Dr. George Payton, Bible Translation, Session 4, Steps in Translation
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This is Dr. George Payton in his teaching on Bible translation. This is session 4, Steps in Translation.

In this talk, I'd like to go over the big picture of the translation process and what that looks like, what the different steps are, what's done in each of the different steps, so that we can have a big picture of the whole process and then we can get into some of the more specific things in other talks.

So, first of all, remember the qualities of a good translation. The four qualities are accurate, natural, sorry, accurate, and nothing added, so there's no new information. Sometimes we do need to add implied information as needed, but that is not adding information to the text.

There's nothing removed that should be there. We can't unnecessarily say, well, I don't think that that's necessary, and we just take it out. We don't have the liberty to do that.

And also, nothing has changed. Nothing has changed. Second of all, we use normal, natural language.

It's beautiful, and the word in Swahili, safi means clean, but you can say this is a safi translation. It's clean. It sounds nice.

It's great. Clearly understood, and that's a very important aspect, because if we didn't communicate to where somebody understands, then have we done our job? And the fourth one is accessible to the reader. And just by way of example, in Swahili, we have two words that both mean story, as it were.

There's hadithi, and there's habari. So, if you say this is the hadithi of Jesus, then you have to think, okay, what does this word in Swahili mean? And hadithi tends to imply fiction. So, if you say this is the hadithi about Jesus, it's something that didn't really happen.

So, we need to be careful. Is that going to be an acceptable translation? And if we just think, well, hadithi means story, story should work wherever we use the English word story, is that really going to be acceptable? Is this going to communicate the level of seriousness about the scriptures that we want them to have? My suggestion is no, it's not. And so, the word habari means news.

So, you read the habari in the newspaper, you see the habari on TV, or you hear it on the radio, and it's also a greeting when you see someone you say habari. In other words, what's the news with you? How's it going with you? So, it's really important that we get that clear on the front end so that it is not inaccurate, so it is not leading them to a wrong understanding. And we have to be very careful with that.

And here's one example, just a one word in Swahili that can change a person's impression of the scriptures that they're reading. So, is it the hadithi of Abraham? That means Abraham never existed. Okay, or that event that's being told did not really happen.

Okay, so once we say, okay, these are our qualities of the Good Translation, now, how do we then put that into practice? So, steps in translation. Obviously, the first step is to interpret the text. So, we produce an understanding of the text.

Oftentimes, we'll sit together in a translation team, and we'll talk about the meaning, and we will then get some idea of the intention of the text. And we internalize the meaning, and then we produce a first draft. And that first draft, then, is the first attempt at expressing this in their language.

Sometimes, you can use the scriptures from a similar language, like, for example, Swahili, and they can use that as the basis for their draft. And so, a front translation is a simplified, or it's a translated text that's a basis for translating into the mother tongue. Okay, so anyways, you produce this first draft, and then the first thing that you do is you check, well, did we do an accurate job? Then, you go through and compare the draft together with a literal translation, as literal as possible because the literal translation will reflect as closely as possible to the Greek or the Hebrew.

If you know Greek, or if you know Hebrew, then you can do an accuracy check with the Hebrew or the Greek. If not, then you pick something like the ESV, or the NASB, as a literal version that you can compare your translation. And you're looking for, remember what accuracy is.

Did we leave anything out? Did we add anything that shouldn't be there? Or did we change any information that would make it not accurate? So, we check through that. And then you revise accordingly. So, you have a second draft.

Then, you get someone on your team to look over your draft, and that person says, okay, this is good. The wording in verse two, I might have said it like this. Verse three, I might have said it like that.

They go through all the different passages. Usually, you would do this for a chapter at a time. And maybe one person is responsible for one chapter.

Another person may be responsible for another chapter. But the idea is to give it to each other. You swap the work, yours with theirs, and theirs with yours.

And then, you get feedback on it. And we really can't do without feedback. We really need feedback from many other people.

This is the first step. And so, you read it through. You take the suggestions.

You revise it. And you do a third draft. And so, you've been through it now three times.

Rough draft, first draft, then accuracy, and then this. Then, the other thing that we do is for you to do another accuracy check here. When you change things in a sentence or a verse, sometimes you might skip something.

You might leave something out. You might change something you didn't intend to change. And so, you do an accuracy check.

Now, you notice all of these circles are green. All of these steps here, they happen within the translation office. This is team internal processing, team internal production, team internal checking.

And remember what we're checking for in all of these. Accuracy. But we're also checking when you get through team members, is its natural language? Is it how we normally speak? Is it clear, or is it understandable? Do you think that that's going to be understood by the people who read this? Okay.

So, the green represents everything that's done within the translation team. This is before it goes to anyone outside. So, you've done your homework.

You've been as thorough as you can. And then, you go into the next phase. And the blue represents the feedback stage.

And so, the first thing you do is what we call community testing. So, what does that mean? That means we take out two people in the community. It could be one person.

It could be sitting down with a group of people. And you either read it aloud to them or have someone else read it aloud. And then, you ask the content questions.

First of all, can you tell us what this means in your own words? And this is a story about Jesus. He's telling a parable. And you say, put it in your own words.

What did Jesus say? And then, they narrate it back to you. And in narrating it back, you can tell, did they miss something? Did they forget it when they read it? Did they add something in it that shouldn't be there? And so, it's a way of testing, is it understandable? And a way of testing, is it natural language? This is the way that we normally speak. So, that's one thing: Can you get the big picture of the pieces of the story? Then, you might have a question.

You know, we weren't really sure about the word that we should use for baptism. This is the word that we used. When you read it, did you understand this word? Well, no, not really.

I just kind of skipped over it. Oh, okay. Well, help us out here to try to find a good word for baptism.

And so, you try to get feedback from people in the community. You try to get feedback, young and old, male and female, married and single, so that you're trying to get a good picture of people in the community. Do they get what the translation is saying? So, you're trying to check the naturalness and the understandability.

And you don't just do one or two people. You do as many people as you can so that you get a broad range of people. And then, it's a percentage thing.

If a particular passage is clear to, say, 70% of the people or 80% of the people, they got it. And maybe 20% or 30% didn't understand it as well. We're probably okay, but we make a note, this might need to have some kind of footnote or some kind of explanatory note to help them understand.

If it's 50-50, there's probably a problem that needs to be changed. So, after you're getting the feedback from different people around the different communities, then you go back to the translation office and you revise it again. And you notice, yes, we did need to change things because this wasn't getting through, and so you change it again.

And then, after you make the change, every time you make a major change, you always check the accuracy again, just to double-check to make sure. The next phase is when you have a consultant to come and look at your work. And I'll be talking in a minute about what a consultant is.

But a consultant check is when an outside person comes in, and they look over your translation to see if it is accurate. So, a consultant's main function is to help people make sure that the text is accurate. And usually, a consultant knows Greek and Hebrew. How can a consultant then read this translation if they don't speak that language? Well, we have what we call a back translation.

So, let's say, for example, that in Tanzania, the translators read the Swahili Bible, and then they translate it into their language Malila. How am I going to read their translation if I don't speak Malila? Well, then they give me a translation back into Swahili of their translation. So, they give me a Swahili translation of theirs, and then I can read the Swahili and say, oh, this is what the Malila text means.

So, a back translation means back into the language that they started with. And then after that, then you have final corrections. In some cases, if there's a church, before you do the final corrections, you're going to want to take it to the church leaders and have a group of church leaders.

We call this a reviewer's check. And you get maybe 10, 20 pastors, church elders, other people respected in the community, and you sit down together with them, and you read over the translation, and you would usually do a larger piece of translation, like the entire book of Mark, or the first eight chapters of Mark. Or you could do Titus, Timothy, first and second Timothy, and Titus would be a good chunk to do.

You need to read it all through together. And their input is on the side of the naturalness. Are we using the vocabulary that we usually use in church? Are we using phrases that we are familiar with that we want to retain in the translation? So, that would actually come either before the consultant check or after the consultant check.

And the purpose for that is a couple of things. First of all, you want their feedback, because their feedback is very, very valuable. And when they give their feedback, the translation team would do well to take their feedback.

And in taking their feedback, that then makes them feel like they have a stake in this translation, that they have helped with this translation, and that becomes not the translation team's translation, but our translation. We are working together with our translators. They're working hard over there.

We're trying to help them out. This is our translation. This is our language.

This is for our church people. And so, getting that buy-in from the reviewers is really, really important. So, whether it comes before the consultant check or after the consultant check, it needs to happen, particularly if there's a Christian community.

If there's not a Christian community, and I've done this in a non-Christian community, I still got a group of people together, and we still went ahead and went through the text and asked the same kinds of questions. So, our three main qualities of good translation—accuracy, naturalness, clarity, and then acceptability. So, the accuracy is checked by the consultant.

They often have more knowledge of translation and a wide range of languages. They probably know Greek and Hebrew, whereas the translation team may not.

They can add a lot more wisdom and knowledge because they have translation experience for years, not only on identifying that there's an issue, but then the translation team looks to the consultant. So, what do we do about this? This happened once when I was doing a consulting consultation with a team in Tanzania, and one of the younger translation consultants in training was along with me. We were reading through the book of Timothy, and we would take turns.

I would do a chapter, and then he would do a chapter. I would do a chapter, and then he would do a chapter. So, we were going through this one chapter, and he was leading the discussion, and I was observing.

They came to this one verse, and the consultant trainee said, I think that this verse doesn't convey what the meaning is in the original. Then they said, okay, let's look at that, and so they looked at this version, and that version, and that version in Swahili, and he was explaining to them, this is really the sense behind this verse, and if we look at your translation, your translation says something a bit different. Oh, okay, great.

So, they accepted the fact that that was something that they needed to work on. They needed to change it, and edit it, and make it different, and they said, you know what, we are just not coming up with anything. We have no idea.

We know what you said it says, and we know what we started with, but we don't know how to say it this way, and he thought, and he looked at that, and he says, gosh, I can't think of anything either. So, he said, George, do you have any ideas? And I said, well, you know, this one language in Kenya, they had this same problem, and this is what they did. Oh, okay, yeah, we can do that in our language here.

It's not exactly the same. That's pretty close, though. They were a similar language, and a similar language family, and so, not that I'm brilliant, but the fact that I'd had translation experience with other similar languages, working on the same book, then I was able to contribute in a way that really helped the team.

So, this is what people look to the consultant for, is this advice on how to make a final edit that's really accurate, and then the naturalness, and the clarity, and the acceptability we find from the community, and we do that through the community testing, and we do that through with reviewers, and especially with the reviewers, that's where we get the buy-in, and if there's buy-in, there's acceptability. Okay, so after it goes through all those checks, and then final corrections are done, you do all the proofreading, and you check for consistency. Did we translate the same thing the

same way every time? If it needed to be, and then you designed the book, it got proofread, and then it got published, and that is the process of translation?

I wanted to talk a little bit about how sometimes you intentionally produce a front translation, and a front translation is a translation that they translate from if it's not the actual biblical text and one of the first things is, so you do an intralingual translation that is designed to be easily translated. For example, when I was first starting out, we were translating the book of Genesis, and my translator was new at the job; he wasn't sure, gosh, how am I supposed to do this? How do I get started? So, we would read the passage together, and then I said, well, let me do my translation of this paragraph, and you do your translation of the paragraph, and so we did that, and then we compared notes, and we found that my information was correct, and his grammar was correct, so we had to blend it together, and then I thought, well, why don't I just write a simplified English of this, and we actually said, well, before we translate the actual book of Genesis, let's do Bible stories in Genesis, so we're doing Bible stories, we have a bit more flexibility, but then I chose this huge 12 chapters about the Abraham life, and I said, okay, let's talk about this part of Abraham's life, and I wrote a simplified English, because when we read through the chapter, just like it was from the Bible, he wasn't getting the information as quickly as he would have liked, so I wrote a simplified English, and he goes, oh, okay, I get this, and so we used that simplified English to then translate it into Orma, the language we were going into, and it went a lot faster, then I didn't need to have that intermediate step of me doing my part, my part was producing the English, so we did the English all the way through for the life of Abraham, we did the English all the way through for the life of Isaac and Jacob, for the life of Joseph, and that English model helped the translation process go quickly for these Bible stories, so that's what a front translation is, so it makes it easier, starting with what? Intralingual, so if we were reading in Swahili, then we would have a simplified Swahili that could be then adapted into a translation. It's another method for getting the first draft, so if you look at the first draft, and it's really hard to produce something, you look at the blank page and you think, how in the world am I going to translate chapter one of Mark, and sometimes that blank page is daunting, you look at that, and it scares our translators, it scares other people as well, not just our translators, but it can be daunting, and so this is one way to get something down on paper so that they can then work with that, so you try to get appropriate vocabulary.

One of the things that you work on is how long are the sentences, and if you look at the epistles of Paul, the sentences go along for like 10 verses, it's like one sentence, and you go, dude, that's way too much, and so what do we need to do? We need to break it up, and so producing a front translation, you would break up the sentences and you would make them a reasonable length, and studies have shown that most languages, sentences, when people just talk naturally, or they're telling a story or something, are around 10 to 15 words. Now, we're not religiously doing bean counting and counting, oh, this is 14 words, that's okay, it's 15, it's marginal 16, that's

too much, no, but that's a rough approximate, it's a front translation, you tend to make the appropriate length of sentences, you can simplify the grammar, and you can condense concepts together, and you can add more information if necessary for clarity, so for example, if you have, they went down to the Jordan, and that's what the text says, the Jordan what? The Jordan River, so you add the word river there. Are you adding something to the text that shouldn't be there? No, you're clarifying, and so you can add like those kinds of information, or the town of Nazareth, rather than Nazareth, so you can do that in the front translation, and then that helps the translators, and then also the tone, what is the tone of this text, and the tone can be very important, and if we get the tone incorrect, then maybe the translation would be communicating the wrong message. What do we mean by tone? Well, you have in Philippians, you read it, and Paul says in verses 7 and 8, it's very appropriate for me to think about you like this because I have you in my heart, I love you guys, I was there with you, we worked so hard together, you were supporting me even when I was in prison, and you can tell the whole tone of the letter is one of a friend to people that he cares about.

Paul writes to the Galatians, chapter 3, verse 1, you foolish Galatians, who bewitched you to believe this garbage, can you, when was, okay, so he goes and he just rails on him, okay, so we're not translating words at that point, we're translating the tone of Paul's message in addition to the content of Paul's message, so we keep that in mind as we prepare this front translation, and then as we go on to other steps in the translation, we still keep that in mind, this is a sharp rebuke section of the letter, it may not be the whole letter, but at least that part of this, how we're then going to translate that so that the people who hear it read today will get the point that Paul was really upset with these people, something to keep in mind, and I don't know if you've watched it from the beginning, but we have a lot of things to keep in mind when you do translation, so many things that we have to keep in mind, so many things that we have to be aware of, and that we have to watch out for, okay, so let me talk about the consultant check, so it happens in the final feedback stage, the consultant is usually a senior editor, or they function like a senior editor, and they help the team to produce a good draft, they're trying to fit the text to the reader, so for example, if you're producing bible stories, then you want the bible stories to fit the people you're writing the bible stories for, so for example, if you were doing bible stories for children, you would, the consultant would want to help the team with how long the sentence is, do the sentences flow together, can we remove extra words, can we simplify the grammar, can we check the flow between paragraphs, can we look at the whole story as a whole, and make sure that the whole story hangs together well, and that there's a logical train of thought through the whole story, that would be for a story, if it's a narrative, that's one thing, if it's the epistles of Paul, we probably wouldn't do that for children, but we would go through and ask the same kinds of questions, so once that's done, then the team goes to the drawing board again, and they try to implement the recommendations from the consultant so that they can then produce a better quality translation, so in that regard, the

consultant isn't the English teacher that marks up your paper with a red pen, the consultant is there to help the team to a, understand better, b, communicate well in their language, and c, apply the appropriate translation principles where needed, so that they can then achieve a good text, and so that's what happens in the consultant check, okay, so let me stop there.

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