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To cite this article: Madlome Steyn Khesani (2018) A linguistic gap in translation: A case of English to Xichangana/Xitsonga of Zimbabwe, South African Journal of African Languages, 38:3, 255-260, DOI: [10.1080/02572117.2018.1518028](https://doi.org/10.1080/02572117.2018.1518028)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02572117.2018.1518028>



Published online: 29 Nov 2018.



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A linguistic gap in translation: A case of English to Xichangana/Xitsonga of Zimbabwe

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This study falls under the discipline of translation studies, which may sometimes be referred to as applied cultural linguistics. The aim of this study is to critically analyse linguistic challenges encountered in translations between Zimbabwean Xichangana/Xitsonga and English. In this study a qualitative approach is employed. The instruments used for data collection are interviews and document analysis. Thematic content analysis was employed to analyse the data. The theoretical framework which was taken into consideration is the linguistic theory since the focus of this study is on linguistic matters in translation. What gave rise to this research is the observation that many official documents in Zimbabwe are written in English and then translated mostly into either Chishona or isiNdebele, while formerly marginalised languages such as Xichangana are neglected. In fact, where translations are done into these marginalised languages, they are abridged versions of the original documents which are translated in full in the formerly so-called national languages. As a result, translation work in this language still lags behind and shows that there are still some linguistic challenges. This paper therefore seeks to find solutions to these challenges and to improve the quality of translations involving this language.

Introduction

Xichangana, as it is commonly known in Zimbabwe, is a language which belongs to a family of Tsonga languages (group S.50) as classified by Guthrie (1948) and is spoken in other southern African countries such as Mozambique, South Africa and Swaziland (Hlungwani, 2003). However, due to historical events which occurred in the past and also some distortions in naming, this language carries different ethnonyms in different countries (Mathebula, 2014). Even if the umbrella name for the language is Xitsonga, in Zimbabwe, it is mistakenly recorded as Xichangana or Shangani (Hachipola, 1998). The aim of this paper is to discuss linguistic challenges encountered in the translation of documents from English to Zimbabwean Xichangana. The analysis was based on documents such as the Zimbabwe Junior Secondary (ZJS) African languages syllabus, the national Constitution (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013), and some chosen newspapers from 2015 to 2017 which were translated from English into Xichangana. It is important to note that ZJS examinations were suspended some 15 years ago, but the syllabus was still working for the teaching component until it was revised recently to suit the new curriculum.

Literature review

This section gives a review of literature related to the study. It helps in identifying and closing some gaps in the field of translation (Ridley, 2012). Aspects discussed here include the definition of translation, the history of translation, theories of translation, problems and challenges encountered in other areas, and strategies or methods

used to overcome such challenges. Translation is changing an original text from one language into another language known by the target group. Munday (2012: 8) defines it thus:

The process of translation between two different written languages involves the changing of an original written text (the source text or ST) in the original verbal language (the source language or SL) into a written text (the target text or TT) in a different verbal language (the target language or TL).

This means that translation is changing words written in one language to a different, second language.

Steiner (1998), in his book entitled *After Babel*, divides the history of translation into four periods starting from the work of Cicero (46 BCE) and Horace (20 BCE) to Alexander Fraser Tytler. He also shows that St Jerome played a vital role in the history of translation by translating the Bible from Greek into Latin around the 1530s. Munday (2012: 12) supports the idea of translation of religious texts, saying that 'the practice of translation was crucial for early dissemination of key cultural and religious texts and concepts'.

This shows that translation work started quite a long time ago and it catered for cultural differences. Steiner then discusses the second period which stretches up to 1940 in the 20th century. This period is characterised by a theory known as 'hermeneutic', which is derived from a Greek word *hermeneuein* 'to understand'. Steiner's study shows that this is the period in which methods of translation and vocabulary became more prevalent. One of the proponents of the translation methods in this second period is Etienne Dolet. The third period described by Steiner is the beginning of machine translation (1949–1954) which was the first type of this kind. This was then followed by the fourth period which

started in the 1960s. This is the time in which new methods of translation and interpretation were discovered, for instance polysystems theory (As-Safi, 2011). The history of translation is important since it shows all the developments which took place in this discipline. This history is also important to the Zimbabwean situation since one may need to know some background information pertaining to translation involving Xichangana which started approximately two decades ago. This helps in monitoring progress in as far as the development of the language is concerned.

Berdom's (2007) 'A comparative study of some English translations of parts of three Mu'allaqat' discusses different theories and methods used in translation. It focuses mainly on problems encountered when translating from Arabic to English, bearing in mind the complexity of Arabic poetry called *alum (allaqit)* in terms of its content, themes, structure and form. These aspects are completely different from those found in English. Berdom further evaluates methods and strategies used by Western translators when it comes to translating aspects of semantics, namely synonyms, polysemy and connotation. He found that it is difficult to translate between Arabic and English due to cultural differences. This is close to the situation of Xichangana and English which also have cultural and linguistic differences. However, this current study focuses on the linguistic aspect only.

The current study also draws from the doctoral thesis of Baloyi (2015), who makes a comparative analysis of stylistic devices in Shakespeare's plays, *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*, and their Xitsonga translations. The main aim of his study was to carry out a comparative analysis of the figures of speech used in these two Shakespeare plays and in their translations respectively. His study examined the strategies used in translating these stylistic devices from the source to the target language using the skopos theory.

Baloyi (2015) highlights that for a translator to produce quality translations, he or she should have a deep understanding of the languages and cultures involved. Baloyi's study explains some of the essential information needed in translation, hence it is of paramount importance to this current study which also deals with strategies which can be employed to overcome linguistic challenges in translations involving English and Xichangana.

In his analysis, Baloyi focuses on strategies used in the translations of *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*, namely *explicitation*, *simplification* and *normalisation*. These strategies aim at expanding details, summarising the information or borrowing, simplifying by using ellipsis or word-for-word translation, as well as adaptation. In this section, Baloyi discusses the flow of the translations of stylistic devices and strategies used in the translations of *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*, the effects of choosing strategies which retain the main idea in the devices and also the effects of using strategies which enable the target population to grasp the main idea of the book without knowing the language of the source text.

In his study, Baloyi finds that translators use the simplification strategy through word-for-word translation in instances where there are cultural gaps. Explicitation and exaggeration were used to a lesser extent. Another finding is that some poor translations of idioms had some semantic and communication effects in the target text. Loss

in translation was evident. This current study also discusses strategies used in translating documents from English into Xichangana to see if there are linguistic challenges in terms of meaning of words, phrases or sentences.

Methodology

The design of this study is qualitative in nature. The data collection instruments used were interviews and document analysis. Neuman (2006: 149) supports the use of different methods by asserting that 'by measuring something in more than one way, researchers are more likely to see all aspects of it...looking at something from multiple points of view improves accuracy'. Observations helped me to identify words which were to be analysed, while interviews confirmed what the interviewees thought about the translation of the documents in question.

Data collection

The data for this paper was collected between April and June 2015 using personal interviews as well as informal observation and guided conversations. The participants and documents were purposively selected for this study. The sample population was drawn from the Chiredzi district of Masvingo province. Chiredzi is the district where the majority of Xichangana speakers are found and, significantly, the language is taught in most of the rural schools.

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of twenty participants. The purposive sampling procedure was used to select translated documents and the 20 participants to be interviewed in this study. These people were translators who took part in the translation of the Zimbabwe Junior Secondary syllabus, the abridged version of the national Constitution of Zimbabwe and some stories from selected newspapers.

Data analysis

The data for this paper was analysed using thematic content analysis. This type of analysis involved the identification of themes in qualitative material which is usually identified by means of a coding scheme (Manion & Morrison, 2000). Data analysis was conducted based on interview transcripts of the descriptive narrative accounts of the twenty participants who were involved in translation work. Furthermore, the analysis was conducted based on the documentary analysis. Comparison was done between two documents, namely the source and target language documents.

Data presentation and discussion

This part discusses how certain words were selected and used in certain contexts in trying to show the challenges which were encountered in the process of translation. The main focus is on the meaning of the words. This is referred to as lexical semantics. Possible substitutes for terms which seem not to be suitable are suggested in these discussions.

Translation of terms used in materials for education

This sub-section focuses on the translation of the Zimbabwe Junior Secondary syllabus. Even if the examination at this level is not written anymore, the curriculum requires the learners to learn the content of it. The translations of this syllabus took place long after the ZJS examinations had been abandoned. However, translation work is still going on for the current curriculum, which builds on the previous one. This is done in line with promoting other indigenous languages in the country. In this case the source language is English, while the target language is Xichangana. We shall look at the following translations:

- (1a) Culture > *Ndhavuko*
 (1b) Culture > *Tumbuluko*

The word 'culture' was extracted from the title Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. Example (1a) (*ndhavuko*) is more appropriate than Example (1b) as a translation of the word 'culture' since it refers to the way of life, beliefs and thinking of a certain group of people. The word *tumbuluko* refers to nature, but it was used on another page to mean the same thing as *ndhavuko*. The translators could have mistaken the two words as synonymous which shows that they have challenges in the meanings of certain Xichangana words. Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2014: 189) define synonyms as 'words or expressions that have the same meaning in some or all contexts'. Example (2) is another translation from the syllabus:

- (2) Revised 2011 > *tlheleliso 2011*

This is just a label on the cover page of the syllabus. In English it means that the syllabus was revised again in 2011. This also means there are certain changes which were effected in that 2011 syllabus. The meaning of the translation in the target language is different from what is given in the source language since it now refers to repetition. Repetition and revision are two different things. Repetition means no changes are made, whereas in revision there are notable changes. This shows that translators had a linguistic challenge in choosing the appropriate lexical item with an equivalent meaning in the target language. The reason for this could be limited vocabulary on the part of the translators. An appropriate translation could have been as follows:

- (3) Revised 2011 > *Mpfluxeto wa 2011*

Some of the words used seem to be influenced by relatively well-developed languages such as isiNdebele and Chishona. These languages have been taught at higher levels since independence and speakers of formerly marginalised languages were forced to learn them depending on their region. This has influenced them even in the way they translate into their respective languages. The translators also faced challenges in the translation of the word 'assessment' which they gave in this way:

- (4) Assessment > *hlolisiso*

This word was taken from the phrase 'assessment objectives'. Assessment is a way of checking pupils' understanding of what they have learnt and this is done mostly through giving tests and exercises or even an examination at the end of a certain level at school. The word *hlolisiso* is derived from the word *hlola* which means to spy on something. The meaning of this word makes it unsuitable to be regarded as an appropriate translation. There is nothing to spy on in as far as the school syllabus and curriculum are concerned. The challenge seems to be caused by the influence of other indigenous languages. In this case it is isiNdebele, since it has the word *imihlolisiso* 'examinations'. There are some pockets of isiNdebele-speaking communities among Xitsonga speakers which could have caused the translators to opt for the isiNdebele word. Another possibility is that there are other translators whose dialects had been heavily influenced by Nguni languages. Therefore, this word could have been borrowed as a solution to the translation challenge of the English word. However, there is no need to borrow such a word if it can be found in the target language or other related varieties in the same language grouping. A word could have been coined like this:

- (5) Assessment > *ku kambela/makambelelo*

We also find that other translations are influenced by Chishona words which sound like Xichangana words but having different meanings. In this category, we have the following example:

- (6) Plan > *Ku longa*

If we look closely at the context in which the word is used, it is clear that it is all about strategising on how certain tasks would be tackled. However, the word *ku longa* means putting objects in a certain order or packing one's goods in preparation for a journey, but has a different meaning from what was intended. The translators were tempted to associate this word with the Chishona word *kuronga*, which is equivalent to the English word 'plan'. Possibly this challenge is caused by the fact that most of the Xichangana speakers could either have learnt Chishona for a long time or are neighbours of the Chishona speakers. These languages had been in contact for quite a long time. In this case the translators used Chishona as a pivot in trying to translate into their language. An appropriate translation could have been Plan > *kunguhata*. Their failure to come up with an acceptable word shows a linguistic challenge which is mainly caused by external influence or language contact. Due to this contact, some of the Zimbabwean Xitsonga speakers seem to have adopted the word to mean the same thing in the target language.

Another reason for having chosen this word is that *longa* and *ronga* seem to be rhyming words. They only differ in one sound r/l. This makes some think that the words also have the same meaning. This challenge is to choose words which are called 'false friends' (Baweja, 2011: 157). People with such related languages are tempted to think the words are similar in all respects thereby causing translations to lose their sense. In this case the influence came from Chishona which has been a dominant language over other indigenous languages in Zimbabwe for many years. Ansre,

in Phillipson (1996: 56), explains language dominance as 'the phenomenon in which the minds and lives of the speakers of a language are dominated by another language'. Speakers of Xichangana have spoken and learnt Chishona for many years, since their childhood, hence their minds are dominated by a foreign vocabulary. Some of the translators are also teachers who happen to teach Chishona in schools.

Furthermore, there is evidence that running short of terminology was a challenge encountered by translators from English into Xichangana. For instance:

(7) Writing a CV > *Ku tsala CV* (curriculum vitae)

It seems there was no equivalent word for a CV. This could have been coined to read as: Writing a CV > *ku tsala papilavutitivisi*. A curriculum vitae is a kind of a document in which someone describes his/her educational and personal credentials. The word CV (curriculum vitae) shows that the translators did not try to find out the name from other related language varieties, such as Xitsonga in South Africa. In the next section, translations in parliamentary or legal terms found in the constitution of Zimbabwe are discussed.

Legal and parliamentary terms

This paper also discusses words and phrases which were used in translating the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) from English into Xichangana where challenges of choosing the right words were encountered. Examples of such translations are given below:

(8) Bind(s) > *khoma* (p. 1).

In order to understand the meaning of this word we shall give the context in which it was used: The Constitution binds everyone > *Vumbiwa byi khoma*. In this sentence, the word *khoma* does not have the same meaning as the English one according to the context. In this context it means that everyone has to respect the constitution. The word that could have been used is *boha* instead. The translators could not recognise it according to the way in which it was used in the above context. The word *khoma* which was chosen by translators was a kind of a faithful translation which may mean to touch or put things together, but it does not necessarily mean something which binds. If something binds, it means everyone is supposed to follow it without any choice whatsoever. The word *khoma* implies someone might be part of something, but it does not necessarily mean that one is compelled to perform any action in relation to what would have been said or given. This is a semantic challenge on the part of the translators since this English word may have more than one meaning.

This study also found another challenge of using words which have a different meaning from what was intended by the source text. Consider this translation:

(9) Fostering > *ku wundliwa*

For us to get a better understanding of the meaning of this word, we shall give a phrase from which it was extracted: Fostering of national unity and peace > *ku wundliwa ka vun'we na ku rhula etikweni*.

In these two sentences, the meanings differ to a certain extent, looking at how the word 'fostering' was used. Fostering may mean promoting, nurturing, adopting and raising. In the target language, translators used it as 'raising' by choosing the word *ku wundliwa*. This makes the translation lose its meaning since peace is not something which can be raised like a child. In this context the word makes the translation meaningless.

An appropriate word could have been *ku tlakuseta* 'to promote'. This implies something can be done to bring about peace, rather than raising or nurturing it as shown in the translation. We can only nurture something which is found among people so that it grows. Unity is something which can be created by people just by staying together, accepting and getting used to each other, implying it is not something which can be raised like a human being. This is the same with peace, which is brought about by mutual understanding among people.

Translators in this case only used faithful translation without first reading to get the sense in the sentence. Such an act of just looking at the meaning of one word instead of the whole sentence brings possibilities of translation loss.

This study also found that translators faced challenges in selecting appropriate words due to the fact that some words in the source language are polysemous or hyponyms. Words are said to be polysemous when they have more than one meaning, whereas hyponyms are those words that are subcategories of a more general class (Baweja, 2011). This phenomenon causes them to choose any of the words from the given set, thereby choosing a word whose meaning is actually different from the given context. The difference in these two languages posed a challenge to the translators as shown in this study. Below are such examples of translations:

(10a) State > *Mfumo*

(10b) State > *Tiko*

Considering the translation in this example, the word 'state' was translated to give two words with different meanings. *Tiko* refers to a country which is demarcated by borders, whereas *mfumo* refers to the government which runs that country. The translators went on to translate two words to mean a single common word as given below:

(11a) State > *Mfumo*

(11b) Government > *Mfumo*

In this case, the Xichangana version implies that the words 'state' and 'government' are synonymous. However, in all other sections of the constitution, the word 'state' refers to the country. Somewhere in the document the word 'state' is synonymous with 'nation' as shown in one of the translations which refer to them as a country:

(12a) State > *Tiko*

(12b) Nation > *Tiko*

Looking into the translation of the two words 'state' and 'nation', it is evident that it is a challenge to find a clear-cut difference between them in the target language. This causes a problem of repeating one word whenever we meet these

different but related words of that nature. It is very easy to differentiate these words in English, but it is not easy with Xichangana. Challenges emanate from the fact that these words are closely related (Baweja, 2011). In this section, we found that words such as 'state', 'nation', 'government' and 'country' are closely related, and sometimes some of them are used interchangeably.

Furthermore, we found that translators sometimes use non-equivalent words due to semantic challenges. Let us look at the following sentence and its translation:

- (13) Campaign freely and peacefully for a political party or cause > *Lemukisa vaakatiko, a tshunxekile, hi ta vunene bya vandla ra tipolitiki ro karhi kumbe swin'wana*

In this translation, the word 'campaign' was translated to mean making people aware of how good a certain political party is. Even if it could be partly correct, it does not capture the whole meaning of campaigning. Campaigning involves convincing people to support a certain cause or group, and also talking about other things besides the group itself, for instance saying bad things about other groups. For instance, when party X is campaigning, it may say what is negative about party B, while saying good things about itself as if it is the only one which is guaranteed to perform such acts.

Looking closely at the two texts, we find that the language used in the constitution is political and at times translators faced challenges in coming up with equivalent words. This could have been caused by the fact that they were not used to the kind of language and also lacked political terminology in some of Zimbabwe's indigenous languages such as Xichangana. The word *lemukisa* simply means making aware, which is not equivalent to campaign. In its place a word like *ku gangisa* could have been used even though it might have other connotations. Its literal meaning is to ask for love, but when used in the sense of campaigning, it means convincing someone about how good a certain party is. This is called semantic broadening and is a strategy which can be used in free translation to overcome some linguistic challenges. O'Grady, Archibald, Aronoff and Rees-Miller (2011: 646) explain 'semantic broadening [as] the process in which the meaning of a word becomes more inclusive than its earlier form'. This supports how a word like *gangisa* can be used instead of *lemukisa* since it seems to be more convincing than the former.

In free translation, translators are not coerced to choose words which have an exact meaning as those in the source language text, but they are free to use those which can express fully what is intended by the source text message and which may also be understood better by target text readers. In the illustration given above, the word *ku gangisa* can be more appealing to the target text readers than *ku lemukisa* since it is very common in their language.

This challenge is mainly caused by lack of material to use in law and political terminology. One of the translators interviewed supports this assertion by saying this: *a ku na switirho swo enela swo tanihi tidikixinari eka Xichangana leswi hi nga swi tirhisaka* ('there are not enough tools such as dictionaries which we can use in Xichangana').

Terms in the media

This study also found that there are challenges in using appropriate lexical items in the print media. Some of the words used were not the best as indicated in the analysis of translations done in *Masvingo Star* (Gezani, 2015) given below:

- (14) a packet of mealie meal > *xikwamana xa mapa*

The word *xikwamana* was translated from a part of a sentence which reads '...maize meal which sells at \$6.50 for a 12.5 kg packet'. Looking into this translation, we can see that the word *xikwamana* is not suitable since in everyday life the speakers do not talk of a packet of mealie meal, but they commonly refer to it as a sack of mealie meal which is called by a borrowed term *saka*. In its diminutive form it becomes *xisakana*. The translator could have translated the word 'bag' as *xisakana* considering the size of the bag which is bigger than 5 kg but less than 20 kg instead of translating the word 'packet'. A bag may be called *xikhwama* in the target language if it is just for carrying things other than mealie meal. Hence the translator was tempted to write 'xikhwamana', which is a diminutive of *xikhwama*, trying to match the word 'packet' used in the source text.

Maluleke, one of the translators, agrees that one faces difficulties in getting Xichangana terms in some of translations by saying this: *kun'wana swa komisiwa, kun'wana u pfumala marito loko kuriku swi fanele swi fika swi ri leswi swi nga xiswona* ('sometimes it is summarised, sometimes you fail to get words when the message has to reach its target as it is'). The translator is pointing out that it is not easy to translate everything without changing the intended meaning somehow. The issue of using summaries sometimes has its own semantic challenge of losing important information.

Conclusion

Following the discussions above, we can safely conclude that there are some linguistic challenges faced, mainly at the level of lexical semantics, when it comes to translating documents from English to Zimbabwean Xichangana. Some of the causes of these challenges are lack of linguistic knowledge in the target language by some of the translators, and a lack of dictionaries and/or terminology books for specific fields. There is also a problem that both translators and those who need translation services seem not to be aware of the needs of and prerequisite information about quality translation work. Looking at the quality of translations discussed in this paper, we can also conclude that some of the translators are inexperienced as this was evidenced in some sections where they completely failed to translate and just retained the same words as those in the source language. Finally the translators are also encouraged to take advantage of other Xitsonga varieties in the region, with better resources in South Africa than in Zimbabwe, to improve their quality of work.

Recommendations

Since there are limited resources, linguists in Xichangana/Xitsonga of Zimbabwe should come up with specialised

terminology books and dictionaries to aid in translation work. Translators should also take into consideration the use of technology in coming up with effective and efficient translation work when translating into these under-resourced languages, for example making use of the internet to find the meanings of words in the source language first so that it will be easier to simplify them in the target language text. Organisations which seek translation services are encouraged to engage recognised institutions which offer language and translation services in order to produce quality work. Lastly, the government is also encouraged to treat all official languages equally when it comes to the translation of all important documents in the country. That is, its policy should be clear on the issue of making translations available to speakers of all previously marginalised languages.

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