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Embodied Hermeneutics: Oral Bible Translation and Embodied Cognition

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This paper explores quality in Bible translation by examining the linguistic basis of sound exegetical practices for Oral Bible Translation (OBT). Traditional exegetical practices rely on assumptions about how to interpret texts based on principles of linguistics, including structural, descriptivist, generative, and functional linguistic schools of thought. However, these practices have been challenged by the growing importance of orality studies, particularly in relation to oral preference learners. Newer practices of internalisation and oral exegesis have been developed to address these challenges, but so far there is not yet a solid theoretical basis for these practices in linguistics. Drawing on the author's master's thesis, this paper explores the findings of cognitive linguistics in embodied cognition as a foundation of oral hermeneutics. It demonstrates how humans make and understand meaning in terms of physical interaction with their environment and argues that oral exegesis is not simply an accommodation for non-literates, but rather a valid form of linguistic analysis. This paper seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions about the importance of quality in translation and the evolving practices of exegesis in the context of Bible translation. By highlighting the role of cognitive and embodied linguistics in oral hermeneutics, it offers new insights into the linguistic foundations of oral exegesis and its potential for enhancing the quality of translation.

1. Introduction

New methods of internalisation and exegesis have been developed for OBT that are responsive to the needs of non-literate, oral learners.¹ These emerging methods are sufficient for differing learning styles and are adequate to account for important background information for translation. It is not, however, clear whether they are suitable for sufficient linguistic analysis of texts to be translated. This paper will briefly explore the cognitive linguistic foundations of the internalisation practices and processes of OBT, specifically the concepts of embodied cognition and meaning construction.

¹ An earlier form of this paper was given at the Bible Translation Conference 2023 in Dallas. This article is based on Adams (2023).

2. Traditional Exegetical Methods

John Catford wrote that “any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language” (Catford 1965, 1). Following the lead of Pike and Nida, Bible translation practitioners have long drawn on the findings of linguistics to bolster their effectiveness, while making rich contributions to the field themselves. As new schools of linguistic thought have developed, translators have cautiously adopted the most helpful theories and practices. However, exegesis was not always taught as part of translation training, thus exegetical models were often imported into translation theories. Typically, these models have been some form of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic approach, though somewhat modified given the unique demands of translation (Weber 2005, 43–45). Given the objective of translation to transfer the grammatical meaning of a text, historical or cultural context is referenced only as needed to understand that grammatical meaning, while theology and application are deliberately omitted in an attempt to prevent bias.

Thus, exegetical methods for Bible translation rely heavily on linguistic analysis both because of the movement’s linguistic foundation and the unique demands of translation. These linguistic analytical techniques assume literacy, linguistic training, and exegetical proficiency, all of which present challenges for the emerging methods of OBT.

3. OBT Exegetical Methods

As an emerging model, OBT has introduced new methodologies for internalisation and exegesis, which have been developed based on orality studies in consideration of non-literate, “oral preference” (Moon 2010, 2012), or “connected learners” (Thigpen 2020). A summary of internalisation practices and processes follows.²

Internalisation includes four *practices* involving various methods. (1) Familiarisation with the passage takes place through repeated listenings and visualisations as the passage is performed; (2) Informational understanding: through conversational exegesis an understanding of background knowledge and key concepts is developed; (3) Experiential understanding: a deep internal knowledge of the passage is developed through telling stories that connect the heart and experiences of the people to the story as well as creating experiential memories of the passage through focusing on conceptual meaning; (4) Performance understanding: as translators begin to retell and perform the passage, understanding is integrated and naturalness is developed.

² An outline of the practices and processes of internalisation can be found in Appendix A. This description is based off of my own experience with the Khebo (DRC), Logal (Sudan), and Lakoya (South Sudan) translations of Ruth in Uganda (Jan–Feb 2023), the Tokodede, Idate, and Nawete translations of Ruth in East Timor (Jul–Aug 2023), and training received as part of consultancy training (the MALICT program). This is supplemented by Suzuki (2022) Santos (2023) and Töler (2020). For a complementary approach see K. H. Frost (2024) and J. Frost, Mustin, and Beal (2024).

The following *processes* describe how these practices are employed. (1) Multimodal: utilising various ways of learning including actions, visuals, oral performance, singing, and so forth. (2) Holistic: engaging the heart, mind, and body. (3) Multilingual: using the language of wider communication, the host language, and any other common languages, interpreting as necessary. (4) Iterative: internalisation practices are interwoven rather than step-by-step. (5) Conversational: utilising conversational rather than didactic approaches. (6) Communal: participation of all members of the translation team as well as the wider community. (7) Location-aware: as place is vital in many cultures, translators lead the decision-making on where translation work is hosted.

In comparing these emerging methods with those of established models of exegesis, it becomes clear that internalisation is suitable for non-literate learners; it is also adequate to cover historical background and key concepts. However, it appears to lack sufficient methods for discovering linguistic meaning. Thus, the question of this paper is, *are the processes of internalisation in OBT linguistically rigorous enough to ensure proper understanding of meaning for translation?*

In order to briefly point in the direction of an answer to this question, a few of the ideas from cognitive linguistics with its embodied cognition foundation will be explored. These will point to the conclusion that OBT internalisation techniques make use of tacit meaning construction, which is based in embodied cognition. First, embodied cognition will be introduced, followed by a look at meaning construction in cognitive linguistics.

4. Embodied Cognitive

Embodied cognition suggests that our understanding of reality is shaped by our species-specific embodied experiences in the world. In a cognitive linguistics approach, semantic structure (i.e., language knowledge) is built upon the general conceptual structure of the human brain which is in turn built upon embodied interactions with the world. Language, therefore, has a solid basis in embodied experience. In addition, language is based in social networks, so that language is both embodied and socially embedded (Evans 2019, xxii–xxiii). Image schema theory, neuroscientific evidence, and embodied cultural memory will serve as a brief introduction to the theory of embodied cognition.

Image Schema Theory

Image schema theory, as developed by Mark Johnson and George Lakoff, argues that knowledge is grounded in and structured by various patterns derived from perceptions and bodily interactions with the environment (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987). These rudimentary concepts are termed ‘image schemas.’ However, it is important to note that these schemas are not mental images, but analogue representations formed in the mind by holistic, multimodal, sensorimotor experience. They are

‘schematic’ in that they are abstractions and ‘images’ in the sense that they are representations of sensorimotor experiences (Johnson 1987, 23–24, 37–40; Gibbs and Colston 2006, 239–240; Evans 2019, 221–224).

It is argued that image schemas derive from sensorimotor experience very early in life (Lakoff 1987, 269–275). This is based on evidence from developmental cognitive psychology and is in direct contrast to the idea of innate structure developed in generative grammar.

An example is the CONTAINER image schema (Johnson 1987, 21–23).³ From very early on, a child interacts with containers, first visually, later kinaesthetically. Studies have shown that infants as young as two and a half months have already begun to conceptualise containment and occlusion events (Aguilar and Baillargeon 1999; Luo and Baillargeon 2005). These perceptual and motor interactions form the image schema CONTAINER which includes within it the concepts of inside, outside, and bounded space (Mandler and Pagán Cánovas 2014, 515–517). As a second example, take the image schema UP-DOWN. This pre-conceptual schema of up and down forms is due to the types of bodies we inhabit with their vertical asymmetry (as opposed to horizontal symmetry) and the environment in which we live with forces such as gravity. From basic image schemas such as these our conceptual structures are abstracted (Johnson 1987, 34–36, 79–95).

Image schemas are pre-conceptual in origin, that is, they are the foundations of conceptual structure. They are abstracted from embodied experience, derived from interaction with and observation of the world—and because embodied experience has predictable outcomes, they are inherently meaningful. These image schemas can be internally complex. Image schemas give rise to more specific concepts and become building blocks for the conceptual system. They underlie linguistic meaning and give rise to abstract thought. Gibbs and Colston summarise:

For us to have meaningful, connected experiences, there must be regular patterns to our actions, perceptions, and conceptions. Image schemas reflect these recurring patterns and emerge through our bodily movements through space, our manipulation of objects, and our perception of the world in which we live (Gibbs and Colston 2006, 259).

Evidence From Neuroscience

Numerous brain-based studies show the connection between motor processes, conceptualisation, and language (Evans 2019, 211–217). For example, mirror neurons located in areas of the brain associated with both

³ Note that image schemas are conventionally written in SMALL CAPS.

language and motor control are activated both when engaging in actions and when observing someone else engaging in those actions (Barsalou 2008; Barsalou et al. 2003; Boulenger et al. 2008; Gallese and Lakoff 2005; Rizzolatti and Craighero 2004). Further, the same types of brain activation occur when subjects engage in intentional action, imagine themselves engaging in the action, observe another person engage in that action, or prepare to imitate another's actions (Grèzes and Decety 2001; Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 204–205). These same motor processes in the brain are also activated when using language about body-based tasks.⁴

Embodied Cultural Memory

Indigenous cultural memory provides many examples of embodied, holistic, social, land-based learning (Barwick 2023). Lynne Kelly has worked to show how indigenous cultures, ancient and modern, use embodied, mnemonic devices to commit vast amounts of information to memory. Through hard work and strict educational programmes, knowledge can be passed on through time that is extremely accurate and detailed (Kelly 2017, 31–33; Nunn and Reid 2016). She documents the use of songs, stories, songlines, landscape, rituals, ceremonies, body art, stars, sunset and sunrise locations, behaviour of birds and animals, and tidal patterns as integrated systems of encoding memory. In addition, many smaller objects such as paintings, sticks, boards, cloths, scrolls, and knotted strings are used to remember information. The same object can be used to tell multiple stories, as each item can be encoded multiple ways depending on need, which allows for creative integration of knowledge (Kelly 2017, 41–52). Together these mnemonic devices of communication form integrated knowledge systems that take advantage of multimodal, community-based embodied learning.

This social component is a vital part of meaning-making. As theologian John Sanders says, meaning is “connected to our creaturely status as finite physical beings who live in particular linguistic communities” (Sanders 2017, 95). Much of our encyclopaedic knowledge is gathered from the social contexts in our community. At an even more fundamental level, our image schemas are developed not just from interaction with our bodies and the physical environment, but also from interaction with the other people in our social environment.

Charles Taylor speaks of the ‘social imaginary,’ “an implicit ‘map’ of social space” often maintained in images, stories, and legends (C. Taylor 2007, 173). This embodied, socially embedded pre-conceptual, *tacit* knowledge includes the knowledge of language, which in an embodied cognition approach is

⁴ Numerous studies provide evidence for this claim (L. J. Taylor and Zwaan 2009; Buccino et al. 2005; Pulvermüller et al. 2005; Martin and Chao 2001; Zwaan and Yaxley 2003; Glenberg and Kaschak 2002; Stanfield and Zwaan 2001; Spivey et al. 2000; Isenberg et al. 1999; Pulvermüller 1999; Büchel, Price, and Friston 1998).

demonstrated in the *use* of language (Polanyi 1966). It is this tacit social map and embodied pre-conceptual and conceptual knowledge that is used to make sense of the conceptual meaning behind language. This sense-making is usually achieved without conscious effort using what Timothy Wilson calls the ‘adaptive unconscious.’ This is the faculty of human meaning-making, which automatically filters information and constructs meaning subconsciously (Wilson 2002, 17–41). In other words, interpretation usually takes place at an unconscious level and relies on tacit knowledge of social imaginaries and conceptual language. Importantly, this also applies to bilingual and multilingual individuals for whom *translation* is part of tacit knowledge about language.

5. Meaning Construction

How does this tacit, embodied meaning-making happen? Various models of ‘construction grammar’ outline the ways in which meaning is constructed in a cognitive linguistics framework (Evans 2019, 565–716).⁵ A brief look at some of the most salient ideas will point towards the linguistic foundations of internalisation for OBT.

The ‘constructions’ in construction grammar, also called ‘symbolic units,’ are form-meaning pairs made up of two elements: a phonological pole (the sound or form) and a semantic pole (the meaning).⁶ Initially, this is essentially Saussure’s concept of the *sign*, which is made of the signifier and the signified, both being psychological realities (de Saussure [1916] 1959). However, cognitive linguistics takes this further by claiming that all types of linguistic phenomena, including conventional complex phrases, language schemas such as inflectional morphemes, and complex grammatical constructions such as active and passive sentences, can be understood as symbolic units. As Adele Goldberg says, “The network of constructions captures our grammatical knowledge of language *in toto*, i.e., it’s constructions all the way down” (Goldberg 2006b, 18).

Constructions represent syntactic patterns in mental language, encompassing syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and morphology. They are abstracted from use early in infancy, forming the basis of language, shaped by social convention. Constructions become entrenched through automatization, wherein the concept and sound are regularly associated, ultimately grounding language in communal and embodied cognition.

⁵ Construction grammars have been developed by Ronald Langacker (1987, 1991), Paul Kay and Charles Fillmore (1999), and Adele Goldberg (1995, 2006b, 2006a). Langacker’s approach is called Cognitive Grammar but he now identifies it as a type of construction grammar (2005, 101–102).

⁶ For instance, the lexical unit, *cat* in English, on one side, is made up of a phonological pole represented by the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) notation as /kæt/. On the other side the semantic pole corresponds to the concept of cat, represented in small caps as CAT. Together this sound-meaning pair is notated as [[CAT]/[kæt]] with the semantic pole represented on the left and the phonological pole on the right.

Importantly, it is these constructions that prompt the creation of conceptual space—also called a domain—in which meaning construction takes place. This prompting happens in various ways, but here the focus will be upon ‘construal,’ which is the ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways.

To understand construal, two pairs of technical terms must be introduced. The first are ‘profile’ and ‘base.’ In a conceptual space a base is the context or background, against which a profile is highlighted. Second, are the terms ‘trajector’ and ‘landmark.’ A trajector in a conceptual space is the thing moving or acting. The landmark is the background against which the action takes place. These concepts are closely related, but their differences will become clear in the examples that follow.

Against this background, the nature of construal in meaning construction can be explored. Symbolic units, or constructions, (of all types) prompt conceptualisation. Certain words help to create the appropriate base, others highlight the trajector and profile. Because symbolic units include schematic elements, certain sentence constructions and word types also prompt certain types of conceptualisations. Consider the statements:

- (1) a. The lamp is above the table.
- b. The table is below the lamp.

In both, the same scene is being described. In a formal semantic approach, these two sentences mean the same thing. In a cognitive linguistics approach, however, though these two statements describe the same situation, they offer differing construals. In terms of trajector-landmark relations, in (1a), the lamp is the trajector and the table is the landmark. This relationship is reversed in (1b).

Construal can also be understood in terms of profile and base. The lamp is the profile in (1a), while the table is profiled in (1b). In both, the base remains the same. It is important to keep in mind that the domain base is often wider than a landmark because a base takes into account, often unspoken, encyclopaedic information. For instance, in the examples in (1), the base is larger than just the lamp-table arrangement. The prototypical lamp-table base is perhaps a lounge room, so that in the peripheral of the scene depicted in (1) is a room with other furniture, typically a couch, in a home of some sort. Alternatively, consider:

- (2) a. The neighbours are gone.
- b. The neighbours are away.

The examples in (2) have the same profile but different bases. In (2a) the base is the neighbour’s house. In (2b), the base is wherever the neighbours have gone to. A slightly more complex example shows how alternating construals can shift the profile between elements in a statement:

- (3) a. Bill gave Joyce a walrus.
- b. Joyce was given a walrus by Bill.
- c. A walrus was given to Joyce by Bill.

Each of the examples in (3) describe the same situation, in which the walrus-less situation of Joyce is resolved, but from alternating points of view. In (3a), Bill is profiled; in (3b), it is Joyce; and in (3c) the walrus is in profile.⁷

Construal can also be understood in terms of schematicity. Consider the following descriptions of the same situation in increasingly abstract (schematic) terms:

- (4) a. The boy opened the door.
- b. The boy did something.
- c. Something happened.

Each is an accurate depiction of the scene; however, the construal varies in terms of level of detail and type of informational load.

Finally, construal can be understood in terms of ‘scanning.’ Scanning refers to the way in which a scene is viewed either as a process—called ‘sequential scanning’—or as a thing—called ‘summary scanning.’ Consider:

- (5) a. I saw how the bridge collapsed.
- b. I saw the collapse of the bridge.

In (5a), the process, a sequential scan, of the bridge collapse is in view. In (5b), it is the complete event in view, a summary scan.

In a formal approach to semantics, alternate construals are seen as encoding the same meaning but from different perspective. Take the following examples:

- (6) a. Steve gave Barb a teddy bear.
- b. Steve gave a teddy bear to Barb.

The first (6a) is an example of a ditransitive construction in which the verb requires three arguments, that is, *give* requires a giver, a receiver and the thing given. In (6b), the example is in a prepositional dative construction, which requires two arguments with an optional third. Many verbs appear in both constructions. But consider (7):

- (7) a. *Barb explained Steve the problem.⁸
- b. Barb explained the problem to Steve.

⁷ This rather quirky example is original to Langacker.

⁸ The asterisk is the conventional notation for an ungrammatical sentence.

To a native speaker of English (7a) is ungrammatical, though (7b) is not. Though both have the exact syntax of (6), examples such as this are used to show that grammatical constructions have internal, schematic meaning (Goldberg 2006a).

There are numerous instances where two construction types encode the same scene but possess distinct semantic meanings, such as the active and passive voice or the different genitive forms, such as *Joyce's walrus* and *the walrus of Joyce*. From an early Chomskyan perspective, one could argue that there exists a deep structure that unifies these construction types. However, examples such as (7) demonstrate that these constructions have constraints, meaning that not all lexical items can be used interchangeably. In construction grammar, this phenomenon reveals that surface forms or syntactic structures themselves encode specific meanings. This approach assumes a continuum between the lexicon and grammar, acknowledging that words do contribute meaning to sentences, although not exclusively. Evans sums this up well:

...certain aspects of the meaning of a sentence, as well as certain restrictions upon its structure, arise directly from the properties of the skeletal grammatical construction rather than from the properties of the lexical verb. In addition, the verb contributes its own rich and specific (frame semantic) meaning, as well as bringing participant roles. It is in the interaction between the properties of the verb and the properties of the construction that both semantic and syntactic properties of these classes of sentences receive an explanation (Evans 2019, 705).

Consider an example of the verb *sneeze*. This verb conventionally takes one participant role (AGENT, i.e., the one who sneezes). But notice what happens in (8a):

- (8) a. She sneezed the foam off the cappuccino.
- b. She blew the foam off the cappuccino.
- c. She scooped the foam off the cappuccino.

In this example, *sneezed* is used to describe the causal event of moving the foam.⁹ This is a novel use of the verb, yet the meaning is clear. Where does this causal motion meaning come from? Upon careful analysis it becomes evident that the causal motion meaning does not belong to any of the words. *Sneeze* does not carry a causal meaning in its normal usage as compared to (8b) or (8c). One possible solution is to posit a new sense of the verb *sneeze* for this specific occurrence, but this quickly becomes impractical. Goldberg instead posits that the causal meaning is found in the sentence structure itself. Because this causal motion is found frequently with other verbs in the

⁹ This has become a typical example in construction grammar, originating with Goldberg (2006b, 94).

structure of sentences in (8), the meaning of *sneezed* can be deduced based on the structure in which it is discovered. Thus, sentence-level constructions can bend or ‘coerce’ lexical meanings (Goldberg 2006b, 94–100).

In summary, construal is the ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways, including trajector-landmark, profile-base, schematicity, and type of scanning. Construal is an important concept in cognitive linguistics because it shows the way in which grammar is inextricably linked to conceptual structuring.

6. Internalisation and Embodied Cognition

John Sanders points out the paradigm shift that the cognitive linguistics approach makes for exegetical practices.

For cognitive linguistics, language is fundamentally about meaning between persons. It involves a variety of contexts and relies upon vast storehouses of background knowledge. This encyclopaedic knowledge is not contained solely in texts. Rather, texts prompt the construction of meaning (Sanders 2017, 138).

Thus, for cognitive linguistics, meaning is not found by analysing separate components of language. Instead, “determining the meaning of biblical texts... involves cultural communities in dialogue” (Sanders 2017, 136).

Communication of any type prompts for meaning construction which happens immediately, tacitly, and naturally. The practices of internalisation allow for the creation of new conceptual imagery. Practices in which the passage is told from varying character’s points of view are exercises in construal. Not only does this help to create more robust conceptual structure, when this is done by the translators it is a sign of deep understanding of the conceptual scene and shows an in-depth, tacit-level knowledge of language in use, what we might call tacit-level language analysis.

Additionally, conceptual meaning construction is evident in the processes of internalisation. Normal language use is multimodal, communal, conversational, holistic, iterative, and in many parts of the world, multilingual. Using these processes streamlines the meaning construction. Because the process is iterative, communal, and involves performance, there are built-in quality control checks to make sure that the proper meaning has been constructed. In a cognitive linguistics approach, language is all about meaning, therefore, the evidence of sufficient linguistic understanding is demonstrated in proper meaning construction. Because form and meaning are connected it is impossible to miss out on constructs of language when talking about meaning, even in a ‘non-academic’ way: meaning always involves language knowledge.

7. Case Study

These principles were tested in an OBT project in January–February 2023 in Arua, Uganda. Translators from three languages—Khebo of Democratic Republic of Congo; Logol of Sudan; and Lokoya of South Sudan—gathered for training and the creation of draft translations of the book of Ruth. I will briefly outline the processes used in this OBT project, especially highlighting those elements which might be understood as tacit-level linguistic analysis.

After formal introductions and orientation, each language group was invited to tell a story from their own language, either in that language, or in one of the common languages (English, Arabic, or French). On the first day, each group told a story choosing to use a common language. They were then asked to prepare a story from their own culture to share with the group on the following morning. These were shared in the target languages without translation, each story approximately fifteen to twenty minutes long. Only at the end did someone else from the group give a rough interpretation and summary in a common language. There was then time for questions and responses to each group. For example, the Logol storyteller used a prop at certain points together with singing and dancing, the meaning of which was clarified in the question and response time. Each group's contribution was celebrated and approached with curiosity and respect. Comments were made by several of the participants highlighting the similarities and differences of culture, and how much information could be understood by body language and intonation alone.

Over the next several days, three different types of short stories were shared and internalised using the OBT internalisation principles and practices. Each story served several purposes simultaneously. The first, the Wise Counsellor story, which has been used in storying processes for some time, was used to model and teach exegetical principles.¹⁰ The second, a true-life story shared by one of the facilitators from his time in the Amazon, embodied many principles of the importance of understanding culture, contextualisation, key terms, humility, and orality. Finally, the story of the four lepers from 2 Kings 7:3–9 was told and internalised. It was chosen as a short biblical story, which is relatively simple in its outline, but which has many important contextual elements which must be understood for the story to make sense.

On the Friday of the first week of training the entire book of Ruth was performed, first in English, then in Hebrew, and again, by a different performer, in English, some with props and actions. Subsequently, every day, after a devotional time, the book of Ruth was performed again in English before each language group went to work on drafting. The drafting process involved successive retellings of the whole book of Ruth beginning with

¹⁰ A version of the story can be found in Miller (2012, 19–21).

the major flow of the story and progressively adding details in, finetuning along the way. Some of the finetuning came through corporate corrections within each language group as one translator would correct another. Other corrections came through daily back translation checks. Internalisation techniques were used, such as acting out the story and using props as memory tools. Facilitators were present in each group to answer exegetical or cultural questions, retell parts of the story, or to question comprehension on certain sections, especially those that appeared unnatural in retells. As the retellings became more confident, the translators naturally began to incorporate elements of their cultural storytelling including actions and song.

Each day in the larger group sessions, there were retellings of the story of Ruth, combined with other activities to encourage greater understanding of the main themes. For example, on one day space was created to share personal stories of suffering related to famine, widowhood, and death which are main themes in the framing story of Ruth. These stories often turned into personal ministry times.

In the final weeks, each target language group performed drafts of Ruth for each other, taking time for comment and feedback. Observations and comparisons allowed for further finetuning of drafts within each language team. In preparation for community checking, final draft recordings were made around the campfire incorporating natural sounds and ambience as requested by the translators.

This brief case study highlights many aspects of embodied cognition in the work of the translation teams. Oral storytelling and performance—utilising gestures, props, intonations, and song—engaged the translators through embodied learning pathways. By watching, listening to, retelling, and performing the book of Ruth, meaning was reinforced through multiple sensory and interactive modalities. These sensorimotor activities and interactions triggered embodied schemas, helping internalisation. Likewise, by telling personal stories that connected to the themes of Ruth, embodied emotional connections were made to the story.

Meaning construction was also demonstrated by the focus on cultural context through the various storytelling approaches. Because meaning is not derived solely through isolated linguistic forms, but also through cultural and contextual nuances, this process of meaning construction was facilitated by the preparatory storytelling exercises in the leadup to the focus on the Ruth story. In addition, the process of progressive drafting exemplified incremental meaning construction as conceptual frameworks were developed and refined. This iterative process incorporated natural feedback and correction loops, reflecting an ongoing negotiation of meaning.

Finally, retelling and correcting the drafts relied on intuitive, tacit adjustments based on what ‘felt’ natural in the target language, rather than on explicit analytical rules. When clarity was needed, facilitators prompted articulation of cultural and linguistic choices by asking about specific phrases or word selections. Hearing stories in other languages without translation also encouraged participants to focus on nonverbal aspects of meaning, such as body language, rhythm, and intonation. This process also prompted thinking about natural forms of storytelling in each language.

Many of the embodied, experiential, and dynamic aspects of meaning-making can be seen in this case study. By combining sensory engagement, cultural grounding, and an iterative and collaborative process, tacit-level linguistic analysis was taking place in the drafting of Ruth. While further studies and innovative processes are needed, this case study shows, at least, the promise of tacit-level, embodied linguistic analysis in OBT.

8. Conclusion

Though there are many other helpful ideas in cognitive linguistics, this paper has explored the ideas of construal and embodied cognition as linguistic foundations for the internalisation practices and processes of OBT. In a cognitive linguistics approach, semantic structure and meaning construction are based on embodied cognition. Processes and practices that take advantage of embodied learning make use of tacit meaning construction evidenced in both neuroscience and indigenous learning techniques.

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APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF INTERNALISATION PROCESSES AND PRACTICES (K. H. Frost 2024)

Facilitator Internalises

- The facilitator(s) should internalise the passage and background information, ideally ensuring deep knowledge and the ability to perform and recall relevant details naturally.
- This facilitator internalisation can be done using oral or literate modalities, but to be effective the facilitator(s) must have a deep heart, mind, and body connection with the passage beforehand.

Translation Team Internalisation and Exegesis

- Seven processes that describe how the methods (next section) should be employed:
 - Multimodal: utilising actions, sights, sounds, and so forth
 - Holistic: engaging heart, mind, and body including the spiritual world of the translators, paying careful attention to issues of self-esteem, shame and honour, a redemptive and reflexive process
 - Multilingual: utilising both the language of wider communication and the language into which the Scriptures will be translated as well as any other common languages, interpreting if necessary—though it is not necessary for the facilitator to understand every part of every conversation
 - Iterative: all of the following processes are not ‘steps’ but should be interwoven as is appropriate and natural for the community, circular and spiral learning
 - Conversational: rather than teaching from one person, this is group conversation, facilitators may help gently guide conversation, but not take over, conversational exegesis
 - Communal: All processes are relational, with people as priority, all members of the team participate, paying attention to relevant issues of the community

- Location-aware: concerned with the location of events. Place is a vital component of the internalisation process.
- Internalisation should include four major practices that account for many types of methods:
 - Familiarisation
 - Listen to the passage or watch it being performed
 - This can be listening to audio recordings
 - Watching the facilitator or other perform
 - This happens repeatedly throughout the process, several times a day, if possible, as a group and/or individually
 - Informational understanding:
 - Conversational exegesis
 - Background information
 - Clarify anything that is unclear
 - Facilitators or translators can ask questions
 - Discussing key concepts
 - Visual aids can be used (maps, pictures, videos, etc.)
 - Experiential understanding:
 - Tell stories that connect the heart and experiences of the people to the story
 - Focus on the characters of the story and imagine the story from their point of view
 - Experience the passage as if one was there (using storyboarding, sketching, props, dramatization), building experiential memories of the passage
 - Create internal images of the story focusing on meaning and not word-for-word memorisation

- Preparing to retell the story requires a detailed internal knowledge of the passage
- Discuss the relevance the story personally and for the community
- Performance understanding:
 - Iterative process of listening and watching the performance of others and performing it
 - Involve the body through gestures, props, pictures
 - Practice getting the performance natural as the process goes along: natural pauses, emotion, tone, and so forth