

## Challenges of Translating a Translation: The Role of Language, Culture and Ideology in *Shetani Msalabani*

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### Abstract

*Shetani Msalabani* is the Kiswahili translated version of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel *Devil on the Cross*, which was originally written in Gikuyu as *Caिताani Mutharaba-ini*. It was translated from English into Kiswahili by Clement Kabugi. It explores the extent and effects of neo-colonialism in independent Kenya as manifested in the political, economic and socio-cultural domains. The aim of this paper is to discuss the challenges of translating the novel from English into Kiswahili and to examine the strategies used by the translator to deal with them. The paper focuses on the challenges arising from the influence of the source language and its culture, the target language and its culture, the author's ideology and problems of the genre (novel) itself and how these affect the quality of translation. The paper evaluates the success of the translator in conveying the message and is guided by the principles of a Linguistic Theory of Translation as explained by Catford (1965).

**Key Words:** Translation, Challenges, Culture, Ideology

### Introduction

This paper discusses the challenges encountered by the translator in translating the English novel *Devil on the Cross* into Kiswahili as *Shetani Msalabani*. The novel was originally written in Gikuyu as *Caिताani Mutharaba-ini* before being translated into English then into Kiswahili. The paper discusses challenges arising from the influence of the source language and its culture, the target language and its culture, the author's ideology and problems of the genre (novel) itself and how these affect the quality of translation. The paper quotes textual evidence to illustrate the strategies used by the translator to deal with those challenges and evaluates the degree of success from the point of view of a Linguistic Theory of Translation.

### **Linguistic Theory of Translation**

The analysis of the quality of translation in *Shetani Msalabani* is guided by the principles of a Linguistic Theory of Translation as explained by Catford (1965). This theory evaluates the success of translation through the following five principles:

#### **(i) Translation Equivalence**

The source language text is translated into the target language text by using target language forms that have equivalent meaning to the source language forms.

#### **(ii) Linguistic Levels**

The source language text may be translated into the target language at different linguistic levels including the grammatical, phonological, lexical and graphological level. A given translation may include all these levels (total translation) or one of the levels (restricted translation).

#### **(iii) Extent of Translation**

The source language text may be fully translated into the target language text or it may be partially translated whereby some source language items will be transferred and incorporated into the target language text.

#### **(iv) Ranks of Translation**

Translation equivalence may be established at various ranks of translation, namely, morpheme to morpheme, word to word, phrase to phrase, clause to clause, sentence to sentence, or group to group. Depending on the rank of translation, we can have various types of translation, namely, word for word, literal or free translation.

#### **(v) Limits of Translation**

A source language text may be linguistically or culturally untranslatable into a target language text due to lack of translation equivalents.

The following analysis is guided by the above principles of translation.

### **Challenges of Translating *Devil on The Cross***

There are various reasons that make the translation of any text difficult. King'ei explains the following reasons that contribute to inaccurate translation: First, is over-translation and under-translation whereby the translator may include additional information or fail to translate part of the information contained in the source text; second, is the cultural difference between the source language and the target language whereby cultural concepts of the source language are not easily translated into the target language; third, is the difference between the source language and target language in terms of words, grammatical structure and sound system; fourth, is the difference between the aim and language use of the translator and that of the writer of the source text; fifth, is the difference between the philosophy of the translator and that of the writer of the source text whereby one of

them may use language symbolically whereas the other may use it realistically; and lastly, is a badly written source text and the incompetence of the translator (1992:70-72). The challenges of translating the translated novel *Devil on the Cross* into Kiswahili are related to those challenges mentioned by King'ei especially the influence of Gikuyu, English and Kiswahili language and culture, the influence of the writer's ideology and also problems of the novel itself as a genre.

### Influence of Gikuyu Language and Culture

It is important first to note that *Shetani Msalabani* is a translation of the English novel *Devil on the Cross* which was in turn translated from *Caitani Mutharabaini* which was first rendered in Gikuyu. Some of the challenges that the translator (Clement Kabugi) encountered resulted from the use of Gikuyu language and cultural concepts that do not have equivalents in Kiswahili language and culture. Aixela explains that some of the culture specific items that will normally present a translation problem in other languages include names of the local institutions, streets, historical figures, place names, personal names, periodicals and works of art (57). Theoretically, this issue can be explained by reference to the principles of translation equivalence, limits of translation and extent of translation. The translator used partial translation by incorporating Gikuyu words in the Kiswahili text as is evident in the following quotations. Italics are used to identify target language text (Kiswahili) so as to differentiate it from source language text.

“He is a member of the committee that runs the Church of Heaven.” (19)  
“*Yeye ni mwanakamati aliye na sauti katika kanisa la Matuiguru*” (16). The translator opted to use the Gikuyu name “Matuiguru” instead of using the name “Kanisa la Mbinguni” perhaps because proper names are not supposed to be translated. But if that is the case, it is not clear why that name is translated into English if it was used in the Gikuyu source text. Perhaps the Kiswahili translator realized that the concept of “heaven” among the Gikuyu is somehow different from that of the English and the Swahili and therefore he decided to retain the name that was used in the Gikuyu source text. In Gikuyu culture, their God (*Ngai*) resides in Mt. Kenya, which implies that Mt. Kenya is probably where “heaven” is but that is not true among the English and the Swahili people. In order to give more information to the readers of the target text, the translator could have probably used a footnote to explain briefly the use of that name and the reason why he did not use the Kiswahili equivalent “mbinguni.”

“Before a month is up, Kareendi finds herself a Kamoongonye.\*” (20).  
“*Kabla ya mwezi kwisha, Kaledi amejipatia Mchumbakijana.*” (16).

The translator of the English text uses a footnote (asterisk) to draw our attention to the fact that *Kamoongonye* is a character in a Gikuyu ballad about a young girl whose father wants her to marry Waigoko, a rich old man with a hairy chest, while she prefers her own choice, a poor young man, *Kamoongonye*. It is

evident that the translator failed to get the equivalent of *Kamoongonye* in Kiswahili since the word that he has created “Mchumbakijana” does not convey the idea of poverty which is evident in the footnote description. Perhaps the translator should have been more specific by using the word “Mchumbakijana maskini” since the name Mchumbakijana alone may either refer to a rich or poor young man. A part from the attribute of poverty, it is possible that *Kamoongonye* may also have other attributes (for example, a small body structure as signaled by the sound *Ka*) which may not be conveyed through the name “mchumbakijana.” It is possible that this name which is used in Gikuyu culture may also connote a young man who is despised and this may explain why the English translator could not find an equivalent of that name in English, perhaps “*a poor young man or a poor boy friend.*” It appears that in Swahili oral literature, there is no such a character that is identified by a specific name, contrary to the case in Gikuyu oral literature.

Newmark proposes that when translating literary proper names that have connotative meanings in the source language, the translator must first translate the basic word in the noun before transferring to the target language connotative meanings that are associated with that noun (71). It appears that the translator of *Shetani Msalabani* succeeded in translating into Kiswahili the basic word but he was not able to transfer the connotative meanings of the proper noun “Kamoongonye.” The translator also appears to have successfully translated the proper noun “Kareendi” into Kiswahili as *Kaledi* at the phonological level since he is aware that this noun is a result of the influence of Gikuyu and English language. The basic noun is from English “lady”, the prefix “Ka-“ refers to the diminutive form of the person being referred to, the phonemes /nd/ and /r/ originate from the influence of Gikuyu in articulating English and Kiswahili phonemes /d/ and /l/ respectively. Therefore the name *Kaledi* connotes a young lady, who understands English (she is educated) and it is also adapted to conform to the phonological structure of the names of the Swahili people who are Bantu in origin.

“Those boys, are they even circumcised?” (22). “*Wana nini hawa? Maskini wa kupindukia! Hawa ni wa kuhurumia tu!*” (19). The translator has avoided using the Kiswahili word “tahiri” which is the equivalent of “circumcise” apparently because of cultural reasons. It is possible that the meaning associated with circumcision among the Gikuyu is different from the meaning of circumcision among the Swahili or readers of the target text in general. Therefore the translator has decided to refer to those young men (*Kamoongonye*) as “watu wa kuhurumia” (people who need compassion) instead of “watu wasiotahiriwa” (the uncircumcised people). It is also possible that circumcision is not part of the culture of target readers hence the use of that word in the target text would have been meaningless to them. This is evident in the following statement where the translator uses the word “maskini” (a poor person) as the equivalent of “the uncircumcised person”:

“The young man who you claim is uncircumcised is my chosen one.” (23). “*Huyo unayemwita maskini ndiye kifu la moyo wangu.*” (19). Gikuyu oral literature also influenced the translation as illustrated in the following quotation:

“I don’t want any tales about one-eyed ogres.” (37) “*Sitaki hadithi za uongo.*” (35).

This challenge arises due to the fact that Gikuyu oral literature has one-eyed characters. It is possible that such characters are not found in the oral literature of the target audience and therefore the translator uses the phrase “hadithi za uongo” (untrue stories). According to the principle of ranks of translation, this is known as free translation at the phrase level.

“The organization of home guards and imperialists...the organization of patriots under Maumau.” (39). “*Ushirikiano wa wasaliti (Ngaati) na wabeberu, na ushirikiano wa wazalendo, Maumau.*” (37). The concept of *Ngaati* originates from Gikuyu culture and the translator has mentioned it in brackets despite the fact that he also uses the word “wasaliti” (betrayers). Perhaps this is because the Kiswahili equivalent does not accurately capture the meaning of that concept as used in Gikuyu. Even the etymology of the word “Maumau” shows that this word has a meaning among the Gikuyu (it refers to the patriots who fought for independence by attacking colonialists and retreating to the bush, also known as guerilla warfare). This word does not have an equivalent in the target language hence the translator has decided to use it in the target text.

“Who can play the *gîcaandî* for us today and read and interpret the verses written on the gourd? Today who can play the *wandîndî*, the one-stringed violin...?” (59). “*Nani hivi leo anayeweza kutuambia nyimbo za ngoma za kikwetu na kutueleza mafundisho yaliyokuwamo katika mashairi yenyewe. Nani anayeweza kutupigia muziki kwa vile vyombo vya zamani...?*” (58). The translator transfers the meaning of Gikuyu cultural vocabulary *gîcaandî* and *wandîndî* by using Kiswahili phrases “ngoma za kikwetu” (traditional dances) and “vyombo vya zamani” (traditional instruments) respectively perhaps because there are no equivalents of such words in the target language culture. This is free translation that uses a phrase as an equivalent of the word as a unit. Elsewhere, the phrase “*gîcaandî* player” (7) is translated into Kiswahili as “*mcheza ngoma ya gîcaandî*” (4) because of lack of an equivalent. This is also evident in the following statement where the foreign concept *Muomboko* is translated into Kiswahili by using the phrase “ngoma ya kisasa” since there is no equivalent of that word: “Today’s *Muomboko* dance is two steps and a turn.” (16). “*Ngoma ya kisasa ni hatua mbili na badiliko.*” (13). The translator dealt with the challenge of translating Gikuyu and English proverbs and other sayings by using free translation at the sentence level whereby he used Kiswahili proverbs that convey similar message although they use different words. This is evident in the following examples:

“He who has seen once knows thereafter, and he who has drunk from a calabash can gauge its size.” (19) *“Mtafunwa na nyoka akiona ukoka hushtuka, na alisifuye jua limemwangaza.”* (16)

“A borrowed necklace may lead to the loss of one’s own.” (20). *“Usiache mbachao kwa msala upitao.”* (20).

“Gikuyu said that no one can cook two pots of food simultaneously without burning the contents of one of them.” (47). *“Wahenga walisema kuwa mwangaza mawili moja humponya.”* (46).

“Aping others cost the frog its buttocks.” (12). *“Njia mbili zilimshinda fisi.”* (7).

“Change seeds, for the gourd contains seeds of more than one kind.” (16). *“Badilisha pombe, si ya kitoma kimoja.”* (13).

“Is it not said that the antelope conceives more hatred for him who betrays its presence with a shout?” (4) *“Wahenga si walisema ‘Alalaye usimwamshe kwani ukimwamsha utalala wewe?’ ”* (4).

“...joined hands with the police like the yam and its supporting tree,...” (44). *“...waambatane nao kama uta na upote, ... ”* (43).

“A chameleon will always be a chameleon.” (25). *“Mwana wa nyoka ni nyoka.”* (22).

Although we are not sure whether those English proverbs are the equivalents of Gikuyu proverbs that were used in the original source text, it is apparent that the translator tried very hard to find the equivalents of those proverbs in Kiswahili by using free translation.

### **Influence of English Language and Culture**

There are also concepts in English culture that cannot be translated accurately into Kiswahili and therefore the translator has used free translation to deal with this challenge. Mwansoko (26) explains that free translation or communicative translation is the translation that focuses on the target reader (audience) who does not expect any difficulty in the target text. Instead, they expect a simple translation of foreign concepts into their language where possible. The translator is free to look for words or groups of words that are equivalent to idioms, sayings, proverbs, culture and the environment of the target language. Therefore, although communicative translation conforms to the grammar of the target language, it must also conform to its social, historical, cultural and environmental system. The following quotations illustrate how the translator dealt with difficult concepts of English culture. (The words in italics in the source text were rendered in the same manner by the writer of English and Gikuyu texts):

“I’ve lost my faith in silken-tongued gigolos.” (18). “*Umenierevusha kwa hizo hila zako tamu kama asali.*” (15).

“Do not forget that men have stings, vicious and corrosive, the poison of which never leaves the flesh of their victims.” (18). “*Kufikia hapo ujue ya kuwa wanaume si waaminifu. Watakutia katika kilindi cha taabu na kukuacha humo.*” (15).

“The firm will pay you *overtime*.” (21). “*Utalipwa ziada – overtime – na kampuni.*” (17). This Kiswahili translation is not accurate because it focuses on the extra amount of money that is given but not the extra number of hours spent. So the translator decides to add the English word (*overtime*) so as to ensure that the target reader gets the intended meaning. Perhaps that statement could have been translated as “*utalipwa kwa masaa ya ziada na kampuni.*”

“Choose any flat or house.” (22). “*Wewe chagua tu uniambie. Nyumba hiyo niipambe...*” (18).

This Kiswahili translation is also inaccurate because the word “nyumba” has a general meaning since it does not differentiate between “a flat” and “a house.” The concept of “flat” refers to a collection of rooms in one building, especially on the same floor, and in most cases each room is self-contained. Therefore various families live in “a flat” but “a house” is a residential building, especially with one storey and is intended for one family. If it is not a storied building then it is called “a bungalow.” Perhaps that statement could have been translated as “*chagua nyumba yoyote ya kukodi iliyo na jikoni na bafu ndani.*”

Other English concepts that do not have equivalents in Kiswahili have been transferred into Kiswahili by using italicized English words as illustrated in the following examples:

“High heels and platform shoes will come from Rome, Italy.” (22). “*Vile viatu virefu vilivyochongoka, Platform, vitakuwa vikitoka Rome. Italy.*” (19).

“That is Boss Kihara’s *sugar girl*.” (22). “*Yule ndiye Sugargirl wa Boss Kihara.*” (19).

“Take this month’s salary and next month’s too *in lieu of notice*.” (24). “*Shika mshahara wako wa mwezi huu na wa mwezi ujao in lieu of notice.*” (21).

The phrase “in lieu of notice” should have been translated in ordinary words as “*badala ya kupewa ilani ya kuachishwa kazi.*” Perhaps this phrase, which is borrowed from a foreign language, represents an official style of legal register which does not have an equivalent in Kiswahili, hence the translator decided to transfer it to the target text without any changes. This may be the reason why the writer of the Gikuyu text also used it the way it is since that style of language does

not also have an equivalent in Gikuyu language and culture. This is in accordance with the principle of limits of translation.

“I would like to start a heart business, a market for human hearts, a shop for human hearts, a *supermarket* for human hearts, *Permanent sale...*” (50).  
“*Mimi ninaweza kufanya biashara ya mioyo...soko kubwa la mioyo...biashara ya kudumu...*” (49).

This translation has a weakness because it does not differentiate the concepts of “market,” “shop,” and “supermarket.” The correct translation should have been “market – *soko*”, “shop – *duka*” and “supermarket – *duka kuu la kujihudumia*.” The translator could not find an equivalent because *supermarket* is a foreign concept in Kiswahili language and culture.

“Animals stoop low before nature, allowing themselves to be turned this way and that by her, just as *sausages* are turned casually in the fire by little boys.” (52). “*Mnyama daima huwa mtumwa wa maumbile.*” (51).

“Sausages” is a foreign concept in Kiswahili language and culture so the translator decided to use free translation so as to avoid mentioning its non-existent equivalent. But that translation fails to preserve the creativity of literary language which is evident in the source language text (English) in form of visual imagery. So the Kiswahili text does not appear to be as captivating as its English counterpart despite the fact that the translator tried to transfer the intended message.

“The riddle lies there, so take *a forfeit*\* and solve the riddle for us, because you seem familiar with books.” (57). “*Kitendawili hapo ndipo kilipo. Wewe umesoma vitabu vingi. Tutegulie kitendawili hicho.*” (57)

The writer of the English source text uses an asterisk as a footnote to draw our attention to the fact that *a forfeit* (which is *kigacwa* in Gikuyu) is an imaginary piece of property that is surrendered by someone who has failed to resolve a riddle to the person who posed the riddle. It appears that “*tutegulie kitendawili hicho*” is the translation of “solve the riddle for us” but we do not see the equivalent of “forfeit” in Kiswahili, meaning that this concept cannot be accurately rendered into Kiswahili. We are aware that in Kiswahili a person who is unable to solve a riddle is requested by the person who posed a riddle to “give him/her a town” (*nipe mji*). It is possible that the translator did not find this equivalent appropriate due to the ambiguity of the polysemic word “*mji*” which appears to have the following five meanings:

- a. An area that has many houses, many people engaged in various activities together with all important social services;
- b. One or more houses where people live as a family;
- c. A section that connects an unborn baby with the mother in the stomach of an expectant woman;



- d. A narrow place inside a grave, especially in islamic burial ritual, where the departed is laid to rest after taking measurement;
- e. A part of cloth, especially kanga used by women, that is found in the middle of a hem. (BAKITA, 674).

In short, there is no appropriate word with a specific meaning in Swahili culture that can be used as an equivalent of the concept of *forfeit* in English or *kigacwa* in Gikuyu.

“I caught up with you as you were swaying on the kerb.” (15). “*Nilikufikia hapa ulipokuwa karibu na kuanguka.*” (11).

The weakness of this translation is that it does not tell us where the person being referred to was at the time of swaying. In Kiswahili there is no equivalent word for the concept of *kerb* that is used in English to mean a line of raised stones along the edge of a pavement (for walkers), separating it from the road (for vehicles). According to the principle of limits of translation, the said concept is untranslatable due to lack of a linguistic equivalent in Kiswahili, so the translator avoids mentioning that word. The translation that could have probably been closer to the meaning in the source text is “*Nilikufikia hapa ulipokuwa karibu kuanguka pembeni mwa barabara.*”

In other contexts the translator has attempted to create new words in Kiswahili in order to refer to foreign concepts in English, for example, “A bride” (22) is “*Mkepembeni*” (19); “Mistress” (23) is also “*Mkepembeni*” (20).

However, there are some italicized English words that the translator intentionally incorporated into the Kiswahili text despite the fact that it is possible to have their equivalents in Kiswahili. (The writer of the English text notes that those words were rendered in the same manner in the original Gikuyu source text). This is the style of code switching and code mixing that is used by characters in a novel in order to identify themselves as educated people. This is exemplified in the following quotations:

“Are you really so *old-fashioned*?” (22). “*Umekuwa old-fashioned*?” (19).

Although the phrase “old-fashioned” could have been translated as “mshamba” or “mtu asiyestaarabika,” the translator has decided to use the English word in order to preserve the style of language use in the source text.

“A one-way ticket to Heaven or Hell.” (10) “*One Way Ticket to Heaven or Hell.*” (6).

This English statement is used in the Kiswahili text stylistically meaning that it is a case of code mixing that occurred in the source text. It is unlikely that the translator failed to find its equivalent in Kiswahili because he could have rendered it as “Tikiti ya Kwenda Mbinguni au Kwenda Ahera bila Kurudi.” It would have been wrong to translate that statement into Kiswahili.

*“It is so funny. They speak the two languages as if they were Italian priests newly arrived from Rome – priests without priestly collars.” (109-110). “It’s so funny. Lugha hizo mbili wao huzisema vibaya kabisa kama wazungu makasisi wa kutoka Rome. Ni makasisi waliokosa huo ukosi mweupe tu!” (114).*

That English statement was reproduced in Kiswahili text because it is a code mixing style that was used in the original Gikuyu source text. Otherwise, if that statement were to be translated into Kiswahili, it would have been “Ni jambo la kuchekesha” but that would have been a stylistic weakness. The same reason of style is also applicable in the following statement:

*“What are your plans for this weekend?” (20) “Una shughuli yoyote this weekend?” (17).*

The phrase “this weekend” could have been translated as “wikendi hii” or “mwisho wa juma hili” but the translator did not do so because that is a style of language use that must be transferred into the target text. Catford explains that when translating a literary text, some of the words of the source language are transferred and incorporated into the target text intentionally either because they are regarded as ‘untranslatable’ or for the deliberate purpose of introducing ‘local colour’ into the target language text (21). So those words are meant to do just that – introducing local colour into the Kiswahili text perhaps to identify the speakers as educated people.

English culture differs from Kiswahili culture in many ways. One of the ways is that in Kiswahili, taboo words are not allowed to be mentioned in public unlike in English. Owing to this obstacle, the translator of *Shetani Msalabani* has avoided using the true equivalents of some English words that are found in the source text as is evident in the following quotation:

From that day on, Ndinguri began to fart property, to shit property, to sneeze property, to scratch property, to laugh property, to think property, to dream property, to talk property, to sweat property, to piss property. Property would fly from other people’s hands to land in Ndinguri’s palms. People started wondering: How is it that our property slips through our fingers into the hands of Ndinguri? Furthermore, he was now wearing iron rings on his fingers, which prevented him from working himself. (64).

*Kutoka siku hiyo, Ndinguri akaanza kulundika mali. Aliwaza mali; alicheka mali; alilia mali; aliimba mali; aliiba mali; aliota mali. Mali ilikuwa ikiwakimbia watu wengine na kumwendea mtu mmoja huyu. Na sasa ametajirika hata kazi hafanyi! (65).*

The equivalents of the words *to fart*, *to shit* na *to piss* in Kiswahili would have been (ashakum! si matusi) “kunyamba,” “kunya” and “kukojoa” or to use euphemism “kupyonyokwa na hewa,” “kwenda haja kubwa,” “kwenda haja ndogo,”

“kujisaidia” au “kwenda msalani.” However, the translator has deliberately avoided using those taboo words because he does not want to embarrass Kiswahili readers in accordance with Swahili customs. As Ryanga puts it, “the equivalent translations of those source language concepts are not attractive or acceptable when used in another language (169)” which is Kiswahili. Those euphemisms are not appropriate equivalents because they lack the obscenity quality that is inherent in the English words. Instead the translator uses the strategy of ‘attenuation’ by selecting other Kiswahili words that weaken or reduce embarrassment like “alilia mali”, “aliimba mali” and “aliiba mali” whose equivalents (*cry*, *sing* and *steal*) were not used by the writer of the source text. Aixela defines attenuation as a strategy for dealing with difficult culture-specific items which involves “replacement, on ideological grounds, of something ‘too strong’ or in any way unacceptable, by something ‘softer’, more adequate to target pole written tradition or to what could, in theory, be expected by readers (64).” It appears that when the translator chose to use softer non-obscene Kiswahili words, he was not able to convey the complete message in the source text. The English writer used taboo words in order to emphasize the fact that it is immoral, unethical and uncivilized for a person to amass wealth by exploiting the poor peasants and workers who create it. The writer used the words intentionally in order to elicit in the reader emotions of nausea and hatred against bourgeoisie lifestyle. Perhaps the translator could have elicited the same feelings without going against Swahili cultural expectations by using equivalents like “aliteuka mali,” “alitapika mali” and “alipenga mali.” There is no doubt that belching, vomiting and blowing one’s nose in public are habits that are perceived by many people as being immoral and uncivilized. In short, those words that were used in the source language were difficult to translate into Kiswahili due to constraints of Swahili culture.

The translator was not also able to use Kiswahili equivalents of the words “to sneeze property,” “to scratch property” and “to sweat property” which would have been “kupiga chafya mali”, “kujikwaruza mali” and “kutoa jasho mali” because those concepts are semantically unacceptable when translated into Kiswahili. The English writer used those concepts symbolically or figuratively in order to emphasize the extreme bourgeoisie lifestyle of Ndinguri. Perhaps this is why the translator decided to use alternative words (“alilia mali”, “aliimba mali” na “aliiba mali”) which communicate the acceptable meaning in Kiswahili although they are not as effective as the taboo words.

The Kiswahili translator has also not translated a section of the English quotation that says “Property would fly from other people’s hands to land in Ndinguri’s palms. People started wondering: How is it that our property slips through our fingers into the hands of Ndinguri?” He avoided that statement probably because it was difficult to convey that message by using a Kiswahili sentence structure. Consequently, the Kiswahili text lacks the emphasis that is

manifested by the use of a rhetorical question in the English text. It is in this context that we concur with Ryanga when she states that many Kiswahili translations have weaknesses because they don't communicate accurate and complete message; either they exclude part of the message or they include extra personal opinion and feelings that were not intended by the writer of the source text. She adds that in an attempt to explain the message of the writer, the translator may exclude phrases that are perceived to be difficult to explain accurately in the target language (167).

### **Influence of the Writer's Ideology**

*Shetani Msalabani* is a good example of the kind of Kiswahili literature that arose after the mid 1970s which may be described, in King'ei's words, as "ideological literature (1999:89)." King'ei explains that literary works that were written and translated during this period traced the source of some of the problems facing African communities not only to colonialism and neocolonialism but also to our social structures and economic systems. They are works that aim at emancipating the class of peasants and workers since they describe the struggles between the landowners and the oppressed masses. The writers have sought to defend the rights of the masses and this is evident in their ideologies. Ngugi's ideology is about fighting political, economic, cultural and linguistic imperialism. In his own words: "I believe that my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples"(Wa Thiong'o, 28). Ngugi's ideology has influenced to a large extent the translator's choice of words in *Shetani Msalabani*. Basically, his ideology revolves around the following three issues:

- a) Ngugi castigates materialism and individualism.
- b) Ngugi believes that the bourgeois exploit the workers and peasants.
- c) Ngugi believes that the workers and peasants can overturn their oppression if they actively engage in revolutionary thinking.

As Maina observes, Ngugi's ideological standpoint is influenced by Marxist realism (118). This ideology is about the struggles of social classes in the process of wealth production whereby the ruling class and land owners exploit the class of workers and peasants.

The championing of the rights of workers and peasants is manifested in the following words of Wangari when she narrates her tribulations as a peasant in Nairobi city:

*Hebu niambieni jamani, ni sehemu gani hapa Kenya ambayo maskini anaweza kukimbilia aepukane na taabu? Ilmorog, Mombasa, Nairobi, Nakuru, hata Kisumu: Maji ya miji hiyo yote yamekuwa machungu kabisa kwetu sisi **mafalahi** (wakulima wadogo) na **wafanya kazi**... Kishamba changu cha ekari mbili kilinadiwa na benki ya Kenya*

*Economic Progress niliposhindwa kulipa mkopo wao wa shilingi elfu tano nilizokopeshwa ili nifuge ng'ombe wa gredi (39).*

Ngugi also appears to defend the rights of workers through the words of Muturi when he says:

*Tazama miji mikubwa mikubwa ambayo tumekwisha kuijenga kwa ushirikiano wetu kazini; Mombasa, Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kitale, Kisumu, Ruwaini na Ilmorog. Tazama uone mibuni, majani ya chai, ngano, miwa, pamba, mchele, maharagwe, mahindi na kadhalika – vitu ambavyo sisi huvipanda kutokana na chembe chache tu za mbegu. Tazama moto mwingi wa spaki unaopitia katika nyuzi za shaba au fedha kwa msaada wa nguvu za maji ya mito kama Tana, Athi na Ruiru na kwa moto huo tukaweza kuwasha mataa mijini, mabarabarani na nyumbani mwetu usiku kukawa na mwangaza kama mchana. Waona? Usiku hatutegemei tena mwezi na nyota! Kama si kwa sababu ya hawa **vimelea** – **wanyonyaji** wanaolifaidi jasho letu, sisi **mafalahi** (wakulima wadogo) na **wafanya kazi** tungekuwa tumefikia kiwango gani cha maendeleo? Unafikiri leo hii tungekuwa tukiumizwa na njaa, kiu na kupigwa na baridi kwa uchache wa nguo? (52).*

The translator has chosen to use the words in bold type because they capture Ngugi's ideology.

Likewise, Ngugi appears to defend the rights of the peasants through the words of Muturi when he says:

*Vita vyenyewe havina watazamaji. Kwani, mtu ama huwa upande wa jeshi la kujenga, kuumba na kuusitawisha utu wetu – tueneze usambae na kukua katika hali ya uadilifu tukiiga mfano wa mbinguni na kuwa karibu na Mungu – hilo ndilo jeshi la mafalahi (wakulima) na wafanya kazi au huwa katika jeshi la kuuangamiza utu wetu, kuubomoa na kuwadhulumu wajenzi na waumbaji wa utu wetu – tuseme hili ni jeshi la kudunisha utu wetu tuwe kama wanyama, tukiiga ahera na kukaa karibu na shetani – hilo ndilo jeshi la vimelea – wanyonyaji (53).*

“The clan of producers” (53); “jeshi la mafalahi (wakulima) na wafanyakazi” (53).

“The clan of parasites” (53); “jeshi la vimelea – wanyonyaji” (53).

Basically, the meaning of the word “clan” is *ukoo* but the translator has chosen to use the word “jeshi” which appears to support Ngugi's ideology that workers and peasants can overcome their oppression through revolutionary thinking. Similarly, the basic meaning of the word “parasite” is *kimelea*. The translator has

decided to add another word “*wanyonyaji*” in order to emphasize Ngugi’s ideology that the bourgeois depend on the blood and sweat of peasants and workers so as to amass wealth just like the louse sucks people’s blood.

From that day on, Ndinguri began to fart property, to shit property, to sneeze property, to scratch property, to laugh property, to think property, to dream property, to talk property, to sweat property, to piss property. Property would fly from other people’s hands to land in Ndinguri’s palms. People started wondering: How is it that our property slips through our fingers into the hands of Ndinguri? Furthermore, he was now wearing iron rings on his fingers, which prevented him from working himself (64).

*Kutoka siku hiyo, Ndinguri akaanza kulundika mali. Aliwaza mali; alicheka mali; alilia mali; aliimba mali; aliiba mali; aliota mali. Mali ilikuwa ikiwakimbia watu wengine na kumwendea mtu mmoja huyu. Na sasa ametajirika hata kazi hafanyi! (65).*

The translator’s choice of words *kulundika mali* is attributed to the need to emphasize the idea of bourgeoisie lifestyle which is against Ngugi’s ideology. A bourgeois is a person who lives a town lifestyle without working; a person who has amassed a lot of wealth through exploitation or inheritance, like land and rental houses especially in big towns (BAKITA, 105). The translation of that paragraph was also influenced by the target language culture (Kiswahili) as explained earlier in section 3.3.

*Wazee wa kijiji wanasema: ‘Kumbe kwa muda huu wote tumemhifadhi mlozi kijijini? Kumbe tumemhifadhi chawa katika kinena? Huyu amenyonya majasho ya watu nchini mpaka wamekuta hawajiwezi.’ Na wakati huo huo wakamrukia [Ndinguri] wakamfunga kwa majani makavu ya mgomba. Wakamtia ndani ya nyumba yake wakaipiga moto (66).*

“This one will drink up all the blood of all the people until there is no more blood left in the land.” (66). “*Huyu amenyonya majasho ya watu nchini mpaka wamekuta hawajiwezi.*” (66).

The underlined words emphasize Ngugi’s ideology. The translator has chosen to use the word “majasho” instead of the word “damu” which is the equivalent of “blood” because *majasho* evokes images of someone who does a lot of manual labour which makes them produce a lot of sweat but not blood. The choice of that word is in agreement with Ngugi’s ideology that the workers and peasants class is oppressed and exploited during wealth production.

### Problems Arising from the Genre of the Novel

Some of the challenges of translating *Devil on the Cross* may be attributed to the nature of the genre of the novel itself. For example, there is a song of four stanzas

that was jointly sung by Muturi and Wangari and translated in *Shetani Msalabani*. The following are the stanzas of the song:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Famine has increased in our land,                | <i>Kwa kuwa njaa imezidi sana</i>       |
| But it has been given other names,               | <i>Na kubandikwa majina</i>             |
| So that the people should not discover           | <i>Ili umati usipajue</i>               |
| Where all the food has been hidden.              | <i>Palipofichwa chakula.</i>            |
| Two bourgeois women                              | <i>Wake wawili wa madaraka</i>          |
| Ate the flesh of the children of the poor.       | <i>Wakala wana wa fukara</i>            |
| They could not see the humanity of the children  | <i>Hawakuona utu wa wana</i>            |
| Because their hearts were empty.                 | <i>Kwa hiyo njaa ya kiroho.</i>         |
| Many houses, and acres of land,                  | <i>Majumba mengi na mashamba</i>        |
| And mounds of stolen money –                     | <i>Na pesa nyingi za wizi</i>           |
| These cannot bring peace to a person,            | <i>Haziridhishi rohoni mwao</i>         |
| Because they have been taken from the poor.      | <i>Kwa kunyang'anywa fukara.</i>        |
| Now look away from the rich                      | <i>Tazama wote hata tajiri</i>          |
| At the poor, and at the children.                | <i>Hata fukara na wana</i>              |
| They are all stagger-a-staggering on the highway | <i>Hao wote wanayumbayumba</i>          |
| Because their hearts are empty. (50-51)          | <i>Kwa hiyo njaa ya kiroho. (49-50)</i> |

A close look at the lines of the above song reveals that the Kiswahili translator was not able to accurately convey the meaning contained in some English lines. Some punctuation marks like the comma and full stop were not properly transferred into Kiswahili lines hence making the form of the source text differ from that of the target text in terms of rhythm. Rhythm is the arrangement of stressed sounds in a song (BAKITA, 1214). Songs are classified under the genre of poetry which puts emphasis on the choice of words, arrangement of those words in lines and the arrangement of stressed sounds in communicating meaning. The genre of the novel, on the other hand, does not put its emphasis on these elements. It is emphasized that the translation of a poem should preserve the “form” of the source text. This implies that the translator needs to ensure that he uses the same number of, for example, words, sounds, cries, metaphors, lines, hyphens, full stops, italics, and others in both the source and target text (Mwansoko, 43). However, since English and Kiswahili differ in their morpho-phonological and syntactic structures, it may not be possible sometimes to get the same number of words in the lines of these languages. The following should have been the correct Kiswahili translation of the first and fourth stanzas:

*Njaa imezidi sana nchini mwetu,  
Lakini imebandikwa majina mengine,  
Ili umati usipagundue  
Palipofichwa chakula chote. (Ubeti wa 1)*

*Sasa kando na hao tajiri  
Tazama hata fukara, na wana.  
Hao wote wanayumbayumba barabarani  
Kwa hiyo njaa ya kiroho. (Ubeti wa 4)*

The other weakness of that translation, which is also found in the source text, is that we are not able to know the tune of that song since this element cannot be properly represented using the genre of the novel. Tune refers to the style or the manner in which music is played, for example the tune of original taarabu (BAKITA, 586). We do not even know whether or not the stanzas of that song are sung in turns by members of a group or by a whole group. In the absence of certainty, we can only figure out how the singers sang the song and this is the weakness of representing a song in a novel. This weakness is manifested wherever songs have been used in this novel, for example on pages 9, 28, 30, 37, 45, 54, 58, 70, 92, 96, 107, 131, 132, 134, 143, 144, 160, 161, 213, 219, 225, 241-244 and 258.

### **Conclusion**

A critical analysis of *Shetani Msalabani* reveals that the Kiswahili translator encountered various challenges which sometimes hindered him from communicating the exact message contained in the source language text. Those challenges are related to the influence of Gikuyu, English and Kiswahili language and culture, the writer's ideology, and problems arising from the genre of the novel itself. This paper has demonstrated that the translator dealt with those obstacles of language and culture by using five strategies, namely: transferring source language words into the target language text in italicized form (partial translation); creating new words in the target language; using free translation by creating phrases or using proverbs which have equivalent meaning; avoidance of words that are linguistically or culturally untranslatable; and also using target language words that weaken or soften the degree of obscenity or offensiveness in the source language words (attenuation) in accordance with the expectations of the target audience. In spite of those challenges, the translator generally did a commendable job since he communicated the message in a manner that is easily understood and attractive to the reader even though, in some parts of the novel, he failed to preserve the creativity manifested in the source language text.



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