

Payton, Bible Translation, Session 10, Challenges in Translation, Cultural Issues, Part 2 Resources from Notebooklm

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

1. Abstract of Payton, Bible Translation, Session 10, Challenges in Translation, Cultural Issues, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This excerpt from a Bible translation lecture by Dr. George Payton discusses the challenges of translating biblical texts accurately while considering cultural context. Payton uses examples from Genesis and Ruth to illustrate how cultural norms and word usage in the source language (Hebrew) differ significantly from modern English, impacting the best translation choices. He highlights the complexities of translating words like "hate" and "redeemer," emphasizing the need to understand the original cultural context to convey the intended meaning accurately. The lecture underscores the translator's crucial role in bridging the gap between ancient cultures and contemporary readers. Finally, Payton emphasizes the importance of providing additional information, through footnotes or introductions, to clarify cultural nuances for readers unfamiliar with the source text's historical context.

2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Payton, Session 10, Challenges in Translation, Cultural Issues, Part 2 – 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_Session1
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3. Bible Translation: Session 10, Challenges in Translation, Cultural Issues, Part 2

Bible Translation: Cultural Challenges Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 complete sentences.

1. According to Dr. Payton, what are the first two steps in the translation process?
2. What was the initial translation of "unloved" into Orma, and why did the translator use that word?
3. How does the Orma language's lack of nuance in expressing affection affect translation of the text in Genesis 29?
4. What was the cultural context surrounding Naomi's statement to her daughters-in-law in Ruth chapter 1?
5. Explain the concept of Levirate marriage and its significance in ancient Israelite society.
6. What is the significance of the firstborn son in a Levirate marriage scenario according to Deuteronomy 25?
7. What are three ways the term "goel" or redeemer is used in the Old Testament?
8. Why was Boaz considered a potential "redeemer" for Naomi and Ruth?
9. Why did the closer relative refuse to redeem Naomi's land and marry Ruth?
10. In the context of Ruth, how does Dr. Payton suggest the term "hesed" might be better translated, and why?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The first step of translation is breaking down the meaning of the text. The second step is communicating that meaning into the target language.
2. The initial translation of "unloved" into Orma was "hated." The translator used this term because the Orma language doesn't have a distinction between liking and loving or disliking and hating; they only had those two options.

3. The lack of nuance in Orma forces a more stark contrast that is not present in the original Hebrew, leading to the potential for misunderstanding the emotional state of Leah. It risks portraying the situation as more severe than it may have been intended.
4. Naomi's statement to her daughters-in-law is in the context of Levirate marriage, where the brother of a deceased husband marries the widow to continue the family line and provide for her. This custom, absent from many modern cultures, is why her response might be confusing.
5. Levirate marriage is a custom where a man marries his deceased brother's widow to ensure the continuation of the family name and to provide support for the widow. This custom was vital in a culture where women relied on men for provision.
6. In a Levirate marriage, the first son born is legally considered the son of the deceased husband and inherits his name and possessions. This system aimed to preserve the lineage and property of the deceased.
7. The term "goel" or redeemer is used to describe a relative who buys back family land that has been sold, pays off a family member's debt, or rescues a relative from slavery. These examples demonstrate a concept of familial responsibility to care for and protect relatives.
8. Boaz was a potential "redeemer" for Naomi and Ruth because he was a relative who could buy back their land, thus restoring their family's prosperity, as well as marry Ruth, and thus provide stability and security for both women.
9. The closer relative refused to redeem Naomi's land and marry Ruth because he feared it would jeopardize the inheritance of his own sons. Marrying Ruth would mean any sons from that union would inherit her deceased husband's land, potentially diminishing his own family's share.
10. Dr. Payton suggests that "hesed" might be better translated as "loyalty" or "faithfulness" in the context of Ruth, because these terms more accurately capture the depth of commitment and responsibility Ruth showed toward Naomi, and also captures her loyalty to her deceased husband's lineage.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each of the following essay questions in a well-organized essay format, using supporting details from the text.

1. Discuss the challenges of translating emotional nuances, using the example of the word “unloved” in Genesis 29. How do cultural and linguistic differences impact the translation process?
2. Explain the cultural significance of Levirate marriage, as discussed in the context of the book of Ruth. How does this custom clarify Naomi’s concerns in Ruth 1, and why is it important for a modern reader to be aware of such traditions?
3. Analyze the role of the “goel” (redeemer) in the book of Ruth. Discuss the various responsibilities associated with this role, and how Boaz fulfills them.
4. Examine the complexities of translating the term “hesed” in the book of Ruth. How does the context of Ruth’s actions and Boaz’s response help to determine the most appropriate word choice, and what are the implications for a modern interpretation?
5. Compare and contrast the different cultural issues discussed in the Orma language example in Genesis 29 and the Levirate Marriage and “goel” examples in the book of Ruth. What common threads can be identified, and how do these examples emphasize the importance of cultural context in accurate translation?

Glossary of Key Terms

Cultural Context: The social, historical, and environmental circumstances that shape the meaning of a word, phrase, or situation within a specific culture.

Goel (Redeemer): A male relative in ancient Israel who had responsibilities to buy back land, pay off debts, or rescue relatives from slavery.

Hesed: A Hebrew term that can be translated in various ways depending on context, such as kindness, graciousness, loyalty, or faithfulness.

Levirate Marriage: A custom in ancient Israel where a man marries his deceased brother's widow, primarily to ensure the continuation of the family line and provide for the widow.

Orma: A language spoken in Africa.

Right of First Refusal (ROFR): A legal term that gives a person the first opportunity to purchase or acquire something before anyone else.

Target Text: The translated text in the receiving language.

Translation: The process of transferring the meaning of a text from one language (source language) to another language (target language).

Worldview: The fundamental cognitive orientation of a person or society, encompassing the totality of their knowledge, values, beliefs, and understanding of the world.

4. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Payton BT_EN_Session10.pdf":

Briefing Document: Cultural Challenges in Bible Translation

Source: Excerpts from "Payton BT_EN_Session10.pdf" - Dr. George Payton, Bible Translation, Session 10, Challenges in Translation, Cultural Issues, Part 2

Date: Created Oct 25 2024

Introduction:

This document summarizes Dr. George Payton's lecture on the challenges of Bible translation, specifically focusing on cultural issues and their impact on accurately conveying the meaning of the original text. The session emphasizes that effective translation involves more than simply replacing words; it requires a deep understanding of the source culture, its worldview, and its unique customs. The lecture uses examples from Genesis and Ruth to illustrate the complexities involved.

Main Themes & Key Ideas:

1. The Importance of Contextual Understanding:

- **Multi-layered Context:** Translation requires understanding the context at multiple levels:
 - The immediate situation and people involved
 - The broader cultural setting
 - The text itself: words, sentences, paragraphs
- **Worldview & Word Usage:** Cultural concepts, worldviews, and the nuances of word usage all contribute to meaning. Translators must analyze how words are understood within their original context. "We need to understand the cultural concepts, the worldview, and word usage; all of those things help us to break down the meaning of the text."
- **Breaking Down Meaning:** The first step in translation is to carefully break down the meaning of the text. The second step is communicating that meaning in the target language. "So, step one of translation is breaking down the meaning. Step two of the translation is how to communicate that into this other language."

1. Challenges with Direct Word-for-Word Translation:

- **Limited Vocabulary:** Languages may not have direct equivalents for certain words or concepts, especially when dealing with emotional or relational terms.
- **"Love" vs. "Hate" in Orma:** The Orma language doesn't have the same spectrum of feeling as English (like/dislike, love/hate). They used the word "hate" when the original text said "unloved," highlighting the challenge of cultural interpretation. The cultural understanding of love/hate was that if someone doesn't like you, they will say that person hates you."
- **Hebrew Nuance:** The Hebrew concept of "hated" in the context of God's love for Jacob and "hate" for Esau is not literal hate but a comparative preference. This requires careful explanation to avoid a misunderstanding of God's character.
- "The word was hated. That's their cultural concept. That's their mindset and their worldview... And so, if someone doesn't like you, you'll say, that person hates me."

1. The Significance of Cultural Practices (Levirate Marriage):

- **Levirate Marriage Explained:** The practice in ancient Israel where a man is obligated to marry his deceased brother's widow to ensure the family's continuation.
- It is mentioned in Deuteronomy 25:5-9, that if a woman dies, the brother of her deceased husband will marry her.
- This custom is not merely about providing for the widow; it's about preserving the deceased's family line and inheritance. "One thing, she belongs to that family and she deserves to stay within that family. Another thing is, she needs someone to provide and care for her."
- **Purpose:** The first son born to the widow and the brother is considered the son of the deceased brother, inheriting his name and possessions. "The first son that is born is counted as the son of the deceased husband... He takes the father's name and any possessions that the father has belong to that boy."
- **Judah and Tamar:** The story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 serves as the only biblical example of Levirate Marriage in the Old Testament, which can be used to explain the custom of Levirate marriage.

- **Naomi's Dilemma in Ruth:** Naomi's statements to Ruth about her not having sons highlights the importance of understanding this cultural practice to make sense of her words. She's referring to the Levirate marriage custom and the fact that she has no more sons to continue the line.
- "Return my daughters, why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may be your husbands?"

1. The "Go'el" (Redeemer) Concept:

- **Multiple Dimensions of Redemption:** The Hebrew word "go'el" carries multiple meanings beyond simple "redeemer." These meanings include:
 - Buying back land that was sold due to poverty
 - Paying debts to free a relative
 - Rescuing a relative from slavery
 - Figurative rescue from a bad situation. "You're restoring them out of this bad situation into a good situation."
- **Boaz as Go'el:** Boaz is portrayed as a potential "go'el" for Naomi and Ruth. He could redeem their land and offer them security. "Naomi is saying that we're poor people. Maybe this man would be one of the people who could possibly get us out of this situation and into a better situation— out of poverty into a comfortable life."
- **Closer Relative's Refusal:** The closer relative refuses to act as the go'el, fearing it would jeopardize his own inheritance by dividing his property between his sons and the son that Ruth could have. This highlights cultural practices that dictate the division of property. "And what he's probably talking about here is the things that my sons will inherit... it's going to ruin the things that my children will inherit."

1. The Significance of "Hesed":

- **Beyond Simple Kindness:** The Hebrew word "hesed" is often translated as "kindness" or "graciousness," but has deeper connotations including loyalty, faithfulness, and covenantal love.

- **Boaz's Recognition of Ruth's Hesed:** Boaz praises Ruth for her "hesed" towards Naomi, which is seen not only as kindness but also as loyalty and faithfulness to her mother-in-law. "Because I've heard about your hesed, what you did for Naomi."
- **Ruth's Return of Hesed:** Ruth asks for Boaz to spread his wings over her, which is a callback to Boaz talking about God's protection. "Spread your wings over me, for you are a kinsman redeemer."
- **Ruth's Second Act of Hesed:** Ruth's act of choosing to marry within the family instead of someone else is described as a greater act of "hesed". She could have married someone younger, richer, or more appealing, but she chose to stay loyal to her deceased husband's family. This suggests that, in this context, *loyalty* might be a better translation of *hesed* than *kindness*.
- "This hesed is more than your first one... By agreeing to marry somebody in Boaz's family or in his clan, she's preserving the name of her husband."
- **Context-Specific Translation:** It emphasizes that the best translation of a word depends on its context and the various nuances that particular word can have, like faithfulness, or loyalty, in a given context. "So we always translate the sense as dictated by the context that it's in."

Implications for Bible Translation:

- **Avoid Over-Simplification:** Translators must avoid reducing complex cultural practices to their own cultural understanding.
- **Footnotes/Introductions:** Where direct translation is insufficient, footnotes or book introductions can provide cultural context to assist the modern reader. "If you read that in a book introduction, and your mind is heightened, and then you read the text, you go, I get it."
- **Faithfulness to Original Text:** Translators must try to remain as true as they can to the original text while also making sure that the original text is able to be understood in the translation.
- "And we can't change the text. We have to stay as close as we can to the text within reason."
- **Prioritize Accurate Meaning:** Translation should prioritize accurately conveying the intended meaning of the original text to the target audience.

Conclusion:

Dr. Payton's lecture underscores the inherent challenges of Bible translation when confronted with diverse cultures. Effective translation necessitates a careful study of the source language, culture, and worldview. It involves not just replacing words but seeking to understand the historical, social, and conceptual framework in which the texts were written. This approach allows for a more authentic and meaningful experience for the reader.

5. FAQs on Payton, Bible Translation, Session 10, Challenges in Translation, Cultural Issues, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions About Bible Translation and Cultural Context

- **Why is understanding the cultural context so crucial in Bible translation?**
- Understanding the cultural context is vital because language is deeply embedded in culture. Words and phrases carry specific meanings within a culture's worldview, values, and social practices. Without grasping the cultural nuances, translators risk misinterpreting the text and communicating unintended or even inaccurate ideas to the target audience. For example, the concept of "love" and "hate" in the Orma language and the cultural practice of levirate marriage in ancient Israel reveal how cultural context impacts both the meaning of the text, and how the text should be understood.
- **How does the Orma language's lack of distinction between "like/love" and "dislike/hate" impact the translation of Genesis 29:31?**
- The Orma language only has single words for "love" and "hate" without the nuanced gradations present in English. This means a word that might literally translate to "hated" in Orma might actually mean something closer to "disliked more" or "less loved" in the context of Jacob's feelings for Leah compared to Rachel. Translators must consider this cultural and linguistic limitation in order to accurately convey the intended meaning of a text to a new audience.
- **What is Levirate marriage and how does it help in understanding the book of Ruth?**
- Levirate marriage was a custom in ancient Israel where, if a man died without children, his brother was obligated to marry the widow. The purpose of this custom was to ensure the continuation of the deceased man's family line and provide for the widow. Understanding Levirate marriage is essential to interpret Naomi's actions and statements in Ruth 1, where she expresses concern for her daughters-in-law's future, recognizing her inability to provide them with husbands within her family. Similarly it is important to fully understand the role of the "redeemer" in the book of Ruth.
- **What is the role of a *goel* or "redeemer" in the Old Testament, and how does it apply to the book of Ruth?**

- A *goel*, or "redeemer," was a relative who had certain responsibilities towards family members, particularly those who were impoverished or in need of protection. These responsibilities included buying back land sold due to poverty, paying debts, and rescuing family members from slavery. In the book of Ruth, Boaz acts as a *goel* by acquiring Naomi's land and marrying Ruth to maintain her family's lineage. The concept of a *goel* illustrates the societal support systems in place for those who were in vulnerable positions, and helps the reader understand why the "redeemer" in the book of Ruth is so significant to its themes.
- **Why does the first potential redeemer refuse to marry Ruth, and what does his refusal mean for the story?**
- The first potential redeemer refused to marry Ruth because he was concerned that it would jeopardize his own inheritance (specifically the inheritance of his sons). According to the customs, if he married Ruth and she had a child, that child would be considered part of Ruth's deceased husband's lineage. The first son of the marriage, according to Levirate law, would become the heir of her former husband, not his. Thus he was concerned that his family land holdings would be further divided to make room for Ruth and any future children. This refusal allowed Boaz, who was next in line, to fulfill the role of the redeemer, and marry Ruth, which moves the story forward.
- **What does the Hebrew word *hesed* mean, and why is its translation so important in the book of Ruth?**
- *Hesed* is a rich Hebrew word that is often translated as "kindness," "graciousness," or "loyalty." In the context of the book of Ruth, where both Boaz and Ruth demonstrate this quality, it goes beyond mere niceness. It encompasses aspects of faithfulness, loyalty, covenantal responsibility, and steadfast love. While kindness is acceptable, loyalty may be a more accurate interpretation in certain contexts. Understanding *hesed* helps readers grasp the depth of Boaz's and Ruth's actions and their significance in the larger story of God's provision and faithfulness.

- **Why is it essential to look at the original languages when translating the Bible?**
- Returning to the original Hebrew and Greek languages is vital because it allows translators to delve deeper into the meaning of the text. It can help us to understand both the nuances of specific words and phrases, as well as specific cultural concepts. This practice also ensures that the translation accurately reflects the intended meaning of the original authors rather than relying solely on interpretations from later translations or cultural misunderstandings. The example of the word for "hate" in the Orma language demonstrates the value of looking back at the original languages and the way that helps contextualize the meaning of a text.
- **What is the relationship between cultural practices like Levirate marriage, *goel*, and *hesed* in the book of Ruth, and how do they contribute to its message?**
- These cultural practices are not isolated concepts in Ruth but interconnected elements that together contribute to the story's central themes. Levirate marriage establishes a legal and societal framework for continuing a family line and providing for a widow. The concept of *goel* highlights the responsibility of extended family to care for their own and redeem them from difficult circumstances. And *hesed* emphasizes the loyalty and commitment that underpins their relationships and actions. All of these demonstrate the importance of family, community, and covenant in ancient Israel, and how God works within cultural contexts to accomplish His purposes of redemption.