

ISSUES IN TRANSCRIBING AND TRANSLATING URHOB PROVERBS INTO ENGLISH

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This paper discusses issues relating to the transcription of Urhobo oral forms into writing and their translation into English, using proverbs as examples. Both issues are extremely necessary for the documentation of small languages to enable them to contribute to global knowledge. Six proverbs were examined in all, four of which were taken from Erivwo (2006) while the other two are popular proverbs selected for their semantic and aesthetic effects. The proverbs are non-universal but the cultural practices and moral values which they convey could abound in other cultures and could be made available for the dissemination of knowledge to the non-Urhobo when translated. Transcription was based on linguistic parameters of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and sociolinguistics while their translation drew on Toury's (1995) descriptive translation theory, otherwise known as Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS). A description of the contextual meanings and functions of the selected proverbs was done and the work reveals that different proverbs require different translation techniques such as idiomising translation, equivalence, stylized paraphrase, etc. The paper shows that Urhobo oral literature, represented here by proverbs, can be transcribed and translated into other languages, thereby promoting global knowledge and contributing to studies on translating cultures engendered by the cultural turn in translation studies.

Cet article met en exergue des sujets relatifs à la transcription des énoncés oraux en langue urhobo et leur traduction en anglais, en utilisant des proverbes comme exemples. Ces deux sujets sont d'une nécessité avérée pour la documentation des petites langues afin de mieux maximiser leur contribution à la connaissance mondiale. Nous nous sommes appuyés en tout sur six proverbes dont quatre viennent de Erivwo (2006) tandis que les deux autres sont des proverbes populaires choisis pour leurs effets sémantiques et esthétiques. Les proverbes ne sont pas universels mais les pratiques culturelles et les valeurs morales qu'ils véhiculent pourraient abonder dans d'autres cultures et on les rendrait disponibles pour la diffusion du savoir aux locuteurs qui ne parlent pas urhobo une fois traduites. Nous avons basé la transcription sur des paramètres linguistiques de phonologie, morphologie, syntaxe, sémantique et sociolinguistique tandis que leur traduction s'est appuyée sur la théorie de la traduction descriptive de Toury (1995), connu aussi sous le nom d'Études de Traduction Descriptive (ETD). Nous avons fait la description des significations en contexte et les fonctions de proverbes choisis et l'étude montre que différents proverbes exigent des techniques de traduction différentes telles que la traduction des idiomes, l'équivalence, la paraphrase stylisée, etc. L'article montre que la littérature orale urhobo, représentée ici par les proverbes, peut être transcrite et traduite dans d'autres langues, promouvant par ce faire la connaissance mondiale et contribuant aux études de traduction des cultures engendrées par le tournant culturel dans les études de traduction.

0. INTRODUCTION

Urhobo, a name that refers to both the people and their language, is spoken in Delta State, southern Nigeria and has a population of more than two million. It is an Edoid language, a sub-branch of the Niger-Congo phylum.

Anyone familiar with the Urhobo people, and indeed most traditional societies in Africa, knows that proverbs, like Chinua Achebe aptly puts it in his novel *Things Fall Apart*, are "the palm oil with which words are eaten." They are a major source of cultural information as well as a means of communication; there can hardly be a conversation, no matter how short, without the interlocutors using one proverb or another. They are at the fingertips of every competent Urhobo speaker. Each proverb carries with it both linguistic and aesthetic features of the language, its people and

their environment together with their native knowledge. Consequently, the meaning of a proverb goes beyond the accumulation of the meaning of the lexical items with which it is composed to include the context of usage which is the realm of pragmatics. Proverbs could be defined as any form of well known elegantly expressed group of words or sayings that convey supposedly acknowledged truth. It is also described as a short sentence or saying generally known by many people, and which usually contains words of wisdom, truth or morals that are based on common sense or practical experience (Akakuru and Mombe 2008). By nature proverbs are figures of speech and they reflect, in a way, aspects of the cultural practices of a people: they are thus culture bound.

Translation involves representing a message, information or idea in one language, i.e. source language (SL) into another, i.e. target language (TL) with the aim of reproducing as closely as possible the original meaning in the SL into the TL. It is generally conceived by translation theorists that there is no such thing as a perfect translation since there are no exact equivalents of even the most concrete words from one language to another (Roberts 2000). Culture bound elements such as proverbs constitute translation problems because they are not transposable automatically from SL to TL; yet it is a necessary exercise for achieving cross-fertilisation of ideas across cultures. Several theories and methods of translation have been suggested by paramiologists (cf. Ibe, 1997) but to achieve good results, it is important for the translator to be very knowledgeable in both the linguistic structure and the cultural settings of the two languages involved since both areas contribute to a better translation.

This work draws on Toury's (1995) DTS, a descriptive explanatory branch of translation studies, which allows a description of the functions and contextual meanings of the proverbs after which the translator may opt for translation techniques. To Toury, texts and modes of behaviour are situated in the appropriate cultural settings and textual components contextualized in their texts. This implies that a descriptive explanation would provide a framework for individual studies of all kinds for the proverbs. The translator may then retain features in the SL and transpose them in the TL: It is the prospective function of the translation, via its textual linguistic make up and the relationship which would tie it to the original, which yields and governs the strategies which are resorted to during the production of the TL (Target Language) text in question, and hence, the translation act as a whole (Toury 2012:6).

Urhobo proverbs are available mainly in their oral form since the society is still basically an oral/illiterate society. Although Urhobo was first committed to writing around 1910 (Ojaide 2007), only very few publications exist and they include the translation of the complete Holy Bible, four dictionaries, some primers and a few short story books (personal observation). The language has an orthography that is generally adhered to by writers in the language but serious problems exist with word division within grammatical structures arising from how to represent productive phonological processes such as vowel elision and glide formation in writing. Besides, tone marking is generally avoided by writers even though tone plays both lexical and grammatical functions in the language. In spite of these problems, the transcription of Urhobo proverbs from the oral form into the written form will enable them to become permanent documents of the literature of the people that can be referred to by generations yet unborn, more so that fewer and fewer young people now speak the language. In addition, the translation of Urhobo proverbs into English, a major world language and a key player in the globalisation process, will help to reveal how language works, how the linguistic features combine with the social, cultural and

psychological elements to derive their meanings. It will also enable the native knowledge and cultural nuances contained in them to be made available for people across the world to access for the promotion of global knowledge, understanding and cooperation.

Data for this work were obtained using four randomly selected proverbs contained in Erivwo (2006) (Samples 1-4) and two popular community proverbs (Samples 5-6). Selection of data was guided by the availability of linguistic features such as vowel elision, glide formation, vowel harmony and negation and their representation.

1. OVERVIEW OF LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF URHOB0 AND ENGLISH

The linguistic features of Urhobo are different from those of English; this overview will however focus more on Urhobo which is a less known language than English. Urhobo has 28 consonant segments as follows:

Stops: /**p, b, t, d, c, j, k, g, kp, gb**/ (written as: **p, b, t, d, ch, dj, k, g, kp, gb** respectively)

Fricatives: /**ɸ, f, v, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, ɣ, h**/ (written as: **ph, f, v, s, z, sh, j, gh, h** respectively)

Nasals: /**m, n, ɲ, ŋm**/ (written as: **m, n, ny, mw** respectively)

Trill/Tap: /**r, ɾ**/ (written as: **rh, r** respectively)

Approximants: /**ʋ, j, w**/ (written as: **vw, y, w** respectively)

(For ease of typing, we shall represent the trill as [rh] and the tap as [r] in our phonetic transcription)

Urhobo also has seven oral vowels: [**i, e, ɛ, a, ɔ, o, u**] (written as **i, e, ɛ, a, ɔ, o, u**) respectively, each with a phonemic and phonetic nasal counterpart [**ĩ, ê, ẽ, â, ã, õ, û**] (nasal vowels are indicated in writing by placing the letter **n** after the vowel). There is evidence that the Urhobo vowel system has been reduced from the proto-Edoid (PE) ten vowel system comprising /**ĩ, I, e, ɛ, ə, a, ɔ, o, u, u**/. In the synchronic system, the vowels ***/I, ə, u/** no longer exist but have merged with [**e, ɛ, o,**] respectively although they still retain their phonological features especially in their [ATR] harmony and height behaviour which are displayed in grammatical sequences. Besides these, there are other phonological processes such as vowel elision and glide formation that affect vowels. (For a fuller discussion of Urhobo vowel system, see Aziza 2008). In the transcription of oral forms into writing, phonological processes throw up a number of issues relating to spelling and word division.

Unlike Urhobo, the English sound system comprises 24 consonant and 20 vowel segments. The English writing system has been in existence for so long that features of the sound system have been fully established in writing. In terms of syllable structure, while English has a complex syllable structure with some 8 syllable types comprising consonant clusters and close syllables (Gimson 1980), Urhobo has only three syllable types: **V, CV** and **CCV**; there are no closed syllables. The **CCV** structure is of two types: the phonemic **CCV** in which **C₁** is always [+labial] or [+velar] and **C₂** is always the tap /**r**/; and the phonetic **CCV** structure which is derived from an underlying CVV structure in which **V₁** is either [+close, +front] that gets realised as

[j] or [+close, +back] that gets realised as [w]. Thus the phonetic **CCV** is either **CjV** or **CwV** but **C₁** could be any consonant segment.

Also unlike English, Urhobo is a tone language with two basic tones, low (L) and high (H), a non-automatic downstep (!H) and two contour tones, LH and HL which are combinations of the basic tones. There are also floating tones used to express grammatical categories such as tense and negation; only vowels bear tone (Aziza 2003).

In the first part of this paper, we examine some linguistic features of Urhobo as displayed by the selected proverbs while in the second part, techniques of translating the proverbs are examined.

The following abbreviations have been used in this paper:

IND PRON – indefinite pronoun

INTRANS – intransitive form of a verb

NEG – negative

ˊ – high tone/H

ˋ – low tone/L

The downstepped high tone is unmarked.

2. SAMPLE PROVERBS

As mentioned earlier, Proverbs (1-4) were randomly selected from Erivwo (2006) while the other two Proverbs (5-6) are popular community proverbs.

- (1) [àá rjá kómó èé rhiwé kěé]
 Á riá kẹ ọmọ ẹ hìvwẹ kẹẹ
 IND.PRON eat.INTRANS give child IND.PRON swallow give him/her NEG
 ‘one can chew (food) for a child but one cannot swallow (the food) for him/her.’

Erivwo’s version (14):

A ria kẹ ọmọ erhivwẹ kẹ-ẹ

- (2) [ò ró jégbó jẹ rjèrèrè rọjẹ]
 Ọ rẹ ó shé égbó ọyén riè èrèrè rọyèn
 He/she that he/she fell forest it.be.him eat benefit of .it
 ‘He who clears the forest enjoys its benefits.’

Erivwo’s version (227):

Ọ rẹ o shẹ egbo ọye riẹ erere rọye

‘It is the one who cleared a forest (or made a farm) who ought to enjoy its benefits’

- (3) [ànmá ró béré jòwí nò ró tòrhéré]
 Amwa rẹ ọ bẹre yovwi nẹ ọ rẹ ọ torhẹre
 Cloth that it tore good more.than it that it burnt
 ‘A torn (piece of) cloth is better than a burnt one.’

Erivwo’s version (59):

Amwa rẹ ọbẹre, yovwi nẹ ọrọ torhẹre

‘A torn cloth is better than one that is burnt.’

- (4) [àphòphò ró mwébé kpenú òjé ʒí mwó cóto]
Àphòphò rẹ ó mú èbè kpò ènú óyén jí muó chà óto
 Wind that it carried leaf go up it.be also carry.it come round/down
 ‘The wind that blew a leaf up will also bring it down/ what goes up must come down.’
 Erivwo’s version (61):
Aphopho rẹ omuẹ ebe kpe enu oye ji muo che oto
 ‘The wind which carried leaves upwards will bring them down.’
- (5) [èkpèkpèwè ʒhó kpèwè èrùrù]
Èkpèkpèwè ʒhó kpèwè èrhùrhù
 Continuous.thanks chicken thank rubbish heap
 ‘The chicken is ever grateful to the rubbish heap’
- (6) [àkálámùdó wànrè ʒjòví kóyweé]
Àkálámùdó wànrè ʒyònví kẹ óghwée
 Name.of.plant shave head give flood NEG
 ‘Àkálámùdó does not shave its hair for the flood.’

3. TRANSCRIPTION OF ORAL FORMS

Erivwo’s transcriptions are juxtaposed with ours below for easy reference:

- a) Erivwo: **A ria kẹ omọ erhivwẹ kẹ-ẹ**
 b) Aziza: **Ǻ riá kẹ ọmọ, ẹ rhìvwẹ kẹẹ**
- a) Erivwo: **Ọ rẹ o shẹ egbo oye riẹ erere roye**
 b) Aziza: **Ọ rẹ ó shẹ égbó óyén riè èrèrè rọyèn**
- a) Erivwo: **Amwa rẹ ọbẹre, yovwi nẹ ọọ torhẹre**
 b) Aziza: **Àmwá rẹ ọ bẹré yòvwí nẹ ọ rẹ ọ tòrhẹrè**
- a) Erivwo: **Aphopho rẹ omuẹ ebe kpe enu oye ji muo che oto**
 b) Aziza: **Àphòphò rẹ ó mú èbè kpò ènú óyén jí muó chà óto**

In the transcriptions above, notice that Erivwo, like most writers of Urhobo, completely avoids tone marking, a situation that often leads to ambiguity or meaninglessness since tone has both lexical and grammatical significance in this language. For instance, negation is marked by a floating LH tone sequence which gets segmentalised on the final vowel of the positive clause resulting in vowel lengthening (see Examples (1) and (6) above). Although there are also negative particles as found in English, they can only be used in addition to tone which is an obligatory element. In most writings in Urhobo, only the lengthening of the vowel is indicated by doubling it; the tone is left unmarked. We recommend that tone be marked.

Another common problem noticeable in writings in Urhobo, even by the same writer, is that of word division. For instance, in Example (1), **a/e** are the two shapes of the indefinite pronoun, the choice of which is determined by the [ATR] harmony of the verb stem vowel in the clause. In Erivwo’s transcription of Example (1), while a is

left on its own as a word, **e** is prefixed to the verb **rhìvwé**. Also in Example (3), Erivwo's **oro** is made up of three words (the indefinite pronoun **o**, the associative marker **re**, and the third person subject pronoun **o**). Similarly, **ómuẹ** in Example (4) is made up of two words (the pronoun **o** functioning as concord marker and the verb **muẹ**). We recommend that for proper transcription and ease of teaching of Urhobo grammatical structures, each word should be written in its full form as commonly found in writings in English, and writers should adhere to the principle of consistency in writing (see Williamson 1984).

A third unresolved problem has to do with the choice of word forms used at word boundaries. As a rule, Urhobo does not permit vowel sequences within words or at morpheme/word boundaries. Whenever they occur, one of them, often the first either undergoes glide formation if it is [+close] or vowel elision if it is [-close]. However, vowel elision may be blocked at word boundaries and both vowels retained by using the emphatic form of the word which always ends with **ẹ** irrespective of the [ATR] requirement dictated by the environment. This word form is usually used in slow speech for emphasis. In writing, while some writers prefer to use the uninflected/underlying forms for writing words in grammatical structures, others (even the same writer) may choose to use the emphatic forms. Like many Urhobo writers, Erivwo frequently utilizes the emphatic form as in **shẹ** 'fell' and **riẹ** 'eat' (Example 2) and **ómuẹ**, **kpe** and **chẹ** (Example 4). We recommend that the uninflected/underlying word forms be used by writers. The identified words should then be written as **she**, **rè**, **mú**, **kpò** and **chà** respectively. This would make it easier to explain, for example, the two processes that **riẹ** 'eat' (Example 2) has undergone: (a) that the underlying form of the word 'eat' is **rè** but this **e** is [+close] and therefore automatically becomes a glide [j] when followed by another vowel; (b) the addition of the suffix **-ẹ** makes it an emphatic form and allows the following vowel to be retained. (Notice that **riá** (Example 1) is the intransitive form of **rè** 'eat' and is followed by a word beginning with a consonant.)

Reduplication is a productive morphological process in Urhobo and both complete and partial reduplication exist. The process applies to both verbs and nouns with various semantic effects. Where verbs are involved, if the structure of the verb is monosyllabic, complete reduplication applies, otherwise partial reduplication takes place with only the first syllable prefixed to the full stem. In Example (5) **Èkpèkpèvwè óhó kpèvwè ẹrhùrhù, èkpèkpèvwè** is derived from the reduplication of the gerund **èkpèvwè** 'the act of giving thanks', itself derived from the verb **kpèvwè** 'give thanks' by the addition of a low toned prefix vowel **ẹ**. Notice the HL contour on the second **ẹ** of **èkpèkpèvwè** because the tones in question are grammatical tones, information that is lost without tone marking

In the area of aesthetics, Urhobo abounds in the use of figurative language. For instance, in Urhobo culture, when a man dies, his wife and children are required to shave their hair as a mark of respect for him (although a man does not shave his hair at the demise of his wife). The shaving of one's hair, therefore, is a mark of respect and a sign of being subservient to a stronger person. In Example (6), **àkálámùdó**, a creeping plant, is personified and given the quality of a human being whose hair can be shaved. The proverb shows that **àkálámùdó** is a strong plant which is not subdued by the flood to shed its leaves, as most other plants do during this season.

From the discussion above, it is clear that to transcribe oral forms into writing in Urhobo, efforts must be made to reflect its linguistic peculiarities. An attempt to write Urhobo while adhering to the features of English would yield poor results.

4. ISSUES OF TRANSLATION

As mentioned earlier, culture bound elements such as proverbs constitute translation problems because they are not automatically transposable from **SL** to **TL**. Proverbs examined in this paper like other African proverbs are non-universal and may present stylistic and cultural patterns that differ from language to language but in an era of globalisation, mutual co-existence and intercultural promotion, it is necessary to translate them. The cultural turn in translation studies engendered by post modern thought conceives translation as intercultural studies which transcends linguistic equivalence and facilitates the translation of cultures. Various techniques abound with regard to the translation of proverbs including the principle of equivalence. Some proverbs could be translated by the aid of specialized dictionaries and glossaries. Benard and Horguelin (1977) posit that proverbs and idioms present two types of translation difficulty. The first lies in creating an equivalence that may retain the **SL** image or translate meaning at the expense of stylistic loss. The second is the risk of non-recognition of the fact that the sequence is a proverb which may lead to literal (word for word) translation.

In Examples (1-4) above, Erivwo seems to have adopted the literal approach to translation. For instance, the proverb **A ria kẹ ọmọ erhivwẹ kẹ-ẹ** is literally translated as ‘you can chew food for a baby, but you cannot swallow it for him’. Proverbs translated literally imply that the translations are of the same semantic values as the **SL** proverbs. However, while this proverb corresponds to a moral expression in the target language culture (English), the translation is not idiomatic. Urhobo proverbs express moral truths in the Urhobo ethno-linguistic setting but Erivwo’s literal translations are devoid of their contextual meaning and may be unclear to the target interlocutor.

One appropriate approach to translating proverbs could be Nida’s (1964:159) dynamic equivalence which puts translation as “the closest natural meaning”. This may require proverb-for-proverb translation from **SL** to **TL**. However, Nida’s equivalence may be inadequate to translate some of the Urhobo proverbs due to the non-universality of the moral and cultural realities they express. For example, the proverb **Àkálámùdó wànrè ùyòvwí kẹ ọghwée**, translated as ‘**Àkálámùdó** does not shave its hair for the flood’ figuratively denotes the image of maintaining a superior position vis-à-vis another. It means that one does not shelve one’s position of superiority and authority even in the face of difficulties. In Urhobo moral setting, the proverb is commonly used to express the ultimate superiority of the husband (**Àkálámùdó**) over his wife (the flood). A woman who attempts to express her individuality is deemed rebellious and may be liable to sanction. This seems to be the lot of the African woman as expressed by African female writers: ‘Despite vast differences in traditions and beliefs among African societies, any female writer must have defied prevailing tradition if she speaks as an individual, as a woman’ (Brunner, 1983:111). The literal translation of this proverb does not evoke a moral truth and cultural practice of the native speakers of English whose culture does not place absolute authority of the husband over the wife. Western feminism by nature suggests respect for the individual rights of the woman, it is a ‘profoundly individualistic philosophy, it values personal growth and individual fulfilment over any communal needs or good...’ (Frank, 1984). The proverb may not allow a target culture translation equivalent in a situation where the individual rights of the woman seem to be at variance with the absolute superiority of the male; hence a culture bound translation of

the proverb **Àkálámùdó wànrè ùyòvwi kẹ́ óghwée** is impossible in English. It is probably for such reasons that Khordorkovsky (2008:1) rejects word for word translation, maintaining the view that to properly translate a proverb, a translator needs to delve deeper into the culture of the source and target languages to determine its idiomatic translation’.

Other techniques of translating proverbs include Baker’s (1992) proposed strategies: using an idiom of a similar meaning and form (i.e. communicative translation), using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form (idiomising translation), translation by omission and translation by paraphrase (creating a paraphrase in an elegant form to express an idiom in a TL). These techniques could be used to translate Urhobo proverbs. To Hervey and Higgins (2002:18), idiomising translation is the translation “that respects the ST message content, but typically uses TL idioms or familiar phonic and rhythmic patterns to give an easy read, ... even if this means sacrificing nuances of meaning or tone”. Hence, the literarily translated Urhobo proverb ‘The wind that blew a leaf up will also bring it down’ can be rendered in English as “what goes up must come down”.

Another possibility is the communicative translation technique. This translation is produced when, in a given situation, the ST uses a SL expression standard for that situation, and the TT uses a TL expression standard for an equivalent target-culture situation. Communicative translation is usually adopted for idioms and proverbs with identifiable communicative equivalents in the TL. However, certain cultural and contextual factors may not allow the use of communicative translation as in the example **èkpèkpèvwè óhó kpèvwè èrhùrhù** which translates as the ‘chicken continuously thanks the rubbish heap’. The proverb is used to express a situation of endless appreciation towards a regular source of benevolence. A target-culture equivalent may be difficult for this kind of proverb. In such cases where a communicative equivalent (a target culture equivalent) seems impossible, the translator may be free either to translate literarily, or create a paraphrase in which he captures the semantic core of the proverb which he then renders in an elegant literal form in the target language (cf: Akakuru and Mombe, 2008:61). The translation may not necessarily be a conventional saying or a true proverb and may amount to a degree of loss.

From the foregoing, lexical items in the proverbs which have aided the translation process indicate that there is a cultural relationship between languages. A comparative analysis shows that the same cultural reality is identifiable in the two languages as expressed in proverbs (1, 2, 3, 4). The discussion so far suggests that idiomising translation may best be used for proverbs whose messages are identifiable in the TL while stylised paraphrase may be used for a proverb where an equivalent idiom is not found in the TL. The following transcription and translations together with suggested techniques are outlined below for our randomly selected Urhobo proverbs into English:

S/N	PROVERBS	LITERAL MEANING	RECOMMENDED ENGLISH TRANSLATION	TRANSLATION PRINCIPLE
1.	Ă riá kẹ́ ómó, ẽ rhìvwé kẹ́	You can chew food for a baby but cannot swallow it for him	You can force a horse to the stream but you cannot force it to drink	Idiomising translation

2.	Ọ̀rẹ́ ọ́ shé égbó ọ́yén riè èrèrè rọ́yén	It is the one who cleared a forest or made a farm who ought to enjoy its benefits	A labourer is worthy of his wages	Idiomising translation
3.	Àmwa rẹ́ ọ́ bẹrẹ yònví nẹ́ ọ́ rẹ́ ọ́ tòrhẹrẹ	A torn cloth is better than one that is burnt	Half a loaf is better than none	Idiomising translation
4.	Àphòphò rẹ́ ó mú èbè kpò énú ọ́yén jí muó chà ótọ	The wind which carries leaves upwards will bring them down	He who can do worst can do the least What goes up must come down	Idiomising translation Idiomising translation
5.	Èkpèkpèvw ẹ́ ọ́họ kpèvwè èhùrhù	The chicken is ever grateful to the rubbish heap	He who gives generously requires endless gratitude	Stylised paraphrase
6	Àkálámùdó wànrè ùyònví kẹ́ óghwée	Àkálámùdó does not shave its hair for the flood	Àkálámùdó does not shave its hair for the flood. (translator's note: An Urhobo proverb used to express absolute authority especially of the husband over his wife)	Literal equivalence with translator's note explaining proverb

6. CONCLUSION

It is evident that the transcription and translation of Urhobo proverbs could be precarious and so must be taken beyond their linguistic and literal levels to also include socio-cultural and psychological nuances. In terms of transcription, the representation of certain vowels and phonological and morphological processes create problematic structures. However, as has been rightly pointed out by Elugbe (1991), any attempt to write the language using phonologically 'accurate' vowels would create problems for the native speaker because it is at variance with his linguistic instincts. For instance, the native speaker knows whether the [e] or [o] in a word would undergo glide formation or not so that the use of the seven vowels for writing the language is appropriate and in consonance with his competence and innate knowledge of his language. However, we advocate tone marking on grammatical structures and, for consistency in writing; the uninflected forms of individual words at word boundaries should be written.

As for the translation of the proverbs, this could be done with options ranging from idiomising translation, stylised paraphrase, to communicative translation and in problem cases literal equivalent (word for word). Proverbs are a part of the aesthetics of a literary text; in such cases the translator may translate literally and add an extra textual note explaining the cultural connotation of the proverb so as to maintain the intended aesthetics of the source text to the target audience. This technique could also be used for proverbs other than those in literary texts; these are proverbs usually put together in a collection, devoid of their cultural settings. For example, target readers would need an explanatory note of Eriwo's literal translation of the proverb **èkpèkpèvwè òhó kpèvwè èrhùrhù** 'the chicken is continuously grateful to the rubbish heap'. As society evolves, studies in African linguistics concerning problematic domains such as our presentation in this paper attract the attention of more and more scholars and such research should aid the development of African languages. It is our hope that this study has contributed to studies in Urhobo language and serves as a guide to the African literary translator in the area of proverb translation.

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