

Dr. George Payton, Bible Translation, Session 19, Translating Verbal Ideas, Part 1

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This is Dr. George Payton and his teaching on Bible Translation. This is session 19, Translating Verbal Ideas, Part 1.

The next challenge in translation that we're going to address is how to translate verbal ideas. What do we mean by verbal ideas? These are words that have some kind of verbal notion attached to them, or the basic semantic underlying meaning is actually a verb, even though it might be expressed in a different way.

So, in the Old Testament, both Hebrew and Greek, Old Testament and New Testament make use of words that have underlying verbs as part of the semantic makeup of the word. They can be verbs, so a verb is a verb, that's fine, but it has nouns, which can either be a participle or an abstract noun, or it could also be an adjective. But underlying, there's some kind of verb associated with it.

So here are some examples. Punishment is a noun, and we need to remember, let's not get our English concept, well, it's a thing; therefore, it's concrete. No, it's abstract, and oftentimes, abstract nouns are indeed verbal ideas.

So, punishment, and the verb is to punish. Knowledge and the verb is to know. Suggest comes from suggestion.

Deliverance is to deliver. The coming king, we would say, is the king who is coming, so coming is describing the king, and so that regards an adjective. And of late, we have the president-elect, and in this case, the president-elect of the U.S. is Donald Trump.

It means he hasn't taken office yet, but the president who was elected. Okay, so those are examples of nouns and adjectives, but underlying it, there's a verb. And what is the problem with these? There are gaps in communication. What are they? First of all, it doesn't tell us who's doing the action, and it doesn't tell us who is receiving the action or other parts that are related to it.

The action itself might be obscure, and many languages don't have abstract nouns or verbal nouns like this. And we'll see some examples of participles in just a minute. What do we do? So, in Papua New Guinea, they don't have abstract nouns, and so this is what Galatians 5.22 and 5.23 sound like to someone from PNG.

The fruit of the spirit is blah blah blah blah blah blah. Why? Because they don't have abstract nouns. So, what do we do? How do we break down the meaning? First of all, we have to identify the verb.

Okay, now here are some participles. Arriving in Jerusalem. That comes from Mark, and the verb is to arrive.

They were amazed at his understanding. The underlying verb is to understand when your greeting reaches my ears.

The underlying verb is to greet. So, we have identified the verbs that are related to those. Second of all, who are the participants? So, arriving in Jerusalem.

This is speaking of Jesus and his disciples during Passion Week. It says that when arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus saw a fig tree and cursed it. They were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

This is when Jesus was in the temple talking with the priests, the Pharisees and, the Levites, and whoever, and they were amazed at his understanding. Now, it's a noun because it can be possessed, a possessible thing like his dog, his house, his understanding. And so, grammatically, it's a thing, but conceptually, it's a verb; it's an action.

And we're trying to break down and get to the underlying action. So, that's to understand. When your greeting reached my ears, to greet.

And this was Mary and Elizabeth were the two participants. Who's doing the action? Mary is doing the action. Elizabeth hears the greeting.

So, Mary greeted Elizabeth. And so, we state Mary greeted Elizabeth. We get that idea in our minds.

Then we rewrite the verse, making all of these parts of the action and the participants, and even things that might not be animate, can still be participants. So, if I say I gave Ted the book, in one sense, the book is a participant. So, I, in the actor, Ted is the receiver, and what did he receive? A book.

You can't give anything. So, you say that Ted, the book, and I are all quote-unquote participants involved in that action. Some of the actions, like walking, involve only one person.

Some of it can be two people. I saw Ted, or I saw the book. So, that would be two, as it were, participants.

Sometimes, it's three if you're doing an action of giving something to someone else or doing something. Okay, so how do we rewrite the verse? When Jesus and the disciples arrived in Jerusalem. There are two things I want to mention here.

Jesus and the disciples arrived in Jerusalem, and one of the things that we want to say is they were the ones doing the action, even though participle in Greek hides that. Two, how does the participle function in this particular phrase? It functions as a time reference, and that time reference means it's setting the stage for when they arrived in Jerusalem when Jesus cursed the fig tree. So, we can just say when.

If we leave off the word when we're not adequately reflecting the Greek because it is a time phrase. It's not a process. It's not describing them walking from Bethany, and it took them x amount of minutes or hours to get there.

It's not talking about that. It's simply a time expression. So, we need to add that to our translation when we re-translate it, making these things explicit.

Okay, they were amazed at how he understood his understanding. He understands the concepts that they are telling him, and what are they amazed by? How in the world can this 12-year-old boy have such depth of knowledge? How can he know all those things? How can he understand all those things? And so, they were amazed by that. So, we have to insert the word how, because that had been, this is not a time phrase.

This is more of a manner phrase, and he understood the things that they were discussing with him well. Okay, and with Mary and Elizabeth, when I heard you greet me, Elizabeth says to Mary, that conveys that same sense of the time phrase, the word, when was already there, when your greeting reached my ears, but that is a really figurative, idiomatic way of talking. Remember, we talked about idioms before.

We break down the idioms and say them in a straightforward way, especially in those cases, but how do we break them down? We do that by identifying the verb and the participants and then rephrasing it in a clearer, more straightforward way. Okay, all right, so we have this one, a fruit of the Spirit is blah blah blah blah, and here they are. Okay, we're going to break these down together.

Okay, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, etc. Okay, this comes in a phrase that involves the word, of, which in Greek studies is a genitive phrase, and we have to understand what this phrase, fruit of the Spirit, means. So, if we think about this, is this a description of the Holy Spirit? Probably not.

This is an objective genesis, the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in people, and if you read Galatians 5, you'll get that idea that these are things that are evident in God's people, because the Holy Spirit worked these things into their lives. Okay, what

do you do for these people in Papua New Guinea? Well, first of all, we have to say love. What is the verb? The verb is to love.

Okay, who is doing the loving? Someone, let's say a person, the generic Christian person, male or female, it doesn't matter, and with the word love as an action, you can't love anything, so it requires another thing, another participant, and who or what does this person love? Probably other people. Okay, and so how do we put that together with the fruit of the Spirit? We broke that down by saying the Holy Spirit produces these qualities in people, so we could say the Holy Spirit makes the person love other people. Okay, joy, and joy, let's just call it a verb because there's an action there, and it's rejoice. What is the action involved? Sorry, who are the people involved? The person himself, again, the Christian person, and the Holy Spirit make the person joyful or make the person rejoice.

Peace, peace is a hard one because it's not easy to find an underlying verb that's associated with peace, but again, it's a person; the Holy Spirit makes the person peaceful or be at peace, something like that. Patience. Now, in English, it's be patient.

In other languages, such as Swahili, Arabic, and some other languages, there's actually a verb for being patient. So we'll just say be patient since we're working in English, and we don't have any other verbal choice, but we understand, and sometimes it's patient with other people, so it could be that there's another participant there. You could be frustrated that you're stuck in traffic and you're not being patient.

Is that other people's fault? Not really. If a person is not coming, and you're waiting for them to come, you can feel impatient. So there could be another person involved, or there may not be, but the Holy Spirit makes the person be patient.

Kindness. Kindness is like love, and it requires something else. So the Holy Spirit makes a person be kind, be kind to people.

Gentleness. Gentleness. You get the idea, but let's continue.

So, the verb is be gentle, and person, others. It makes a person be gentle, or treat others gently, or be gentle to other people. Faithfulness.

What is the verb there? Be faithful is one. Does it mean to have faith? Maybe not. I think all of these are verbs involving us interacting with others, interacting with other people.

And so be faithful, be trustworthy, be reliable, be dependable, living up to commitments that you have. So I'm faithful to my family by providing for them; I'm

faithful to my family by protecting them and taking care of them. So be faithful to other people.

And again, the Holy Spirit would be there in every way. And the last one. So, control.

Self makes a person control their actions. You control yourself by not letting what you want to do and what you want to say, to let that out. So, the purpose of all of this is to show us that not every language has these, and even if it does have them, I'm going to give some examples in the next talk, it may not be clear the association of that noun with the actions that are being described in the text.

And let me say this. The participle form of verbs in Greek is the most common verbal form. That's one thing.

And okay, so I asked my Greek teacher if it was true that the participle was the most common. And he says, yeah. And I said, then why do you wait until halfway through the second semester to teach them? And he says, well, you need to know all these other things first. Do I really need to know all of those paradigms of verbs and how to conjugate a verb in verb forms that hardly ever show up in the Greek New Testament? So, as a pedagogical teacher, I pushed back on that and said, teach me the high-frequency ones first.

Okay, be that as it may, that's just how it goes. So, you did need to have some critical mass of information before tackling the participles. Participles are very, very challenging.

In fact, Darrell Bock, a professor from Dallas Seminary, says participles are probably the hardest feature of Greek in the New Testament to figure out, the hardest thing to interpret. And so we can say by association, if it's the hardest thing to interpret, it's the hardest thing to translate. Yeah.

I was talking to a Tanzanian colleague who we worked with, and I'd run translation workshops, and I covered this information that we had here, taking these verbal ideas and turning them into verbs. And he looked at me, and he said, you know, that one principle is probably the most important thing that you've taught us as Tanzanian translators. And I said you're probably right.

This is so key. This is one of the biggest challenges to communication, and I want to spend more time on it. We'll do that in the next couple of sessions. In addition to abstract nouns and participles and how to break them down, we will also deal with generative construction.

What happens when you get two nouns together and two abstract nouns together? For example, Jesus preached a baptism of repentance. Baptism is an abstract noun. Repentance is an abstract noun.

What do you do when you have those two words joined up? What do you do with some of the passages in Romans and Ephesians, where they have two, three, or four abstract nouns joined together? It's very, very complicated and very, very challenging. We'll go slow. We'll do it step by step, but I needed to introduce this so that we know we really have a problem when it comes to these nouns.

One of them is koinonia. Oh, it means church, or it means fellowship. Does it? What does it mean when we participate in his sufferings? We koinonia in his sufferings.

That's a verb, not a thing. What does it mean when they send their koinonia with Titus to take it to another place? They sent their what? Their koinonia. Okay, so it's really challenging to break down these abstract nouns.

But another thing I wanted to say was that when we look at something like this, we have to end up rephrasing it as a whole verse. And I showed this to students in a translation class, and they said, that's a whole paragraph right there. And the answer is, yeah, it is.

But there's no way around it because these languages do not have another option for communicating these truths. As we do this research, as we try to break them down, as we try to understand the relationships between these words, our understanding of the biblical text is greatly enhanced. Rather than treating things like this as thoughts out there, these are things that Paul wrote to us because he expected us to do them.

And we'll look at the verses from 1 Corinthians 13: love is patient, love is kind, love is gentle, etc. Is that this abstract thing out there? Maybe not. Okay, we'll come back next time.

Thank you.

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