

## **Payton, Bible Translation, Session 15, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Unknowns Resources from Notebooklm**

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

### **1. Abstract of Payton, Bible Translation, Session 15, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Unknowns, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

This lecture by Dr. George Payton discusses the significant challenges of translating biblical concepts and terminology into other languages. He highlights the difficulties posed by **unknown ideas**, such as specific plants, animals, and cultural practices, which lack direct equivalents in target languages. Dr. Payton proposes several translation strategies, including using **descriptive phrases**, **generic terms**, **similar concepts**, **borrowed words**, and even **creating new words** to bridge the semantic gap. The lecture emphasizes the crucial role of cultural context and collaboration with local church leaders to ensure accurate and culturally appropriate translation. Ultimately, the goal is to effectively communicate the biblical message while maintaining its integrity and avoiding alienating the target audience.

**2. 8 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Payton, Session 15, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Unknowns, – 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  
5.mp3**

### 3. Bible Translation: Session 15, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Unknowns

#### Bible Translation: Navigating Unknown Ideas

#### Quiz

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

1. What is the central challenge when translating "unknown ideas" from the Bible, according to Dr. Payton?
2. Why is context so crucial when trying to understand the meaning of a word, and how does "house" illustrate this principle?
3. Describe the challenges that geographical formations, like a desert, pose for Bible translation.
4. According to Dr. Payton, what are three ways that unknown words or concepts can be translated?
5. Why might a translator choose a generic term rather than a specific term when translating certain words or concepts?
6. In the example of translating "green grass," why was it essential for translators to choose the *right* kind of grass?
7. Why is it important for translators to be cautious when using words borrowed from another language, such as Swahili?
8. How did the concept of "agape" evolve over time to hold a particular meaning in the New Testament?
9. How did the Orma people adapt their existing concept of "Mahala" to translate the concept of an altar?
10. What is one of the "litmus tests" that Dr. Payton suggests can evaluate the effectiveness of translation choices?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. The main challenge is that these are things or concepts in the Bible that do not exist in the target culture, making it difficult to communicate their meaning effectively. Therefore, translators must find ways to represent these ideas using the vocabulary, concepts, and understanding of the target language.

2. Context is critical because words can have multiple senses, and their meaning is defined by the specific setting in which they appear. For example, the word "house" can mean a physical building, a family lineage, or a household, depending on the context.
3. Geographical formations can pose challenges for translation because some cultures may not have the same kinds of landforms. For example, people who live in the jungle will not necessarily understand what a desert is.
4. According to Dr. Payton, three ways to translate unknown ideas are to use a descriptive phrase (like "house of prayer" for "synagogue"), to use a generic term (like "tree" for "sycamore tree"), or to use something similar (like "white as milk" instead of "white as snow").
5. A translator might choose a generic term when there is no specific term for the concept in the target language, and the specific detail is not crucial for the message. This happened when the Orma had to use the generic word "tree" since they did not have specific words for different types of plants or trees.
6. It was vital to choose the right kind of grass because people in Papua New Guinea have many words for different types of grass, some of which are not comfortable to sit on. Since Jesus had his audience sit on the grass, they wanted to choose a word that communicated comfort rather than one that would be prickly.
7. It is crucial for translators to be cautious when borrowing words because excessive borrowing can make the translation sound foreign and thus unacceptable. When the translation sounds too foreign, it will be rejected, which can lead to people rejecting the gospel message as well.
8. The term "agape" was not initially very common in Greek, but its meaning was redefined in the New Testament to refer to unconditional love that is not based on favoritism, and has come to have the meaning of God's love for all people.
9. The Orma people used their word "Mahala," which originally referred to a small, enclosed sacred place for prayer, and refashioned it to translate "altar." They retained the sense of it being a holy place, but modified the meaning through explanations and images to include a place where sacrifices are made.
10. One of the "litmus tests" that Dr. Payton suggests to evaluate translation choices is to observe if the church accepts and uses the translation, especially if pastors use it when they preach sermons.

## Essay Questions

**Instructions:** Write a well-organized essay that responds to one of the following prompts.

1. Discuss the interconnected challenges of language and culture in Bible translation, as highlighted by the concept of "unknown ideas." Use examples from the lecture to support your points.
2. Explore and analyze three distinct translation strategies, as presented in the lecture, for addressing the lack of direct equivalents in target languages. Discuss the benefits and potential limitations of each strategy, using examples from the text.
3. Analyze the complexities involved in translating religious and abstract terms such as "God," "baptism," and "agape." Consider the various translation strategies that can be applied, and discuss which strategies can prove the most effective and why.
4. Reflect on the potential impact of translation choices on the reception and acceptance of the Bible and the Gospel message by target audiences. Discuss how different choices made by translators can be both beneficial and problematic.
5. Evaluate the claim that language is like "water that runs downhill" and explain its relevance to the principles and best practices of Bible translation. Use specific examples from the lecture to illustrate this principle.

## Glossary of Key Terms

**Agape:** A Greek word often translated as "unconditional love." In the New Testament, it's used specifically to describe God's love, which is not based on favoritism or merit.

**Descriptive Phrase:** A method of translation that uses a longer expression to explain a concept for which there is no direct equivalent in the target language. For example, "house of prayer" to describe a synagogue.

**Generic Term:** A broad, general word used to translate a specific term when the target language lacks an equivalent or the specific detail isn't crucial. An example is using "tree" to translate "sycamore tree".

**Neologism:** A newly created word or phrase, often used to fill conceptual gaps in a target language.

**Semantic Domain:** A set of words related to a particular concept or subject, such as the semantic domain of plants, animals, or royalty.

**Semantic Overlap:** The degree to which the meanings of words in different languages correspond or share common elements.

**Specific Term:** A precise and detailed word used in translation, especially when the target language has different words for specific things within a semantic domain, such as types of grass.

**Transliterate:** To represent the sounds of a word from one language using the closest matching characters or sounds of another language; to borrow a word from another language and to fit it into the sounds that exist in the new language.

**Unknown Idea:** Concepts or things found in the Bible that do not exist or are unfamiliar in the target culture, posing translation challenges.

## 4. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Payton BT\_EN\_Session15.pdf":

### **Briefing Document: Challenges in Bible Translation - Linguistic Issues & Unknown Ideas**

**Source:** Excerpts from "Payton BT\_EN\_Session15.pdf," Dr. George Payton, Bible Translation, Session 15

**Date:** 2024 (Document states it is a teaching session from 2024)

#### **Introduction:**

This document summarizes the key concepts presented by Dr. George Payton in Session 15 of his Bible Translation course, focusing on the challenges of translating "unknown ideas" - concepts present in the biblical text that do not have direct equivalents in the target language and culture. Dr. Payton emphasizes the complexity of this task, highlighting the need for careful research, sensitivity to the target language, and a variety of translation strategies.

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

##### **1. The Challenge of Unknown Ideas:**

- Dr. Payton identifies a significant challenge in Bible translation as the need to translate "unknown ideas," which are concepts, objects, or cultural elements that don't exist in the target culture. This makes direct translation impossible and requires translators to find culturally relevant ways to communicate the intended meaning.
- These unknown ideas are not just words, but concepts tied to specific cultures.
- Examples include: flora and fauna (specific plants and animals), geographical features (deserts for those in jungles), weather patterns (snow and ice), weights and measures (cubit, omer), currency (shekel, denarius), cultural objects (plow, millstone), social structures (kings, centurions), and abstract concepts (hope, faith, holiness, even "God").
- "Because of this problem, it's challenging to know how to effectively communicate them if this concept or if this thing, this object, doesn't occur or doesn't exist in the target language."

## 1. The Importance of Contextual Meaning:

- Words can have multiple meanings, and the specific meaning is determined by the context in which it appears.
- Example: the word "house" can refer to a physical structure, family, or household depending on the context ("house of David," "Philippian jailer and his house").
- "And remember, we always say words are defined specifically in the context where they occur. You can't say it always means one thing over all the senses."
- Translators must identify all the senses of a word in the source language and determine which sense applies in a particular verse.

## 1. Process of Translation

- The process begins by first determining the meaning of the term by understanding the cultural domain the term belongs to. Each meaning also belongs to a different domain with a unique relational frame of reference.
- The next step is to look at possible words in the target language that could be used to translate the word in the source text.
- There is no set way to translate. Translators must focus on the principles and best practices to guide their work.

## 1. Translation Strategies for Unknown Ideas:

- **Descriptive Phrase:** Using a phrase to describe the concept. (Example: "synagogue" as "house of prayer", or using "a powder that makes bread swell" for yeast before adopting "Hamira").
- "So, for synagogue, you might use house of prayer."
- **Generic Term:** Using a general term if no specific term exists. (Example: "sycamore tree" as "tree").
- **Specific Term:** Choosing a specific term from a semantic domain when a generic term is inadequate (Example: choosing among different words for "grass" in Papua New Guinea based on its texture and the context of the passage in Mark).
- **Similar Concept:** Using a similar concept if the direct concept does not exist. (Example: "lion" as "a dangerous animal" in Papua New Guinea, or "white as milk" instead of "white as snow" in Orma).

- "So, if you go to Papua New Guinea and the devil prowls around like a lion. Sorry, what's a lion? We don't have lions. Therefore, what do you say? He prowls around like a dangerous animal."
- **Borrowing from Another Language:** Using a word from another language that has spread within the target language's region. (Examples: "mungu" for God in East Africa from Swahili; borrowing the word for "lake" from a neighboring language in the Kinga language).
- **Redefining a Target Language Word:** Using a word from the target language and assigning it a new meaning, as was done with agape in Greek (meaning unconditional love).
- "And agape, my understanding from the research that I've been able to do, it wasn't all that common to begin with. It is used in a unique way in the New Testament to mean unconditional love."
- The Orma example of redefining the term Mahala to match the biblical practice of sacrifice.
- **Creating a Neologism:** Creating a new word for a concept, as was done for words like "email" and "text." The King James Version also created words like Jehovah, Passover and atonement.
- "And the KJV, primarily from the influence of William Tyndale initially, came up with a bunch of new words because they didn't have words."
- **Combination of Methods:** Combining methods, such as a descriptive phrase with a borrowed word (e.g., "synagogue, a house of prayer").
- "So, if you use the word synagogue and transliterate it, synagogue and house of prayer..."

#### 1. **Linguistic Considerations:**

- Language tends to take the path of least resistance; people will naturally use what is easiest for them to understand and communicate, this is the water running downhill analogy.
- Borrowing too many words from another language can make the translation sound foreign and cause people to reject the Bible.



- "And if you're talking about an unreached people group or a people group where there's a lot of non-Christians that have begun reading the Bible, they'll say, this isn't our language. And when they say this isn't our language, what else do they say? We don't want to read this Bible."
- Transliterated words must fit within the sound patterns of the target language.
- Sometimes, a good enough translation is all that can be achieved, acknowledging the linguistic limitations.
- "Sometimes, in translation, we try to get as close as we can, but sometimes, close has to be good enough."

#### 1. **Importance of Collaboration and Feedback:**

- The translation process should be done in conjunction with the local church and community.
- Translation teams should get feedback on whether the chosen translations are understandable and acceptable. A key way to measure if a translation works is to evaluate whether the pastors are using the chosen word or method in their sermons.
- Translators should be prepared to revisit and revise their translation based on feedback.
- "Sometimes you try it out, and you see, is this something that people understand? Is this comfortable to them? Do the church leaders accept this?"

#### 1. **The Radical Nature of Bible Translation:**

- Translating the Bible is a radical act of taking an ancient text and trying to make it understandable to people who may have no knowledge of the concepts or cultural context.
- Translators should provide additional aids to help people understand (e.g., footnotes, glossaries, pictures).
- "We have to remember that we are doing a very, very radical thing, taking this ancient book over 2,000 years ago and communicating it to a group of people who have no idea what we're talking about."

#### 1. **Further Complexities:**

- Dr. Payton notes that there are many other complex terms and concepts that present challenges that were not covered in detail in this session, including God, Spirit, Holy, Faith, Angels, Demons, Sanctification, and Justification.
- Translating these concepts requires an in-depth understanding of both the biblical world (Hebrew and Greek) and the target language/culture.
- "The process of translating these means you do a much deeper dive into the world of the Bible, the world of the Hebrews and the Greeks, what those semantic domains are, what the ranges of words that occur together, how you can really understand the interplay between words that are similar that are in the same domain..."

**Conclusion:**

Dr. Payton's Session 15 highlights the intricate and delicate nature of Bible translation, particularly the challenges involved in conveying "unknown ideas." It underscores the need for translators to be both linguistically and culturally astute, employ a wide range of translation techniques, collaborate with the local community, and recognize the profound impact their work can have on the reception of the Gospel. The document emphasizes that translation is an iterative process that requires continuous evaluation and adaptation.

## 5. FAQs on Payton, Bible Translation, Session 15, Challenges in Translation, Linguistic Unknowns, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions About Translating Unknown Ideas in the Bible

1. **What is meant by "unknown ideas" in the context of Bible translation?**
2. "Unknown ideas" refer to concepts, objects, and cultural practices found in the Bible that do not have direct equivalents or do not exist in the target language and culture. This includes things like specific plants, animals, geographical features (e.g., deserts in a jungle environment), weather patterns (e.g., snow), weights and measures, cultural objects (e.g., a plow), and abstract ideas like hope or holiness. These are challenging to translate because the target language may not have a word or concept that carries the same meaning or cultural significance.
3. **Why are unknown ideas a significant challenge for Bible translators?**
4. These ideas present a challenge because effective communication requires that the target audience comprehend the intended meaning. When a concept or object doesn't exist in the target culture, it becomes difficult to convey its significance and nuances. It necessitates a deep understanding of both the source (biblical) culture and the target culture, and a process of finding or creating words or phrases to bridge the gap. The goal is to avoid introducing foreign or inaccurate concepts while preserving the integrity of the biblical text.
5. **What is the first step in translating an unknown idea?**
6. The initial step involves an in-depth investigation into the meaning of the term in the original context of the Bible. This includes examining the different senses of the word as it appears in various verses, as words are defined by their specific context. For instance, the word "house" can refer to a building, a family, or a lineage. Understanding the semantic domain—or the frame of reference—of the word is vital to correctly understanding the intended meaning, and this must be done before attempting to find a suitable word in the target language.
7. **What are some strategies used to translate unknown ideas when a direct equivalent is unavailable?**
8. Translators use a variety of strategies, including:

- **Descriptive Phrases:** Using a phrase that describes the concept (e.g., "house of prayer" for synagogue).
  - **Generic Terms:** Using a broad term if there's no specific one (e.g., "tree" for sycamore if the target language lacks that specific tree).
  - **Specific Terms:** Choosing a specific term within a broader category (e.g., a type of grass that is soft to sit on, instead of a general term for "grass").
  - **Comparisons:** Using similar, known things for comparison (e.g., "white as milk" instead of "white as snow" if snow is unknown).
  - **Borrowing Words:** Adopting words from other languages (e.g., "mungu" for God in some East African languages).
  - **Redefining Existing Words:** Assigning a new meaning to a term in the target language to match the biblical concept (e.g., retooling the meaning of a "sacred place" to describe the altar).
  - **Creating New Words:** Inventing new terms to communicate the biblical idea.
  - **Combining Methods:** Using a combination of descriptive phrases with borrowed words or new words.
1. **Why is it important to avoid borrowing too many words from another language when translating the Bible?**
  2. Borrowing too many words can make the translation sound foreign, which may cause readers to reject the Bible as not being in their language. This, in turn, can lead to rejecting the Gospel message. It's crucial that the translation feels natural and familiar to the target audience to facilitate understanding and acceptance. Too many foreign words can create a barrier to the message of the scripture.
  3. **How can the challenge of translating a word like "baptism" be addressed?**
  4. "Baptism" is challenging because it carries a range of spiritual and religious connotations, beyond simply being submerged in water. Instead of using a literal translation, a common strategy is to transliterate the word from Greek (e.g., "baptize") and provide explanations or teach the meaning. This retains the connection to the original religious context while ensuring understanding of the fuller concept.

5. **How does the concept of language as "water running downhill" relate to translation choices?**
6. This metaphor emphasizes that language users naturally adopt the easiest, most direct option for communication. When translating, if a translator provides a long, complex description, people are likely to prefer a simple, borrowed word if it's available. Therefore, it is important for translators to understand that the simpler and more readily accepted word is often the best choice.
7. **What additional resources and steps are used to ensure that translations of unknown ideas are properly understood?**
8. Beyond the core translation, translators often use additional support tools, including:
  - **Footnotes:** Providing explanatory notes for unclear words or concepts.
  - **Glossaries:** Creating a list of key terms and their definitions.
  - **Visual Aids:** Incorporating pictures or illustrations in the translated Bible.
  - **Community Review:** Seeking input and approval from the local church leaders, pastors, and community members to ensure that the translation resonates and communicates the intended meaning.
1. The translation process is not static. After an initial translation, teams revisit these key terms and unknown ideas to ensure that they are used and understood within the community. This ongoing evaluation is essential for effective communication.