

Dr. George Payton, Bible Translation, Session 8, Language, Part 3, How We Communicate in a Relevant Way.

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This is Dr. George Payton in his teaching on Bible Translation. This is session 8, Language, Part 3, How We Communicate in a Relevant Way.

We're continuing our discussion on language and how we communicate.

This time we want to talk about communicating in a relevant way. Before we get started, I have another little anecdote, a little thing here for us to read, a translation. So, this is at a, like a park or some kind of outdoor thing, maybe a campground.

I think it's a campground. So, the left says this, please don't hesitate to text us at this number if you see anything that needs our attention. We want to make this campground as relaxing and comfortable as possible for our guests.

Thank you. So, this is the translation of that text for teenagers. Sup? HMU at blank if you see anything that is sus or cringe or IDK, a toilet that got wrecked or something.

TBH, we high key try and glow up this campground. Can't stop, won't stop until this place straight-up slays. Need your help. Fam. TY.

Okay, so I've shown that to my students.

Actually, the can't stop, won't stop is more of like a 90s thing or early 2000s thing. So, people today don't say it anymore. Anyway, so HMU, hit me up.

It means contact me. IDK, I don't know. Wrecked, it means spoiled.

And so on. TY, thank you. Yeah, somehow texting has influenced the way that people write a lot of things, even sometimes papers and things like that.

Alright, so language. Sorry, if you haven't guessed by now, I'm a linguophile. I love languages.

I love thinking about them. I'm talking about them. And our daughter, when she was in high school, it was, we have five kids.

She's the youngest, and she was in high school, and she was the only one at home. And she asked my wife and me one time at dinner, and she said, why is it that every dinner conversation somehow ends up winding up talking about language. Sorry, I

married your mom, and we're Bible translators, and we're language people so we just can't help it. Alright, so we wanted just what we talked about, about speech acts.

High assumed shared context is, this type of communication means minimal text, small amount of words. Low shared context, or it's assumed that there's low shared information, results in maximal text, a lot of speaking. Sometimes a speech act, we don't see this very much, but in the Bible we see it more, where the actual speaking is in fact doing something, it's performing some kind of action.

So, when the pastor is marrying a couple, he says, I now pronounce you man and wife. Are they man and wife before that? That's kind of like the last thing, and then they're for sure man and wife, and then they're gone. What do we see in the Bible? Blessings.

When Jacob stole his birthright from his brother, he went, and pretended to be his brother. Dad pronounced the blessing on Jacob, and said, I'm giving you all these great blessings. Well, then, Esau comes along, brings a meal to Dad, and says, what, where's mine? And Dad said, sorry, I don't have any left. It's like he had given Jacob a physical thing, like here's \$10,000, this is all the money I have in the bank, it's yours.

What about me? So, this performative thing, we don't see it so much in English, but it is in the Bible. Blessings, but also what? Cursings. So, they pronounce a curse.

When Jesus cursed the fig tree when he was going into Jerusalem during Passion Week, they came back; the cursed tree had shriveled up. So that is one type of speech act that we haven't talked about, but it's sometimes relevant in the Bible. So again, what are we looking at? What was said? What was meant? What was the desired response? And how did the people respond? And as we said, the biblical culture tended to be high context, and many languages where we translate the Bible today are also high context.

Okay, speech acts. The utterance often matches what's said. So, you have this one, the Johnsons are coming for dinner this weekend, it's a straight-up statement, and it's understood as a straight-up statement.

When you have, when are the Johnsons coming for dinner? That is a straight-up question; it's not a rebuke or anything. It could be what precursor of the second one, when are the Johnsons coming for dinner? The Johnsons are coming for dinner this weekend. Please, let's have the Johnsons over for dinner sometime.

Maybe the husband asks the wife or the wife asks the husband, and that is a polite request. Then you have a straight up command, don't leave the dishes on the table, that's actually telling them to do something, and it's not ambiguous at all. All right,

but the problem comes when there's a mismatch between what is said and what is meant, and we say that there's skewing between the intent and the utterance.

It means it's not lined up, and it doesn't correlate. All right, so again, we had the utterance, we're out of milk, it was a statement and looked like it was for information, but it was actually a polite request. And then we also have another one, a rhetorical question.

Here's the utterance: Mom walked into the kitchen, little Tommy was sitting on the floor, stuffing cookies into his face from the cookie jar crumbs were everywhere, and Mom said what? What are you doing? Now, here's what Tommy doesn't say. Duh, I'm sitting here eating cookies, Mom, can't you tell? Why? Because she's rebuking him. Okay, so it was a rebuke, and she's scolding him.

So, what's the upshot of all this? We need to check do they match? If they don't match, in other words, if they're skewed, we need to determine these things so that we can figure out what the utterance means before we translate. All right, for example, from the Bible, here's that passage from the Galatians I've been talking about, and just listen to it and figure out the way that Paul is using language. Oh, Galatians, who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

Let me ask you only this, did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, are you now being perfected in the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain, if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Just as Abraham believed in God, and it was counted to him as righteousness, know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, in you shall all nations of the earth be blessed. So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

It's just loaded with everything we've been talking about, about speech acts and intentions and what he wants and what he doesn't want. So, why do we study speech acts? It is a framework for understanding the interpretation of utterances, and that's the point. Okay, moving on, we want to talk about relevance and communication, and this is from Brown.

Brown says that communication is largely an inferential process. What does that mean? Speakers imply something. It's often cryptic, and they don't say it openly.

The listener infers or tries to figure out what is said. Some people equate implying and inferring. Actually, they're opposites.

It's like give and take. I give, you take. They are not synonymous.

So, the listener needs to try to figure out what is said. Okay. Contextual information is absolutely essential for understanding the meaning, and in her book, Brown uses this example.

One time, she came home in the afternoon. Her daughter came home from school, and the daughter was there for a few minutes, and then the daughter said, hey, Mom, can I watch TV? And Mrs. Brown said, have you finished your homework? So, think about what Mrs. Brown meant by her question. So, what was the daughter asking for? She was asking for permission to watch television, right? What did Mrs. Brown mean when she said, have you finished your homework? So, if the answer is, have you finished your homework, is that a real question, or is that some kind of other question? It's probably a real question.

Have you finished your homework? Yes, I have. Then, yes, you can watch TV. Have you finished your homework? No, not yet.

Do your homework first, and then you can watch TV. But the daughter knew the answer as soon as mom said that question, right? So, that was an actual conversation she had with her daughter, which she gave an example of in the book. Okay.

Here's another one. The guy goes up to this girl that he likes, and he says, what are you doing Friday night? And the girl says I'm busy. The guy was shot down immediately.

Okay, what was he saying when he said, what are you doing Friday night? He's saying, I want to take you out on a date. More than that, he's saying, I like you, and I want to pursue a relationship with you. All of that is couched in that question, and maybe even more.

Okay, what was she saying when she said, I'm busy? I don't want to go out with you. I don't like you. I don't want a relationship with you.

We're going to nip this in the bud, and we're not going to get this off the ground. Okay, cryptic language. Great.

So, let's talk about communication and relevance. And, again, it's very similar to what we've been talking about, about speech acts. There's some kind of shared knowledge going on.

For example, my neighbor is a big fan, and he loves the Cowboys. He has a Cowboy flag that hangs outside of his house every game day during football season. The guy

just loves the Cowboys. And one time, he said to me, hey, will the Cowboys do better this year? So, he's assuming that I know who the Cowboys are.

And if you're speaking to a person from another country, what are you assuming that they know? Well, you have to, first of all, understand who the Cowboys are, right? Actually, there is at least one college team, Oklahoma State Cowboys. So, you need to know that this is a professional football team. It helps to know a little bit about the fact that we have professional level and college level, maybe high school level.

It depends on how much you really need to know, but the fact that there's a professional team and they play football, American football. Speakers usually say something because they think they have some reason for saying this. And so, what is this person's reason for saying this to me? Maybe he likes the Cowboys.

He likes talking about them. Maybe he wants to make a connection with me. And he just enjoys all things Cowboy.

So, I try to engage him when I see him, and we lament when the Cowboys lose. I'm not a Cowboys fan, but he is, so you know. All right.

So, shared knowledge is there. The person has a reason for saying what they say, and they also think that they have something important to say, that they have something of value to say. If you're not from that culture, if you're not from that situation, or if they say things that are unexpected to you, you don't always get what they mean.

So, you deem it not very important or not relevant. Okay. So, one time, this one young man, an American young man, was in Japan, and he was traveling around Tokyo with his Japanese friend from Tokyo, and they were traveling on the train, and the American young man was looking around, and as he was looking around, he's making eye contact with people, and his friend said in English to him, it's good to look at your feet, or maybe the signs.

American guy goes, okay. So, Japanese guy, shared knowledge, reason for saying it, something important. The American guy, okay, great, and he started looking around, and he's making eye contact with people, and the Japanese guy said it again a second time.

Yeah, it's really, really a good thing to look at your feet. He looked under his feet, okay, and he continued to do that until the guy finally had to say in English that it's not polite to look people in the eye. It's offensive to them.

So, you need to not look at people in the eye, and what we do is look at our feet. All of a sudden, the lights come on. He didn't have that shared knowledge.

He didn't know the culture. He didn't know the rules. So, I was talking to a student at Biola once, and he asked me this question.

So, what kind of music is on your playlist? What did he assume that he and I knew? So, just imagine what a person needs to know in order to make sense of this question. Number one, what's a playlist, right? Number two, what do you play this playlist on? A playlist of what? A playlist of songs. It's a music playlist, usually, right? And what do you listen to this on? Now, it's on your phone, but before it was on some other electronic device, right? And what else did he assume? He assumed that I had a playlist, and so I had to tell him, yeah, actually, I don't have a playlist. I don't listen to music on my phone.

I knew what it was. I knew what he meant. He assumed that there was shared knowledge, and there wasn't, or there was at least shared experience.

Knowledge was there, but the experience was not. So, if he knew that I didn't even do that, he would have never asked the question, but he was trying to make a connection with me and just kind of like, yeah, well, so he could have said this. What kind of music do you like to listen to? That was really the intent of his question, and so then he asked me that.

So, what do you listen to? Oh, I like this, and I like this, and I like that. So, I told him, you know, I listen on my laptop or whatever. So, communication and relevance.

So, the listener always has to think, why is this person saying this to me? And again, it's in this immediate context, right? It could be something related that's not immediate around you, but often, it has to relate to the thing that's around you right then, like the guy on the train. And then they try to guess the speakers, not only why, what is the intentions, why is this important to me? Why is this relevant to me at all? Why should I listen to this? What will I gain from this? There's the story of the young man, our little boy, who comes to his mom and says, Mom, what time is it? She says, I don't know, go ask your father. And the little boy said, I don't want to know that much, because then he's stuck there listening to dad, and dad's going to make this long explanation of something, and the kid's like dad, please.

And you tune out. Okay, fine. All right.

So, how much effort does it take for the person to figure out what the person means? If it's hard to figure out what they're trying to say, you ever talk to somebody and you just like, they're droning on, and you have no idea what they're on about? And you're going, man, I'm trying to figure out what they're saying, but I'm just not getting it. Or if you read something, and you just read it, and you go, man, this is so dense, I can't figure out what's being said. So, then the person asks themselves, is it really worth the effort to listen? And these are normal feelings that people have.

This is normal human communication. This isn't any specific special case. All right.

Is it worth the effort to listen? If it's too much effort, they can't make sense out of it. There's implied information they don't understand. The topic is interesting.

Hopefully you're still with me by now. And hopefully all this is interesting to you. Is the speaker unclear? What do people do? They stop listening.

They tune you out. Or if they are listening, they're listening for that nugget, that piece that they can take away. And once they get the takeaway, they stop processing.

Sometimes this happens when your pastor is speaking on Sunday morning, and he's preaching a sermon, and he makes his point, and then he gives two or three illustrations. You heard the point, and then during the illustrations, your mind starts to wander, and maybe you go, well, maybe I'll look up this verse on my phone. Then, you look up the verse on your phone.

Oh, there's a message. Next thing you know, you are lost. And then you come back, and you try to listen to the pastor, and you're like, gosh, I'm lost.

I have no idea where he is in his message. Let me check the outline in the bulletin. All right.

If you get what you need, you stop listening. People tend to be like that. So, how does it relate to interpersonal communication? Again, language is inferential.

The shared context is needed. The speaker assumes the context. It's really important information.

And what's said doesn't always match what's meant. Okay. So our translation paradigm, when we talk about relevance in the Bible, our translation paradigm begins with the understanding that the author has something important that they want to say.

Why else would they be writing it? We assume that they had a reason behind why they wanted to say it, that they had a reason for this message. We assume that the people are there, and he wants to make himself understood. You don't intentionally speak in a vague and confusing way, except my daughter in high school once read this dystopian novel.

It was written by a guy who intentionally worked at writing something that made no sense whatsoever. And she's like, why do I have to read this? But usually, people

want to be understood. And we assume that he used language that he hoped would be understood.

Okay. We also believe that we can do our level best to figure out what the author meant, and that they were trying to do this. And we can do this by studying.

And we said we try to understand the context. What's the situation that they're in? What possible information is shared between the two parties? What the author actually said and actually did not say. Like Jesus' mother, they're out of wine.

And Jesus says, Mom. What do they mean in that context, and how is the cultural understanding, is relevant to the discussion of what they understood and what they shared? Okay. So, implications for translation.

First of all, will the people who are receiving this translation be able to make sense of this text? Will they be able to know the explicit information and how that's been used? Will they be able to figure out what's been left out? Sometimes yes, and sometimes no. So then that begs the question on our side: Do we need to supply some of this implied information if it's going to help the people who are reading it understand it? We need to ask that question. I'm not saying we change the text.

I'm saying, do we need to supply information? If the answer is yes to both of these questions, then we're good. Like the situation with Jesus and his mother. We're not going to add anything to that text.

We're not going to take anything away or anything. So that's the question: will they get it? How can we make this message relevant to them so that they will want to read this passage? You ever had a friend who was not a Christian, and you're trying to encourage them to consider the gospel, and you encourage them to read the Bible, or you give them a tract with Bible stuff in it, and they're like, I don't really want to read it. Or they take it, and they're polite, and then you ask them later, well no, I haven't had a chance yet.

I haven't had a chance yet. How can we make the text, and I'm not saying spruce it up by doing something outside of that we shouldn't do, but is the communication relevant to them? Is it something that's important to their lives? And remember, if it is too hard, what will they do? They will stop reading it. King James Version was probably the greatest book that was ever written, in my opinion, apart from the Bible itself and the original languages.

The KJV is the most printed book in human history and the most translated book in human history. But today, if you try to read it, it's too hard, and you get to be about three or four sentences in, and you just can't read it. It's too hard.

The same thing happens when people read a literal translation. It ends up being too hard. It's too difficult to figure it out.

They have no connection with it. They can't figure out why this is important. And so they do what? They stop reading it.

So, our translations need to be relevant. So, how do we provide this information to them? And it could be in footnotes or some other way. How do we provide this information that helps fill the gap or gaps in the communication between the people in the biblical culture and the people in the target culture, and what the target culture people know that maybe they don't know that was in the Bible? So, we keep this concept or this topic of relevance and the way that people talk in mind every step of the way as we translate.

Thank you.

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