

**CHUMBURUNG – NATURAL EXPRESSION AND DEEPER MEANINGS BY
KEIR L. HANSFORD AND GILLIAN F. HANSFORD: A REVIEW**

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“Chumburung – Natural Expression and Deeper Meanings” is the work of a husband and wife team, Keir L. Hansford and Gillian F. Hansford who lived in Ghana among the Chumburung people for 33 years – from 1976 to 2009. As members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, their main task was to reduce the Chumburung language to writing, and supervise the translation of the Bible, which was published in 2010. However, the Hansfords’ interest in the language was not confined to translation. While Keir Hansford focused on the grammar, Gillian Hansford focused on literacy in the early years.

Their book is an edited grouping of articles both previously published and some unpublished, most of them in the *Journal of West African Languages* from 2003-2012. Some of the articles are in the area of ethnolinguistics, and in particular metaphors, proverbs, names, riddles, songs, and colour terms.

The Chumburung are one of 60 or more language groups in Ghana, and live around the River Daka and north side of the Volta Lake in the Northern, Savannah and Oti Regions of Ghana. They may now number about 60,000, and their language was previously fully unanalysed and hence unwritten.

Chapter 1 deals with Metaphorical idioms. Gillian found that terms for actions, emotions and characteristics in Chumburung are nearly always expressed in metaphors using body parts, such as the body (as a whole), the head, the limbs and the various internal organs, making 19 possibilities. She gives examples from other Ghanaian languages, such as Konkomba and Ntrubo, which also utilise the same or other body parts to express similar actions, emotions and characteristics.

Chapter 2 – Numbers that Chumburungs Count On. The author studies the numeral system of Chumburung, and finds it similar to English in that it is decimal, and even has words for hundred, thousand and million. An interesting discovery is that the culture has two-day systems, a 7 day week clearly borrowed from Akan, and its own 6 day week, each with its own indigenous name.

Chapter 3 – Understanding Chumburung Proverbs. Chumburung speakers divide their proverbs into literal and metaphoric, and using their situational competence are able to employ them neatly, whether they are literate or not. Through their long stay in Ghana the Hansfords realized that proverbs were still being cited in ordinary conversation, in singing, in naming children, in the telling of folk stories, and also in oral history. Gillian also reports on special case studies she made of the use of proverbs cited in cases brought before a traditional court.

Chapter 4 – Chumburung Names. The connection between Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 is that among the names given to an individual Chumburung person, the language has a very fruitful naming system that attempts to be unique to the child. These are Proverbial Names and can be a word or a phrase or a short sentence, e.g. ‘The elders have departed,’ and ‘We will not die out.’ There are 7 names for boys and 7 for girls, derived from the

Akan naming system, which has a name for each day of the week. The order of birth in the family may also enable the child to have an additional name, which is Chumburung. An additional name may indicate a special circumstance of the birth such as the date order of birth among siblings, distinguishing between a boy and a girl. A child may also have a name of one of the local deities, or even the name of God himself in a sentence.

Chapter 5 – Riddles. This chapter explores the context of telling Chumburung riddles, beginning with the formulaic opening to get the listeners' attention. Then follows an analysis of the riddles' structures. First there is the beginning of the Head, consisting of a fictitious person who is part of the riddle, e.g. 'I have a certain child...' Then comes the main part of the Head. The fictitious person may be the teller of the riddle. A comparison of Riddles with Proverbs is also presented. Finally, she suggests some functions for riddles, and mentions some ways in which Chumburung riddles could be used in education.

Chapter 6 – Sing to Him a New Song in Chumburung. This Chapter is included in the book, because songs and poetry may have deeper meanings than appear on the surface. She notes that the Chumburung language does not distinguish between song and poetry, their word is the same for both.

The contexts in which certain songs are sung vary as to whether it is a celebration (such as a funeral or a marriage), an activity (such as work), in a place (church or school) or a time (such as moonlit nights). In many cases some kind of dancing will accompany the songs, and instruments such as a drum (there are different types, most of which are played by men) are played.

Chapter 7 – A Chumburung Poet -Amoako-Adjah. Besides Emanuel Amoako-Adjah, Keir reports he has never heard of another Chumburung person who has written poems in his own language. His three published works show his ability to move the heart. Features in his poems have been compared with traditional oral songs, and similarities have been found in laments. He has imaginatively used the Chumburung practice of giving proverbial names to new-born children by giving proverbial names to God, which match the doctrine of God in the Bible. He has also used irony, rhetorical questions, metaphors, personification, and also proverbs, both those commonly known and others made up by himself.

Chapter 8: How we used Chumburung Proverbs in the Bible. Bible translators follow strict guidelines in translating the Bible. So, the question arises: "How does one bring Chumburung proverbs into the Biblical text?" The solution the Hansfords adopted was to add a Chumburung proverb in italics where it matched in meaning the Biblical proverb. Another question they faced was: "Should a Chumburung proverb totally replace a Biblical one if it had the same meaning entirely?" This problem was solved by having a literal translation of the Biblical text, followed in italics by the Chumburung proverb, so that it was clear it was not part of the original text.

Chapter 9 – Using Natural Language in the Target Language to Translate the Bible. This Chapter authored by Keir L. Hansford, shows how natural expressions in Chumburung were used to translate certain expressions and Key Terms in the Source Text, i.e. the Bible in English into Chumburung. Such expressions include Body Metaphors, Proverbs, Personal Names, and Name Formation Rules and Calques.

This Chapter also deals with Ideophones, Parables, Euphemisms and Word Plays. Finally, a few examples are given on how Chumburung uses the sun's position as the base for indicating North, South, East, and West.

Chapter 10 – Red is a Verb – The Grammar of Colour in Chumburung. Chumburung was one of the languages included in Berlin and Kay's seminal World Colour Survey. In that research it was shown that all languages have a division between white and black, then other basic colours can be found, such as red, then they may distinguish green and yellow, then they may have blue, and then brown. Their conclusion was that Chumburung had five and a half so-called basic colour terms, and they appear to be all adjectives.

Gillian Hansford came to a different conclusion about the number of basic colour terms in the language, and that where adjectival colour terms do not occur, a noun or noun phrase is used, based on an object whose colour is the nearest match.

Her research led her to the conclusion that the basic colours (red, white and black) are derived from verbs rather than adjectives and often express a process rather than a state of being: red- to be or become ripe; white – to whiten, wash, boil, bubble; black – to get dark. She also adds green as a basic colour, although it does not derive from a verb.

Chapter 11 – Widening the Criteria for Serial Verb Constructions – The Case of Chumburung. Keir L. Hansford, the author of the final Chapter, deals with the mismatching between English and Chumburung, in that, whereas English uses adverbs or prepositions, which are an open class, Chumburung uses Serial Verb Constructions, which are a limited class, to express manner, location, direction, causation, dative, benefactive, and comparative. Rare examples are also given where some SVCs have been grammaticalised to form what could be argued to be prepositions, whereas all other natural adpositions are postpositions. SVCs are fully natural in Chumburung. Keir points out that failure to understand their grammar would lead to a poor analysis of Chumburung

He maintains that separating the semantic from syntactic relationships is fundamental to understanding SVCs in Chumburung.

An interesting feature of Chumburung, unlike many languages cited in the literature, is that it distinguishes between the intransitive verb 'come' bà and the transitive verb 'bring' bàà, and between intransitive yò 'go' and transitive yàà 'send'. These complementary pairs help to disambiguate SVCs where the NPObj of CL1 apparently becomes the NPSubject of CL2.

The book that the Hansfords have produced comes from their many years of living among the Chumburungs and doing serious research of their language and culture. Their book is a gold mine of linguistic and ethnolinguistic materials in a Guang language, with many examples given from related languages in Ghana – Gonja, Twi, Ntrubo, Nkonya, Vagla, Konkomba, and Ewe, etc. Their ample references to early and later scholars in the areas studied add depth to the scholarship of their research and make their book attractive to scholars and students of other African languages and cultures.