

March 15, 2014

Dear and good friends,

Greetings from Wake Forest.

We've been busy, and we're looking forward to leaving in a few weeks for two months in Peru where I'll be teaching a semantics course—a course on meaning—to ten Latino students interested in cross-cultural ministry. I know that a course on meaning sounds a bit bizarre, as if “meaning” were some kind of transcendental category, or perhaps some sort of weird blob that you can dissect and study. But it is indeed kind of complicated. Here's an example.

Let's say you go to Bob's house to pick up him and his wife for dinner. When you arrive you see the emergency squad in the driveway with lights flashing, and you figure something is up. You ask, “Are we still on for dinner?” and Bob says, “Our son is really sick.” In this context, the sentence “Our son is really sick.” means basically, “No, we're not still on for dinner.” So there are two levels of meaning here, the actual meaning of the sentence that was uttered (that the son is really sick) and then what it means in this specific context (no, we're not going to dinner).

To drive the point home, here's another situation. Assume the same basic story with a different question. You come up to Bob and ask, “Are you headed to the hospital?” and Bob says, “Our son is really sick.” In this context, Bob's answer means, “Yes, we're going to the hospital.” In the first scenario, the exact same sentence means “No (we're not going to dinner).” In the second scenario, it means, “Yes (we're going to the hospital).” And the actual utterance is the same in both cases. “Our son is really sick.”

So how are these levels of meaning related, and what do we mean by “meaning?” Is the meaning what Bob said about the sick son or is the meaning the deeper meaning-in-context of what Bob said? And how are we supposed to know which interpretation is valid and viable in each situation?

Meaning gets more complicated when it's in a different language and when there is a large gap, perhaps in time or culture, between the native language one speaks and the language he or she is trying to learn. Add to this that meaning is not only in the words and sentences uttered, but also in the context that the words and sentences are spoken into.

So our students take this course in semantics in order to get ready for the translation course that they take second semester, when Nan and I hope to be back in North Carolina.

In late January we were able to visit our daughter Amalia and her family in Hawaii. They are well and our newest grandchild, Aila, is now three months old and healthy,

for which we thank God. We were delighted to participate in Amalia and Kyle's wedding while we were there. It wasn't planned a long time in advance, but it was special nonetheless. I sang a song "Molly's Song," which I wrote when Molly (Amalia) was a mere six weeks old, the same age as Aila is now. I sang the song to Molly many times since her birth and I had the privilege of singing it at her wedding as well. She and I agreed that we could get through it if I didn't look her in the eyes, which I did anyhow, and I did pretty much get through it. Molly is wearing a dress of my Mom's. We figured that it had to be some 75 years old. In the photo, Aila and



Eden are hugging Grandma Nancy. The water you can barely see at the left is the Pacific Ocean.

While in Hawaii we were able to visit the University of Hawaii linguistics department in Hilo, where I gave a talk on minority languages. It was encouraging to see that a language like Hawaiian, which was severely endangered fifty years ago, has made a remarkable comeback, something we hope for many of the world's minority languages. Hawaiian is now widely spoken, Hawaiian greetings and vocabulary are used even by non-Hawaiian speakers, it is widely written and used on TV, on signs and in many church hymns.

I spent most of February trying to pull together the faculty for our CILTA training course in Lima. With the smaller number of students this year—just ten—there was a lot of talk of cancelling. But Latino churches, pastors and missions prevailed on us

to move ahead. They didn't want to lose momentum for the students who had signed up in good faith, so our administrators were eventually convinced and we decided on fairly short notice, to go ahead. So that's what we're doing. We've got a good faculty lined up (despite a late start and after many inquiries and scores of e-mails), and the course starts tomorrow, Monday. Nan and I arrive four weeks later to do our part (the semantics course).

You've heard me talk a bit about my forthcoming book on Mam language and culture. I've now got the photo-ready copy in my hot little hands and I need to read it through just once more—very carefully—and then create an index and then it's done. The publishers are talking about a June publication if I don't drag my feet.

As I get older, I find multi-tasking to be more of a challenge. I used to love to get up early in the morning rearing to go with a list of twenty things to do. Now just getting up in the morning is first on my short list of things to do, and mono-tasking is the rule of the day.

We continue to thank God for good health and for the chance to teach highly motivated and dedicated students.

Thanks to all of you for your interest and prayers and support.

Blessings to all,

Wes and for Nancy