

Payton, Bible Translation, Session 9, Challenges in Translation, Cultural Issues, Part 1 Resources from Notebooklm

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Payton, Bible Translation, Session 9, Challenges in Translation, Cultural Issues, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Dr. George Payton's Bible translation course focuses on the challenges posed by cultural context in translating the Bible. **Payton emphasizes the importance of understanding the cultural background of both the biblical text and the target language to accurately convey meaning.** He illustrates this with examples showing how seemingly simple sentences carry culturally specific connotations, impacting interpretation and necessitating careful word choice in translation. **The lecture uses examples from the Gospels, specifically focusing on the concept of ritual purity in relation to leprosy, to highlight the complexities of translating culturally embedded ideas.** He argues that translators must consider not only explicit meanings but also implicit cultural knowledge and frames of reference to bridge communication gaps. The lecture concludes by suggesting solutions such as footnotes or glossaries to help readers understand culturally specific concepts.

2. 8 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Payton, Session 9, Challenges in Translation, Cultural Issues, Part 1 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Introductory Series → Bible Translation).



**Payton_BT_Session0
9.mp3**

3. Bible Translation: Session 9, Challenges in Translation, Cultural Issues, Part 1

Bible Translation: Cultural Challenges

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What are the two main categories of challenges in Bible translation, as discussed by Dr. Payton?
2. Explain the concept of "collocation" in the context of language and translation.
3. Using the example of the sentence "He bought a ring for his girlfriend," what does Dr. Payton illustrate about how people understand language?
4. According to Dr. Payton, why is shared cultural knowledge essential for communication?
5. What does the phrase "made up with" mean in the example given by Dr. Payton, and what cultural scenario does it evoke?
6. What does "made out like a bandit" mean, and why is this an example of an idiom?
7. In the context of the passage in Mark 1:40-45 about the leper, what are the four Swahili words for "clean," and what are their distinct connotations?
8. Why did the leper's request, "make me clean," refer to more than physical cleanliness?
9. Why did the woman with the hemorrhage in Mark 5:25-34 fear after she touched Jesus's cloak?
10. How can understanding cultural background help fill the gaps in understanding a biblical text according to Dr. Payton?

Answer Key

1. The two main categories of challenges in Bible translation are linguistic challenges and cultural challenges. Linguistic challenges involve issues within the languages themselves, while cultural challenges arise from differences in societal norms and practices.

2. Collocation refers to the words that occur together in the same sentence. Understanding collocations is crucial because the words that commonly accompany a specific word can influence its meaning.
3. The example illustrates that a simple sentence can evoke a wealth of cultural background, shared knowledge, and situational context. The phrase triggered an immediate mental image, and this understanding goes beyond the literal meaning of the words.
4. Shared cultural knowledge allows for efficient and abbreviated communication. It provides a common framework that enables people to understand each other through indirect language and assumptions.
5. "Made up with" means to reconcile or to come to peace after a conflict or disagreement, which is most likely in a romantic relationship and often infers the need for an apology and some sort of gesture.
6. "Made out like a bandit" means that someone was very successful or benefited greatly, particularly in an unexpected or effortless way. It's an idiom because its meaning cannot be derived from the individual words in the phrase.
7. The four Swahili words are *Safisha* (to clean a house), *Osha* (to wash with water, like dishes), *Fuwa* (to wash clothing), and *Takasa* (to purify). Each word has a distinct context in Swahili, and *Takasa* refers to ritual cleansing.
8. The leper's request referred to ritual purity, a concept deeply rooted in the culture of that time. Leprosy was considered not only a physical ailment but also a state of ritual uncleanness that excluded one from worshipping and participating in the community.
9. The woman feared because, according to cultural norms, her hemorrhage made her ritually unclean. By touching Jesus, she had transgressed social and religious laws and made herself and others around her ritually unclean.
10. Cultural background can provide missing context, allowing readers to grasp the implied meanings and intentions. It helps to explain cultural practices, unspoken rules, and the significance of certain actions or situations that are not explicitly stated in the text.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each of the following essay questions in a well-organized essay format.

1. How does understanding cultural context impact the interpretation of biblical passages, and what are the implications for Bible translation?
2. Discuss the concept of "cultural frames of reference," and use examples from the provided text to illustrate how these frames shape meaning and communication.
3. Analyze the challenges of translating idioms and culturally specific phrases in the Bible, and propose strategies for overcoming these challenges.
4. How does Dr. Payton's analysis of the leprosy narratives in the Gospels demonstrate the importance of understanding the ritual purity laws of the time?
5. Compare and contrast the importance of linguistic and cultural knowledge in accurately translating biblical texts for a cross-cultural audience.

Glossary

Collocation: The habitual juxtaposition of a particular word with other words within a sentence or phrase; the way words tend to occur together. **Context:** The circumstances, background, and setting of an event or statement; this includes the immediate situation, the cultural background, and the history or beliefs involved. **Cultural Frame of Reference:** The set of cultural values, beliefs, and knowledge that shape how individuals perceive and interpret experiences, situations, and communication. **Cryptic:** Having a meaning that is mysterious or obscure; something shortened or condensed in the way it is expressed. **Inferential:** Requiring the reader or listener to infer or deduce the full meaning from what is said; not stating everything explicitly. **Idiom:** A phrase or expression whose meaning cannot be understood from the ordinary meanings of the words in it; a phrase with a meaning different from the literal meanings of its parts. **Linguistic:** Relating to language or linguistics, involving words, grammar, and other aspects of how language functions. **Ritual Purity:** A state of ceremonial cleanliness or holiness that makes one fit to worship or participate in religious practices. Often involves specific behaviors and is dictated by religious law. **Semantic Frame of Reference:** The meaning frame of reference that is associated with a particular word, phrase, or event. **Takasa:** A Swahili word that means "to purify." In the context of the lesson, it refers to ritual cleansing or purification.

4. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. George Payton's lecture on cultural issues in Bible translation:

Briefing Document: Cultural Issues in Bible Translation (Session 9, Part 1)

Overview:

This lecture by Dr. George Payton focuses on the challenges of Bible translation, specifically those stemming from cultural differences between the original biblical contexts and the target cultures of translation. Payton emphasizes that accurate translation requires understanding not only the literal meaning of words but also the cultural context and implied meanings behind them. The lecture uses numerous examples from everyday life and the Bible to illustrate these points.

Key Themes and Concepts:

1. **Context is Crucial:** Payton stresses the importance of context, moving beyond simple word-for-word translation. He identifies three levels of context:
 - **Situational Context:** The specific circumstances of an event in the Bible (e.g., where was Jesus, who was he talking to).
 - **Cultural Context:** The broader culture, history, and beliefs of the biblical world.
 - **Textual Context:** The words within a sentence and how they relate to each other, including collocations (words that frequently occur together).
 - *"Everyone says, well, you need to understand the context. Well, what does context mean?"*
1. **Cultural Frames of Reference:** Our understanding of language is deeply embedded in cultural frames of reference. These are the mental pictures, scenarios, and background knowledge triggered by words and phrases. For example:
 - The phrase "He bought a ring for his girlfriend" immediately evokes the cultural scenario of a marriage proposal in many Western cultures.
 - *"From that simple sentence, he and ring and girlfriend popped in this picture in your mind and my mind, the guy is going to propose and it's a marriage proposal."*

1. **Language is Cryptic and Inferential:** Communication relies heavily on shared cultural knowledge. Language is often "cryptic" (shortened and condensed) and "inferential" (requiring listeners to fill in gaps based on their understanding). This implies that meaning is not always explicitly stated but rather implied.
 - *"This is part of the reason why we say that language is cryptic and inferential. Cryptic means it's shortened or condensed. By inferential, it means that the person needs to infer or figure out what was said..."*
 - *"So that shared knowledge, that shared encyclopedic cultural knowledge is what enables communication to happen, and we see the people in the Bible communicating in the same way."*
1. **The Power of Collocation:** The meaning of a word is heavily influenced by the other words that surround it (its collocations). Payton demonstrates this with the word "make," using examples like "Jane made up a shopping list," "John made up with Jane," "John made out like a bandit," and "John made out with Jane" to highlight the multiple meanings and cultural scenarios implied by these phrases.
 - *"So that little word out changes everything. That word out changes the whole meaning of the word make. And so make out is a separate unit apart from made up or make up."*
1. **Biblical Examples: Leprosy and Cleansing:** Payton uses the story of Jesus healing a leper (Mark 1:40-45) to illustrate how a lack of understanding of first-century Jewish culture can hinder translation. He emphasizes:
 - The concept of ritual purity is not prominent in many modern cultures but is central to understanding leprosy in the Bible.
 - The different Swahili words for "clean" (*Safisha*, *Osha*, *Fuwa*, and *Takasa*) show the challenge in selecting the right term that conveys both physical and ritual cleansing. *Takasa* is the correct translation because it carries the sense of ritual purification.
 - *"In English, we do not have this concept of ritual purity. In many cultures that I've dealt with... many of them have this concept of ritual purity and ritual impurity."*
 - Jesus touching the leper made the leper ritually pure because Jesus was holy, subverting the usual understanding that something unclean makes something else unclean, thus displaying his divine power.

- The leper needed to go to the priest to be officially declared clean to rejoin the community, highlighting the social and religious implications of leprosy.
- 1. **Biblical Examples: The Woman with Hemorrhage:** Payton uses the story of the woman with a hemorrhage (Mark 5:25-34) to demonstrate how cultural knowledge shapes our understanding of the text:
 - The woman's fear after touching Jesus stems from her awareness of breaking the cultural norms around ritual purity. She was considered unclean due to her hemorrhage and would have been prohibited from touching others.
 - She thought by simply touching Jesus' garment, she could be "cleaned" of her illness, revealing a belief that he had some kind of holy power.
- 1. **Translation Strategies:** Payton suggests a few strategies for dealing with cultural translation issues:
 - Choosing words that match the cultural context, as in the case of the Swahili translation of the leper story.
 - Using footnotes to explain culturally specific concepts where possible.
 - Creating glossaries to explain key terms and cultural background in greater detail.

Key Quotes from the Source:

- *"So, we're talking about these cultural frames of reference and if you look at the word, it's the meaning frame of reference or the semantic frame of reference that's surrounding this particular event."*
- *"What's wrong in the situation of translation is the way that they use the language in the Bible is not obvious to us because we are not from that culture and we are not from that language."*
- *"Understanding the culture can fill in the gaps for us."*

Implications for Bible Translation:

Dr. Payton's lecture underscores the need for translators to:

- Be acutely aware of their own cultural biases and assumptions.
- Conduct thorough research on the cultural contexts of both the source and target languages.
- Employ a holistic approach to translation, moving beyond literal word choices.

- Consider different translation strategies like footnotes and glossaries to fill the gaps that can not be translated by language alone.

Conclusion:

This lecture effectively conveys the complexities and importance of understanding cultural context in Bible translation. It emphasizes that accurate communication of the biblical message requires more than linguistic skill, it also requires a deep understanding of cultural frames, shared knowledge, and the implicit meaning embedded within language. This is crucial for ensuring that the translated text resonates with its intended audience and conveys the intended meaning of the original text.

5. FAQs on Payton, Bible Translation, Session 9, Challenges in Translation, Cultural Issues, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Cultural Considerations in Bible Translation

- What are the two main categories of challenges encountered when translating the Bible into other languages?** The primary challenges in Bible translation fall into two main categories: linguistic challenges and cultural challenges. Linguistic challenges involve the differences in grammar, vocabulary, and structure between the original biblical languages and the target languages. Cultural challenges arise from the different ways of thinking, values, practices, and beliefs that exist between cultures and are crucial for conveying the true meaning of the text.
- Why is understanding cultural context so crucial in Bible translation?** Understanding cultural context is essential because the Bible is written within specific cultural and historical settings. These settings influence the meaning and interpretation of the text, and therefore translating literally may not convey the intended message to people from other cultures. For example, actions, sayings, and events in the Bible often reference cultural practices, social structures, and religious beliefs of that time, and an understanding of these is critical for accurate translation and interpretation.
- How do cultural frames of reference impact the interpretation of seemingly simple sentences?** Cultural frames of reference are the underlying assumptions and shared knowledge that people within a culture use to interpret the world around them. These frames are triggered by words and phrases and bring to mind specific scenarios and understandings. For example, the sentence "He bought a ring for his girlfriend" might immediately trigger the image of an engagement proposal within an American cultural context, an understanding that isn't explicitly stated in the sentence itself but is inferred based on shared cultural knowledge. These frames, or backgrounds, are not always universal, and can vary widely between cultures.
- What does it mean to say that language is "cryptic and inferential" and how does this relate to Bible translation?** When we say language is cryptic, we mean that it is often shortened or condensed, leaving out much detail. Language is inferential because listeners or readers are expected to fill in the gaps based on shared understanding and prior knowledge. This is important in Bible translation

because the biblical writers often left things unsaid, assuming that their readers within their culture understood the implied meanings and context. Translators must uncover these implied meanings and then find ways to convey those meanings in another language in a natural and understandable way.

- **Why are idioms and phrases challenging to translate, and how do translators handle them?** Idioms and set phrases are challenging to translate because their meaning is not derived from the individual words. They operate as a single unit with a unique meaning. Translators can't simply translate them word-for-word. Instead, they must find a phrase or idiom in the target language that conveys the same meaning, even if the specific words are different. If there isn't a clear equivalent, translators may have to choose between a more literal, potentially awkward translation that doesn't convey the sense of an idiom or a more interpretive translation that is more meaningful to the reader.
- **How did the understanding of Jewish concepts of ritual purity affect the Swahili translation of the healing of the leper in Mark 1?** In Mark 1, a man with leprosy asks Jesus to make him "clean." Understanding the Jewish concept of ritual purity was critical in choosing the correct Swahili word. Instead of using a word that simply meant "to wash" or "to be free of dirt," the Swahili translators chose the word *takasa*, which specifically means "to purify ritually." This word communicates not only physical healing but also the restoration of the man to religious and social acceptance, and reflects the cultural context of the passage more accurately.
- **In the story of the woman with a hemorrhage in Mark 5, why was she afraid after she touched Jesus's garment?** The woman with the hemorrhage was afraid after touching Jesus because she understood that according to her culture, her condition made her ritually unclean. By coming into physical contact with Jesus, who was considered clean, she was seen as having made not only him unclean but also potentially infecting other people in the crowd. Her fear stemmed from the awareness that she had broken social and religious customs, likely expecting to be punished for her actions.
- **Besides choosing the correct words, what are other ways that translators can help bridge cultural gaps?** Besides choosing the correct words, translators can bridge cultural gaps by adding footnotes that provide contextual explanations. They can also add glossaries to provide detailed information about customs and other culturally-specific topics or provide culturally equivalent scenarios or similes that relate a biblical text to the readers own understanding of the world around

them. These tools help the reader understand the cultural context and accurately interpret the meaning and intent of the text.