The Impact of Translation Activities on the Development of African Languages in Multilingual Societies: *Shona–Ndebele–English Musical Terms Dictionary*, a Case Study[*]

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Abstract: The article examines the impact of translation activities on the development of African languages in a multi-lingual Zimbabwean society. It analyzes Shona musical terms that were created through translation processes and strategies such as borrowing, coining, compounding and derivation. Focus is on how the ongoing term-creation is contributing to or hindering the development of the Shona language. The importance of such strategies and processes are discussed in the broader context of empowering African languages. The article also offers recommendations on how best to come up with systematized terminology in music and other specialized fields.

Keywords: TRANSLATION, DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES, MULTI-LINGUAL SOCIETIES, BORROWING, COINING, COMPOUNDING, DERIVATION, TERMINOLOGY, TERMINOGRAPHY

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Introduction

The first part of the presentation reveals the general language situation in Zimbabwe that has resulted in translation and terminology development activities. The second segment explores the nature of the ongoing term-creation in the music industry and brings out its positive effects on the Shona language. The third section reveals the problems that are emanating from the on-going term creation and the last part focuses on recommendations and probable solutions to the outlined problems.

The language situation

Like many other African countries, Zimbabwe is a multi-lingual and multicultural society. However, its situation is less complex than what we find elsewhere in the sub-Saharan region. Shona, spoken by at least 75% and Ndebele spoken by 10-16% of the country's estimated population of 11 376 676, are clearly dominant languages. These two Southern Bantu languages are sometimes referred to as national languages, along with English, which is used for most official purposes. Other small but significant minority language groups, which together account for 6% of the population, are Tonga, Nambya, Venda and Kalanga in the Ndebele speaking area, and Kalanga and Shangaan in the Shona speaking area. In addition, there are about eight other indigenous language minorities and about five African migrant minority language groups, with Chewa/Nyanja being by far the largest, plus another five or six non-African language minorities, including English and other European languages.

Whenever there are two or more languages in a society, translation and the resultant term-creation activities become inevitable. For there to be communication between people of different languages translation, which is a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source language (SL) text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language (TL), is always a vital activity. In order to transfer ideas across different cultures the translator's tasks involves creating rather than merely finding equivalence (Venuti 1995: 38). In other words, translation involves not only finding equivalence but also creating terms when dealing with cultural and linguistic differences between languages. Terminology is, in some cases, therefore, a by-product of translation activities. This is why in this article, translation and terminology are discussed simultaneously. It is this creative component which is of particular interest to us in this article because it contributes to borrowing and change (Hartmann and Stork 1983: 242) and therefore allows the TL to grow in both lexical capacity and utilitarian value.

Officially, not much attention, if any, is paid to this multi-lingual and multi-cultural situation, because language, translation activities and communication for development are generally neglected issues. Even up to the present date Zimbabwe has no language policy which reflects the government's lack of seriousness on issues of language development. As a result, the standard of translation and the terms created through the process is not very good. The

general attitude to translation and terminology in most sectors in Zimbabwe is rather casual and nobody seems to be keen to hire competent translators and terminologists.

Term-creation in the music industry

This article is based on observations that I made as a member of the ongoing project of compiling a trilingual Musical Terms Dictionary (MTD) that is being carried out by the African Languages Research Institute (ALRI) at the University of Zimbabwe. Shona, Ndebele and English musical terms have already been collected for this project from institutions that offer music as a course or subject and other organizations and personnel who deal with music. Close to 1000 Shona musical terms have been collected and entered into the database and it is on these terms that this presentation is based.

An analysis of the Shona musical terms that have so far been entered into the MTD database shows that so many terms have been created in various tertiary institutions that teach music. In Zimbabwe, music is a well-established discipline that uses specialized terms in the analysis and teaching of sound components. Like in most specialized fields, it is taught in English and some of the Shona terms that exist are equivalents created from English through translation. Chimhundu (1996: 449) aptly notes that

> a main trend in translation between international languages or languages of wider communication (LWCs) and indigenous languages or national official languages (NOLs) is unidirectional transfer from the LWCs as SLs to NOLs as TLs during the translation process. Both ideas and words are transferred as African societies modernize and change.

This is the same scenario we have in the field of music. There is unidirectional transfer of musical terms from English to Shona. This translation process often referred to as borrowing has resulted in the creation of so many musical terms. Examples of such terms drawn from the musicology branch of music are as follows.

English Form	Shona Form
alto	*aruto*
bass	*bhesi*
beat	*bhiti*
chorus	*korasi*
soprano	*sopurano*
verse	*vhesi*

The above examples show that English terms are adopted as they are and then adapted to the Shona phonological and morphological structures. However, the term-creation that is going on does not end at borrowing but also includes

other term-development processes such as coining. Examples of Shona musical terms that have been created as equivalents of existing English musical concepts and terms are as follows.

(1)   *mavambo* (LT: beginning)
        musoro (LT: head)

The two Shona terms are used interchangeably to refer to the beginning of a musical piece.

(2)   *dziro* (LT: wall)
        muviri (LT:body)

The two terms are used by different institutions in the music discipline to refer to the basic pattern of a musical composition.

(3)   *makukumidzo* (LT: climax)
        chimonauswa (LT: pinnacle)
        chisuwi (LT: pinnacle)
        mabvuto (LT: climax)

The four terms are used by different music scholars to refer to the climax of a musical arrangement.

(4)   *magumo* (LT: end)
        mushwe (LT: tail)
        mhendero (LT: hem)

The three mean the tail of a musical composition.

    The four sets of examples are good coinages which emanate from a sound understanding of the Shona environment and language. In example (1), *mavambo* is a Shona word that has existed for a long time in the Shona language. It denotes the beginning of something. The creator of this term just selected a word in common use, a word that any Shona speaker hearer can easily understand and identify with. The creator of this term might also have been influenced by the analysis of the structure of folktales. A folktale, like a musical composition has

    mavambo (beginning)
    muviri (middle)
    magumo (end)

    The examples given also equate the structure of a musical piece to a hut which has:

    dziro (LT: wall) — basic pattern

chisuwi/*chimonauswa* (LT: pinnacle of a hut) — climax

However, the beginning of a song is not captured by the terms that are currently being used. With terms like *dziro*, *chisuwi*/*chimonauswa* in use, one would logically expect to find a word like *hwaro* (foundation) being used to refer to the beginning of a musical composition. This will also make the hut imagery that is being used to represent the full structure of a musical composition, complete.

The terms *musoro*, *muviri* and *mushwe* are drawn from animal imagery. A musical composition is thus equated to the structure of an animal with a head (*musoro*), body (*muviri*) and tail (*mushwe*). The three Shona terms respectively refer to the beginning, basic pattern and tail of a musical arrangement. The word *mushwe* is also a direct translation of the English term tail.

The tail of a musical composition is also known as *mhendero* which is a word that already exists in the Shona lexicon which means the hem of type of clothing. The purpose of a hem is to make the clothing appear neat. It beautifies and dignifies any form of clothing. Any musical arrangement requires a logical and dignified ending and this shows how appropriate the term *mhendero* is when used to refer to the tail of a song.

The above examples demonstrate that the people who are creating terms in the music industry are very creative. Musical terms are not being created from nowhere but are a result of the creators' understanding of their environment and the Shona language. Any speaker-hearer of the Shona language can easily identify with the terms for they are closely linked to real and appropriate images. This alone is a way of expanding and enriching the Shona language with new terminology. However, there are problems which can be noted from the given examples.

Problems

The discussed examples show that there are a lot of inconsistencies in the creation and use of Shona musical terms. There are too many different terms that refer to the same musical concept. The tail of a musical arrangement for instance is represented by three different terms namely, *magumo*, *mushwe* and *mhendero* which are drawn from divergent images.

In some interviews and term lists obtained from institutions and organizations that deal with music there are inconsistencies that can be noted with regard to the Shona alphabet. On some lists of Shona musical terms the English term alto is retained despite the fact that the current Shona alphabet does not include /l/. On very few Shona term lists alto is represented as *aruto*. The lateral /l/ is replaced by the trill sound /r/. However, in most speech cases one hardly uses /r/ but the /l/. If the term creators in the music industry coordinate their activities they will come up clear cut policies on how to deal terms like those given above. Decisions on how to deal with the letter /l/ and letter combinations such as /pr/ in the English term soprano can also be easily

reached if term creation is well planned and coordinated. Existing speech excerpts show that most Shona speakers use /pr/ and not /pur/ when speaking and to represent the letter combination /pr/ as /pur/ as in the given examples is to grossly misrepresent how the Shona terms are being used in actual speech acts.

The other problem is that of inaccessibility of some Shona musical terms that were created. Some of the term lists that ALRI collected from The Zimbabwe College of Music contain Ndau terms which were coined by the late guru of ethnomusicology in Zimbabwe, Dr Maraire. The problem with some of the terms he coined is that they are easily accessible to the Ndau people and not the other Shona dialects namely, Kore kore, Manyika, Zezuru and Karanga. Terms like *mushwe* and *makukumidzo* are such examples which can easily be understood by the Ndau but are not readily understood in the other Shona dialects. As such the two terms should not be the standard terms for the musical terms tail and climax respectively. It would be better to use the terms *muswe* and *chimonauswa* which are readily understood in most of the Shona dialects.

The above examples indicate that there is lack of uniformity of terms in the music industry which goes to show that the term-creation that is going on is largely unplanned and uncoordinated. The chaotic situation in term-creation is not confined to the music field but is a general problem affecting nearly all sectors in the Zimbabwean community. As noted by Chimhundu (1987: 142), term-creation is a growing phenomenon, particularly in the post-independence era in Zimbabwe. It is proliferating in business, central and local government, commerce, industry, mining, agriculture, broadcasting, education and other spheres of life. If this continues unchecked this will eventually result in an undesirable "terminological flood". In other words, the result will be an influx of terms created outside the standards and principles that govern terminology development.

A situation whereby every institution has its own set of terms does not promote language development. As noted by Karl Max development comes through the effective control of resources including language. In other words language development can well be ordered and planned. He states that "language would be one of the things that in time would be taken under human control by the victorious proletariat". But the big question is who has to control language development in a country.

Recommendations

If the music industry is to come up with terminology work that will promote the development of the Shona language it important that committees responsible for the development of musical terms be formed. The committees should be formed in the four main provinces of Zimbabwe namely Mashonaland, Matebeleland, Manicaland and Midlands. The committee should comprise lecturers, academics and personnel from institutions and organizations that deal with

musical terms. The provincial committees should collect Shona musical terms that have been created in the areas they represent.

The head of the provincial committees will form the national board for the development of Shona musical terms. The board will be responsible for analyzing the terms that have been created so far in the music industry. To give credibility to what the national board implements it should work closely with other committees, boards and institutes that have the development of indigenous languages at heart. The Shona Language Committee and ALRI are examples of groups with which the National Board for the development Shona musical terms, if formed, can work in conjunction with in the implementation of principles lying at the basis of terminological activities in the music industry. The above recommendation, if implemented should ensure that there will be uniformity in the creation and use of musical terms.

It should however be noted that for the above recommendations to be effectively implemented there is need for the Zimbabwean government to be actively involved by providing financial assistance. The above mentioned committees and boards need a lot of financial support from the government for them to effectively pursue the objective of systematically creating and storing musical terms. Terminological management requires adequate resources like buildings, research equipment and well trained personnel. The end result will be the implementation of the given recommendations not only in the music discipline but in other fields which use specialized terms.

The government should also go a step further by forming a national unit for terminology development. The unit should be responsible for the ultimate documentation, development, standardization and publishing of term lists covering not only the music domain but also various other fields. The main objective of the unit should be to reduce ambiguity and misunderstandings and thereby improving on the exactness of technical communication. The proposed unit will deal with terminology on music, weather, basic health, HIV/AIDS, commerce, finance, banking, basic agriculture, information technology and terms drawn from other specialized areas. It should work in collaboration with linguists and specialists for the various subject areas. The unit should however start with the two main indigenous languages in Zimbabwe, Shona and Ndebele, and then with time spread to the recognized minority languages.

Another positive step would be to introduce tertiary training in the theory and principles of terminology. Currently, training in the theory and principles of terminology receives little attention. It is only taught under the translation and lexicography courses and as such is not given a fair coverage. To make matters worse, the two courses under which it is taught are optional courses at UZ and consequently some graduates who have studied African languages have no knowledge about terminology. In addition, the two courses are covered by one module at the University of Zimbabwe and the obvious result is that very little attention is given to terminology theory and principles. As a

solution to this problem, it will be better for the UZ African Languages and Literature Department and other departments in various tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe to follow the example set by the same department at the Midlands State University. At MSU, translation and lexicography are taught as different modules, the former in second year and the latter in the final year. The teaching of the two courses at different levels ensures that they taught over a two year period, hence more time for terminology, which is also taught in the two modules. In addition, the two courses are compulsory. If all tertiary institutions follow suit it would mean more students will receive training in terminology. However, to teach terminology as a course will ensure training of terminologists and terminographers of even better quality. This is exactly what is happening in South Africa which in 2000 introduced its first graduate course in the principles and practice of terminology and terminography in the Department of African Languages at the University of Pretoria. For quality terminology work to be realized in Zimbabwe the same route taken by South African can be fruitful.

In conclusion, terminology problems in the music discipline and other specialized fields are not without solutions. It only takes patience and effort from the concerned stake holders in implementing and refining the given recommendations. Effective implementation will in future enhance the communicative power of the indigenous languages in Zimbabwe.

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