

Payton, Bible Translation, Session 13, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Issues, Part 2, Figures of Speech Resources from Notebooklm

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

1. Abstract of Payton, Bible Translation, Session 13, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Issues, Part 2, Figures of Speech, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Dr. George Payton's Bible translation course focuses on the challenges of translating figures of speech, particularly metaphors and similes, across languages and cultures. **Payton illustrates these challenges with numerous examples from English and the Bible**, emphasizing the importance of understanding the cultural context and points of similarity in the source language to accurately convey meaning in the target language. He highlights the complexities involved in rendering metaphors and similes literally versus adapting them for clarity and cultural appropriateness. **The lecture also addresses euphemisms**, showing how culturally sensitive language necessitates careful translation to avoid offense and maintain respect within the target culture. Ultimately, **Payton stresses the collaborative nature of translation**, advocating for close work with native speakers to ensure accuracy and cultural sensitivity.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Payton, Session 13, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Issues, Part 2, Figures of Speech, – 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_Session1
3.mp3**

3. Bible Translation: Session 13, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Issues, Part 2, Figures of Speech

Bible Translation: Figures of Speech Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the key difference between a metaphor and a simile?
2. Why is it significant that metaphors compare things from different semantic categories?
3. How does the use of vivid and familiar word pictures in metaphors and similes affect communication?
4. When translating a metaphor or simile, what are the three key parts that a translator must consider?
5. What does Dr. Payton mean when he says, "Sometimes, close is as good as it gets" in translation?
6. What are the two options Dr. Payton suggests for translating metaphors or similes when the point of comparison isn't obvious in the target language?
7. Why might the metaphor "I will make you fishers of men" be difficult to translate?
8. How does the cultural understanding of "fox" influence the interpretation of Jesus calling Herod a fox?
9. What is the purpose of using euphemisms, and why are they especially important in many non-Western cultures?
10. According to the passage, what is the rule of thumb when considering if a translation of scripture is acceptable?

Answer Key

1. A **metaphor** is an implied comparison between two things, while a **simile** is a direct comparison, using words like "like" or "as." Metaphors suggest a connection without explicitly stating it, whereas similes directly point out the similarity.

2. Metaphors comparing things from different semantic categories create a more striking comparison, highlighting the similarities in surprising ways. This juxtaposition can make the description more vivid and thought-provoking, engaging the audience on a deeper level.
3. Vivid and familiar word pictures make language more impactful by evoking concrete images and experiences, allowing the audience to quickly understand and relate to the meaning. This method enhances both the richness and memorability of the language.
4. The three key parts are: the **topic** (what is being described), the **illustration** (what it's being compared to), and the **point of similarity** (the shared attribute). Identifying these parts helps translators understand and convey the intended meaning effectively.
5. This phrase indicates that translators may not always achieve a perfect or exact translation, due to the complexities of language and culture. In such situations, a reasonably accurate translation that conveys the core meaning is often the most realistic and acceptable goal.
6. When the point of comparison isn't obvious, a translator can either **turn the metaphor into a simile** or **state the similarity explicitly**, thereby making the connection clearer to the target audience. These options aim to preserve the text's meaning while ensuring it's understandable in a different linguistic and cultural context.
7. This metaphor is difficult to translate because the action of "fishing for men" isn't immediately clear and can be interpreted negatively. It can evoke ideas of capturing or kidnapping rather than gathering for spiritual purposes, creating confusion.
8. In many Western cultures, "fox" implies cleverness or trickery, but in Hebrew culture, a fox is associated with being small and insignificant. The latter understanding better fits the context of Jesus dismissing Herod, highlighting the importance of cultural awareness in translation.
9. Euphemisms soften speech to avoid offense, disrespect, or vulgarity. They are particularly important in non-Western cultures because many have stricter standards of propriety and are more sensitive to explicit language regarding certain topics, like bodily functions and death.

10. The rule of thumb is to ask if you would be embarrassed to read the translation to your grandmother or in church. This test of acceptability ensures that the translation is respectful and appropriate for the cultural and social norms of the target audience.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the challenges of translating figures of speech, such as metaphors and similes, from one language to another, providing examples from the source material.
2. Explore the significance of cultural context when interpreting and translating biblical metaphors. How does this impact the translator's work?
3. Explain the role of euphemisms in language and describe how they are used in the Bible. What considerations should translators make when dealing with euphemisms in their work?
4. How can contemporary Bible translations create challenges for translators working in languages beyond English? What specific problems does Dr. Payton highlight?
5. Analyze the importance of accuracy, clarity, naturalness, and acceptability in Bible translation, discussing how translators must balance these competing goals.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Metaphor:** A figure of speech that implies a comparison between two unlike things, without using "like" or "as."
- **Simile:** A figure of speech that directly compares two unlike things using words such as "like" or "as."
- **Semantic Category/Frame:** A mental framework for understanding concepts and organizing knowledge; these categories influence how we use and interpret language.
- **Exegesis:** The critical interpretation and explanation of a text, especially from the Bible.
- **Target Language:** The language into which a text is being translated.
- **Euphemism:** A mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing.
- **High-Context Culture:** A culture in which communication relies heavily on implicit and nonverbal cues, often requiring a shared understanding to grasp the full message.
- **Low-Context Culture:** A culture in which communication relies heavily on explicit verbal communication, with less emphasis on implicit and nonverbal cues.
- **Word Picture:** A vivid description in language that creates a strong mental image.
- **Point of Similarity:** The shared characteristic or quality between two things being compared in a metaphor or simile.
- **Goel/Redeemer:** In the context of the passage, someone who has the obligation to marry a widow in the family and preserve the family line.

4. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Payton BT_EN_Session13.pdf":

Briefing Document: Bible Translation Challenges - Figures of Speech

Source: Excerpts from "Payton BT_EN_Session13.pdf" - Dr. George Payton, Bible Translation, Session 13

Overview:

This session focuses on the challenges in Bible translation stemming from *figurative language*, specifically metaphors, similes, and euphemisms. Dr. Payton emphasizes the need for translators to understand the cultural context of both the original text and the target language to avoid misinterpretations and ensure accurate and acceptable translations. He highlights the complexities involved in conveying the intended meaning of non-literal expressions and advises a careful, culturally sensitive approach.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Figures of Speech as Translation Challenges:

- Figurative language (metaphors, similes) presents unique challenges to translators because of their non-literal nature. Translators must determine the intended meaning, rather than translating literally, which can lead to confusion or an incorrect understanding.
- The session follows the discussion on idioms (from the previous session), recognizing that both are forms of figurative language that can be difficult to translate.

1. Metaphors and Similes: Definition and Structure:

- **Metaphors:** Implied comparisons between two unrelated things, drawing parallels between different semantic frames or categories.
- **Quote:** *"Metaphors are an implied comparison of two things. It's not coming out and saying that these two things are; it doesn't say explicitly that this thing is being compared to that thing."*
- **Example:** "John's room is a pigsty."
- **Similes:** Direct comparisons, using "like" or "as."

- **Quote:** *"Similes use like or as. So, they'll say this is like this, or this is as that."*
- **Example:** "Blind as a bat."
- **Three-Part Structure:** Both metaphors and similes typically have three parts:
 1. **Topic:** The thing being described or discussed (e.g., "the sea")
 2. **Illustration:** The thing to which it is compared (e.g., "raging bull")
 3. **Point of Similarity:** The shared characteristics between topic and illustration (e.g., "stormy", "powerful").
- Translators need to identify all three parts to properly understand the meaning and assess how it may be translated.
- 1. **Translation Strategies for Metaphors and Similes:**
 - **Direct Transfer:** Sometimes, a metaphor or simile can be directly transferred (word-for-word) into another language if it makes sense and communicates the same idea.
 - **Quote:** *"Sometimes you can just take it straight over and say it word for word, and we'll have some examples of that."*
 - **Adjusting the Figure:** If a point of similarity isn't obvious in another language, translators can try one of two main approaches:
 - **Turning Metaphors into Similes:** Changing "I am your shield" to "I am *like* a shield to you."
 - **Quote:** *"If it's a metaphor, then you can turn it into a simile. I am like a shield to you, rather than I am your shield."*
 - **Stating the Similarity Explicitly:** Adding explanatory words, such as changing "I am your shield" to "I protect you like a shield."
 - **Quote:** *"If it's still not obvious, you can state the similarity explicitly: I protect you like a shield."*
 - **Breaking Down the Word Picture:** If no other method works, and to ensure clarity, a translator can break down the word picture by explaining the meaning in plain terms, such as changing "God is my shield" to "I will continually protect you." * **Quote:** *"The other choice is to break down the word picture, and just simply say, I will continually protect you."*

- **Literal Translation with Footnotes:** When meaning is unclear, especially when no clear meaning is discernable or it may mean multiple things, literal translation with a footnote is a viable option.
- **Balance:** Striving to preserve the original word picture as much as possible while ensuring clarity, but not making the language too clunky or unclear.

1. **Biblical Examples and Their Analysis:**

- **Psalms 1:3:** "He is like a tree planted by streams of water."
- **Topic:** The righteous man
- **Illustration:** A tree by a stream
- **Point of Similarity:** Flourishes due to constant water source.
- **Isaiah 53:6:** "All we like sheep have gone astray."
- **Topic:** Humanity
- **Illustration:** Sheep
- **Point of Similarity:** Prone to wander, easily lost.
- **Lord as Rock:** The topic is the Lord, the illustration is rock. The points of similarity are security, safety, and stability.
- **Psalms 119:105:** "Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path."
- **Topic:** The Word of God
- **Illustration:** Lamp and Light
- **Point of Similarity:** Guidance, Illumination, Way to go
- **Genesis 15:** God to Abraham "I am your shield"
- **Topic:** God
- **Illustration:** Shield
- **Point of Similarity:** Protection, Safety

1. **Importance of Cultural Context:**

- Translators must consider the cultural context of both the source text and the target audience.

- Assumptions based on one's own culture can lead to misinterpretations.
- **Example:** The fox in Western cultures signifies cleverness or trickery, while in biblical Hebrew culture it signifies being small or insignificant. Translators must know this difference before deciding how to translate the phrase "that fox" in relation to Herod.
- Translators need to use commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and seek help from cultural experts in the target culture to understand the meaning and intent of the original text within its culture.
- **Quote:** *"We have to use commentaries. We have to use other resources and Bible dictionaries, because we want to get what was their cultural concept, and then we transfer that cultural concept over."*

1. Euphemisms: Softening Language

- Euphemisms are used to soften speech, avoid offense, and show respect. These are important in many face-to-face cultures.
- Often, in the Bible, topics related to bodily functions, dying, intimate relations, and women's functions are presented euphemistically, which needs to be respected in translation.
- **Example:** "Covering one's feet" is a euphemism for a bowel movement
- **Example:** In Swahili, "I have a need" is used to mean "I need to go to the bathroom."
- **Example:** The phrase, "Adam knew his wife," which is a euphemism for sexual relations between a married couple
- **Rule of Thumb:** If a translation is embarrassing to read to your grandmother or in a church setting, something needs to be changed.
- **Quote:** *"Can you read this translation that you just produced for your grandmother? Would you be embarrassed to read it to your grandmother? Would you be embarrassed to stand up in church and read it when there are women, and there are children, and your grandma, and would you be embarrassed reading it to them? If the answer is yes, something has to change."*
- Translators should use target language euphemisms to communicate biblical ones.

1. **Acceptability and Collaboration:**

- **Acceptability:** The translated text needs to be acceptable and natural to the target audience, and not viewed as vulgar.
- **Community Involvement:** Local people need to be involved in the process and their feedback must be considered.
- **Target Audience:** Translations produced for one group, like contemporary translations written for Americans or English speaking audiences, may not fit or be appropriate for other cultures.
- **Balance:** The translator must balance accuracy, understandability, clarity, natural language, and acceptability.
- **Quote:** *"We have to keep all those things together with acceptability. So, if the local people say no, then it's no. It's their translation."*

Conclusion:

This session underscores that accurate Bible translation requires not just linguistic knowledge, but also deep cultural awareness, and a careful use of strategies for communicating figurative language. The translator's role is to build bridges between cultures, ensuring that the Bible's message is both understood and accepted by the target audience. This includes careful attention to local sensitivities, euphemisms, and working closely with target language communities throughout the process.

5. FAQs on Payton, Bible Translation, Session 13, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Issues, Part 2, Figures of Speech, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Bible Translation and Figures of Speech

- **What are metaphors and similes, and why are they challenging for Bible translators?**
- Metaphors and similes are figures of speech that create comparisons. Metaphors are implied comparisons (e.g., "John's room is a pigsty"), while similes are direct comparisons using "like" or "as" (e.g., "blind as a bat"). These are challenging because their meanings aren't literal. Translators need to identify the topic, illustration, and the point of similarity to convey the intended meaning in another language and culture. The comparison may be obvious in one culture but not another. For example, "the Lord is my rock" communicates security to cultures familiar with a desert environment.
- **What are the key components of analyzing a metaphor or simile for translation purposes?**
- When analyzing a metaphor or simile for translation, there are three key parts to consider: the **topic**, which is the thing being described; the **illustration**, which is the thing it is being compared to; and the **point of similarity**, which is the common characteristic or quality between the topic and the illustration. For example, in "He is like a tree planted by streams of water," "he" is the topic, "a tree planted by streams of water" is the illustration, and "flourishing" is the point of similarity.
- **What if the point of similarity in a metaphor or simile isn't obvious or doesn't exist in the target language?**
- If the point of similarity isn't obvious, a translator has several options. They can turn a metaphor into a simile (e.g., changing "I am your shield" to "I am *like* a shield to you"). They can also state the similarity explicitly (e.g., "I protect you *like* a shield"). If these don't work, they might break down the word picture altogether and state the meaning literally (e.g., "I will continually protect you"). The goal is to prioritize clarity of communication, while preserving the word picture where possible. If ambiguity still exists, a footnote may be added.

- **Why is it essential for Bible translators to be aware of cultural nuances, especially regarding figures of speech?**
- Cultural nuances greatly influence how figures of speech are understood. What may be a clear comparison in one culture can be confusing or even nonsensical in another. For example, the metaphor of "sheep going astray" resonates deeply with cultures familiar with sheep herding, but might be confusing to a culture unfamiliar with this animal. It is crucial to understand the cultural context of both the biblical text and the target language to ensure the intended meaning is conveyed accurately. In addition, the same animal may have very different connotations in different cultures, for example, foxes.
- **What are euphemisms, and how are they used in the Bible and in translation?**
- Euphemisms are used to soften speech, avoid offense, or show respect. They are common in many cultures and in the Bible. For example, "covering one's feet" is a euphemism for using the bathroom. In Bible translation, it's important to use similar euphemisms in the target language to convey the same meaning and cultural sensitivity, even if the original text is more direct. Translators also must be careful with common idioms and expressions as they may carry hidden or negative meanings in some contexts.
- **What considerations should be made when translating biblical euphemisms, especially those involving sensitive topics?**
- Translators must be particularly sensitive when translating euphemisms related to bodily functions, death, intimate relations, and women's issues. What is acceptable in one culture might be offensive in another, affecting how the community views the translation. Translators should check with the local community to determine how best to express these ideas, often using the target language's common euphemisms. In some instances, translators may find that it is impossible to openly discuss sensitive topics with a member of the opposite sex. The priority is to have a text that is understandable, accurate, and culturally acceptable.

- **How does understanding the original cultural context influence the translation process of figurative language?**
- Understanding the original cultural context is essential for accurately interpreting and translating figurative language in the Bible. For example, understanding the significance of "shields" in ancient cultures or the common experience of sheep herding in Biblical times is crucial to ensure a proper translation. Translators must do their homework, consulting commentaries and other resources, to determine the original meaning of the figures of speech before transferring them into the target language. The translator's own cultural understanding must not be imposed on the biblical text.
- **What are some potential pitfalls when relying on contemporary English translations of the Bible as a guide?**
- Contemporary English translations often cater to a specific cultural audience and may not accurately reflect the original biblical context for other cultures. Using these translations as a basis can lead to transferring culturally specific figures of speech that don't make sense or are interpreted wrong in other cultures, for example, "apple of my eye". Translators must be careful not to simply replicate the wording or imagery of a contemporary translation but instead should focus on understanding the original meaning and finding the best way to express it in the target language, taking cultural context into account.