that process, he goes, well, this is easy.

Can you show us how to break this down for ourselves? And so yeah, we did that. It takes the burden off of the translator to try to dig into this really tough text to understand, and it makes it easier for them to actually work with. Okay, so we talked about this passage from the fruit of the Spirit in the previous discussion, and the fruit of the Spirit, we said, the relationship between fruit and Spirit.

The Spirit is doing this action. The Spirit is producing fruit in people. And we said, okay, that Spirit makes people, makes a person love other people.

The Spirit makes people rejoice or joyful, makes people peaceful and patient, makes a person behave kindly to other people, makes a person gentle toward others, makes a person or helps a person to be faithful, and helps a person to control themselves. Okay, and the final step is then to write the whole verse. We didn't do that in the previous discussion, and I want to do that now because doing the exegesis part and digging up the meaning part is half of the equation.

Until you actually try to put it into a sentence, you realize, oh, I can't just list all these things just like that. It has to flow like a normal sentence, and sometimes, you need

to add connectors. You need to add the or a. You need to add this or that or because or as a result of, in other words, that join that together.

So, this is what we came up with. The Spirit enables a person to love others. He makes them rejoice.

He makes them peaceful. The Holy Spirit helps a person be patient with others. He helps them be kind to people.

He enables them to treat people gently. He makes them behave to be faithful to people. He helps them control themselves.

What do you think? So that translation that I just came up with is not perfect, but hopefully, it gets them a little bit closer to where they need to be so that they can then consider, well, how can I say these things now in my language? And so when you write it out, again, we said this is kind of like a first draft of how it might be said in the target language, and then the translation team needs to determine, okay, now that we've ingested it, now that we have conceptualized it in our minds, and we've thought how our people can't receive it, now we're thinking, how can we word it for our people? All that process is this in-between step between interpretation and writing it out in the translation. So, we sit in this middle space of dwelling on this text, internalizing the meaning, thinking through the different translation difficulties based on the language that we're working with, what is the essential information that we have to have that needs to be conveyed, and what language forms in the target language do we need to use in order to accomplish all those goals. So, that middle space is where a lot of translators spend their time, and then, once they get there, they can express it.

And so the process of doing this and writing out a draft version is really, really helpful in that middle space, and then that makes the transition to the target language much, much easier. Okay, so translating verbal adjectives. So, a verbal word, often expressed as a noun, is used to describe a person or a thing, and commonly, we refer to and translate it.

This is not a must, but this is one of the best practices that translators do is to turn it into a relative clause. That means a clause with who in it, the one who does something, and then you make the verb explicit. Remember, we make it a finite verb.

Okay, so his elect would be the people he chose. A savior is a person who saves others. A sinner is a person who sins or offends God or who disobeys God.

An apostle is a person who is sent by someone. A servant is a person who serves. A ruler is one who rules over a country or a group of people.

Overseer is the one who supervises people. Sometimes, in Greek, it's a noun; sometimes, it's a participle. In Hebrew, a lot of times, they're participles, but do they have participles in the language that you're translating into? That's the question.

Okay, so we've now broken-down translating verbal adjectives. Let's use some examples of verbal nouns and participles. Acts 4:12, there is salvation in no one else.

Again, who saves? God saves Jesus. Who do they save? They save people. What do they save them from? From eternal punishment to being punished by God for their sins.

But if you wanted to say it in a fairly straightforward way, we can say there is no one else who can save people. And if you wanted to add to that punishment, that would be okay, too. And until you try to put it in Acts 4:12, it's one thing to do it right here like this, but another thing to actually put it into the verse.

It can be tricky because we talked about adding connectors and other things, making the sentence and the information flow properly in that language. James 4.9, let your laughter be turned into mourning. Laughter is a noun, and mourning is a participle.

And James is exhorting them, perhaps even rebuking them. You should not laugh, so he's telling them to stop laughing, but instead, you should start to mourn. So that is one way of getting around these abstract nouns and participles.

Okay, in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord. And remember what we said: what is the function of this participle phrase? It's actually a prepositional phrase when the Lord comes. So, we who are alive remain until the Lord comes or until He has made known to us your love.

Your love, object, possessed by your, in other words, the people, something akin to this. He has told us about how you love other people. He has told us that you love other people or the way that you love other people.

The way that you, again, if we say show your love to people, then we have put love back in there as a thing. So, we need to be careful not to do that. We just let the verb stand on its own.

Interestingly enough, in English, we have a noun-driven language. We function a lot by what the noun is in the sentence, and that gives us a bigger piece of information. In Swahili, it is a verb-driven language.

So, if you say, he went home, he went is alienda, one word. And you can say, he went, alienda. One word is the entire sentence.

One word has he on it as a prefix, it has the tense, which means past tense, and it has the action went. It's all one word. He bought it, or he bought the book.

Ali ninnua kitabu, he bought book. You can even say, Ali ki ninnua, he bought it. And all that is one word.

So, we need to wrap our brains around how these languages function so that we can communicate them in the best way possible. Okay. Does Swahili have abstract nouns? Yes.

Do they use them? Yes. Do they have genitive phrases with of? Yes. But we need to be careful that they match up the way that it means and is used in Greek and English lines up with the way that they use it in Swahili.

And we'll have an example of when it doesn't do that. And that's the problem, which is they might assume that they know what it means, but in actuality, they may not. And that's not because they're not intelligent; it's because they have a preconceived notion in their head about what a particular word or phrase means.

Okay. All right, let's go on. Let's get an example of a sentence that has abstract nouns and participles in it.

John appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Fairly straightforward. Or is it? Okay, what are the verbs? Baptist.

So, baptize is the verb. And John and he's the one who baptizes, and he baptizes people. John the Baptist appeared.

So that's a straight-up verb. It's a finite verb. It has ed on it.

We know that that's past tense. Preaching is a participle. John was preaching.

John was preaching to people. And what was John preaching? John was preaching some kind of message to people. Baptism.

And the participants are John baptizing people. Now, if you say, John the baptizer, could that work? It's making it a noun again. When you put -er on something, it's now becoming a noun.

And we're trying to avoid that by saying it straight up as a direct verb and the person doing the actions. Okay, so baptism. Repentance means to repent.

It means to turn away from. People stop doing something. So, in this case, they repent from sinning, and the sinning is some kind of offense against God.

Forgiveness. It says, for the forgiveness of sins. Does it say who forgives? No.

Does it say who is forgiven? No. But we know God forgives. He's the only one that forgives.

And the people are forgiven, and they're forgiven because of what they sinned, how they sinned against God. Okay, sin can actually be a verbal notion. To sin.

People sin, and in this case, against God. Okay, let's work on how we put this all together. So here's the verse, and we need to ask a couple of questions before we get to the re-expressing part.

So, baptize. Who is John baptizing? He was baptizing people in the wilderness. Repent.

Who repented? The people repented. Who forgives? God forgives. What is a baptism of repentance? What is the relationship between baptism and repentance? To do this, we need to imagine and picture in our minds the scenario involved in this.

This happens with John and the people in the wilderness, where he was baptized in the Jordan River. But also we can just picture in our minds what happens when a person does these things. So a person does what first? They repent first.

And then they are baptized after they have repented. And generally, you ask, okay, I repent. I'm sorry for what I did.

So, there's regret followed by repentance. And then they say, John, I want you to baptize me. And that baptism, when they're baptized, shows they have made that decision to repent.

Just like today, if a person is not a believer and they're baptized, it shows I have believed in Jesus, and I've committed my life to follow Jesus. So baptism is a symbol of inward faith. So, being baptized shows that they repented.

And what does it mean that John preached a baptism? Sorry, if you said that to 10 people on the street who don't go to church, probably 10 out of 10 would say, I have no idea what that means. That is a weird construction that we become used to in the church, but it doesn't really sound like good English. It's not normal English.

What did he tell them to do? So, preaching means giving some kind of message, right? Or proclaiming a certain message. What did he tell them to do? We have a clue in other parts of Scripture, and this is where we use Scripture to interpret

Scripture. And we get in Acts 2.38, Peter says, repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

That sounds almost exactly word-for-word, like Mark 1:4. Jesus said, repent, for the kingdom is at hand. So, the call to repentance is the first thing. And be baptized.

In other words, let me baptize you for the forgiveness of sins so that you may be forgiven of your sins. Okay, so let's try to put it all together in a verse. So here's the verse, and here is one possible way.

It's not perfect, but here's one possible way of saying this. John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness. He preached that people should repent from sining, and he would baptize them, and God would forgive them for sinning against him.

What do you think? In Tanzania, we have been teaching our translation teams in southern Tanzania, where I was working this whole process. One of the languages that we are working with is the Yakuza language. Most of these languages have had the church around for a long time and even had pastors working as translators with us. And so they translated this into one of the languages, and it was the Yakuza language.

And they worded it something similar to this. So, I was speaking in a Yakuza church, and I wanted to see how they liked the translation. So, I had a copy of the translation with me, and we were discussing this. I was discussing this from the pulpit when I was giving this message, and it's really hard to understand.

The pastor of the church was also the bishop of the area. So Bishop Simon was there. He's in the front row.

And I asked Pastor Simon, can you please come up and read this in Yakuza? So he came up to the podium, and he read it in Yakuza, and then he handed me the Bible back, and he started laughing. He just started laughing and laughing and laughing. And then he went down, walking back toward his seat, and he stopped, and he doubled over, and he's just laughing.

And he got back to his seat, and I said, Pastor Bishop, why are you laughing? And he said that's so clear. He said a child could understand that. This is fantastic.

Similar reaction. My friend Edward was a translator for his language, the Pogoma language in Kenya, and they had translated using these principles. They've translated the whole New Testament, and they were doing a final read-through of everything.

And so they asked a group of pastors, will you come and sit with us and read through it with us before we produce a draft copy? And then you can all take the draft copy

later and read it in with your churches and stuff. But we want to do a final read-through now. And they invited this one man to come.

And he goes, you know, I don't see the value in this. I don't know why I'm here, but okay, fine. I'll stay today, and I'll see if I have time to do this.

Well, they were planning on being there for about two weeks to read through the entire thing, and he was not positive that he wanted to do that. He was skeptical because, after all, we have the Swahili Bible. Why do we need a Pogoma Bible? It's easy.

Just read the Swahili. We all speak Swahili. So they started with the Book of Mark, and they got to this verse here.

And this elder said I have never understood that verse. The way that you've worded it is so fantastic. It makes it so understandable.

And he said I'm canceling all my other appointments and all my other work. I will be here for the next two weeks. A good translation should be accurate.

It should be natural. It should be understandable. And it should be acceptable to the people.

But remember what the other one was that I said? It should be impactful. That man was impacted by the language. It was his language, and he was impacted by the message because it communicated to him in a deep way that touched his heart.

That is what we're after. In conclusion, rephrasing the verbal nouns, adjectives, and participles using finite verbs and making these participants explicit. We do that as a precursor.

Then the next step is to rephrase it in a sentence so that it can then be translated. Thanks.

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