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CULTURAL IDENTITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION

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AT THE END of the last century, missionary efforts to translate the Bible and other religious tracts demonstrated the problems of cross-cultural communication in Zimbabwe.¹ The fact that many of the early versions needed soon to be revised was a recognition and an acknowledgement of the nature and scope of the problems of translation which had been experienced earlier on. These various translations provide the basis for a fruitful study of literature. With the spread of Christian education in Southern Rhodesia, that is, about forty to fifty years later, there was a shift in emphasis as Africans took to the writing of imaginative works which they themselves translated into English. This dramatic change, even though it was gradual, was of intellectual significance to nascent Shona literature because what initially started, paradoxically, as a source-language (English) became a receptor-language: a work in Zezuru, Karanga, Manyika, was translated into English. These two processes, particularly the latter, show the problems of expressing a cultural and national identity in another language.

The aesthetics of translation is not divorced from its utility or morality. That is to say that pure aesthetic experience does not consist of a disinterested contemplation of an object without reference to its essence in reality as well as its 'external' ends. In literature, language is used in a way that is aesthetically appealing; but it also invokes our personal attention to its use — especially as a medium for the making of folk-tales, at the oral level, and for making fiction, at the literature level. However, while accepting this view, our attention is drawn to the fact that there is literature which is not fiction, such as biography, and that there is fiction (imaginative work) which is not necessarily literature (take, for instance, the narrative form in advertising) in the sense intended in this article.

In this article the concept of fiction will be stretched to cover oral traditional songs, didactic poetry and folk-tales based on family legends and tribal myths, all of which are in turn an important ingredient of modern imaginative works. In this respect, it is evident that literature appears to be identified with fiction only in the negative sense, namely, that we never accept it as 'true'. It is precisely for this reason that a story with its characteristic rhetorical devices — metaphor,

¹ G.P. Kahari, 'Missionary influences in Shona literature', in M.F.C. Bourdillon (ed.), *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, Vol. 2 (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1977), 87-101.

metonymy, paradox and ambiguity — even if it is conspicuously and consistently successful, is immediately dismissed by the Shona audience as 'untrue': *rungano* (It is [only] an untrue); that is, it is a series of entertaining events whose objective is to lead a character out of an invidious but mostly imaginary situation.

One of the ways one can recognize the problems of cross-cultural communication in a literary work is by drawing attention to the way in which language is used to indicate social relations. Particular terms are used to indicate familiar and other social relationships or to show the position people occupy in the society as a whole. In addition to this language, symbols are used to designate certain referents which do not exist in the alien culture. In as relatively simple a form as the folk-tale, the express purpose of the tale is to inculcate in children an awareness of the society's values — and this may be lost in translation into the language which does not recognize these values.

It is not the statistical frequency of foregrounding components that distinguishes literary discourse from non-literary discourse, but that consistency and systematic character of the foregrounding and the fact that the background, as well as the foreground, and the relationships between them are aesthetically relevant, whereas in non-literary discourse only the backgrounded components are aesthetically relevant.²

I would argue that in Shona literature the 'background' is of a dual nature: the use of language in its literal sense and its traditional use as metaphor and metonymy, which the audience recognizes as giving it a place within Shona traditional formulas and therefore within Shona cultural traditions.

THE ORTHOGRAPHY

A historical survey of the various dialects, their subsequent reduction to writing and the development of their orthography leading to modern Standard Shona will help us evaluate the nature, scope and field of the language's phonemes, morphemes and syntax which affect the aesthetics of modern translation and the general problem of transferability and of finding modern cultural equivalents of traditional concepts.

☐ 'Shona' is an artificial term used by African linguists to refer to an agglomeration of highly and mutually intelligible dialects found within and outside Zimbabwe.³ It was reduced to writing by various missionaries — the Jesuits of Chishawasha (1892); the South African Dutch Reformed at

² D. Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and Typology of Modern Literature* (London, E. Arnold, 1979), 2.

³ There are a number of theories which try to explain the origin of the word 'Shona'. See Recommendation 3 in Southern Rhodesia, *Report on the Unification of the Shona Dialects...* by Clement M. Doke (Sessional Papers, C.S.R. 25, 1931), 78–80; and see also Dr Cyril A. Hromník's article in the *Cape Argus*, 28 Nov. 1983. In this article, Dr Hromník argues that the word 'Shona' is not derogatory; that it is derived from Sona, an Indian word of the Pali people and that the word, therefore, refers to the 'land of gold'.

Morgenster (1892); the American Board Mission at Chikore (1893); the British Methodists at Waddilove (1896); the Marianhill Fathers at Triashill Mission (1896); and the Anglican Community of the Resurrection at Saint Augustine's (1897) — who strategically deployed themselves throughout Southern Rhodesia at the end of the nineteenth century.⁴ Missionary efforts to reduce the spoken dialects to a written medium began to flourish after the Southern Rhodesia Missionary Conference passed a resolution in 1928 asking the Government to invite Professor Clement Doke to make a study of the languages; he subsequently presented his *Report on the Unification of the Shona Dialects* in 1931.⁵ The *Report* initiated the 'Standard' replacing the 'Old' orthography which had been used in the publication of the New Testament in 1900.

The Zimbabwe Literature Bureau, then the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau, established in 1954, sponsored the publication of imaginative works in the vernacular; and in 1956 Oxford University Press, Cape Town, published the epic novel by Solomon Mutswario, *Feso*. By 1983 one hundred and four novels had been published by various publishing houses. They fall into two broad categories: the 'Old World' and the 'New World', depending on whether the author's vision of life is directed towards the period before or after the arrival of the Whites in Zimbabwe.⁶

The Old World novel with fantastic and marvellous elements is based on Shona traditional myths, legends and folk-tales,⁷ while the New World novel, in which realism struggles against idealization and supernaturalism, is concerned with the disintegration of the traditional family as a result of urbanization and Christianity.⁸ The colonial novel takes the form of satire. For example, Chakaipa's *Garandichauya* [Wait, I will come] depicts the patience of a faithful woman left by her husband who returned blind.⁹ This type of novel compares and contrasts traditional with industrial life, regarding the former as the ideal. The novel is thus moralistic and didactic.

In 1958 Chitepo's *Soko Risina Musoro* [A Tale without a Head] was published, a long poem of epic proportions with quasi-biographical elements.¹⁰ The hero is in search of spiritual satisfaction in the midst of chaos. This poem was followed by eight anthologies of modern and traditional verse. Modern verse, like modern prose, is highly moralistic. The first anthology of traditional clan poetry, with commentary, was compiled by Hodza and Fortune in 1979 under the title *Shona Praise Poetry*.¹¹

⁴ G. Fortune '75 years of writing in Shona', *Zimbabwe* (1969), 1, 55–67.

⁵ See fn. 3 above.

⁶ See G. Kahari, *The Novels of Patrick Chakaipa* (Salisbury, Longman, 1972).

⁷ See, for example, P. Chakaipa, *Karikoga Gwanemiseve* (Salisbury, Longman, 1978).

⁸ See, for example, A.C. Moyo, *Ziva Kwawakabva* (Salisbury, Longman, 1977).

⁹ P. Chakaipa, *Garandichauya* (Salisbury, Longman, 1963 [2nd edn, 1979]).

¹⁰ H. Chitepo, *Soko Risina Musoro* (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1958).

¹¹ A. Hodza and G. Fortune, *Shona Praise Poetry* (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1979).

The first play modelled on Western plays in form but not in content, was Paul Chidyausiku's *Ndakambokuyambira* [I Warned You Before].¹² Based on a traditional theme, the play pokes fun at women for their inability to keep family secrets. The twelve plays which have, so far, seen the light of day since 1968 have a variety of themes, including men who neglect their families because of greed. Unlike *Ndakambokuyambira*, they are not written for the urban theatrical stage, but for the village open-air arena after the fashion of the traditional carnivalesque shows.

MODERN POETRY

Without fear of running the risk of being too abstract and theoretical, which would defeat the purpose of translation, I seek in this article to consider some of the fundamental procedural problems relevant to the translation from the source-language (Shona) to the receptor-language (English) texts as experienced by poets such as Solomon Mutswairo, Herbert Chitepo, Henry Pote and others. The poets' works were conceived in and written in Shona and later translated into English. My choice goes to poetry because it is an older and neater genre than the amorphous genre of the novel which is a later development.

Solomon Mangwiro Mutswairo (b. 1924) has emerged as the most widely publicized author in Zimbabwe — and not without reason. His novel *Feso* was, in 1956, the first ever to be published in Zimbabwe, then Southern Rhodesia, and this together with most of his poems which he wrote in the 1940s, appears in English in an anthology of his works entitled *Zimbabwe: Prose and Poetry*,¹³ *Feso* has also been translated into German.¹⁴ It is for these reasons that Mutswairo's poems have been chosen as central to this discussion although, for illustration and for the purpose of clarity, examples will be sought from wherever the source-language is Shona.

Most of Mutswairo's poems are set in the Chiweshe Communal Land, popularly known as the Mazowe Valley, and this narrow setting makes them particularly difficult to understand. This is so, simply because local literature invariably presents emotional feelings and images which are difficult to communicate to the reader. Such emotional images come from the knowledge that one's ancestors and one's immediate friends and loved ones, all the dead familiar faces, may be buried beneath the foot of the mountains where one lives:

¹² P. Chidyausiku, *Ndakambokuyambira* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1968).

¹³ S. Mutswairo, *Zimbabwe: Prose and Poetry* (Washington DC, Three Continents Press, 1974 [2nd edn, 1979]).

¹⁴ S. Mutswairo, *Feso*, transl. by Karin von Schweder-Schreiner (Freiburg, Walter, 1980).

Makomo eNyota¹⁵

Anoyevedza sei makomo eNyota
 Akashongedza nyika yaMambo Chiweshe!
 Zvinondifadza sei kana ndichirota
 Ndiri mhiri yaSawi pedyo nokwaGweshe!

 Ndinoyemura sei makomo eNyota,
 Kutiva mumimvuri yawo richabuda!
 Napakunge rodoka usiku ndorota
 Ndiri mhiri yaRhuya, nzvimbo dzandinoda!

 Kuyevedzawo here kwenyika yeNyota!
 Munhuruka wosvika miti yotungira,
 Maruva omubani acheni sedota,
 Nepfumvudza yemiti nyika yopfumbira!

 Ndinogodisa sei kuva kwaChiweshe,
 Ndichinzwa nziyo itsva dzeshiri mungan'a,
 Nenziyo dzavagere munisha tekeshe,
 Vachigere chinyakare, vasinai hanyi'a!

 Iyi nyika yeNyota pedyo kuna Sawi:
 Inyika yomupunga, chibahwe nezviyo.
 Inyika ine hova dzinosarukira;
 Vanhu vagere imo vazere nenziyo.

 Kunyange ndova kure nenyika yeNyota,
 Ndichiri nyika dzino dzinenge masowi.
 Zvinondifadza sei kana ndichirota
 Ndiri mhiri kwaGweshe, pedyo kuna Sawi!

The Nyota Hills

How assertive are the Nyota Hills,
 Bold, they clothe the horizon in the land of Chiweshe!
 How glad I am when I dream myself back
 Beyond the Sawi River near Gweshe!

 In exile I long for the Nyota Hills.
 Lonely, I want to bathe naked-souled in their shadows at dawn!
 How I dream myself back at sunset
 Beyond the Ruya River, to places I long for!

 How brilliant is the land of Nyota!
 As the first rains kiss blossoms from the trees:
 Low flowers, too, of the plain, look white as ash,
 My mind strides in the petaled home seas!

¹⁵ Mutswairo, *Zimbabwe: Prose and Poetry*, Shona text, 142, English translation, 143.

How I die, then to be in Chiweshe land,
 Listening to the young birds chirp in the bee-hummed plains!
 Hearing the work songs, the cradle-croons of the calm villages,
 Sounds of a carefree life, safe from alien pillages!

That land of Nyota near Sawi —
 A land of rice, maize and finger-millet —
 A land of ever-rushing streams —
 There, the people have joy; there, my dreams!

Though I may be far from the hills of Nyota
 As I fight the foreign cliffs and deserts,
 I delight in my dreams, for dreaming,
 Beyond the Gweshe I am, and near the Sawi River!

The first line in the source-language (Shona) uses the verb stem *yev-a*, on to which is built the extension *er-a* to which again is added the causative species *r + y + dza* — *yevedza* which means 'cause to admire'. The admiration is caused by an object (in this case the mountain) but the receptor-language used the word 'assertive' which implies that the hills are active — acting upon their subject, the poet. In this respect the word is appropriate as it communicates the right feeling of elation — to the extent that the Shona word is indirect while the English is direct in its appeal to the sense of sight. The introduction of images which are not in the original seems to be an attempt towards dynamic and meaningful translation, which results in the creation of a new piece of work, far removed from the reality of the original source-language poem. For example:

'Bold', 'horizon' (stanza 1, line 2)

'In exile' (2, 1)

'I want to bathe naked-souled' (2, 2) for the Shona *Kutiva mumimvuri* (to bathe in the shade)

'As the first rains kiss blossoms from the trees' (3, 2) for the Shona *Munhuruka wosvika miti yotungira* (when the first rains come, the trees start to blossom)

'the petaled home seas' (3, 4) for the Shona *nyika yopfumbira* (when the countryside is delightful)

Ndinogodisa, meaning 'I yearn', is translated 'How I die' (4,1)

'the young birds chirp' (4, 2) comes from *nziyo itsva dzeshiri*

'Hearing the work songs, the cradle-croons of the calm villages' (4, 3) comes from *nenziyo dzavagere mumisha ikeshe* (with the songs from those who are [firmly] established in the villages)

'Sounds of a carefree life, safe from alien pillages' (4, 4) comes from *Vachagere chinyakare, vasinai hanyan'a* (those who still live a carefree traditional life)

'There, the people have joy; there, my dreams' (5, 4) comes from *vanhu vagere imo vazere nenziyo* (the people who dwell in there are full of songs)

'As I fight the foreign cliffs and deserts' (6, 2) comes from *Ndichiri nyika dzino dzinenge masowi* (while I am still in these parts of the world which resemble deserts)

Herbert Chitepo, assisted by Hazel Carter, in his *Soko Risina Musoro* [A Tale without a Head], a long poem of epic proportions, has retained a faithful translation so far unequalled in Shona literature. The receptor-language has successfully maintained the syllabic rhythm of the source language and this is because both the native speaker and his assistant have an excellent working knowledge of the phonemes, morphemes and syntax of the two languages involved. This does not appear to be the case with Mutsairo and his assistant, the result being that the receptor-product is more poetic than the original.

Soko Risina Musoro¹⁶

CHINYAMATIMBI!

Chinyamatimbi musha une mbiri,
Musha wakanaka kupinda yose,
Une upfuto mumatura
Nesimba mumaoko evanhu,
Chinyamatimbi musha unokosha,
Musha usingakanganwikwi.

Chirimo chakasvika noupenyu hutsva
Chichinongedza mberi kuzvishamiso
Zvinotevera nokuuya kwezhizha.

Mukadzi akatura svinga rokugumisira.
Akamira achitarisa bakwa rake rehuni,
Akanyemwerera akati,
'Tinozotenda dzapfuudza zhizha,
Zvakanzi, "Tendai maruva madya shakata."

Ndaigara pasi mumumvuri padare
Ndichiteerera unguwaru hwevakuru
Vaiswera vachivhutira mvuto,
Kugadzira miseve nematemo,
Kuveza tsvimbo nemikura.

Ndakateerera vakuru vachitonga mhosva,
Vachiranga vaparadzi vepasi nemisha.
Mukuru mushava aiwe nemhanza,
Samusha mutema ane ndebvu chena,
NaSaChin'ara aiwe noungwaru hunoshamisa,
Ane maziso anoona nezviri mumwoyo wemunhu.

¹⁶ Chitepo, *Soko Risina Musoro*, Shona text, 15, English translation, 32.

Ndaiswera kusika nyimo kujana
 Ndikadyisa magwere aMai Munyara
 Ndikanyimwa kudya manheru
 Ndikatizira kuna ambuya,
 Akandigashira kunge ndisina kutadza.

Mikomba yese nemipata yemakomo,
 Zvese ndaizivana nazvo kunge shamwari.
 Ndaiziva miti yese yemudondo,
 Ndaiziva michero yese yemusango
 Patsika tsuro nepafamba nhoru,
 Ndaiziva seshamwari yazvo.

Gomo rekwaMubvuwiri
 Rine makuva pamusoro paro
 Gomo reNgwena rine ninga parutivi,
 Zvese ndaiziviza nokuti ndakabva munaizvo.

Ndakaona maganzvo achibikwa,
 Hari dzedoro dzichikwidzwa gomo,
 Mvura ikanaya. Mwari wepasi
 Akabudisa upenyu hwembesa.

A Tale without a Head

Chinyamatimbi! Chinyamatimbi is a village of renown, a village fairer than all (others), it has riches in its granaries and strength in the arms of its people. Chinyamatimbi is a village held dear, a village not to be forgotten.

Spring arrived with new life, pointing onward to the wonders which follow with the coming of summer.

The woman set down the last bundle of faggots and stood gazing at her shelf of firewood, and smiled and said, "We shall give thanks when summer has passed, it has been said, "Believe the flowers when you have eaten the *shakata* fruits."

I used to sit on the ground in the shade in the court, listening to the wisdom of the elders who spent their time blowing the bellows, to make arrows and axes, to carve kerries and hoe-handles.

I listened to the elders passing judgement on cases, punishing the destroyers of earth and the homesteads. The brown-faced elder was bald, the village headman dark-skinned with a white beard, and SaChin'ara had wondrous wisdom, with eyes that see even what is in the heart of a man.

During my turn at herding I spent my time spinning peas [ground nuts] and let (the cattle) eat the mealies of Mai Munyara, and in the evening I was refused food and ran to the grandmother, and she received me as if I had done no wrong.

All the gullies and passes of the mountains, I knew them all as friends. I knew all the trees of the forest, I knew all the fruits of the veld. The path of the hare and the track of the kudu, I knew them as their friends.

The Mount of Mubvuwiri with graves on its summit, the Hill of the

Crocodile with caves in its side, I knew them all, for I came from within them.

I saw the rain-sacrifices brewed, the pots of beer carried up the mountain, and the rain fell. The God of the earth brought forth the life of the crops.

Henry Pote in translating one of his poems — 'Kukumbira upenyu utsva' [Prayer for New Life] which, translating the first line, he entitles 'Look! Watch Those Trees' — succeeds in capturing the mood of springtime with its new leaves, thus celebrating the link between the young who are represented by the new leaves and the old who are symbolized by the roots. The two complementary and important aspects of the society are thus portrayed in the images of leaves (*ma-shizha*) and one's roots (*mi-dzi*) or one's ancestors (*va-dzimu*), those who go out like fire (*dzimika*) and rise again (*muka*). Words have been carefully chosen and the author's desired intention achieved. The association of 'new life in a new world' with the youth of today and also with leaves, and the 'association of the old roots' with one's ancestors and the suggested 'old world' make poetic readings: 'Look carefully/At the death and resurrection around you and learn about life' (stanza 2, lines 4–5).

Kukumbira upenyu utsava¹⁷

Tarisa, ona miti iyo
Inoyevedza namashizha namaruva ayo
Matsva. Yenge yakamera marimwe-zuro,
Ko mvura zvayakaguma kunaya mukukohwa,
Upenyu utsva hwabukira hwabvepiko?

Tarisa, ona nyoka, zvipembenene nyenze zvamuka
Muhope dzousika urefu. Zvisikwa zvokwakuka
Namasimba matsva. Uswa inga ratova bumhudza
Rinobva pamidzi yaivapo kare. Nyatso nanganidza
Kufa nokumuka kweizvi zvisikwa udzidze zvoupenyu.

Ini ndinofa ndichimukawo misi yose pandinorara
Usiku nokupepuka mangwanani, asi ndakarara
Ndakapata, zvandisingagoni kudzokerazve
Samashizha namaruva nouswa hunoti zvi
Noupenyu utsva hunouya nokutevedza vinoda ivu.

Imi vadzimu namashavi amadzitateguru edu
Onai nyika yashanduka. Ndipeiwo chokwadi yenyu.
Ndinokumbira midzi isingavavi, midzi youpenyu
Utsva munyika itsva. Midzi yangu yakadzurwa.
Dai Mwari Mambo mandipawo mvura kwayo, ivu kwaro, ndikure.

¹⁷ D.E. Finn (ed.), *Poetry in Rhodesia: 75 years* (Salisbury, College Press, 1968), Shona text, 59, English translation, 60.

Look! Watch Those Trees

Look! Watch those trees
Delighting in their new leaves and flowers;
They seem to have come to life the day before yesterday...
But the rain stopped at the time of harvesting.
From whence then came this shooting of new life?

Look! Observe the snake, the beetles and the cicada awakened
From the sleep of a long night. Creatures leap about
With a new strength. The grass is greening
From its old roots. Look carefully
At the death and resurrection around you and learn about life.

I too die and arise daily by sleeping at night
And waking in the morning, yet I am still asleep
Foolishly, since I cannot regain,
Like the leaves, the flowers, and the grass,
The new life which flows from the soil's command.

You, Ancestral Spirits of our Forefathers,
See the world has changed. Teach me your truth.
I yearn for roots that cannot wither, roots of life
New, in a new world. My old roots have been pulled.
Lord God, give me good water and soil, that I can grow.

Gibson Mandishona (b. 1940) in his 'Munda wangu Wegova', which was translated by Philippa Berlyn to 'My Garden of Red Soil', had his poem marred by a person whose knowledge of Shona was only rudimentary. To begin with, her translation of *munda* to 'garden' demonstrates her lack of understanding of the Shona concept of space; *munda* is a piece of land larger than a garden.

Munda wangu Wegova¹⁸

Bvukutiwa riye rachema mumuhacha padanga
Rinondimutsa mashambanzou mazuva ose
Ndafara ndichiona kuti kumuka ndini ndatanga
Naizvozvo munda wangu wegova unokunda yose.

Ndinonzvenzvera mudova ndakananga ikoko,
Nhapata dzichichema mubani kwakasvipa nerima
Munda mukuru, vakuru vanoti chawafira ndechako
Kana uchine simba, sevenza zvisati zvakuchima.

Munda wegova une makuriswa akakomba
Tarisa manhanga akatsvukira pedyo negwenzi
Hero budzi rakaibvira nokupundundutsira mugomba
Svika wega uchatenda kuti munda webenzi.

¹⁸ Ibid., Shona text, 61-2, English translation, 62.

My Garden of Red Soil

The dove cries in the wild fig by the cattle kraal
When I wake up, before the washing of the elephants.
I am happy when early every day at rising I begin
To see that my garden of red soil is better than any other.

I hurry there while the grass is still wet;
The African water-hen cries in the forest at the finish of darkness;
The garden is big and the old people say, 'It is his own affair but
If you are strong, work means nothing to you.'

A garden of red soil grown beyond all others.
Look at those pumpkins ripening nearby,
The long tendrils trailing everywhere.
Reach the garden alone and you will think it is the garden of a madman.

One of Philippa Berlyn's problems is finding the equivalent concepts in the receptor-language from the source-language texts. Her translation to 'wild fig' (stanza 1, line 1) from *muhacha* is a meaningful one and not a literal one; and similarly her translation of the Shona concept of time as represented by 'the washing of the elephants' from *mashambanzou* (1, 2) is poetic, although I doubt whether she is aware of the significance of the morphemes which constitute the word: *ma-* (the manner, period of) + *shamb-a* (verb radical which means 'wash') + *nzou* (noun Class 9/10 meaning 'elephants'). This, then, refers to the concept of time which is not specific but referred to in general terms; the elephants are in the habit of going to the river to wash (*shamba*) or drink water very early in the morning between 3.30 and 4.30. The water-hen (2, 2) is qualified as African — a term which is intended to distinguish this species from those in European countries. But her serious fault is found in her inability to translate a proverb: 'It is his own affair but/If you are still strong, work means nothing to you' (1, 2-3). The Shona version, as is always the case, is pithy and well structured as well as being poetic: 'What you die for is [rightfully] yours: if you still have strength, work before you get bored'. In this example, the translator should have searched hard for an English equivalent instead of what she used which does not resemble the original. In like manner, the 'garden of red soil' does not grow 'beyond all others'. This is misleading: it 'causes or brings about a [great] growth' (3, 1); and in line 2, the pumpkins are not 'ripening nearby', they are 'ripening near the bush' as the Shona version states.

Luke Chidavaenzi (b. 1922), a contemporary and schoolmate of Mutswairo, is a competent poet whose 'Bvukutirwa' [The Turtle-dove] is known in Shona literature for its onomatopoeic and imaginative sound of the turtle-dove cry.

Bvukutirwa¹⁹

Kunze kwomunda wedu mukuru,
 Pedyo nerwizi rwetsanga zhinji
 Rwakakombwa nemitepe mikuru:
 Bvukutirwa rakavaka usanza.

Mumin'ando yematombo makuru.
 Seri kwezvuru zvouswa uzhinji
 Zvakakombwa neminzwa youturu:
 Bvukutirwa raisweroimba.

Varimi vose vairiterera,
 Navafudzi vaigarorinza,
 Kuti roimba newewo terera,
 Rinogaroimba netsitsi muhana.

Muswero wose rinongoimba,
 Pamasikati napamauro:
 'Guku kutizwa nehama!
 Guku ndosara ndoga!'

Parungwanani, mashambanzou,
 Unorinza richingunoimba:
 'Guku kutizwa nehama!
 Guku ndosara ndoga!'

Navanorinza voedzesera
 Kuimba kwaro kunopa mutsa:
 'Guku mukadzi waJeke!
 Guku wakatsva makumbo!'

Roti raneta rotapatira
 Mumhepo muye munozorodza;
 Nechinguvana robhururukira
 Pamun'ando uya uri panyasi.

Usarirove iwe mufudzi,
 Navana varo usavatore.
 Ukazviita wave mukudzi
 Wenhamo yaro yarinochemba.

The Turtle-dove

Far from us across our broad field,
 Along the reed-pronged river,
 Shaded by giant willows,
 The turtle-dove built her nest.

¹⁹ Mutswairo, *Zimbabwe: Prose and Poetry*, Shona text, 224, English translation, 225.

Hunting here and there, stony outcroppings,
 Behind the ant hills tufted with grass,
 Resting on poisonous thorny trees
 The dove sang all the day long.

All the farmers paused to listen:
 Even the shepherds waited for the notes,
 For when it coos, each soul must stop to hear —
 His thoughts darkened with the doleful refrain.

Sun up or sun down it sings!
 Bright day or shadowed evening!
 'Coo! to be deserted by one's kin!
 Coo! I'm left so alone!'

So early before dawn,
 Its doleful plaintive coo you can hear —
 'Coo! to be deserted by one's kin!
 Coo! I'm left all alone!'

Even those who hear it imitate
 Its piteous melody, coo-coo!
 'Coo! Oh, the wife of you-know-who!
 Coo! She has burnt her legs!'

When it is tired the dove flutters up
 Brushing the grey sky with its wings —
 To circle soon towards its nest
 In the thicket close by.

So, please shepherd boy, try not to kill it,
 Or steal its downy fledgelings!
 For, if you do, you can but deepen
 All the sorrows its nature must cool

'Far from us across our broad field' (stanza 1, line 1) is the receptor-language response to the Shona *Kunze kwomunda wedu mukuru* (beyond the bounds of our broad field); 'His thoughts darkened with the doleful refrain' (3, 4) for *Rinogaroimba netsitsi muhana* (He habitually sings with a doleful heart); 'Sun up or sun down' (4, 1) for *Muswero wose* (all day long); and 'Bright day or shadowed evening' (4, 2) for *Pamasikati napamauro* (in daylight and evening). All sound alliterative and thus more poetic than the Shona versions. *Mashambanzou*, which Philippa Berlyn translated as 'at the washing of the elephants' in 'My Garden of Red Soil', is correctly translated here 'before dawn' (5, 1), giving it a significance of time. It will also be observed that *munda*, which Berlyn calls garden, is given its proper equivalence — 'field'. The statement which I made about Berlyn's lack of understanding of the Shona concepts is thus confirmed by a native-speaker's translation. The onomatopoeic *guku* emerges as 'coo' in the

receptor-language and this is a direct and equivalent translation. However, the 'coo' should have been repeated to match the two syllables — the voiced consonant /g/ and the voiceless consonant /k/ each followed by a high back vowel /u/ — which form the word *guku*.

Mutswairo's poetry presents problems in translation as we have seen. To begin with, he belongs to that group of poets represented by Blacks who invoke a Great Zimbabwe cult and the past Shona states of Torwa and Mutapa to justify possession of the land. A good many of them see this in terms of race, whereas the Whites — who naturally write in English — tend to be sentimental: 'I feel I belong here'. The irony of the situation is that while the Black poets are making these assertions they are doing so in a Western poetic form using Western poetic devices and techniques. A fitting example to support my statement is found in Mutswairo's 'The Nyota Hills', stanza 4, line 4, where he translates *vasinai hanyn'g!* (carefree) as 'safe from alien pillages!' — an idea which is not found in the original source-language. What seems to have happened here is that both poet and assistant are imposing a political statement from the early 1970s when the translation was done, which would not have so readily come to mind in the 1940s when the Shona version was written.

The use of Western techniques such as rhyme in the source-language will always present enough problems. It is precisely for this reason that Mutswairo's poems seem to convey a different meaning altogether from the original; and in view of this, as I have stated before, the translation seems to have a sophistication which bears no resemblance to the original. They are new creations, imitations of an imitation, and are thrice removed from reality.

TRADITIONAL CLAN PRAISE POETRY

Up to now, I have discussed modern poetry which, when compared with traditional clan praise poetry, is relatively easy to translate. Modern poetry is patterned after the devices and techniques of English poetry. For example, it develops a trend of thought which is not a feature of clan praise poetry where the trend of thought accumulates in short stereotyped flashes of visions or images in the form of traditional formulaic expressions.

Clan praise poetry is a product of communal activity whereas modern poetry is the work of an individual, even if the individual is influenced by his community's work of art. There is thus no individuality of style as far as language usage is concerned except on points of delivery and intention which is almost invariably to praise someone for the serviced rendered — but doing this in terms of, and in the light of, the past experience of the ancestor's tribe. In fact, a person is thanked and praised for his actions only in so far as he has been given the opportunity to act by his ancestors. The clan praise poetry structure — which includes its intention and purpose, the situation under which it is delivered, its oral nature, devices and

techniques used — makes it the most difficult aspect of Shona poetry to translate, as I shall demonstrate below.

Nhetembo yevanhu vekwaChihota²⁰

Maita, Mazvimbakupa,	
Maita, Mbizi.	
Maita, Tembo yengi yiwi.	
Hekani, Matendera;	
Ngwere	5
Njuma isina nyanga.	
Zvaitwa, Mbizi.	
Zvaitwa, Chivara;	
Zvimbakugova;	
Njuma yeRenje.	10
Hekani, vaTembo;	
Mashongera;	
Manjenjenje;	
Ganda ravasikana;	
Pasweziso, mombe yomuchena;	15
Chinakiramatondo;	
Maruki;	
Musimira;	
Mapfaravara;	
Matungachuma;	20
Mbaravazi;	
Manyerenyete;	
Nyora dzenhurura;	
Mazambacheka;	
Mangarivari;	25
Matoyameso.	
Kuziva zvayo, Mbizi	
Yakashonga mikonde sevakadzi;	
Mhuka isina ukasha kana hundwa;	
Rudzi rune mutupo usina kwasiri;	30
Dandenakutanda;	
Vene vepasi.	

The Clan Praises of the People of Chihota's Clan

You have done a service, You who yearn to give.

Thank you, Zebra.

Thank you, my dear Tembo present to me.

Thank you, Ground hornbills;

Beast whose horns' points grow down to meet together;

Harmless beast without horns.

5

A service has been rendered, Zebra.

²⁰ Hodza and Fortune, *Shona Praise Poetry*, Shona text, 138, English translation 140-2.

Kindly done, Striped one;	
One who yearns to share;	
Hornless beast from Renje.	10
Thank you, Tembo;	
Adorned with your own stripes;	
Iridescent and glittering creatures;	
Whose skin is soft as girls' is;	
One on which the eye dwells all day, as on the solitary cow of a poor	
man;	15
Creature that makes the forests beautiful;	
Weaver of lines;	
Who wear your skin for display;	
Drawn with lines so clearly defined;	
You who thread beads in patterns;	20
Dappled fish;	
Hatching round the neck of a pot;	
Beauty spots cut to rise in a crescent on the forehead;	
A patterned belt for the waist;	
Light reflected;	25
Dazzling the eyes.	
It is its own instinct, the Zebra's,	
Adorned as if with strings of beads around the waist as women are;	
Wild creature, without anger or any grudge;	
Lineage with a totem that is nowhere a stranger;	30
Line that stretches everywhere;	
Owners of the land.	

Tembo Mazvimbakupa is a Zezuru clan of people whose totem is the zebra — Tembo, alternatively known as the Dhube — and whose principal praise name is *mazvimbakupa* (those who yearn to give). On these two names hinge all the other images which are drawn either from the shape and structure of the animal of the desert (see line 10) or from the eating and living habits of the zebra. The qualities are then ascribed to the human form, particularly the form and shape of the Tembo Mazvimbakupa. This background is therefore necessary if a meaningful translation is to be made. All the poetic devices and techniques are subsumed to the characteristic images of the zebra.

An important feature of the praise poem is repetition in various guises; lines 1–4 represent a repetition by initial linking. In this respect, Hodza and Fortune have found it difficult to maintain what is in the original. Although *Maita* (you have done it [a service]) appears four times, they have decided to use 'Thank you' even where in line 4 a different word, *Hekani*, is used. *Hekani* is indeed another word for *Maita* (you have done it); it is repetition in a different guise. *Mazvimbakupa* (those who yearn to give) refers to the *Mbizi* (zebra); *zvimbakugova* (those who yearn to distribute) is a different word from the first two but refers to the same group; and *Tembo yangu yiyi* (my dear Tembo) also applies to the same people. *Maiendera* (ground hornbill) refers to a bird whose (beautiful)

features are associated with the Tembo clan. This final linking is the exact opposite of initial linking. The two types of linking, even if they are kept in the receptor-language, may not allow the meaning to emerge unless the imagery in the substantives *mazvimbakupa* (< *ma* + *zvimba-a* + *ku-p-a*, you-have-yearned-to-give) and *matendera* (< *ma* + *dendera*, the hornbill) is explained. Similarly, nomenclatures — place names (*uzomba*), founding fathers (*Dandahwa Chihota*) — and other collocations must be footnoted. The footnotes which have been generously used by Hodza and Fortune are an important inclusion: their absence would tend to introduce anomalies which are not in keeping with the cultural distance between source and receptor-languages. Footnotes fill in the cultural differences by explaining customs, by identifying unknown places or objects and by including supplementary information or names, phrases, plays on words — *Ndyire waiva neundyire* (Mr Greed was avaricious) — and other concepts or devices.²¹

THE SONG

The genre of the song, which has been described as the 'newspaper of the pre-literate people', is situation-tied; that is to say, it goes with work, the folk-tale, ritual, dance or war. It should also be made clear that the song goes with a particular activity. Even though this is the case, the genre of the song is an independent one, in that it is capable of being sung out of context, as it were. It is precisely because of this versatility that a particular song which traditionally went with a particular folk-tale can now be found with a new story. An appropriate example — the Karikoga song — is found in a new novel depicting the adventures of a young boy: John Marangwanda's *Kumazivandadzoka* [A Difficult Hill].²² Further, we find many traditional songs played by Western dance bands or sung as Liberation Struggle 'hymns'.

The unique structure of the genre of the song — its alliterative, repetitive choruses and refrains, its onomatopoeic, archaic and other poetic devices — render it difficult to translate. Alec Pongweni, in his anthology of *Songs That Won the Liberation War*,²³ must have experienced this problem, as I did in my article 'The history of the Shona protest song: A preliminary study'.²⁴ These songs were originally sung and recorded in Shona, after which they were translated into English by the editors.

²¹ See E.A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating, with Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating* (Leiden, Brill, 1964), 238–9.

²² J. Marangwanda, *Kumazivandadzoka* (Salisbury, Longman, 1959).

²³ A.C. Pongweni, *Songs That Won the Liberation War* (Harare, College Press, 1982).

²⁴ G.P. Kahari, 'The history of the Shona protest song: A preliminary study', *Zambezia* (1981), IX, 79–101.

Work Song²⁵

Zvaishanda kudai vakanga vachiimba zvavo rwiyo rwavo vachiti:

Vamwene vangu godo vanaro; Marianga, Marianga, Marianga.

Ndati ndiende kuhuni kwanzi tutsotso.

Ndati ndiende kumvura kwanzi mabvondwe.

Ndati ndibike sadza kwanzi imbwezhu;

Ndati ndikuye kwanzi mamazhu.

Ndati ndiseke kwanzi inzena.

Ndati ndizorore kwanzi itsimbe;

Ndati ndifambe kwanzi imhandu.

Ndati ndidzurure kwanzi wasiya ndove.

Ndati ndikweshe hari kwa...

As she was working in this manner she was singing a song saying:

My mother-in-law holds a grudge against me; Marianga, Marianga, Marianga.

I thought I brought [good] firewood and she said it was only twigs.

I went to fetch [clear and clean] water and she said it was [murky and] unclean.

I cooked sadza and she said it was underdone;

I ground [corn] and she said the product was poor.

I wanted to be cheerful and she said I was a flirt.

I wanted to rest [after work] and she said I was lazy,

I wanted to travel and she said I was an enemy.

I wanted to polish the floor and she said it was not done properly.

I wanted to wash pots and [she said]...

The translator's problems are many and varied. In the first place he has to identify the genre — which is that of the working song used by young wives who feel they are ill-treated by their husbands. They feel certain that their husbands have the support of their mothers-in-law. An important aspect of this genre is that the singer uses veiled language which is full of indirect allusions and innuendos. The wife's intentions are clear: to publicize her problems so that something be done to have them redressed. The onomatopoeic and nonsensical word *Marianga* is untranslatable and was thus left as it was. I then encountered the problem of clarity and meaning. Square brackets around words and phrases were used to bring out the subtle meaning by the singer, the daughter-in-law.

Other problems for the translator are exemplified in 'Gwindingwi rine shumba inoruma' with its leader/chorus structure, its use of untranslatable words like *Gwindingwi* (< *gwi* + *ndi* + *ngwi*) which can only be understood in the cultural context of tribal warfare. The symbol of the thick black forests where tribal wars were fought can thus be properly matched. Again I used brackets to supply and explain missing concepts.

Gwindingwi Rine Shumba Inoruma²⁶

- LEADER Gwindingwi rine shumba inoruma kuza ngoma.
 CHORUS Vana vaPfumojena vachauya hezvo vaTonga woye muchona.
 LEADER Hoye, hoye-e.
 Gwindingwi rine shumba inoruma-hezvo Makoni.
 CHORUS Vana vaPfumojena vachauya hezvo masango ose achaona.
 LEADER Hoye, hoye-e.
 CHORUS Gwindingwi rine shumba inoruma kuza ngoma.
 Vana vaPfumojena vachauya hezvo vaTonga wose muchaona.
 LEADER The thick black forest has a killer lion — beat the drum.
 CHORUS The children of Pfumojena will come and the Tonga will see (they will be dealt with).
 LEADER Hoye, hoye-e.
 The thick black forest has a killer lion [and 'we warn] you Makoni.
 CHORUS The children of Pfumojena will come and all the forest will witness.
 LEADER Hoye, hoye-e.
 CHORUS The thick black forest has a killer lion — beat the drum.
 The children of Pfumojena will come and the Tonga [people] will be dealt with (defeated).

The Karikoga hunting song which features in the Shona traditional folk-tale by that name, presented problems similar to the ones discussed above, namely, the use of nonsensical words, the need for brackets to provide extra information to make the song more meaningful in the receptor-language and problems of the solo/chorus nature.²⁷

CONCLUSION

Missionaries who deployed themselves in various parts of the country and reduced spoken languages to writing acknowledged the problem of translating from source-languages to a receptor-language. And when the African people, with the spread of education, took to writing imaginative works which they themselves translated into English, they discovered that modern verse was much easier to translate into English as the techniques used in the source-language had been patterned after English techniques. There were problems of great magnitude when they attempted to translate oral traditional genres as these presented concepts, formulaic expressions, collocations poeticizing nomenclature and names which were not present in the receptor-language. Footnotes, as Hodza and Fortune have found, generally provide useful information which supplies the historical and cultural background of the document in question.

²⁶ Ibid., 82.

²⁷ Ibid., 85.