

Dr. George Payton, Bible Translation, Session 14, Challenges in Translation and Communications, Linguistic Issues, Part 3, More Figures of Speech

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This is Dr. George Payton and his teaching on Bible translation. This is session 14, Challenges in Translation and Communication Linguistic Issues Part 3, More Figures of Speech.

We're continuing with our discussion about figurative language, and we want to look at some more figurative language, some more figures of speech that we find in the Bible, and one of them is personification. Personification is when an inanimate object is said to do things that people do, and inanimate objects don't really act on their own.

The problem is that not all languages can do that. Not all languages have that type of figure that they can use, especially when these figures use abstract nouns. Some cultures don't have abstract nouns, so you have a figure that uses abstract nouns doing something, and it is a total disconnect for these people. So, you have to think of another way to communicate the sense of what is being communicated.

So, we have to determine the meaning, break it down, understand it in its cultural context, and then try to respect, express, and reflect what it says without using that figure. So, Fear came on all those living around them. This is what happened after John the Baptist was born, and the people were amazed that this 90-year-old woman, or whatever she was, had this baby, and the baby was healthy.

And so, fear came on all those living around them. That's a verse in the book of Luke. So, what do you say when you see that? All the people around them became afraid, perhaps.

Your faith has made you well. Jesus used that a number of times. He used that for the woman with the issue of blood.

And again, you have the word your faith. What do you do when you don't have that kind of word? Like faith is an abstract noun. It's not a tangible, concrete thing.

So, what did she do? She believed. Because you believed, you were healed. Or even taking it the further step, because you believed in me, you were healed.

So, we can't always do this straight-over thing, particularly when we have these constraints from the language. All right, metonymy and synecdoche are other things

that we're going to look at. Metonymy is used when one object is used to refer to something else rather than referring to itself.

And synecdoche is a part-whole relationship. Now these two words are kind of hard to split apart. When is something a synecdoche? When is something a metonymy? And that's really hard.

So, in some ways, we just treat it as one category and say this is a figure of speech. And in that figure of speech, there's some kind of reference to something by calling it something else. Okay.

A metonymy usually stays within a particular general domain or frame. The same is true of a synecdoche.

Remember that metaphors go across two different forms. Two radically different things are being compared. Here, you've got something within at least the same category referring to something else in that category.

For example, using a metaphor, his room is a pigsty, which is a human domicile. A pigsty is for livestock.

And those are two different frames of reference that a metaphor is connecting. Okay, what about metonymy? We have things like this. I like reading Shakespeare.

Sorry, Shakespeare is a person that died so many centuries ago. So, Shakespeare stands for what? The writings of Shakespeare or the books of Shakespeare. Dallas won today.

Dallas is the team that you're talking about, whether it's one sport or another. Do you want to go get a cup? So, a cup represents the drink that's in it. So, you know, okay, we're going to go get a cup of coffee.

The British, they say the term cuppa. Let's go for a cuppa. And that's cup of, right? And in Britain that usually means tea.

Right? So, when they say come over for a cuppa, you know that you're going to get a cup of tea. I'm parked over by the library. Sorry, I'm standing right here talking to you, and I am not over by the library.

What's over by the library? My car. So, I and my car. Again, this is my car, right? So that's another thing.

The White House announced today. White House then stands for probably the president. The president announced today, but they say the White House and we all know that.

Here's a nice, interesting saying: if pro is the opposite of con, what is the opposite of progress? Congress. And so, we say Congress is doing the craziest things these days. Well, Congress is a group of people.

So, the people are doing crazy things collectively, but we use the word Congress. And so that is one of these figures. Okay, examples of synecdoche.

He asked for her hand in marriage. So, I proposed to my wife. She said yes.

She said we need to go talk to my parents. So, we went down to her house and we are having dinner together and sitting in the living room and talking. And then Dad says, so tell us why you're here.

And I said I'm here to ask for the hand of your daughter in marriage. And without skipping a beat, good old dad joke, do you want the rest of her, too? Her hand represents her. So that's a synecdoche.

It's a part-whole relationship or a whole thing representing some part of it. Nice wheels, which means what? Nice car. Are you saying just the wheels are nice, and the rest of it's not nice? No, you're saying the whole thing is nice, but you refer to it as wheels.

Hey, I'm going out to buy some new wheels. Maybe I'm buying a new car. You have my heart.

Again, heart means the whole person. And so sometimes it's hard to determine whether it's metonymy or synecdoche. It's more important to discern that it's figurative and that it should not be taken literally.

And to figure out what is the comparison or what is the association or the relationship between these two things. Okay. So the first thing that we do is to realize that we have a figure.

Sometimes it's not obvious, but we have to realize, oh, there's a there's a hidden thing here that we need to consider and possibly break down. So, I have come not to bring peace but a sword. These are the words of Jesus.

He didn't come to bring peace. In other words, he didn't come to make everyone at peace with one another. This is one of those hard things of Jesus, but the sword represents what? Fighting, battle, conflict, perhaps bodily injury.

We don't know. But the sword is that word that represents these other things. And so that's the same general domain of warfare.

So, we would say that that is a metonymy of warfare. God will give him the throne of his father, David. Okay.

We'll talk about that in a second. The hand of the Lord was with them. The hand of the Lord is on you.

The first one is talking about disciples. The second one was when Ananias came and talked to Paul. So, what do we do when we translate it? Well, we figured it out that it is one.

Now, what do we do? Once the figure has been identified, determine what it stands for. And so, as we said, I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. The sword is fighting, warfare, and conflict.

What about the next one? God will give him the throne of his father David. What does the throne represent? Being a king, ruling, the authority that David had. Then, this is actually speaking of Jesus and Luke, that he will come to be a ruler like David was a ruler.

And over the people of Israel. The hand of the Lord is the figure of the speech. This whole thing is also an idiom.

So, we have combined figures all blended together. The hand of the Lord was with them. What does that mean? If you look there, there was some type of blessing.

God's presence was with them. God was helping them. In the case of Paul, the hand of the Lord is upon you or is on you.

And the rest of that story is that you're going to be blind for three days. And then someone's going to come and rescue you, and you're going to see again. So that's what? What's happening? So, we have, again, to remember what we said; one little word can change the whole meaning of the expression.

Hand of the Lord with versus hand of the Lord on. Is it always this way? We would do more research to figure out. Is that a pattern that we can tell? But what does the hand of the Lord on you bring to mind? And again, remember, these are word pictures that bring a situation in mind.

They bring this frame of reference to our mind, even though it's not written down. Punishment. God is going to punish you.

The hand of the Lord was heavy on them in some places. So now we've, number one, figured out what it is. It's a figure.

Number two, we've identified what the meaning is behind the figure. Now the question is, how do we say that? Because many languages, if you say the hand of the Lord, do they even have that idea or concept or expression? If not, then we have to do something in order to make it communicate. So, then we try to figure out how to say it.

We translate it using a figure in the most natural way in the target language. So, if we can retain this figure and say the hand of the Lord or give him his father's throne, then we can retain it if it's clearly understood. Even if it's not the most natural way to say it if it's an acceptable way to say it and the people go, yes, we get it, and it doesn't sound weird, or it doesn't sound too foreign, then it might be okay.

But if not, then we need to restate it. And usually, it's restating it in a more straightforward way without using a figure of speech. So God will give him the throne of his father, David.

God will make him rule over Israel like David ruled or like his father David ruled. Acts 11:21, the hand of the Lord was with them, the Lord was with them, the Lord was blessing them, the Lord was giving them success, something of that sort. Again, it depends on the target language, but at least we're looking at different options.

And again, we choose the one out of the toolbox that most fits the thing that we're working on. Okay, the hand of the Lord is on you. The Lord is punishing you. Did Paul understand the Lord was punishing him? Yes.

But again, the word hand on something is not always clear even to us. So, if you read that the hand of the Lord is on you, just by itself, you go, I don't know what's going on. You read the whole context, you go, okay.

Yeah, I get it that God is somehow punishing them. Okay, so translating metonymy and synecdoche in Genesis 14. And I'd like us to camp here for a bit.

Okay, so this situation starts in verse 1 and says, and it came about in the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar, Arioch, king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomar, king of Elam, and Tidal, king of Goiim. They made war against Bera, king of Sodom, and with Birsha, king of Gomorrah, Shinab, king of Admah, and Shemeber, king of Zeboiim, and Bela, the king of Zoar. And these came as allies to the valley of Siddim that is the Salt Sea, otherwise known as the Dead Sea.

So, you've got these five kings and these four kings. Then, they give us a back story of what happened in between. And they were told that the five kings rebelled against Kedorlaomar, who was the head king.

After being subjugated for a number of years, they said, no, we're going to not do that anymore, and then they rebelled. So, the four kings were mentioned first, marched over to where this Salt Sea is, and on their way they conquered these people, and these people, and these people, and these people, and then we hear that they met at this Salt Sea. And the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, or Zoar, came out and they arrayed for battle against them in the valley of Siddim, Salt Sea, against Kedorlaomar, king of Elam, Tidal, king of Goiim, Amraphel, king of Shinar, Arioch, king of Ellasar.

Four kings against five. Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them, but the ones who survived fled to the hill country. Do we see metonymy slash synecdoche here? I hope so.

So, when it says four kings arrayed themselves in battle against five kings, who's fighting? The kings and their armies. And that's pretty clear if you read the whole passage going down, the kings and their armies, and they refer to the king as the king of Amphitryon, so it's a shorthand way of talking. And we don't need to repeat armies, armies, armies, armies, armies, armies.

We just say this king and that king, or these kings and those kings, and that's why it says in verse nine, four kings against five. So, this whole thing is one giant metaphor, or one giant figurative language using this, let's call it metonymy, okay? Great. Then in ten, now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and the Hebrew text literally says this, and they fell into them, and the remaining ones fled to the hills.

Okay? Question. Who fell into the tar pits? And who escaped? Can I ask, who fled? Let's start with that in verse ten. So, we're looking at verse ten.

Now the valley was full of tar pits; the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them. But the ones who survived fled to the hill country. Who fled? This is one of those cryptic things that the writer assumes the reader's going to pick it up.

It's obvious that armies are in battle here, and it's obvious that some of the armies defeated the other armies, and the ones who are defeated, what do they do? They run away. And as they're running away, right, so the whole thing is referring to king, king, meaning king, army, king plus army. The whole, all the way through.

How do we translate verse ten? The good news translation, the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah tried to run away from the battle. They fell into the pits. The other three kings escaped to the mountains.

They took the figure literally. And if you look at that and you say, well, it does say they, right, after it says kings. But it doesn't say kings in the Hebrew, in the Hebrew mindset.

King represents king plus army. Also, if you think of the scenario, you have a battleground, and you have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of soldiers fighting. So, who does that refer to? Does it refer only to the king of Sodom and Gomorrah? I don't think that that's the correct interpretation.

I don't think that that's correct exegesis. And I think it's taking a figure literally, and we what? Never take figures literally, please, okay? And it doesn't mention the other three kings. What does it say? They.

Again, this is cryptic. This is the way that Hebrew does it. But we see that there's a problem with that verse because it's too literal, and it only talks about five men.

But there's something more that illuminates our minds to the fact that this isn't correct. You look down later in the passage. The king of Sodom welcomes Abraham after Abraham rescues Lot and all the people from Sodom. And what does he do? He welcomes him and says, so glad you saved everyone.

How can I pay you, right? But if he fell into the tar pit, where did he come from? The idea is you fall into the tar pit and what? Die. Okay. Where did he come from if he fell and died in the tar pits? So, there's a disconnect there.

And so, there's a lot of issues here that we really struggle with, and we say, is this correct exegesis? And you say, well, let's go back to the Hebrew. Sorry, the Hebrew is the problem. This is why we're talking about all these figures of speech.

This is why we're talking about these linguistic things that challenge translators. NLT. Some fell into the tar pits while the rest escaped.

Okay, that's a little bit better. We can fill in the blanks. Some what? NIV.

Some of the men fell into them, and the rest fled to the hills. Is that acceptable? I think so. I think it gives the same kind of idea.

And we get the idea that men are soldiers. We don't need to say soldiers there. In fact, the Hebrews doesn't even say some.

It just says they. Some fell into them, and the rest fled, just like the other ones. And so, we get this idea that it's talking about a number, hundreds of men fighting, some of them escaping, and some of them dying in the pits.

Okay. So, sorry, we're moving on to metaphors. So, metonymy/synecdoche can we translate the sense behind the figure if the figure itself does not communicate well? And to be honest, this doesn't communicate well if we translate it literally from Hebrew.

If it did, we wouldn't have three or four, or five different interpretations. So, spoiler alert, note to self, when the versions disagree, there's a problem to be fixed. When the versions disagree, that means that there's an interpretation issue involved that you need to investigate.

There you go. Okay, I am moving on. Metaphors.

Well, it's a metaphor. Metaphor is an expression often found in literature. Sorry, we already had this.

Okay, I'm sorry. What I'd like to do now is stop this talk, and then I have another talk that we're going to go to. Okay.

So, that's our figurative language. Now, we're going to move on to another discussion, and that's going to be about how to translate key biblical terms or unknown ideas that are found in the Bible. Okay.

Thank you.

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