

Choosing the Right Words

In English, we use the word “love” to describe a lot of things. You can say, “I love pizza!” or “I love you!” Both are different but use the same word, “love,” to describe our feelings about something or a person.

We also talk about the heart as the place where we feel love or emotion. In a lot of ways, we think of the heart as the center of our feelings and being. But did you know that the Awa people of Papua New Guinea think of the liver as their center? Or did you know that the Rawa people, also from Papua New Guinea, think of the stomach as their center?

That’s why it’s important for translators to choose the right words when they translate the Bible, so that people can understand it in a way that makes sense to them!

Some languages are very specific with their words. For example, the Tzeltal language of Mexico has 26 different ways to say “to carry.” That’s a lot!

In the activity below, see if you can figure out which of the Tzeltal words in the list is best when translating these two Bible verses. Then you can get a small taste of why it’s so important that translators choose the right words as they work. That way, God’s Word speaks directly to their heart (or for the Awa and Rawa people, their liver or stomach!).

*Tzeltal mother
and daughter*



Which Word's Best?

26 Different Ways to Say "To Carry" in Tzeltal

Choose the best "to carry" explanation to help translate these two verses.

1 - "But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am — so much greater that I'm not worthy even to be his slave and **carry** his sandals."

— Matthew 3:11b (NLT)

2 - "And if you do not **carry** your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple."

— Luke 14:27 (NLT)

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| 1  cuch
to carry on back or with a strap over the forehead. | 8  pet
to carry in arms. | 15  lup
to carry in a spoon or ladle. | 22  check
to carry by holding on both sides. |
| 2  q'uech
to carry on shoulder. | 9  nol
to carry in palm of hand. | 16  cats'
to carry tightly gripped between two objects. | 23  lut'
to carry with pincers. |
| 3  bahel
to carry something placed in a container. | 10  julup'in
to carry across one's shoulder. | 17  tuch
to carry in a vertical position. | 24  yom
to carry different items together. |
| 4  cajnuc'tay
to carry over shoulder. | 11  nop'
to carry in one's fingers. | 18  toy
to carry raised up high. | 25  pich'
to carry by scruff of neck. |
| 5  lats'
to carry under arm. | 12  lat'
to carry in a plate or container. | 19  lic
to carry dangling. | 26  ich' bahel
to carry by hand. |
| 6  chub
to carry in pocket or pouch. | 13  lip'
to carry by one corner. | 20  bal
to carry rolled up. | |
| 7  tom
to carry in a bundle. | 14  chuy
to carry in a bag. | 21  ch'et
to carry by gripping tightly (cloth). | |

Answers: 1. Ich'bahel. 2. q'uech.

