



Translation of Conversational Implicature in the Tok Pisin Gospel of Matthew:

A brief evaluation of the translation of three conversational implicatures in the Tok Pisin Gospel of Matthew and translation change proposals for improved truth condition preservation.

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Abstract

In this paper I will be examining and evaluating three conversational implicatures from the gospel of Matthew along with their translations in Tok Pisin, a lingua franca of the country of Papua New Guinea. My purpose in the examination is to evaluate whether the implicatures they contain are likely to communicate the same truth conditional meaning in the translation as in the original. After the evaluation I will show my proposed additions to the translations to ensure that the original truth conditional meanings are preserved.

For evaluation of the implicatures I will be utilizing principles from the theory of conversational implicature proposed by Paul Grice. Specifically, I will be referring to his super maxims of quality, quantity, relation and manner and his theory of implicature through violation of these maxims. (Grice 1989)

Keywords: Tok Pisin; translation; Buk Baibel; Gricean pragmatics; conversational implicature



Method of Analysis

As a basis for evaluating the translation of the implicatures and their truth conditions into Tok Pisin, I am using the method proposed by Greg Thomson in his article *An introduction to implicature for translators*. In this article, Greg Thomson proposes that a failure to communicate the truth conditions of a conversational implicature in translation is likely based on one or more of four problems (Thomson 1982). These problems are a lack of the necessary background information needed by the hearer to calculate the implicature, utilization of a type of conversational implicature that does not occur natively in the target language, the possible mistranslation of original truth conditions, and inability on the part of the hearer to follow the chain of reasoning needed to calculate the implicature's truth conditions.

Thomson's proposed solution to the first of these failures, namely lack of sufficient context, is to provide in the translation the context necessary for the calculation. This could likely be done in footnoting as well if the readers were aware of how to use them. For the second failure, Thomson proposes that information be included in the text to trigger the implicature if it is not naturally triggered in the usage of a particular language. This can often be accomplished with the simple addition of clarifying words or phrases and better done in the text than in footnotes. The third failure, that of mistranslation, Thomson suggests may have to be addressed by translating the truth conditions of the original implicature without preservation of the form of the statement. This is a drastic step, but necessary if the statement is sufficiently foreign in context to the target hearers' understanding. The fourth failure, that of problems in the chain of reasoning, Thomson suggests can be rectified by adding words or phrases in the text that help lead the reader along the reasoning chain.

My goal in the translation changes I propose in this paper is that the final product adheres to the guidelines proposed by Eugene Nida in his book *Bible translating*. These guidelines are that the translation must: represent the customary usage of the native language, make sense, and conform to the meaning of the original (Nida 1947). I will consider a successful translation one that makes the implicatures clear and understandable in the target language, does not fail because of one of the causes listed by Thomson, and produces an equivalent translation under the guidelines proposed by Nida. In addition, I will be drawing on my experience as a Scripture use worker in Papua New Guinea to help anticipate difficulties in reading comprehension for the recipients of the translation.



Matthew 4:3-7: The Temptation of Jesus

The first case of conversational implicature and its translation into Tok Pisin I will consider is that found in Matthew 4:3-7 in the temptation of Jesus.

Matyu 4:4

Tasol Jisas i bekim tok olsem, "Buk bilong God i gat tok olsem, 'Ol manmeri i no inap kisim

But Jesus replied this way, "book of God has words such as PL people are not able get

'But Jesus said, "God's book says, 'all people cannot get'

laip long kaikai tasol. Nogat. Ol i mas bihainim olgeta tok bilong God tru na bai ol i kisim

life from food only No all must obey every word of God well and FUT all get
'life from food alone. No. They must obey all God's words well and they will get'

laip.' "

life

'life.'"

Matyu 4:7

Tasol Jisas i tokim em, "Buk bilong God i tok moa olsem, 'Yu no ken traim strong bilong God,

But Jesus said to him book of God say more such as You cannot test power of God.

'But, Jesus said to him, " God's book says again, ' Don't test God's strength.'"

(Buk Baibel 2008)

According to Grice's theory, in verse 4 we see a case of violation of the maxim of relation in Jesus' reply. The verses Jesus quotes in verse 4 and verse 7 in effect give reasons for his answers to the challenges by Satan. We are, however, left to calculate the implied "no" in his answers.

In both English and Tok Pisin, we see the translators trying to signal the implicature through the translation of the connective starting verse 4. In Greek this connective is the word "δε" which according to Kermit Titrud is likely used to signal conjunction but not necessarily relation of information. (Titrud 1992). In English, we see that the translators have translated this as "but" and in Tok Pisin as "tasol". These are roughly equivalent in meaning, both showing antithesis of the new information to that which comes before. This is likely included to help signal the underlying implicature in Jesus' answer.

In comparing this implicature to Thomson's model for analysis, I believe that of the four



failures listed this translation is most likely to fail because of a failure to trigger the implicature. Following Thomson's advice, I propose a stronger implicature trigger with the addition of the following to verse 4. My proposed additions are in bold. Matyu 4:4

Tasol Jisas **i tok bilong wanem em i no makim dispela na** i bekim tok olsem, "Buk bilong God

But Jesus **talked about why he did not do this and** replied this way, "book of God

'But, Jesus said why he would not do this and replied, " God's book '

i gat tok olsem, 'Ol manmeri i no inap kisim laip long kaikai tasol. Nogat. Ol i mas bihainim

has words such as all people are not able get life from food only No all must obey
'says, all people cannot get life from food alone. No. They must obey'

olgeta tok bilong God tru na bai ol i kisim laip.' "

every word of God well and FUT all get life

'all God's words well and they will get life.'"

(Buk Baibel 2008)

I believe that triggering the implicature in verse 4 in this strong way will lead the reader to recognize the same type of implicature in verse 7.

Matthew 8:19-20: A Scribe's Promise

The next example of implicature translation I'd like to evaluate is that occurring in Matthew 8:19-20. In this passage we see a scribe come to Jesus and disclose his intent of becoming one of his followers.

Matyu 8:19

Na wanpela saveman bilong lo i kam na i tokim Jisas olsem, "Tisa, olgeta ples yu

And one wiseman of law came and talked Jesus such as teacher all place you
'And a man knowledgable of the law came and said to Jesus, "Teacher everywhere you '

go long en, bai mi bihainim yu i go wantaim."

go to it FUT I follow you go along with

'go, I will go with you'

Matyu 8:20

Na Jisas i tokim em olsem, "Ol weldok i gat hul long graun, na ol pisin i gat haus

And Jesus talk him such as all wild dog have hole of ground and all bird have house

'And Jesus said to him, " The wild dogs have holes in the ground, and the birds have their houses. '



bilong ol. Tasol Pikinini Bilong Man em i no gat ples bilong slip.”

of their But child of man he not have place of sleep.

'But the Child of Man does not have a place to sleep.'

(Buk Baibel 2008)

According to Grice's theory, in verse 20 we see a case of violation of the maxim of relation in Jesus' reply to the scribe's declaration. The implicature here seems to be that Jesus is indicating that this man's declared intent will be an uncomfortable or difficult thing. In neither the English nor the Tok Pisin translation does it appear that the translator made any attempt to clarify the chain of reasoning intended by the implicature. Based on my experience working with Tok Pisin speakers, I think the current translation is likely to lead to a loss of the truth conditional meaning of the original or need clarification.

In comparing this implicature to Thomson's model for analysis, I believe that of the four failures listed this translation is most likely to fail because of either a failure to trigger the implicature or a failure on the part of the hearer to follow the chain of reasoning put forth by the use of the implicature. I propose addressing both possibilities by adding a chain of reasoning statement to verse 20. My proposed additions are in bold.

Matyu 8:20

Na Jisas **i makim klia em bai hatwok tru belong makim dispela na em i tokim em olsem,**

And Jesus **explain it(is) FUT difficult very to do this and he** talk him such as

'And Jesus explained it would be very difficult to do this and said,'

“Ol weldok i gat hul long graun, na ol pisin i gat haus bilong ol. Tasol Pikinini Bilong Man

PL wild dog have hole of ground and PL bird have house of their But child of man

''' The wild dogs have holes in the ground, and the birds have their houses. But the Child of Man '

em i no gat ples bilong slip.”

he not have place of sleep.

'doesn't have a place to sleep.'''

(Buk Baibel 2008)

I believe my proposed changes are a much stronger signal for the implicature, lead to less ambiguity and help the hearer to follow the intended chain of reasoning. This clarifying statement enables the verses to meet Nida's qualifications for a dynamic equivalent translation of the original.



Matthew 15:21-28: A Canaanite Woman Seeks Help

The third example of implicature translation I'd like to evaluate is that occurring in Matthew 15:21-28. In this passage we see a woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon come to Jesus and request that Jesus heal her daughter.

Matyu 15:21

Orait Jisas i lusim dispela ples na i go long hap bilong taun Tair na Saidon.

alright Jesus left this place and went to place of town Tyre and Sidon.

'So, Jesus left this place and went to the area of the towns Tyre and Sidon.'

15:22 Na wanpela meri bilong lain Kenan i save stap long dispela hap, em i kam na i singaut

and one woman of group Canaan usually lived in this place she come and called out

'And a woman of Canaan who lived in this place came and called out,'

olsem, "Bikpela, yu Pikinini Bilong Devit, yu mas sori long mi. Spirit nogut i

like this Lord you child of David you must have compassion on me Spirit bad

"'Lord, you are David's child, have compassion on me. An evil spirit'

bagarapim tru pikinini meri bilong mi."

hurt very child girl of me

'has hurt badly my daughter.'"

15:23 Tasol Jisas i no bekim wanpela tok long em. Na ol disaipel bilong en i kam long em na ol i

But Jesus not reply one work to her and all disciple of him came to him and all

'But Jesus did not respond to her. And all his disciples came to him and they '

tokim em olsem, "Dispela meri em i singaut singaut na i bihainim yumi i kam. Yu salim em i go."

talk him like this this woman she call out call out and follow us come you send her go

'said to him, " This woman repeatedly calls out and follows us. Send her away.'"

15:24 Na Jisas i bekim tok olsem, "God i bin salim mi i kam long ol lain bilong Israel tasol, bilong

and Jesus return talk like this God PAST send me come to all group of Israel only to

'And Jesus replied, " God has sent me to the group of Israel only, to '



helpim ol dispela sipsip i lus.”

help all these sheep lost
'help these lost sheep.'

15:25 Tasol meri i kam klostu long Jisas na i brukim skru na putim pes i go daun long graun, na i

But woman come close to Jesus and kneel and put face go down to ground and

'But, the woman came near to Jesus and knelt and put her face on the ground, and '

tok, “Bikpela, yu mas helpim mi.”

talk Lord You must help me
'said, "Lord, you must help me."

15:26 Na Jisas i bekim tok bilong en olsem, “Nogut yumi kisim kaikai bilong ol pikinini na

and Jesus replied talk of him this way not good we get food of PL child and

'And Jesus replied, " It isn't good for us to get the children's food and '

tromoi i go long ol dok.”

throw go to PL dog
'throw it to the dogs.'

15:27 Tasol meri i tok, “Bikpela, yu tok tru. Tasol ol dok i save kisim ol hap kaikai i pundaun

but woman talk Lord you talk true but PL dog often get PL half food fall down

'But, the woman said, "Lord speak the truth. But, the dogs often get the food scraps that fall'

aninit long tebol bilong ol papa bilong ol.”

beneath table of owner of them
'beneath the table of their owner.'

15:28 Jisas i harim dispela tok na em i bekim tok olsem, “Meri, bilip bilong yu em i bikpela tru.

Jesus hear this talk and he reply this way woman belief of you it big very

'Jesus heard this and he replied, "Woman, your belief is very big.'

Samting yu laik i mas kamap long yu, em i ken kamap.” Na long dispela taim stret, pikinini

A thing you want must come to you it can come and at this time exactly



child

'what you want must come to you, it is able to come about.' And at this exact time, '

meri bilong en i kamap orait gen.

girl of her became alright again.

'her daughter became alright again.'

(Buk Baibel 2008)

According to Grice's theory, in verse 24 we see a case of violation of the maxim of relation in Jesus' reply to his disciples. Jesus gives a reason for his reply but we are left to calculate the implied "no" in his answers.

In comparing this implicature to Thomson's model for analysis I believe that, of the four failures listed, this translation is most likely to fail because of either a lack of necessary context on the part of the reader, failure to trigger the implicature, or a failure on the part of the reader to follow the chain of reasoning. I propose the following changes to the translation of verses 22 and 24 to help signal the implicature, provide necessary background knowledge and lead the reader in the right chain of reasoning. My proposed additions are in bold.

15:22 Na wanpela meri **husat i no stap bilong lain Israel tasol** i stap bilong lain Kenan **na** i save

and one woman **who was not of group Israel but** was of group Canaan and usually

*'And a woman **who was not from Israel, but** was from Canaan '*

stap long dispela hap, em i kam na i singaut olsem, "Bikpela, yu Pikinini Bilong Devit, lived in this place she come and called out like this Lord you child of David *'who lived in this place came and called out, "Lord, you are David's child,'*

yu mas sori long mi. Spirit nogut i bagarapim tru pikinini meri bilong mi." you must have compassion on me Spirit bad hurt very child girl of me *'have compassion on me. An evil spirit has hurt badly my daughter.'"*

15:24 Na Jisas i **tok bilong wanem em i no bin helpim dispela meri na em i bekim tok olsem,** and Jesus **talk why he not PAST help this woman and he** return talk like this

*'And Jesus **talked about why he hadn't helped the woman and replied,***

"God i bin salim mi i kam long ol lain bilong Israel tasol, bilong helpim ol dispela sipsip i lus."

God PAST send me come to PL group of Israel only to help all PL this sheep lost *'God has sent me to the group of Israel only, to help these lost sheep.'"*

(Buk Baibel 2008)



The changes to verse 22 are to provide the necessary background knowledge or context for the reader to calculate the meaning of the implicature. The changes to verse 24 are to help trigger the implicature and lead the reader in the chain of reasoning needed to understand the meaning of the implicature.

Conclusions

My evaluation is that the three conversational implicatures are likely to fail for some readers on account of lack of proper contextual understanding, change of reasoning problems, or failure to trigger the implicature. The intent in my revisions was to supply context where needed and clarify the use of an implicature and any chain of reasoning difficulties that may arise. I believe that these revisions would lead to better preservation of truth-conditional meaning to readers of the Tok Pisin translation.



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