

## Payton, Bible Translation, Session 12, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic 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 12, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Issues, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

**Dr. George Payton's lecture** on Bible translation focuses on the challenges posed by idioms. **He explains** that idioms are difficult to translate because they are figurative, non-compositional, and culturally specific. **Payton illustrates** this with numerous examples from English, Swahili, and Orma, demonstrating how literal translations often fail to capture the intended meaning. **He proposes several strategies** for handling idioms in translation, including literal translation (if the idiom exists and means the same in the target language), using a comparable idiom, or paraphrasing. **Ultimately**, the goal is to communicate the intended meaning accurately and effectively.

**2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Payton, Session 12, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Issues, Part 1 – Double click the 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\_Session 1  
2.mp3**

### 3. Bible Translation: Session 12, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Issues, Part 1

#### Bible Translation Study Guide: Linguistic Challenges

#### Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What are the two main categories of challenges in Bible translation, according to Dr. Payton?
2. Why are idioms difficult to translate?
3. What does it mean for an idiom to be non-compositional? Provide an example.
4. How do idioms relate to culture and shared knowledge?
5. Provide two reasons Dr. Payton gives for why we use idioms.
6. Explain the idiom "skating on thin ice" and how it relates to the real world.
7. In the Orma language, what does the idiom "I have your ear" mean?
8. In Swahili, what does the idiom "He got a stove" mean?
9. What does it mean to "break down" an idiom before translation, and what are some considerations?
10. What are three potential approaches to translating an idiom, and in what circumstances might each be used?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. According to Dr. Payton, the two main categories of challenges in Bible translation are cultural problems with the text and linguistic challenges due to differences in language structure. Cultural problems are issues with concepts or practices that are foreign to the target language, while linguistic issues arise from the inherent differences between languages, such as grammar and vocabulary.
2. Idioms are difficult to translate because they are figurative, not literal, and their meanings cannot be derived from the individual words that make them up. Additionally, idioms are often culture-specific, making it difficult to find direct equivalents in other languages.

3. When an idiom is non-compositional, it means the meaning of the whole phrase is not equal to the sum of the meaning of its individual words. For example, the idiom "he blew his top" does not refer to someone literally blowing something off of their head.
4. Idioms are deeply rooted in culture and shared knowledge, which means that speakers of a particular language use them in a similar and expected way. The word pictures they evoke are understood through a shared worldview among those who speak the language.
5. Dr. Payton states that idioms are fun and add to the richness of the language, and they make the language more vivid and interesting because they often create a word picture or comparison, which makes communication more engaging.
6. "Skating on thin ice" means being in a precarious or dangerous situation, often with potential negative consequences. This idiom is rooted in the real-world situation of ice skating on a lake where thin ice can break, leading to a fall into the water.
7. In the Orma language, the idiom "I have your ear" means "I've heard of you." It's used as a way to recognize someone or indicate familiarity, not necessarily as a way of saying one is listening attentively.
8. In Swahili, the idiom "He got a stove" means "He got married." This is based on the cultural idea of the wife as the one who cooks food for the family.
9. To "break down" an idiom before translation means to understand its conceptual meaning beyond the literal words, so one can accurately convey the intended meaning in the target language. It involves understanding the context, cultural background, and the underlying message of the idiom.
10. Three approaches to translating idioms are to translate the idiom literally, use another idiom with the same meaning, or break it down and say it literally. Using a literal translation only works if the same idiom exists in the target language and has the same meaning. Using another idiom works if there is a similar expression. If neither of these is an option, then breaking it down and translating it literally is the final solution.

### **Essay Questions**

1. Discuss the challenges posed by idioms in Bible translation and the various strategies translators can use to address them. Include the concepts of cultural

context and non-compositionality, and explain how each contributes to the complexity of idiom translation.

2. Explore the relationship between language and culture, using idioms as an example to illustrate how language reflects a community's worldview and shared experiences. Explain with specific examples from the source material how cultural understanding is necessary to translate idioms effectively.
3. Analyze the different approaches a translator might take when faced with an idiom, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each option. In what scenarios would using another idiom with the same meaning be preferable to literal translation, and when might a literal translation be best?
4. Using examples from the source material and your own understanding, explain how idiomatic expressions can sometimes be confused for idioms, and how the translator can navigate these challenges. Provide specific examples of expressions that might be confusing in the translation process.
5. Discuss the implications of idiomatic language for the overall goal of accurately communicating the meaning of the Bible, considering how translation choices can impact readers' understanding of the text. Include a specific example to demonstrate your point.

## Glossary

**Figurative Language:** Language that uses words or expressions with a meaning that is different from the literal interpretation.

**Idiom:** A phrase or expression whose meaning cannot be understood from the literal meaning of the individual words.

**Literal Translation:** Translating word-for-word, maintaining the grammatical and lexical forms of the original language.

**Non-Compositional:** The meaning of the whole phrase or expression is not equal to the sum of the meaning of its parts.

**Conceptual:** Related to ideas and concepts; idioms evoke ideas and word pictures shared within a culture.

**Culture-Specific:** Language or customs unique to a particular group of people or society.

**Idiomatic Language:** Language that is characteristic of a specific group or that uses expressions and phrases in a manner that is not intended to be taken literally, but that is not, strictly speaking, an idiom.

**Anthropomorphism:** The attribution of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities.

**Word Picture:** A description using vivid language to create a mental image.

## 4. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Payton BT\_EN\_Session12.pdf":

### **Briefing Document: Challenges in Bible Translation - Linguistic Issues: Idioms**

**Source:** Excerpts from "Payton BT\_EN\_Session12.pdf," a lecture by Dr. George Payton on Bible Translation.

**Date:** 2024

#### **Introduction:**

This document summarizes the key points from Dr. George Payton's lecture on linguistic challenges in Bible translation, specifically focusing on the complexities of translating idioms. The lecture emphasizes that linguistic challenges arise from the inherent differences in how languages structure meaning, requiring translators to make careful adjustments to accurately communicate the original intent.

#### **Key Themes and Ideas:**

##### **1. Two Main Categories of Translation Challenges:**

- **Cultural Problems:** Difficulties stemming from cultural differences that affect how the text is understood.
- **Linguistic Challenges:** Issues arising from the structural and semantic differences between languages. These challenges are the focus of this lecture, particularly idioms.
- Quote: "There are also language or linguistic challenges. They're just the nature of the language is just hard because they don't line up. They don't work the same way, and they have different features grammatically, semantically, so we have to make adjustments in order to communicate the meaning."

##### **1. The Nature of Idioms:**

- **Figurative Language:** Idioms are not literal and cannot be understood by analyzing the individual meanings of their constituent words.
- Quote: "And because it's figurative, that's the opposite of literal. So, you can't take idioms literally."

- **Non-compositional:** The meaning of an idiom is not the sum of the meanings of its individual words.
- Quote: "You can't add up this word plus this word plus this word plus this word and have the meaning of each of those words, and then you understand the meaning of the whole thing. ... it's not a sum of its parts."
- **Conceptual & Culture-Specific:** Idioms carry conceptual weight rooted in shared cultural knowledge and understanding within a language community.
- Quote: "It's very conceptual... it's a part of this shared knowledge that people have together in the same culture, the same worldview."
- **Language Specific:** Idioms are often unique to a specific language, making direct translation difficult.
- Quote: "An idiom in one language cannot necessarily be said the same way in another language. If you try to say it literally, it often doesn't make sense."

#### 1. Examples of English Idioms:

- The lecture provides numerous English idiom examples to illustrate their non-literal nature (e.g., "spread the news," "driving me crazy," "break the silence," "on the ball," "hit me up," "skating on thin ice"). These are designed to show the breadth and depth of idiomatic expression in the English language.

#### 1. Purpose and Significance of Idioms:

- **Fun and Engaging:** Idioms enrich language, making it more interesting, lively, and engaging.
- Quote: "They're fun. If you come up with a really good idiom, it's a lot of fun, and it makes the language rich. And vivid."
- **Connection to Reality:** Many idioms are rooted in real-world experiences or cultural practices, which can be missed if interpreted literally.
- Quote: "with all of these idioms, there's some connection to the real world and the real things that people do. "
- **Reveals Cultural Perspectives:** Idioms reflect how speakers perceive the world and their cultural values.
- Quote: "It reveals what we think of the world. It reveals how we perceive the world. And you see that through the words that we use."

### 1. Idioms in Other Languages (Orma and Swahili):

- The lecture contrasts English idioms with examples from Orma and Swahili to demonstrate the variation in idiomatic expression across languages.
- Examples include: "I have your ear" (Orma) meaning "I've heard of you"; "He got a stove" (Swahili) meaning "He got married"; "Be eyes" (Swahili) meaning "Be on the alert"; and "Hear hunger" (Swahili) meaning "To feel hungry". These examples underscore the fact that idiomatic expressions are culture and language specific.

### 1. Idiomatic Language vs. Idioms:

- The lecture also addresses idiomatic phrases that are not strictly idioms but still pose translation challenges.
- Examples like "wash up the dishes," "wash up before dinner," "finish up the food," and "take a seat" illustrate how seemingly simple expressions can be confusing when taken literally or interpreted through a different cultural lens.
- The example of the American and British colleagues misunderstanding of "wash up before dinner" effectively illustrates how language and culture can collide.
- Quote: "We have two cultures separated by a common language. Americans and British people."

### 1. Amelia Bedelia:

- The reference to Amelia Bedelia is used as a humorous illustration of what happens when idioms are interpreted literally. This children's book character is a maid who misinterprets phrases like "trim the tree" with comical results, highlighting the importance of understanding the figurative nature of idioms.

### 1. Examples of Idiomatic Language in Swahili and Hebrew:

- Examples like "*alifika nyumayangu*" (Swahili) meaning "he arrived after me" and "*wali ongea juyake*" (Swahili) meaning "they talked about him", highlight how direct translations of idiomatic phrases can sound strange in other languages even when using very similar terms.

### 1. The Challenge of Literal Translation:

- The lecture emphasizes that literal translation of idioms can often lead to misunderstanding and sometimes convey completely incorrect meanings.

### 1. Strategies for Translating Idioms:



- **Break Down and Understand:** First, break down the idiom to understand its true meaning.
- **Option 1: Literal Translation:** Translate literally *only* if the language in question has the exact same idiom with the same meaning, which is rare.
- **Option 2: Equivalent Idiom:** Find an idiom in the target language that carries the same meaning, even if the wording is different.
- Quote: "Translate it using another idiom that has the same meaning."
- **Option 3: Non-Figurative Language:** If the first two options are not viable, break down the meaning and express it plainly, using non-figurative language.
- Quote: "Break it down and say it literally."
- **Caution with Body Parts:** Be particularly careful when translating idioms that use body parts, as they often do not correspond across languages and can have unintended meanings.
- Quote: "One thing that we need to keep in mind with idioms is to be especially careful when translating idioms that use body parts."

#### 1. **Best Practices, Not Rules:**

- The lecture concludes by emphasizing that these guidelines are not rigid rules but tools to use based on the specific context and language.
- Quote: "These are just some best practices. These are not rules. What you do is you have this set of tools in your toolbox and then you apply it in the situation depending on the language, depending on the words, depending on the context of both."

#### **Conclusion:**

Dr. Payton's lecture underscores that translating idioms is a complex undertaking that requires a deep understanding of both the source and target languages, as well as the cultural contexts in which they are embedded. Effective translation of idioms requires moving beyond literal interpretations and utilizing various strategies to communicate the intended meaning accurately and effectively. The challenge is not merely about finding equivalent words but conveying equivalent concepts and cultural nuances.

## 5. FAQs on Payton, Bible Translation, Session 12, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Issues, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### FAQ: Challenges in Bible Translation - Linguistic Issues

1. **What are the primary linguistic challenges faced when translating texts, such as the Bible?** Linguistic challenges arise because languages don't always align perfectly. They have different grammatical structures, semantic nuances, and ways of expressing concepts. This means that a direct word-for-word translation often fails to capture the intended meaning and adjustments must be made to communicate the message effectively in another language.
2. **Why are idioms so difficult to translate?** Idioms are challenging to translate because they are figurative and non-compositional. This means their meaning is not literal and cannot be derived from the sum of individual word meanings. They are also conceptual and deeply rooted in the shared knowledge and cultural worldview of a specific language, making it difficult to transfer the same meaning to another language where the cultural understanding of the image or idea is different.
3. **Can you give examples of English idioms and explain why they are difficult to translate?** Examples include "he blew his top," "spread the news," "driving me crazy," "skating on thin ice," "hit me up," and "take it from the top." These expressions cannot be understood literally by adding up the meaning of each word, and a literal translation into another language would likely make no sense. They are also culturally bound and don't always have equivalent expressions in another language.
4. **What are some examples of idioms from other languages, and how do they illustrate the challenge of translation?** In Orma, "I have your ear" means "I've heard of you." In Swahili, "he got a stove" means "he got married," referring to the traditional role of a wife cooking food. "Be eyes" in Swahili (Ue macho) means "be on the alert." and "Hit picture" (piga picha) means take a picture. "Hear hunger" in Swahili literally means to feel hungry. These examples highlight how seemingly simple phrases can carry deeply embedded cultural meanings that are difficult to transfer through direct translation.

5. **How can you tell if you're dealing with an idiom in a different language?** It's often difficult to know right away. The best way to detect an idiom is to recognize that it sounds weird when translated word for word. If it does not make sense literally, it's important to investigate to see if it carries a unique figurative meaning. The context of how words are used will often give clues to if they're being used in a figurative way.
6. **Besides true idioms, what other types of idiomatic language can pose challenges in translation?** Idiomatic expressions that are not necessarily idioms, like "wash up the dishes", "wash up before dinner" (where the first is about cleaning dishes and the other cleaning hands), or "she's on the phone" (not literally on top of a phone), also cause translation problems. These phrases have specific cultural or contextual meanings that must be carefully translated to avoid misunderstanding, and are often based on common practices and cultural understandings.
7. **What are the best practices when attempting to translate an idiom?** There are several approaches: (1) use a literal translation only if the target language uses the exact same idiom with the exact same meaning; (2) use a different idiom in the target language that has the same meaning (for example, translating "Mary kept all these things in her heart" as "Mary kept all these things in her throat" in a language where the throat, not the heart, is the locus of emotion); (3) if no idiomatic equivalent exists, break down the meaning of the idiom and translate it using straight forward language, avoiding figurative language altogether. It is also important to consider if a body part is involved in the expression, as different cultures utilize different body parts when expressing particular emotions or ideas.
8. **Why is it important to be careful with literal translations of figurative language in translations of religious texts?** Literal translations of idioms and other figurative language can lead to misinterpretations and communicate the incorrect meaning of the text. For example, translating "not knowing their right hand from their left" literally in Orma implied that a group of people was mentally challenged, which was not the intended meaning. A good translation strives to accurately communicate the text's intended meaning, and often requires looking for a natural way for that text to sound when used in the target language.