Payton, Bible Translation, Session 14,
Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Issues, Part 3,
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 14, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Issues, Part 3, Figures of Speech, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. George Payton focuses on the challenges of translating figures of speech in the Bible, specifically personification, metonymy, and synecdoche. He explains how these literary devices, which rely on implied meaning and cultural context, pose significant difficulties for translators working with languages lacking similar figures of speech or abstract concepts. The lecture uses examples from the Bible to illustrate these issues, highlighting the importance of understanding the cultural context and intended meaning to achieve accurate and clear translation. Payton emphasizes the need to sometimes forgo a direct translation in favor of conveying the underlying sense, while also noting that different translations often reflect diverse interpretive choices. Finally, the lecture briefly touches upon the complexities of translating metaphors.

2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Payton, Session 14, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Issues, Part 3, 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
4.mp3

3. Bible Translation: Session 14, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Issues, Part 3, Figures of Speech

Bible Translation: Figures of Speech Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is personification in the context of figurative language?

2. Why might some languages struggle with personification, particularly when abstract nouns are involved?

3. Briefly define metonymy and how it differs from a metaphor.

4. What is synecdoche, and how does it relate to metonymy?

5. Provide an example of metonymy used in everyday language.

6. Give an example of synecdoche from the text.

7. According to Dr. Payton, what is the first step when encountering a figure of speech in a text?

8. What does the phrase "the hand of the Lord was with them" represent, according to the source?

9. In Genesis 14, why is it problematic to interpret the phrase "the kings fled and fell into the tar pits" literally?

10. What is the significance of different Bible translations disagreeing on a specific verse?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Personification is when an inanimate object is described as performing actions typically associated with people. These inanimate objects don't actually act on their own.

2. Some languages may not have the linguistic structures to use personification, particularly when abstract nouns are involved, as they may lack abstract nouns altogether, causing a disconnect.

3. Metonymy is a figure of speech where one object is used to refer to something else within the same general category. Unlike metaphors, metonymy stays within a related domain, while metaphors connect radically different things.

4. Synecdoche is a figure of speech where a part of something represents the whole or vice versa. It is a type of metonymy based on a part-whole relationship.

5. An example of metonymy from the text is "I like reading Shakespeare," where "Shakespeare" stands for the writings of Shakespeare.

6. An example of synecdoche from the text is "He asked for her hand in marriage" where the "hand" represents the whole person.

7. The first step when encountering a figure of speech is to realize that it is a figure and not to take it literally; a "hidden thing" that needs to be considered.

8. The phrase "the hand of the Lord was with them" represents God's presence, blessing, or help toward them. It can also be an idiom with other meanings, depending on context.

9. A literal interpretation of "the kings fled and fell into the tar pits" in Genesis 14 is problematic because it doesn't account for the entire army being involved in the battle and it creates a contradiction later in the narrative when the king of Sodom welcomes Abraham.

10. Different Bible translations disagreeing on a specific verse indicates a problem with the interpretation, often stemming from the challenge of translating figures of speech.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the challenges of translating figurative language, using specific examples from the text, and explain how a translator should approach these challenges.

2. Analyze the differences between metonymy, synecdoche, and metaphor, and discuss why it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between metonymy and synecdoche.

3. Explain Dr. Payton's process for translating figures of speech, including the key steps he identifies and why each step is important.

4. Discuss how cultural differences in language can affect the understanding of biblical figures of speech, and why a literal translation can sometimes be inappropriate.

5. Using the example of Genesis 14:10, analyze how a literal translation can lead to a misinterpretation of the original text and how translators should approach such verses.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Personification:** A figure of speech in which an inanimate object or abstract concept is given human qualities or abilities.

- **Abstract Noun:** A noun that refers to an idea, quality, or state rather than a concrete object.

- **Metonymy:** A figure of speech in which one thing is used to refer to something else related to it within the same category or domain.

- **Synecdoche:** A figure of speech in which a part is used to represent the whole, or the whole is used to represent a part.

- **Metaphor:** A figure of speech where a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable, creating a comparison between two unlike things.

- **Figurative Language:** Language that uses figures of speech to be more effective, persuasive, and impactful.

- **Literal Translation:** Translating a text word-for-word, without considering the context, figures of speech, or nuances of the source language.

- **Exegesis:** The critical interpretation or explanation of a text, especially of scripture.

- **Target Language:** The language into which a text is being translated.

- **Idiom:** An expression whose meaning is not predictable from the usual meanings of its elements.

4. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Payton BT_EN_Session14.pdf":

Briefing Document: Bible Translation - Figurative Language Challenges

Source: Excerpts from "Payton BT_EN_Session14.pdf" by Dr. George Payton and Ted Hildebrandt

Date: 2024

Subject: Challenges in Bible translation focusing on figurative language

Main Themes:

1. **The Importance of Recognizing and Understanding Figurative Language:**

- Dr. Payton emphasizes that Bible translation requires a deep understanding of the various figures of speech used in the original text.

- He argues against a literal, word-for-word translation, particularly when dealing with figures of speech, because these figures don't always translate directly across cultures and languages.

- The goal is to convey the intended *meaning* of the text, not just a word-by-word transfer.

1. **Specific Figures of Speech:** The document focuses on:

- **Personification:** Assigning human actions or characteristics to inanimate objects or abstract nouns. Example: "Fear came on all those living around them."

- **Metonymy:** Using one object to refer to something else within the same domain. Examples include "I like reading Shakespeare" (referring to Shakespeare's works), "Dallas won today" (referring to the Dallas team) or "The White House announced today" (referring to the President).

- **Synecdoche:** Using a part to represent the whole or vice-versa. Examples include "He asked for her hand in marriage" (hand representing the whole person) and "Nice wheels" (wheels representing the whole car).

- **Metaphor:** While not the primary focus of this section, the document highlights that metaphors involve comparing two radically different things.

1. **Challenges in Translating Figurative Language:**

- **Cultural Differences:** Not all languages or cultures use figurative language in the same way. Some languages may not have abstract nouns needed for personification, for example. This requires finding alternative ways to communicate the intended meaning.

- **Direct Translation Difficulties:** Direct translation of figures of speech can often lead to misinterpretations or make no sense in the target language.

- **Discerning the Figurative:** The translator needs to be able to recognize when a passage is using figurative language and not take it literally. This can be difficult at times.

1. **Steps for Translating Figurative Language:**

- **Identify:** Recognize that a figure of speech is being used.

- **Determine Meaning:** Understand what the figure of speech represents and its intended meaning.

- **Translate Appropriately:**Retain the Figure if it communicates clearly in the target language and does not sound strange or unnatural.

- Restate the meaning in a more straightforward manner (without the figure) when necessary, especially when the figure doesn't make sense or is misunderstood in the target language.

1. **Case Study: Genesis 14:**

- This passage, describing a battle between kings, is used to illustrate the complexities of translating metonymy and synecdoche.

- The use of "kings" is identified as metonymy, where "kings" stands for "kings and their armies."

- The phrase "the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them" is analyzed as problematic if interpreted literally, as it would imply that only the kings fell into the tar pits. The more likely meaning is that the armies (represented by the kings) fled, and some of them fell into the tar pits.

- This example highlights that word-for-word translations often miss the figurative meaning of the text.

- The Good News Translation, which says only the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fell into the pits, is criticized as a literal, and therefore inaccurate, reading of the text.

Key Ideas and Facts:

- **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."

- **Metonymy:** "Metonymy is used when one object is used to refer to something else rather than referring to itself." It usually stays within the same general domain.

- **Synecdoche**: "Synecdoche is a part-whole relationship."

- **The Difficulty of Differentiation:** "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."

- **Purpose of Figures:** "...there's some kind of reference to something by calling it something else."

- **Literal vs Figurative Meaning:** "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."

- **Example of Metonymy in the Bible**: "I have come not to bring peace but a sword...the sword represents what? Fighting, battle, conflict, perhaps bodily injury."

- **Example of Combined Figures:** "The hand of the Lord was with them...The hand of the Lord is on you. So, we have combined figures all blended together."

- **Importance of Context:** "One little word can change the whole meaning of the expression."

- **Retaining Figures**: "If we can retain this figure...then we can retain it if it's clearly understood."

- **Restating Figures:** "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."

- **Genesis 14 and Metonymy**: "So, when it says four kings arrayed themselves in battle against five kings, who's fighting? The kings and their armies...the 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."

- **Importance of Exegesis**: "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...I don't think that that's the correct interpretation...I think it's taking a figure literally, and we what? Never take figures literally, please, okay?"

- **Literal Translations Lead to Problems**: "...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."

- **Translator's Rule of Thumb:** "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."

Conclusion:

Dr. Payton's lecture highlights the significant challenges involved in translating the Bible, particularly when dealing with figurative language. It emphasizes that a literal, word-for-word approach is insufficient, and that translators must understand the cultural context, the specific figures of speech being used, and the intended meaning of the text in order to produce accurate and meaningful translations. The example from Genesis 14 provides a clear illustration of these difficulties. Ultimately, translators should aim for a "sense-for-sense" translation rather than a "word-for-word" one, when the figure of speech is not clear or does not translate well in the target language.

5. FAQs on Payton, Bible Translation, Session 14, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Issues, Part 3, Figures of Speech, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions About Figurative Language in Bible Translation

- **What is personification, and why is it a challenge in Bible translation?** Personification is when an inanimate object or abstract concept is described as having human-like actions or qualities. This can be a challenge because not all languages have the same capacity to express abstract ideas or use them in personification. When a culture does not use abstract nouns, using a figure of speech like "fear came upon them," which uses the abstract noun "fear," can cause a disconnect for the reader, therefore translators need to find alternative ways to communicate the concept behind the figure of speech. For example, "fear came upon them" may be translated to "the people around them became afraid". Similarly, "your faith has made you well" can be rephrased as "because you believed, you were healed."

- **What are metonymy and synecdoche, and how do they differ from metaphors?** Metonymy and synecdoche are figures of speech where one thing is used to refer to something else that is related to it. Metonymy often uses an object to represent something else in the same general domain (like "The White House" referring to the President). Synecdoche involves a part-whole relationship (like "wheels" referring to a car). Metaphors, on the other hand, compare two different things from different frames of reference (like "his room is a pigsty"). While it can be difficult to differentiate between metonymy and synecdoche, it is more important to understand that they are figures of speech that should not be taken literally.

- **How can you identify metonymy or synecdoche in a text?** When encountering a word or phrase that doesn't seem to make literal sense in its context, this can be an indication that a metonymy or synecdoche is in use. Look for an implied relationship or association between the word used and the actual meaning. For example, "I like reading Shakespeare" doesn't mean you read a person, but the works of Shakespeare. "Nice wheels" does not only refer to the wheels but the entire car. When in doubt, understand that these are figures of speech where a word or phrase is standing in for something else and seek that intended meaning.

- **What are some examples of metonymy and synecdoche found in the Bible, and how are they interpreted?** Examples of metonymy in the Bible include phrases like "I have come not to bring peace, but a sword" (sword represents conflict) and "God will give him the throne of his father David" (throne representing kingship and authority). Examples of synecdoche include phrases like "he asked for her hand in marriage" (hand referring to the person). It is important to identify what these figures of speech represent. For example, in the case of the "sword" the meaning is warfare, conflict or bodily injury. In the case of "throne" the meaning is the power to rule.

- **Why is it important to identify figures of speech before translating?** It's crucial to recognize when a figure of speech is present because the literal translation of these figures may not make sense, or convey the intended meaning in another language. Taking a figure of speech literally can lead to a misinterpretation of the text's message. Once a figure has been identified, the translator needs to determine the meaning that is intended by the figure of speech in order to accurately communicate the message across cultures.

- **What is the process for translating metonymy and synecdoche when a direct translation does not work?** When a direct translation of a metonymy or synecdoche does not make sense in a target language, translators need to identify the meaning behind the figure. Once that meaning is understood, it can be communicated in a way that uses the most natural and acceptable way in the target language. This may involve replacing the figure of speech with a more straightforward explanation that still conveys the intended message. For example, "the hand of the Lord was with them" may be translated to "the Lord was with them" or "the Lord was blessing them" to maintain the overall meaning.

- **How does the example of the battle in Genesis 14 demonstrate the challenges of translating figurative language?** In Genesis 14, the text describes how "four kings arrayed themselves in battle against five kings." This is an example of metonymy where kings represent the kings plus their armies. The text also says "the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them," which is a way of saying the armies fell into the tar pits. The literal reading of this passage suggests that only the kings fled and fell into the pits, but the intent is that the defeated armies fled, with some dying in the pits. This example illustrates how important it is for translators to recognize the figurative meaning instead of relying on a literal translation of a text, otherwise they will misrepresent the events that took place in the text.

- **What should you do when different translations of the same verse disagree with one another?** When different versions of a biblical text disagree, it highlights an issue of interpretation. Translators should use these disagreements as a sign to further investigate, analyze the original language, and the cultural context to understand the true meaning of the text. The differences between various translations suggests a challenge to correctly understand a text that needs to be addressed.