

Therefore an open approach to the subject across cultures is highly recommended.

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## TRANSLATING EZEKIEL'S VISION OF THE DRY BONES —VISUALLY!

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### Introduction: Catch the vision

Chapter 37 of Ezekiel is one of the most familiar portions of the entire book and certainly among the better known passages of OT prophetic literature. This is in large measure due to its vivid vision of a valley full of scattered human bones that are dramatically brought to life by the Lord. I will briefly examine this captivating revelation, which comprises the first half of Ezekiel 37 (vv. 1-14), first from a structural and stylistic perspective. My aim is to show certain aspects of the literary *artistry* of this text as well as the *purposeful* manner in which the discourse is fashioned. What is it that gives this divine vision its special visual appeal and persuasive power as the prophet gives his exiled people a message of hope?

Next we will consider the equally important question: How can translators enable their audience to catch a glimpse of that same spectacular scene today—that is, to see (and hear!) a portion of what “the Sovereign Lord” (*Adonai YHWH*—vv. 3, 5, 9, 12) prophesies about giving new life to his people. This article explores one possibility of capturing this vision—namely, through a “poetic” rendering of the passage in the target language (TL). That is not the only way to do it, of course, but it seems to be an especially appropriate method when we consider the colorful rhetorical qualities of the original text. In passing, I will also comment on several of the notable problems involved in communicating the relevance of this dynamic prophetic imagery to a contemporary audience, namely, a Chewa Christian constituency in south-central Africa.

### What does the text say, and how does it say it?

Both these questions are important for translators to answer as they carry out a study of the original text in preparation for rendering it meaningfully in their language. What is the *content* of the passage and how has this been conveyed by means of the *form* of the text, namely, its structure and style in the source language (SL)? The following is a partial discourse analysis of Ezek 37.1-14. (Normal English citations of the biblical text are taken from the NIV and indicated by double quotes; more literal renderings of specific Hebrew terms and expressions are noted by single quotes.)

The beginning of this pericope (v. 1) is marked by a twofold announcement of the vision. First the prophet says “the hand of the Lord was upon me.” This is coupled with a reference to spiritual inspiration (“and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord”). This replaces the usual prophetic

word formula that introduces God's speech (cf. 1.3; 8.1; 40.1). This formula ("the word of the Lord came to me") reappears to signal the beginning of the next section in 37.15. Another formula, "declares the Lord," reinforces the close of the present unit, as does an *inclusio* formed by another reference to the "Spirit" of Yahweh in relation to the prophet Ezekiel (vv. 1, 14). Clearly the Lord was both the source and the principal agent of this powerful vision concerning a miraculous, life-giving creation ("Yahweh" is mentioned 11 times in these 14 verses). It is also noteworthy that the setting in "the valley" (v. 1) appears to be the same as that of Ezekiel's initial vision of the glory of the Lord, namely, with the exiles of Israel "by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians" (see 1.1-3; 3.22). Thus God is seen to be present and powerfully operative in the whole wide world, wherever his people may happen to reside.

Like many of Ezekiel's other visions, so too this passage is very tightly and symmetrically constructed. It uses parallel patterns of terms, both synonymous and contrastive in nature. The text is arranged in the form of a topical chiasmus (A-B=B<sup>1</sup>-A<sup>1</sup>). This may reflect in a literary manner the great spiritual reversal that is being revealed with regard to God's people. The vision also exhibits a progressive plot-like development as shown in the outline below:

<b>A</b>	<b>Problem:</b> Yahweh shows Ezekiel a scattered mass of human bones. (1-3)
<b>B</b>	<b>Complication:</b> The dry bones are knit together and embodied, but still no life. (4-8)
<b>B<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Peak:</b> The bodies are infused with the breath of life, and an army arises! (9-10)
<b>A<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Resolution:</b> Yahweh reveals to Ezekiel his plans for the resurrected bones (his people). (11-14)

Many lexical correspondences and formulas demarcate these four subsections and also bind them into a closely integrated rhetorical unit. Its purpose is to spiritually inspire, as it were, the disoriented, displaced, and depressed exilic community of "Israel" (i.e., the immediate referent of the "dry bones" in v. 11, hence also denoting "my people" in vv. 12-13). The initial compound speech-opener: "And he [*Yahweh*] said to me ... , 'Prophesy unto ... and say to ... 'Thus says the Lord ... ' "' occurs at the beginning of each distinct paragraph (vv. 4, 9, 11-12). A more complex variation occurs in the final paragraph; this includes the double quotation of v. 11, which links what has gone before (1-10) with what is to come (12-14). This also helps to distinguish the last segment (11-14) as the *thematic climax* of the entire passage—as distinct from the *dramatic* (action-based) *peak* which appears in vv. 9-10.

There are a number of other artistic touches which highlight the essential message that is being dramatized by this vision (1-10) and the subsequent interpretive divine comment (11-14). The latter is a salvation oracle that predicts God's people being brought back to life and restored to their "land," a place of eternal fellowship with Yahweh (cf. 37.27-28). The emphatic formula "and you shall know that I am the Lord," found in the middle of the discourse in v. 6b, is reinforced by its expansion in vv. 13-14 at the close of the pericope.

The apparently doubtful (from a human perspective) rhetorical question of v. 3, "Can these bones live?" and Ezekiel's ambiguous, deferential reply, is balanced by the hopeless communal lament of v. 11 ("Our bones are dried up ... we are cut off"). Similarly, the sequence of words and actions that comprises Yahweh's command to the "bones" in B is basically duplicated in B<sup>1</sup> with his summons of the "breath/wind/spirit." However, a characteristic poetic inversion occurs at the respective endings of each of these B units. Bodies appear in v. 8 but with "no breath in them"; in v. 10, on the other hand, "breath entered them" and the bodies "came to life." This is now "a *very very* (the Hebrew adverb is repeated) great host." It comes about when God transforms the "very many ... very dry" heaps of bones in the vision's opening scene (v. 2, what could be "deader" than dry bones?). A mighty "army" of living people has emerged from the original piles of lifeless skeletons—what an amazing contrast!

The deictic "behold" (Hebrew *hinneh*) punctuates the discourse throughout (vv. 2, 5, 7, 8, 11), bringing the audience (including now Ezekiel himself!) into the very heart of this amazing vision, just like in a movie—its sounds as well as its sights (e.g., v. 7, "clattering"). Such graphic discourse invites all to hear and see the divine show that is being screened within Ezekiel's head. Thus as we hear (or, with less impact, read) this apocalyptic vision, we feel as if we are right there on the scene. All the vivid details are given in the first person by the prophetic commentator who is seeing these wonderful events transpire before his very eyes. The thrilling resurrection of the bones is dramatically prolonged and carried out in stages—first embodiment (v. 8), then "em-breath-ment" (v. 10, which parallels the account of man's creation in Gen 2.7).

This sequence is then reproduced as the Sovereign Lord discloses the vision's meaning. First the people come forth from their metaphorical "graves," then like in the Exodus they are transferred to their "land" (vv. 2-14, which constitutes another dual sequence of corresponding events). The great army left standing at attention at the end of B<sup>1</sup> is finally brought home to their God-given rest at the conclusion of A<sup>1</sup>. This corresponds to the hope-less "house of Israel" (v. 11), which will be made to "live" (v. 14a) and settle in their "own land" forever (v. 14b)—the blessed effect of the Lord's mighty "doing" (v. 14c, an instance of poetic *end-stress*; cf. 36.32, 36).

This inspiring spectacle serves as a vigorous verbal reaffirmation of the reliability of *all* the Lord's predictions or promises given in the preceding oracles of the book of Ezekiel, as well as those yet to come. Indeed, the same basic hope-filled theme of renewal and restoration (following punishment or disciplining, as the case may be) is being recycled throughout these prophetic passages. But it is done from varied viewpoints and with differing emphases each time. This recursive feature further demonstrates the authenticity, veracity, and authority of God's chosen mouthpiece, the human agent of his holy word (note the repeated verb "prophesy").

Everything comes together at the end of this powerful presentation of an entire "people" brought to life—starting not from mere lifeless bodies, but

from the ultimate negative: dried bones scattered about in the wilderness dust. Thus the sense of hopelessness and depression of the exiles of Israel, as symbolized by these drastic death and burial metaphors, is ultimately countered by the Lord's stunning images of resurrection and renewal. So too those among Ezekiel's disheartened addressees should know that they most surely did have a future. They may look and feel quite "dry" (i.e., dead) in a religious sense and "cut off" from God's presence (cf. Ps 31.23; 88.5). But they had only to depend on the energizing Breath of Yahweh (his Spirit), and new "life" would one day surely be theirs (v. 14).

"Will these bones live again?" (3): The Sovereign Lord (5) answers his own provocative question through word and deed in a way that is most lifelike, albeit surrealistic. It must have seemed to the exiles as if things were taking place in the very imaginative presence of the prophet's audience. The distinctive mode by which the message was given highlights the fact that this highly memorable, beatific event of revitalization was as good as done. God's own indwelling Spirit is the unfailing guarantor (v. 14; cf. 10, and 36.26-27). God himself is the gracious initiator of everything that happens (note the focus on the 1st person speaker and agent in vv. 12-14). This divine pledge has the same power and potential to renew and restore the flagging hearts and minds of the faithful today—no matter how pessimistic they are, or how "dead" they may feel (v. 11). But is that how this enlivening vision comes across when translated?

### **How do people see and hear Ezekiel's vision in Chewa?**

It is one thing to analyze a biblical text in the original language, whether Hebrew or Greek, in order to discern how its distinctive combination of linguistic-literary forms and content convey a variety of communicative functions, as presumably intended by the author in its original situational context. That is the essence of exegesis, including discourse analysis, within the larger process of interpretation. But the task of interpretation does not end here, for an acceptable transfer to some present-day setting is still needed. This involves a careful reformulation of the source text in a new language and culture. Any such translation must be appropriately contextualized for a contemporary audience in order to allow the Scriptures to come alive for them. But this task is easier said than done, as most good translators realize.

The preceding study represents a limited fulfillment of the first exercise, namely, an analysis of the biblical text at hand. We will now consider the second aspect of the translation task: How can Ezekiel's message, originally provided in biblical Hebrew, be conveyed meaningfully—or as a minimum, with the least possible distortion or misrepresentation—today via translated versions in other languages of the world? Or, to state the issue in a slightly different way, how can we best replicate within another linguistic and literary framework the powerful reassurance and restoration that are promised in the original text? Is such a goal realistic or achievable at all, and if so, to what extent, especially when we recognize that, even under the best of circumstances, no translation is ever perfect? We will briefly focus our attention with regard to this issue on the rendering of certain aspects of

Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones in Chewa, a south-central Bantu language of Malawi and Zambia.

One *literary* text (Source Language) calls for another (Target Language). If that is your goal (based on your analysis of the biblical text), then you must adopt an appropriate translation strategy. Thus a literal, or "formal correspondence," version generally fails to fill the bill. In order to achieve an even adequate level of artistic and rhetorical text representation, a more *idiomatic, or functionally equivalent, rendering is necessary*. This is a version that seeks to convey the main goals of the original message in what would generally be regarded as the most natural and appropriate style in the target language.

Here is an example of what is meant: The old (1923) Chewa Bible (OC) expresses the first verse of Ezekiel 37 as follows (presented in an equally literal back-translation into English):

The hand of "Jehovah" rested on me, and he went out with me in the spirit of "Jehovah", and he put me inside a valley, it is filled with bones.

This sounds (in Chewa) as if "Jehovah" (*Yehova*, God of the European Protestant missionaries, called *Yahve* in the corresponding Catholic Bible) led the speaker out of some enclosed place by the hand (any connection with "in the spirit ... " is unclear), and later deposited him "inside" some (enclosed) valley. The new (1998) popular language version (NC) clarifies the meaning as follows:

The power of *Chauta* grabbed me, the Spirit of *Chauta* lifted me up and set me down again in the middle of a valley. That valley was filled with bones.

The NC identifies God's "power" (*Chauta* is the personal High Creator-God of the people) with his "Spirit," which is a neat way to express the notion of God inspiring the prophet (i.e., "grabbing").

A common problem when dealing with the biblical prophets (in any language) is the different levels (embeddings) of direct speech that are often represented. As a result, it is almost impossible at times to identify the speaker if we retain a literal rendering. Compare the respective translations of 37.4-5a, for example, in the OC and NC:

Then he said to me, Speak to these bones, and say to them, You dry bones, hear the words of Jehovah. He speaks thus the Lord Jehovah to these bones, Look, I will stick breath in you ... (OC—punctuated as in the original)

Then he told me, "Preach to these bones, [and] tell the dry bones to listen to the words of me, Chauta. Say that what I the Lord Chauta am telling the bones is this: I will breathe breath into you ... " (NC)

One more example of literalism illustrates the difficulties it so often poses: The problem with a version that insists on a concordant translation (one that renders each Hebrew or Greek word by the same corresponding word in the TL) is not merely its foreign sound and its stylistic awkwardness. A more serious problem is that it can mislead and mystify the reader, and especially the

*hearer* of the text (which most receptors happen to be, whether in Africa or elsewhere). Thus people either come away with no meaning (the text is too difficult to understand) or worse, they assume the wrong meaning, something that the Bible never intended to say. Compare once again the two Chewa versions at 37.11-12a (the words in parentheses are my comments; those in brackets are implied):

Then he said to me, One born of a human you (*pejorative address*), These bones are the whole house of Israel; look, he/they (*ambiguous referent*) say/s, Our bones have just [recently] dried up, our hope has been lost, we have been chopped down [like trees]. For this reason, speak for, and say to them, He speaks thus Lord Jehovah, Look [at] my people ... (OC)

Afterwards Chauta told me saying, “You child of a human (*polite address*), these bones are all the people of Israel. They are saying, ‘Our bones are dried out, our hope is lost, we have been completely undone (*lit. destroyed*).’ For this reason preach to them and tell them that I Lord Chauta am saying, You my people ... ” (NC)

The main difficulty with the OC in this passage is its handling of figurative language. The vision of Ezekiel becomes even more fantastic—unbelievably so—since the text seems to imply that the prophet sees an actual house, a dwelling of somebody named “Israel” (= the patriarch?), that has been built out of bones. Furthermore, these bones were apparently cut down (or hacked off) from some human beings (or corpses, cf. v. 9) to replace the normal wooden timbers. In this case, the negative associations of traditional “witchcraft” (*ufiti*, including necrophagy) would probably be even greater, since such a practice is suggested in both versions by the mention of “opening graves” later in v. 12.

But the solution is not simply to replace every biblical figure of speech by a straightforward expression of its meaning. This procedure, if carried out consistently everywhere, would result in a rather lifeless, “dry bones” of a text—a version that is quite reduced in impact and appeal compared with the lively, attractive, and compelling original version. Thus when possible, translators preparing a functionally equivalent reproduction try to “compensate” for the inevitable loss of certain figurative usages in the Scriptures by introducing, where appropriate, corresponding instances of idiomatic speech from their language.

A good example of this is found in the NC in the use of *gwa*, an ideophone (an independent, evocative, dramatic predicate), to describe the “very dry” bones in 37.2. Obviously only skilled mother-tongue translators can achieve a good translation, otherwise subtle mistakes in usage can easily be made, e.g., when seeking to evoke a sound-image of the clattering bones being bound together: *gobede* (OC) vs. *gogobede* (NC). Another instance occurs in v. 10, where the missionary-produced OC introduces the ideophone *ciriri* to portray the sudden “standing up” of the “slain ones.” This was certainly a good intention, but the problem is that *ciriri* refers to the “up-rising,” not of bodies, but of *hair*, either that of a human being or that on the back of an aroused furry animal! The appropriate ideophonic predicate in this case would be *njo*.

The problems of meaningful message transfer are compounded in a literal version due to the many, inexact, one-to-one lexical differences that arise from cultural differences. The most difficult one to deal with in the dry bones vision concerns the vital word “spirit” (Hebrew *ruach*). This has a wide range of meanings that simply cannot be duplicated in a language like Chewa. In ch. 37 alone, for example, the following three distinct senses appear in the Hebrew text: (a) the divine “Spirit,” a personal manifestation of *YHWH* himself (e.g., v. 1); (b) the animating “breath” of human life, or “life-force” (vv. 5, 8); and (c) the “wind/breeze” of nature, by metonymy, “direction” (v. 9). Verse 36.26 adds yet another meaning; (d) “spirit” in the sense of inner attitude, psychological orientation, and religious disposition (as distinct from “heart”). In Chewa, in each of the four mentioned cases, a different word has to be used. Even then there are difficulties, for example, with (a) in that “spirit” (*mzimu*) normally refers to some departed ancestor, and with (d) since this particular sense is normally included under the total area of meaning of the term “heart” (*mtima*).

But our vision presents several other major translational problems that further illustrate the difficulty of the book as a whole: As noted above, the distinctive vocative “son of man” (e.g., v. 3) has been mishandled in the OC: *wobadwa ndi munthu iwe* “one born of a human you,” which is a very unnatural, even impolite, expression. NC’s “you child of a human” (*iwe mwana wa munthu*) is better, but still initially ambiguous (i.e., male or female?). It is also potentially misleading in that the unmarked noun *munthu* “person/human being” would, in the absence of any other evidence, be taken as referring to someone of African ethnic origin (perhaps a desirable form of indirect local “contextualisation”?!). The key term “prophecy” itself (v. 4) is difficult because the indigenous equivalent *kulosa* refers only to ecstatic future predictions (as by someone currently “entered” by an ancestral spirit). The OC tried to create a new sense for an existing word, *kunenera*, normally “to speak on behalf of someone,” but (unfortunately in this case) also “to tell on/inform about someone.” To avoid such potential ambiguity, the NC employs the verb for “proclaim” (*-lalika*), which seems much more suitable in this situation.

Thus far I have dealt only with some of the more content-related aspects of visualizing Ezekiel’s vision in Chewa. But what can one do about some of the key rhetorical elements of his message—those stylistic features that were introduced and modified to convey his “word from the Lord” in such a captivating and compelling manner? *Repetition* per se is no problem, for this is a characteristic feature of all good verbal art and literary discourse in Chewa too. In this case, however, it is the patterning that is of special concern, especially that which demarcates the text into distinct units of structure, e.g., via *inclusio*. Such divisions need to be reflected also in a translation if possible so that the original organization of ideas and areas of emphasis are equally apparent, both visually and vocally. This might be achieved through the use of similar patterns of reiteration, coupled perhaps with additional lexical or grammatical highlighters.

What may be done, for example, to indicate the four major subsections of each of the two halves of ch. 37? At the very least one can set these segments off as distinct paragraphs in the translation, instead of allowing the passage to run on with no break at all, as in the OC, except for the notable pause in the middle (at v. 15). More creative and daring translators (and Bible publishers) will try to visually display some of the larger correspondences in content, like the chiasmic arrangement of 37.1-14, by means of distinctive text formatting procedures (e.g., indentation, spacing, type-head variation, and a single-column of print; see *BT* 55.2:227-233).

Such carefully applied typography is intended to serve as a visual aid and cue to the reader so that s/he can in turn articulate—or even recite (or sing?)—the text more intelligibly and rhythmically for a listening audience. The latter, however, presupposes a version which has been translated with this possibility in mind, that is, one which considers spoken and heard elements, and which also considers spoken phraseology or poetics in its construction. An alternative translation that emphasizes the rhetorical features of the SL text would also be more helpful for presentation in vocal form (e.g., audio-cassette) for the benefit of non- (or new) literates. Scholars continue to debate the literary merits of the book of Ezekiel—with some commentators claiming that he is dull and repetitive, while others draw attention to the many subtle stylistic features that the text displays. I favor the second opinion and feel that one's stylistic evaluation of Ezekiel might be quite different if the prophet's vibrant words and varied images were heard aloud. This would apply especially to listeners who are traditionally accustomed to receiving momentous messages in this vocalized manner.

#### A “visualizable” poetic version of Ezekiel's vision

The ultimate *literary* goal of a good translation is to render the prophet's radical rhetoric of restoration in such a way that it conveys as much as possible of its inherent drama and dynamism. Ezekiel 37 is an intensely personal, at times ecstatic, proclamation of psychological comfort, spiritual hope, and moral encouragement, proclaimed to the people of God of every generation. Why should Ezekiel's message not sound as lively and life-giving in the various world languages of today as it did to that dejected and demoralized “dry bones” of a crowd who were privileged to hear it in Hebrew during the original recorded event (37.10-11)? Guided by “the hand of the Lord upon” them (37.1), and the same Spirit of God within them (37.14), consecrated, committed, and competent translators today can indeed communicate a correspondingly energetic and life-giving message (37.13).

There are different styles available in a given language to accomplish this goal, depending on the various genres of oral and written verbal art forms that are available. I present one of these options below as a sample in Chewa—namely, a rendition of Ezek 37.1-10 that has been composed following the model of the specific *ndakatulo* genre of lyric poetry. This rhythmic, oratorical style features a greater concentration and combination of stylistic devices such as ellipsis, reiteration, ideophones, exclamations, emphasizees, demonstratives, independent pronouns, figures of speech,



idioms, phonological accentuation, punning, and modifications in the normal prose word order. Most of these devices are evident in the version below, which has been formatted in what is intended to be a more readable text design (along with an English back-translation).

### Chata aukitsa mafupa oumatu

Dzanja amvu la Chauta lidandigwira—*gwi!*

*Nyumu!* Mzimu wa Mulunguwu wandinyamulatu

nukandiika pakati pachigwa chachikulu chotakaka.

Chinali chodzaza ndi mafupa okhaokha ali *mbwee!*

Uku ndi uku Chauta ankandiyendetsa m'chigwa umo.

Pakati pa vibade vija ndinkazungulira pali ponsepo,

ali ochulukadi mafupawo nga' mchenga wapagombe.

Onsewo anali *gwa!* pansu mu chigwa choopsacho.

Adandifunsa Chauta kuti, "Iwe mwana wa munthu,

kodi angakhaleenso m'moyo mafupa ouma onsewa?"

"*Ha!* ine ndingadziwe bwanji munthu wapadziko ine?"

Koma inu nokha, Ambuye, popeza mukudziwa zonse."

Adandilamula Chauta nati, "Ulalike kwa mafupa [4-5] awa,

uwauze kuti amvetse mau onse amene ndidzalankhula.

Ambuye Mulungu ali ndi uthenga wofunika kwambiri.

Iwo achere khutu, amve bwino zomwe ndifuna kunena.

"Mafupa oumanu, nazi zimene ine Chauta n'dzachita:

Ndidzakuzirani mpweya, mudzapumanso *wefuwefu!*

Ndidzakuikirani mitsempani ndi mnofu, *ah!* khungunso.

Apo mudzazindikira kuti ine Chauta ndilipo ndithu!"

Nanga ine n'kukana kodi? Ndidayambo-lalika mau,

monga momwe adandilamulirawo Chauta Mulungu.

Pamenepo panalidi phokoso lingoti *gobedegobede!*

Taonani, mafupa onse ouma aja adachito-lumikizana!

Ndili chiyang'anire choncho, n'dapenya zodabwitsa:

### The Lord raises dried-up bones

[1]The mighty hand of Chauta grabbed me—*tightly!*

*Up and away!* The Spirit of God picked me right up,

and put me in the middle of a large, broad valley.

It was filled up completely with bones all *scattered!*

[2]Here and there Chauta moved me inside that valley.

In the midst of those skulls I circled all around there,

the bones were so numerous like sand on a sea shore.

All lay *dried out!* on the ground in that awful valley.

[3]Chauta asked me, "Say you, Child of somebody,

can all of these dry bones become alive again?"

"*Ha!* how can I know, a person of this earth like me?"

But you alone, O Lord, since you know everything."

[4-5]Chauta commanded me, "Preach to these bones,

tell them to listen to the words that I will speak.

The Lord God has a very important message.

Let them lend their ears n' listen to what I want to say.

[5-6]"You dry bones, here's what I Chauta am going to do:

I'll blow breath in you, you'll breathe again *puff-puff!*

I will put tendons and flesh on you, ah! skin as well.

Then you'll realize that I Chauta I really do exist!"

[7]So how could I refuse? I began t' preach the words,

just exactly as those he commanded me, Chauta God.

Right then there was a big noise like *clatter clatter!*

Just look, all those dry bones acted t' join together!

[8]While I'm staring there thus, I saw s' amazing things:

Pa mafupa oumawo paoneka mitsempha ndi  
mnofu,  
kudzanso khungu pamwamba, zonse zili bwino  
*nde!*

Koma muli *zii!* Munalibe mpweya m'kati  
mwakemo.

Adandilamula Chauta nati, "Ulalikire mpweya  
tsono,  
iwe mwana wa munthu, uwuze mau a ine  
Ambuye:

'Bwera kuno, mpweyawe, dzawauzire  
ophedwawo

kuti akhalenso m'moyo pamaso panga monga  
kalelo.' "

Izi zonse ndidachita monga adanduzira Chauta.

Mpweya udangoti *fiku!* n'kulowa mwa  
mitemboyo.

Pomwepo onse aja adasanduka amoyo naimirira  
*njiii!*

Panali chinamtindi cha anthu m'chigwa  
chonsecho!

On those dry bones appear tendons and  
flesh,

and also skin on top, everything's just  
alright *ready!*

But inside is *emptiness!* There's no breath in  
there.

[9]Chauta commanded me, "Now preach to the  
breath,

Child of somebody, tell it the words of me  
the Lord:

'Com'ere, you breath, breathe into these  
killed ones

so that they become alive in my presence as  
before.' "

[10]All these things I did just exactly as Chauta  
told me.

The breath *arrived!* n' entered right into  
those corpses.

Immediately they all revived and stood up  
*upright!*

It was a huge crowd of people in that valley  
there

Several stylistic features that distinguish this Chewa poetic version are worth noting in particular:

- The poem rearranges the ten verses of the biblical text into nine stanzas of four measured lines each. These are roughly equal in length for rhythmic purposes, including several "ballast lines," which reiterate certain aspects of content or its main implications, e.g., "The Lord God has a very important message" (4-5).
- Nine ideophones and two exclamations accent the dramatic character of the discourse in this rendition. Thus, even the lack of a specific action may be highlighted thereby, e.g., "But inside is *emptiness!* [*zii!*] There's no breath in there" (7). An ideophone is the ultimate tool in the Bantu poet's repertory for visualizing any sort of state, action, or event in language.
- The average sentence/clause length is relatively short, and consequently the text is easy to comprehend as it is being uttered aloud, since each line is meaningful as it stands and can be recited as such.
- The literary style is idiomatic, both lexically and syntactically, with many colloquial pronominal, demonstrative, and intensive affixes; word order variations; graphic diction; and euphonic expressions.
- There are several lexical-semantic replacements and additions that serve to embellish the language, to fill out certain poetic lines, and to avoid too much exact repetition, for example: in v. 1 "a large, broad valley" is specified to accommodate the many bones that a multitude of people would produce; in v. 2 "those skulls" is a more picturesque term than "bones"; in v. 3 "a person of this earth" stresses the divine messenger's human nature better than "child of a person"; in vv. 4-5 "let them lend their ears" replaces the simple "hear"; in vv. 5-6 "you'll breathe again *puff-puff!*" is more climactic than "you will live

again”; in v. 7 “all those dry bones” is more poetic than “those bones”; in v. 8 “everything’s just alright *ready!*” brings out the cumulative implication of the awesome description at this point; in v. 9 “alive in my presence as before” emphasizes Yahweh’s personal relationship to all those dried-up, dead bones; and in v. 10 “entered those corpses” replaces the simple pronoun “them.” This style clearly imitates a *ndakatulo* lyric in Chewa, which is characterized by vivid, emotive, highly evocative imagery intended to stimulate the listening audience to experience a dramatic scene and the associated physical sensations and psychological feelings.

- The Chewa poem includes a number of impressive phonological devices: wordplay, rhyme, alliteration, and assonance as in v. 1: *Nyamu! Mzimu wa Mulunguwu wandinyamulatu—nukandiika pakati pachigwa chachikulu chotakata—chinali chodzaza ndi mafupa okhaokha*. Such selective, purposeful sound shaping enables the poet to highlight certain similarities, contrasts, or high points within the text. The conceptual and connotative content being conveyed is correspondingly that much more dynamic and sensual—hence more memorable as well.

A word of caution is obviously in order here: Translators of a lyric version of a given biblical text certainly do not have the liberty to distort either the original essential meaning or its particular areas of thematic focus. Neither are they free to embellish the biblical text to show their artistic skill. A clear measure of functional equivalence, including exegetical fidelity, in relation to the text of Scripture, must be maintained, so far as this can be determined, always keeping the intended audience and venue of use in mind (in this instance, a public recital at a Christian youth festival). Critics and reviewers may debate this or that specific usage or claim that this poetic version has gone too far in the attempt to create rhetorical impact and aesthetic appeal. However, it should be remembered that the basis for comparison must be the project’s primary goal and a careful analysis of the original source text, not some translation in English or another language. Extensive usage and testing, coupled with an intensive Bible study of the text at hand, will soon reveal where any modifications need to be made to Ezekiel’s vision in the vernacular.

Thus scholars must try not to get tangled up in minor details of form or interpretation when conducting a critical assessment of this nature. The exegete’s zeal for precision can all too easily stifle the poetic impulse. In the case of biblical poetry and prophecy such as we have here, it is often not the individual image or utterance that is important, but rather the total conceptual, emotional, and sensory impression created by the text’s literary style and structure. This may well have been the primary purpose of the original writer, namely, to activate the expressive, directive, affective, and aesthetic functions of communication. This would be done so as to create a more immediate and personal impression of one’s religious experience of or relationship with Yahweh. This intention and effect, in such cases, may be far more important than simply providing information. Yet so many people mistakenly identify

information as being the primary object when it comes to the literature of the Scriptures.

It is not that content is unimportant and need not be accurately expressed in a translation. My point is simply that content is not all that there is to so many biblical texts. Ezekiel's vision illustrates that emotive feeling, aesthetic beauty, and rhetorical impact are so very much a part of the original message. This is what sensitive translators must empathize with as they strive to re-create the text in a new language, cultural setting, and oral-literary tradition.

CARLO BUZZETTI

## **TRANSLATOR TRAINING: A European Perspective**

The author is a translation consultant with the Italian Bible Society residing in Rome.

The following paper looks at the training situation from the point of view of one consultant. He notes what has been the situation found in many projects in the past, as well as in more recently completed and ongoing work.

Firstly, the main features of three different situations are indicated along with some notes that are considered necessary or useful to integrate the information. The second part of the report shares "Hopes, plans, and suggestions" for the future.

### **Basic training**

In the past this has usually been done in a short period before the translation was begun as well as during the first meetings of the project.

Often the training period has coincided partly with the seminar held over several days following which the translators are chosen from a larger group of candidates, and partly during the initial stages of the translation. More recently we have established that the training period and the translation period are clearly separated. Of course, it remains true that some exercises given during the training period can anticipate the translation, while the first stages of the translation period also continue that training. This process provides a better introduction to the project.

### **Length of the training period**

In the past it was customary to give only a few days' full-time training to potential translators attending the translation seminar. More recently, over the first year of a project, 6 months to one year of training was given, usually of 20 hours per week. One of the practical difficulties has been that many of those who were potential translators were already heavily involved in other work and so could not devote a large amount of time to the project. All things being equal, the move has been to choose translators more on the basis of the time they can make available for the work. This has meant that they should be able to give at least half their time to the project.