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Mwalimu Nyerere Engages His People: Scripture Translation in Swahili Verse

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Abstract

Julius Nyerere, the former president of Tanzania, was renowned for his political leadership. He was also an accomplished and dedicated poet, teacher, and translator. Having translated Shakespeare into his beloved Swahili language before becoming president, he took up Bible translation in his retirement. His goal was not simply to communicate his message faithfully and clearly, as any Bible translator should do, but also to engage his audience in a direct and personal way. Instead of the usual prose of the Gospels and Acts, he adopted the ancient but still popular poetic form of the *tenzi* as the most effective means of conveying his message. He used vocabulary that was familiar to his audience from the Arabic Islamic culture in which they live and political terminology that they associated with him while he was their national leader. Through the creative use of poetry, the poet-teacher-translator sought to engage his readers and listeners and impress upon them the relevance of the Message of Good News for their lives today.

1. Introduction

Kwa maana Bwana Mungu
Alipenda ulimwengu,
Akamtoa Mwanawe
Wa pekee auawe,
Ili atayemwamini
Asiangamie sini,
Bali awe na uzima
Unaodumu daima.[2]

The above lines might easily appear on the page entitled *Uga wa Malega*, "The Arena of the Poet," in *Uhuru,* Tanzania's daily newspaper. They are poetry in the form of *tenzi,* a popular feature in the press, and they recount a matter of seriousness for the lives of the readers. But they are not from the poets' corner in the newspaper; they are from the pen of the late President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, from his translation of the Gospel of John, chapter 3, verse 16.[3]

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[1] This paper was presented at the Conference on Bible Translation sponsored by the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, SIL International, Dallas, Texas, October 19–21, 2003.

[2] A literal translation of these lines would read as follows:

Because Lord God
He loved the world,
He gave son-his
Only that he be killed,
So that he who him believes (will believe)
He not perish never,
But he be with life
It which remains continually.

[3] Earlier treatments of this topic have appeared as "The *Tenzi* of Mwalimu Nherere: Scripture Translation in Poetic Form" by Philip A. Noss and Peter M. Renju in Ernst M. Wendland and Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole, (eds.), *Biblical Texts and African Audiences* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2004) and "Scripture Translation in Poetic Form: The *Tenzi* of Mwalimu Nyerere" by Phil Noss and Peter Renju in Simon Crisp and Jan de Waard, (eds.), *Text, Theology and Translation* (United Bible Societies, 2004).

2. The Poet

Julius Nyerere will be remembered in the history of Tanzania as *Baba wa Taifa*, "Father of the Nation."[4] Historians and philosophers alike will accord him a place of honor among Africa's greatest statesmen since he combined political astuteness with great intellect and vision. Both his public life and his personal life were guided by the highest ethical standards, while humility governed his actions throughout the time that he held political power as well as afterwards in retirement. Among his fellow countrymen he was known and is still remembered affectionately as *Mwalimu* "Teacher."

Mwalimu Nyerere's long and distinguished political career was framed by his two major literary contributions to the Swahili language that he championed as the language of the nation.[5] These publications were his translations of William Shakespeare and of Holy Scripture into Kiswahili.

In 1963, shortly after he became President, Oxford University Press published *Juliasi Kaizari*, his translation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in Kiswahili. Six years later in 1969 it published *Mabepari wa Venisi*, his translation of *The Merchant of Venice*. In 1966, a decade after he left office, a Benedictine publishing house in Tanzania published five volumes of Swahili poetry under the name of Julius K. Nyerere. These poems were his translations of the New Testament Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles in the form of Swahili *tenzi.*

In the introduction to the second edition of *Juliasi Kaizari*, the translator refers to those who believe that Kiswahili is a language that does not have "the capability of expressing profound thoughts or great eloquence without extensive borrowing of new foreign words" (Nyerere 1969:vii, translation Noss). His translations indisputably refute this belief.[6] In passing, we may observe that the works of Shakespeare and the King James Bible are widely recognized as the two greatest influences in the formation of the English language. Nyerere as translator both of Shakespeare and of biblical texts may have anticipated that these works could similarly serve him in his quest to achieve literary recognition and stature for his own beloved Kiswahili.[7]

Mwalimu Nyerere's translation of sacred texts had a second goal, not only to influence the Swahili language, but also to influence his Swahili-speaking audience. He wanted to engage the readers with biblical truths. Polycarp Pengo, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, who gave the *na ichapwe* ('imprimatur') under which these Scripture translations were published, in his preface to the five volumes, draws attention to the nation's youth for whom these *tenzi* may offer a source of hope as they face the future.

3. The Poetry

The longest history of continuous written literature in Africa south of the Sahara Desert is said to be the Swahili tradition (Arnold 1986:214).[8] Kiswahili, using Arabic script, has been a written language for half a millennium. The earliest Kiswahili manuscripts consisted almost exclusively of poetry. The Kiswahili word for a single line of poetry is *shairi,* and the plural form *mashairi* is used to refer to "poetry" in general.

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[4] Julius Nyerere was born in March 1922 and died October 14, 1999. He was Prime Minister of Tanganyika from its independence on December 9, 1961 until December 9, 1962, when he became President. From 1964 to 1985 he was President of the United Republic of Tanzania, the union of the separate states of Tanganyika and Zanzibar. Prior to entering politics, he was a school teacher.

[5] The Arusha Declaration in 1967 established Kiswahili as the national and official language of Tanzania, and the government subsequently applied its full authority to ensure that Kiswahili occupied the preeminent language role in the building of the nation. In this paper the term "Swahili" is used to refer to the people (*Mswahili/Waswahili* s/pl) and as an English modifier; "Kiswahili" is used for explicit reference to the language.

[6] The renowned Kenyan historian and Muslim scholar Ali Mazrui (1999:9) contends that President Nyerere "translated Shakespeare into Kiswahili partly to demonstrate that the Swahili language was capable of carrying the complexities of a genius of another civilization."

[7] For a discussion of the role of translation in the development of national languages see Delisle and Woodsworth (1995).

[8] Mazrui and Mazrui attribute Africa's "longest documented record of creative writing" to the Ge'ez-Amharic tradition of Ethiopia (1998:73).

However, the term *mashairi* may also refer to a sub-genre of poems marked by these features: 1) they are often fairly short in length; 2) they may address virtually any subject, and 3) they are much appreciated in the modern Swahili press. The lines of these poems are usually twelve to fourteen syllables in length and are divided into hemistiches with a cesura before the last six syllables.

The most common form of poetry in Swahili antiquity was the *utendi*. This poetic sub-genre was closely associated with the cultural life of Lamu, an island off the coast of present-day Kenya. The town of Lamu was an important Indian Ocean cultural and commercial center that was at its zenith in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[9]

The *tenzi* (pl)[10] are narrative and didactic poems that were traditionally composed for singing or declaiming by men and women. The themes of the poems during the era of Lamu ascendancy were predominantly religious and historical. Ever popular in Swahili culture today, they are generally serious and informative poems that proclaim religious teachings, recount events of historical import, offer praise of famous people, and pronounce warnings and exhortations. Certain *tenzi* are considered to be epics, such as the well-known *Utendi wa Liyongo* that recounts the heroic life and tragic death of Liyongo, a seventeenth or eighteenth century warrior of Pate, a neighboring island to Lamu (Jahadhmy 1975:42–61; cf. Harries 1962).

The form of *tenzi* is syllabic verse with line final rhyme. Traditionally, *tenzi* were frequently composed of stanzas of four lines or parts that were measured by syllables. They could be composed of lines having as few as six syllable counts or as many as eleven syllable counts. The most prevalent number of syllables per line was eight making a total of thirty-two per stanza. The first three lines had final rhyme which could vary from one stanza to the next, but the last line of the stanzas would maintain a same rhyme throughout the poem (*aaa…b, ccc…b, ddd…b,* etc.).[11] A single poem could extend up to a thousand or more stanzas.

This was the poetic form that was the most appropriate for President Nyerere's translation of Holy Scripture.[12] It was a familiar form that was suitable for the development of long and serious themes. The structure was flexible and relatively simple to manipulate. A single line of eight syllables was long enough to express a complete idea, but short enough to allow for the formation of phrases in creating stanzas.

Nevertheless, the poet-translator Nyerere found himself obliged to stretch the limits both of poetic form and of translation accuracy. He maintained the biblical format of verses and chapters and sections. Therefore, instead of strictly adhering to the four-line stanza of the classical *tenzi*, he allowed himself the freedom to create stanzas of as few as two lines and as many as twelve lines, depending on the content and length of the verses that he was rendering in Kiswahili.[13] He also abandoned the traditional rhyming scheme in favor of rhyming couplets. Although the majority of his stanzas have an even number of lines, some stanzas have an odd number of lines. In these cases, the final syllables of the last three lines in the stanza rhyme with each other. The translator did, however, strictly adhere to the pattern of eight measures per line.

Given the long history of the *tenzi* tradition, a wide variety of devices are available that enable the composer to remain with the prosodic constraints imposed by the poetic form that he has adopted (cf.

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[9] Abdulaziz credits the Hadramy Seyyids with bringing the form of the *tenzi* from southern Arabia to the East African coast before the seventeenth century. He cites the Arabic *al-musammat*, also known as *al-humanyi*, as the probable origin of the *tenzi* (1979:59, fn 51).

[10] *Utendi/tendi* (s/pl) is the Lamu dialectal form of the word; *utenzi/tenzi* (s/pl) is the standardized form. It is related to the verb *kutenda* "to do" and may therefore mean "deed, exploit", that is, "a poem of an exploit".

[11] This form of rhyme is called *bahar* 'sea'. The rhyming feature of Swahili poetry is often credited to the influence of Arabic versification, notably the *takhmis* and *al-musammat* (Abdulaziz 1979:57 fn 47; 59 fn 51). Several Kiswahili technical terms for identifying poetic features are borrowings from Arabic: *beti* 'stanza', *harufu* 'syllable', and *mizani* 'syllable measure'.

[12] President Nyerere was not the first Swahili translator to use the *tenzi* form for Scripture translation. The Tanzanian poet Mathias E. Mnyampala published *Utenzi wa Enjili Takatifu* (Holy Gospels) in 1963 and *Utenzi wa Zaburi* (Psalms) in 1965b. These are not, however, translations of the full text, but a retelling of the biblical story or text. Another Tanzanian poet Evaristo M. Mahimbi published *Utenzi wa Yusufu* ("Epic of Joseph") in 1975. Throughout the history of the Bible, there have been translations in verse in various languages, such as the *Cursor Mundi*, a thirteenth century translation of the complete Bible in rhyming couplets in English.

[13] The one exception is John 11:35 which is a single line: *Yesu akalia sana* ("Jesus wept much"). This line rhymes with verse 36 which is a three-line verse, thereby effectively creating a normal four-line stanza by combining the two verses.

Abedi 1954:16-20, 33–43). These devices are present at all levels of language: phonology, morphology, grammar, syntax, and lexicon.

It is frequently necessary to shorten words and this may be done through syncope as when the poet drops out a vowel in the middle of a word (*ma'na* < *maana* 'meaning'), through aphesis in omitting a word initial vowel (*'mekuwaje* < *imekuwaje* 'how has it happened that?'), and through synizesis, that is, contracting two vowels into one (*akenda* < *akaenda* 'and he went').

Occasionally, words may need to be lengthened in order to achieve the full number of syllables in a line, and this may be accomplished through articulating a diphthong as two distinct syllables or through repetition of a syllable (*mwana* > *mwanana* 'son'). Words of Arabic origin may be lengthened through epenthesis, that is, introducing a vowel between two consonants (*maskini* > *masikini* 'poor person/s'). Syllabic length may also be added by attributing syllabicity to a nasal consonant (*mbinguni* > *m-binguni* 'in heaven') or subtracted by removing syllabicity from a nasal (*M-takatifu* > *Mtakatifu* 'Holy [One]').

Contraction is phonological, but it occurs on the level of morphology. Relative constructions are frequently contracted (*alo juu* < *aliye juu* 'he who is above') as are possessive constructions (*jinale* < *jina lake* 'his name'; *wafasiwo* < *wafasi wako* 'your disciples').

The flexibility of the Bantu Kiswahili noun derivational system and of the verbal structure with its prefixal and suffixal systems provides a wide range of variables for the Swahili poet to exploit. For example, the word "baptize" may take several forms such as the following:

Mbatizaji	the Baptizer
ubatizo wa Yohana	the baptism of John
Mimi nawabatizeni	I baptize you (pl)
akibatiza	he was baptizing
akambatiza	and he baptized him
anabatizwa	he is being baptized

When the pronominal marker on the verb is omitted, the context indicates which person and number is to be understood. For aesthetic purposes, either the normal past tense marker *-li-* may be used, or the *-ka-* consecutive form may be used, or the *ku-* infinitive form, all with reference to completed action in the poem.

Syntax is another feature that is manipulated by the poet to accommodate rhyme. For instance, the conjunction *lakini* 'but' usually occurs in clause initial position, but in poetry it may occur equally well in line final position, or, as in asyndeton, a conjunction may be omitted altogether. Ellipsis is a frequent syntactic and grammatical feature as in the clause, *si kila [mtu] anoniambia* "it is not every [person] who says to me" (Matthew 7:21).

In the introduction to the second edition of *Juliasi Kaizari*, the translator acknowledges that he indulged in poetic license in using the spelling *Antonio* in some places and *Antoni* in others because of the rhyming of lines. But he says that he did not exercise this *uhuru* 'freedom' often (Nyerere 1969:vi). In his Scripture translation, however, this freedom is exercised somewhat more freely. For example, he uses the borrowed word "Sabbath" in its usual form *sabato*, but for rhyming purposes it may become *sabati* or *sabatu*. "Christ" may be the common *Kristu*, but when required by rhyme it may be *Kristo* or even *Kristi*.[14] To translate "Law", he may use *Tora*, the Hebrew form that has transited through English, or he may use variations borrowed from Arabic, *Torati, Taureti,* or *Taurati.*

The Kiswahili lexicon is another source of great wealth for the poet. Amri Abedi in his rules for composing poems recommends the use of archaic words as synonyms, as well as using words from different Kiswahili dialect areas (1954:34). Early Swahili poetry employed both Bantu lexical items and words that were borrowed or assimilated from Arabic. Mwalimu Nyerere's poetry likewise draws on the lexicon of the

[14] *Kristu* is the form that is associated with Roman Catholic usage, and Mwalimu Nyerere himself was Catholic. *Kristo* is used in the Swahili Union Version Bible and is generally associated with Protestantism. It has also been adopted in the *Habari Njema* interconfessional Bible. *Kristi* is a poetic form that has been created for purposes of rhyme.

Bantu base of Kiswahili together with its extensive reservoir of Arabic vocabulary. For example, God is referred to by the Bantu word *Mungu*, but never by the Arabic name *Allah*. However, the Arabic *Roho,* cognate with the Hebrew *Ruach*, is used with reference to the Holy Spirit. Evil spirits are referred to by the Bantu *pepo* or by the Kiswahili plural *mashetani* of Arabic origin. The singular form of this latter word *Shetani* refers to Satan.[15] English lexical borrowings may be introduced for variety, for example, *kingi* for the Arabic *maliki* or for the older *mfalme* 'king'.[16] Dialectal variants are also used, for instance, the Coastal *nyoyo* and the Inland *mitima* for the more common *mioyo/myoyo* 'hearts'. Present-day conversational forms may occur instead of formal classical Kiswahili (*mmesha* < *mmekwish* 'you have already'). Nyerere's poems do not, however, exhibit a great number of archaisms or otherwise obscure terms.

Figures of rhetoric or literary devices may also be mentioned. The translator introduces his own structures such as appositions, lexical repetition from the end of one line to the beginning of the next, plays on words, and chiastic constructions. Enjambement, or the carry-over of meaning and syntactic structure from one line to the next is, of course, a common feature of classical *tenzi* poetry due to its narrative content. While it is true that these devices are not absent from biblical literary form, the author of these *tenzi* verses introduces and uses them for his own aesthetic and translation purposes.

A word of caution should be offered here along with the catalog of linguistic and literary devices that are available to the poet. Whether it is an author as poet or a poet as translator, variations in grammatical forms and words should not be reduced to static and predictable syllable counts and rhymes. Word choices, even though variants and alternatives may appear to be synonymous, are not made by the poet haphazardly and they do not occur without affecting meaning. As will be demonstrated below, this is very true of the poet-translator of these Scripture texts.

4. The Text – Lexicon

The poet-translator exploits the aesthetic potential of his chosen poetic form while obeying his self-imposed constraint of faithfulness to the biblical text. At the same time, he is ever mindful of his audience whom he seeks to engage through his text.

The published volumes of the translations by Mwalimu Nyerere of the Gospels and Acts all use the key word *utenzi* in their titles, for example, *Utenzi wa Enjili Kadiri ya Utongo wa Yohanna.* The second key word in the title is *Enjili* which in Arabic usage may refer to the entire New Testament. Here it refers to the story of Jesus as told in the four Gospels. Through a striking collocation, the titles of these Gospel volumes evoke the traditional *tenzi* form of Swahili poetry as a "poem of exploits or deeds" and those deeds are *Enjili,* an Arabic religious term that refers to "Good News" or "Gospel." Thus, the title may be translated, "The Epic of the Gospel according to the Composition of John."[17] The fifth volume in Nyerere's series of Scripture translations is "The Epic of the Deeds of the Apostles."

Because of the importance of key words in a text, the way they are rendered in translation may take on great significance. Such is the case with names and expressions for God in Nyerere's translation. As stated above, Nyerere's term for God is the ancient Kiswahili word *Mungu,* a word that is common in this form or in variant form in many Bantu languages of east and central Africa. He does not use the widely borrowed *Allah* of Islam. He also uses other Kiswahili terms with reference to God such as *Bwana* 'Lord', *Mweza/Muwez* 'the Powerful One', *Mwenyezi/Mwinyezi/Mwenyiezi* 'Almighty', *Muumba/Mwumba* 'Creator', and *Mkwasi* 'Rich One, Beneficent'.[18] He borrows the Hebrew *Rabi/Rabu* < *Rabbi* and the Aramaic *Raboni/Rabana* < *Rabboni* 'Teacher'. However, the great majority of the descriptions of God and

[15] *Ibilisi* also from Arabic is used synonymously as in Mark 8:33 and in Matthew 4 for Satan or the Devil.
[16] Borrowing and Swahili-izing English words is a common feature of contemporary Kiswahili dynamics. The English-origin word often replaces the earlier Arabic word, for example, *pensili* in place of *kalamu* 'pencil' and *shule/skuli* instead of *madarasa* 'school'. In current usage, downtown Nairobi is commonly referred to by the borrowed English term "town" instead of the Kiswahili *mjini* 'in the town/city'.
[17] The translator uses two forms, *Enjili* and *Injili,* to translate "Good News." In Matthew 11:5 he inserts *Yaani Habari Njema* "That is Good News" as explanation for *Enjili.*
[18] *Nyakubaho* in John 4:24 may be a term for God borrowed from a neighboring language.

of his attributes are expressed by terms of Arabic origin that are well-known in contemporary Swahili religious life and rhetoric, for example:

Jalali	Glorious One
Jalia	Enabler
Karima	Gracious One
Latifa/Latifu	Benevolent One
Manani	Beneficent One
Maulana	Lord
Mola	Lord
Rabuka	Most High
Rahimu	Merciful One
Rahamani	Merciful One
Sayidi/Seyidi	Lord, Master, One having authority
Wadudu	Loving One
Yarabi	Strong One

These terms are often used in combination as in Luke 4:34 where the man possessed with an evil spirit cries out, *Ni wewe Mtakatifu wa Bwana Mungu Latifu*, "You are (lit. it is you) the Holy One of the Lord God the Benevolent One." In Mark 10:18 Jesus reminds the rich young ruler that there is only One who is Good and that is *Mwinyezi Mungu Karima* "the Almighty God the Gracious One."

Throughout Nyerere's translation of the Gospels and Acts, Jesus is called by the Christian form *Yesu* and not the Arabic form *Isa*. However, for the title "Messiah," variants of the Arabic term occur frequently: *Messia/Masiya/Masihi.*

The Holy Spirit is referred to by the Arabic *Roho.* This term may be qualified by the adjective *Mtakatifu* 'Holy', although it is more often qualified by explicit reference to God as in the following examples:

Roho wa Bwana	Spirit of the Lord (Luke 4:1)
Roho wa Bwana Mola	Spirit of the Lord God (Acts 5:9)
Roho wa Mola Latifu	Spirit of the Lord the Benevolent One (Luke 3:22)
Roho wa Mwenyezi Mungu	Spirit of the Almighty God (Luke 4:18)

The Jewish synagogue does not find its equivalent in Swahili religious life and therefore the borrowed form *sinagogi* that has been adopted by the Christian church in Swahili-speaking Africa has been retained by Mwalimu Nyerere. He also uses this word in its regular plural form *masinagogi* and with the Kiswahili locative suffix *sinagogini* 'in the synagogue'. In Matthew 4:23, Jesus teaches *masinagogini* 'in the synagogues' of Galilee. However, two chapters later, in Matthew 6:2 and 6:5, the translator changes his choice of word and renders "synagogue" by *kanisa*, the Arabic word that has been borrowed to refer to present-day churches. It is noteworthy here that the translator as preacher is adapting his translation to his audience by referring to hypocrites who today pray publicly in places of worship that are familiar to his readers.[19]

A problematic key term is "circumcision," not because the practice is unknown in Swahili culture, but because the concept cannot easily be used metaphorically as is done in the Bible. In Acts 7:51 when Stephen was speaking before the Council, he described his accusers as "uncircumcised in hearts and ears." The Swahili Union Version Bible translates literally, while the *Habari Njema* Version renders it, "Your hearts and ears are like those of the people of [other] nations." Using a borrowing from English *wapagani* (< 'pagan'), Mwalimu calls them, "Pagans in heart and even in ears!" The meaning is very clear to the reader, though like in *Habari Njema* the biblical image is lost.

[19] In the parallel passage in Luke 11:43 he uses another Arabic borrowing *mahekalu* 'temples'. Here by extension this means "houses of worship". Compare the *Good News Bible* (GNB) in English.

5. The Text – Expansion

If Mwalimu Nyerere, in his rendering of the Gospels and Acts, exploits the cultural lexicon of Kiswahili for poetic purposes, he is frequently obliged to create extra lines in order to fulfill the requirements of Swahili poetic form. He does so by expanding his translated text in a variety of ways such as through explanatory appositions, by rendering implicit information explicit, and by constructing parallel constructions based on information taken from the near context or from the wider context of the New Testament.

5.1 Matthew 1:16

Alomzaa Yusufu	Who begot Joseph
Yule Mtu mwadilifu,	The righteous person,
Mume wake Mariamu,	The husband of Mary,
Mama wa Yesu Mwalimu,	The mother of Jesus Teacher,
Anayeitwa Masiya,	The one who is called Messiah,
Mpakwa wake Jaliya	The Anointed of [God] the Enabler.

> …the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. (Revised Standard Version (RSV)

Yule mtu mwadilifu "The righteous person" in the second line is not found in the original text. Its function is primarily to serve as a line that rhymes with the first line of the verse. At the same time, it introduces information about Joseph that is known from Matthew 1:19, where it is stated that Joseph was a "righteous" person. In the Swahili Union Version he is called *Mtu wa haki* 'a person of righteousness'. In more current Swahili versions such as *Habari Njema*, Joseph is described as *Mtu mwadilifu* which is the very expression that the poet has inserted here. The statement of the line is therefore not wholly out of place because mention of Joseph, the husband of Mary, evokes what is said about him elsewhere in the New Testament corpus.

In the fourth line of the verse we find *Yesu Mwalimu* 'Jesus Teacher'. Although Matthew does not use the word "Teacher" here, this title is not foreign to him. Twelve times in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is referred to as "Teacher."

In the sixth line, *Jaliya* is a title for God with the connotation of the one "who enables" or "who provides everything." This line, added in apposition to the preceding line, draws the attention of the reader to the fact that the Messiah is the anointed one of God. Nyerere as translator has incorporated into his poem what in other Bible translations would normally be relegated to an explanatory footnote or to a glossary entry.

5.2 Matthew 1:20

Hayo akifikira,	While thinking about that
Malaika wa Jalia	The Angel of [God] the Enabler
Akamwambia bayana:	Told him clearly:
E, Yosefu wa Daudi,	Oh, Joseph of David,
Maria usimrudi:	Do not reprove/punish Mary:
Mchukue, usihofu;	Take her, do not fear;
Ni Roho Mtakatifu,	It is the Holy Spirit
Roho wa Mola Muumba,	The Spirit of God the Creator,
Alompa hiyo mamba	Who gave her the pregnancy.

> But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." (RSV)

The eighth line, *Roho wa Mola Muumba* "The Spirit of God the Creator," is not in the original text of this verse. It can be argued that its primary function in the translation is for poetic form as explained above and

it is therefore semantically parallel to "Holy Spirit" in the preceding line. At the same time, the phrase is actually another way of rendering the term "Holy," that is, "belonging" or "pertaining" to God that is expressed as *wa Mola* 'of God' who is *Muumba* 'the Creator'.

In Matthew 2:8 it is said, "and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying…." (RSV). The *tenzi* translator expands to fill out his line by making explicit what would have been known to Matthew's first readers, namely, that Bethlehem was a city. By reversing the preferred Kiswahili syntactic order of locative followed by name of location, he both fills out his line and creates the required rhyme with the preceding line:

Akawambia: Nendeni	And he told them: Go (pl)
Bethlehemu mjini	Bethlehem into the city

The poet-translator thus capitalizes on the didactic function of *tenzi*. By employing a common translation technique, he exploits one of the primary functions of the poetic sub-genre without compromising the quality of faithfulness in his translation. The following selected passages further exemplify this characteristic of Mwalimu's poetic translations.

5.3 Matthew 5:17

Wala msidhani kuwa	Do not (pl) think that
Nimekuja kuzitangua	I have come to abolish them
Torati na manabii,	The law and the prophets,
Kusema msizitii,	To say do not (pl) obey them,
Siji kuzibatilisha,	I have not come to annul them,
Bali kuzikamilisha	But to make them complete.

> Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them, but to fulfill them. (RSV)

In a very skillful manner, the poet creates a fourth line in order to fill out a second couplet of his six-line verse by expanding on the meaning of the verb in the second line. "To abolish" the Law and the Prophets means that they would no longer have significance, that is, that the Law would no longer be obeyed. The final couplet of the verse evidences the poet-translator's aesthetic adeptness in the creation of an antithetical parallelism with internal rhyme and repetition.

5.4 Acts 7:1–2a

Mwisho wa usemi huu,	At the end of the speech this,
Yule Khani mkuu	That High Priest
Akauza kwa ukali:	He asked with anger:
Maneno haya ni kweli?	Are these words true?
Naye Stefani mwema	And Stephen the good one
Akajibu akasema:	He replied and he said:
Wananchi, ndugu zangu,	Citizens, my brethren,
Wazee wa nchi yangu....	Elders of my country….

> And the high priest said, "Is this so?" And Stephen said: "Brethren and fathers, hear me." (RSV)

The RSV represents the Greek transitional particle *de* by the conjunction "and," but the composer of these *tenzi* reads considerably more into this little particle than a simple conjunction. He introduces an entire line as a temporal discourse phrase leading into the main statement of the verse. Then he captures the angry tone of the exchange that can only be gleaned by reading between the lines, because the Greek verb is a neutral "said."

In the second verse Stephen is referred to as *Stefani mwema* "Stephen the good one." This is an example of the use of descriptive terms or epithets that are not found in the Greek text, but that are a common feature in Swahili culture. In Acts 6:5 Stephen is said to be "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit," and three

verses later in 6:8 he is described as "a man richly blessed by God and full of power" (GNB). The adjective "good" that is inserted here by the translator is fully justified on the basis of the near context.

The third line of the same verse is composed of a phrase that President Nyerere used frequently when he was addressing the nation, that is, *Wananchi, ndugu zangu!* "Citizens, my brethren!" The compound term *wananchi* "children of the land" has found a place in the translation even though it does not occur explicitly in the original text. Its role is poetic, but its function is to bring the translator into personal engagement with his readers by allusion to what he previously did when he was President of the nation.[20]

5.5 Acts 9:36

Na mwanamke wa Yafa,	And a woman of Joppa,
Mwanafunzi mwenye sifa,	A disciple with fame,
Isimu yake Tabita,	Her name Tabitha,
Jina walilokimwita,	The name they called her,
(Dorkasi, Kiyunani,	(Dorcas, in Greek,
Au Paa kinyumbani),	Or Gazelle in [our] home language),
Mwingi wa maendo mema,	Full of good works,
Na sadaka kwa kauma;	And gifts for the populace;

> In Joppa there was a woman named Tabitha, who was a believer. (Her name in Greek is Dorcas, meaning "a deer".) She spent all her time doing good and helping the poor. (GNB)

The poet-translator's intense quest for expression seeking to engage the reader through his or her own experience is evident in this example. Here he specifies that the meaning of the Aramaic name that is explained in Greek in the text is *Paa* in the "home language." Thus, the woman's name and its meaning are associated with the connotations of familiarity and the warmth of the home that are part of the experience of today's readers.

5.6 Matthew 5:20

Kwani nawaambiani:	For I tell you (pl):
Haki yenu waumini,	Your righteousness believers,
Isipozidi hiyo	Unless it exceeds that
Haki ya mafarasiyo,	Righteousness of the Pharisees,
Na waandishi wa dini,	And the scribes of religion,
Hamwingii uwinguni.	You (pl) will not enter heaven.

> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom on heaven. (RSV)

The translator here permits himself to engage in hermeneutics in the name of poetic constraint and license. In the preceding verse the former President has issued a warning to his people. RSV renders it, "Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so," in which "men" is a literal translation of the Greek word *anthropous* (accusative plural form) with its generic meaning of "people" or "others" (so GNB). Mwalimu has rendered it *raia* 'citizens'. Here in verse 20 he specifies that those being addressed by Jesus are *waumini* 'believers'. In the context, they were the believers of Jesus' time, but for today's reader they are the believers of today among the citizens of the nation.

5.7 Matthew 5:40

Naye mshitaki wako	And he your accuser

[20] Other similar socio-political terms that occur in the translation are *umma* "the population of a country, the whole nation" as in John 12:33, *ushirika* 'community of interests, partnership' in John 12:6, and *huria/huru* 'free' in John 8:36.

Anataka kanzu yako, He wants your robe,
Wewe mpe kofia, You give him hat,
Joho na kilembe pia. Cloak and turban also.

And if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak also. (RSV)

By expanding on the text to specify both hat and turban, the author creates a four-line verse, and at the same time through the use of culturally significant items of clothing, he identifies with his audience. As he speaks to those who wear robes and cloaks, he also addresses those who wear either the hats of a Western lifestyle or the turbans of Islamic heritage. No one is excluded from the exhortations of the poet's *tenzi*.

6. Conclusion

Up to a third of the Old Testament is written in poetic form. Without attempting to determine why each biblical author resorted to what may be identified as poetry, there is no doubt that some of the motivation for such literary rendering was emotive, that is, for the creation of impact. Another purpose would have been to serve as an aid to memory. Mwalimu Nyerere, seeking to accomplish similar purposes among his people, recognized that poetry is the most effective means of reaching the people with the best Message of all. He therefore sought to engage his readers and listeners through the well-known and popular sub-genre of *tenzi*. In this form, the message of the Bible can be recited, sung, and retained in memory.

In this attempt at engagement,[21] the poet-translator employed religious vocabulary that was culturally familiar to his audience. He also used the lexicon of the home and of daily life to make it abundantly clear that the Message is relevant for today's world. As translator, he created poetry that brought warnings and exhortations to his people just as he had done when he was their President.[22] Thus through the poetic form of *tenzi*, the translator-teacher engages his readers and listeners with the Message of Good News.

[21] The United Bible Societies defines "Scripture Engagement" as follows:

A concept that emphasizes making the Scriptures discoverable, accessible, and relevant, that is,

- **Making the Bible recoverable and discoverable as sacred Scripture, and**
- **Making Scripture accessible as the place of life-enhancing and life-transforming encounter.**

[22] After retirement Mwalimu Julius Nyerere continued to teach his people. In 1993 he published a booklet entitled *TANZANIA! TANZANIA!* in which he castigated those who wanted to destroy the national unity of Tanzania. His exhortation is presented in the form of *tenzi* that ends with religious connotations:

Akipendezwa Jalia, If the Enabler is willing,
Itadumu Tanzania, Tanzania will stand,
Amina! tena Amina! Amen! again Amen!
Amina! tena na tena! Amen! again and again!

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Appendix: Examples of Mwalimu Nyerere's Poetic Devices

1. Matt. 7:21a

Si kila anonambia:	It is not every[one] who says to me:
Bwana, Bwana, taingia	Lord, Lord, [he] will enter
Ufalme wa mbinguni:	The Kingdom of Heaven:
Si kila mtu anayeniambia:	ellipsis, contraction, syncope
"Bwana, Bwana," ataingia (atakayeingia)	aphesis
Ufalme wa mbinguni:	syllabic nasal < homorganic nasal consonant

2. Matt. 5:3a

Heri watu maskini,	Blessed people [who are] poor,
Maskini wa moyoni,	Poor of in-the-heart,
Heri watu mas(i)kini,	epenthesis in pronunciation
Mas(i)kini wa moyoni,	anadiplosis

3. Matt. 7:26c

Yeye ni kama mjinga,	He is like a fool,
Mjenga kwenye mchanga:	A builder where there is sand:
Yeye ni kama mjinga,	anadiplosis and word play
Mjenga kwenye mchanga:	apposition

4. Matt. 7:27c

Na nyumba ikaanguka	And the house fell
Anguko kubwa hakika.	[And] the fall [was] great truly.
Na nyumba ikaanguka	anadiplosis, enjambement
(Na) Anguko (lilikuwa) kubwa hakika.	Asyndeton, ellipsis

5. Acts 19:2

Paulo akawambia:	Paul said (consec) to them:
Je, mmesha kupokea	(Question) have you already received
Roho wa Mola Manani,	The Spirit of God the Beneficent,
Tangu mlipoamini?	Since when you believed?
Lakini wakamwambia:	But they said (consec) to him:
Wala hatujasikia	But we have not yet heard
Kuna Roho Mtakatifu,	There is the Spirit Holy,
Roho wa Mola Latifu.	The Spirit of God the Benevolent.
Paulo akawa(a)mbia	dieresis, syncope
Je, mmekwisha kupokea	*mmesha* (contemporary) < *mmekwisha*
Roho wa Mola Manani,	
Tangu mlipoamini?	Assonance *Manani* - *amini*
Wala hatujaskia	
Kuna Roho Mtakatifu,	non-syllabic nasal < syllabic nasal
Roho wa Mola Latifu.	repetitious apposition for eighth line

6. Mark 2:27b

Na Sabato ni ya watu,	And the Sabbath is of/for people
Watu sio wa sabatu.	People are not of/for the Sabbath
Na Sabato *ni ya* watu,	chiasm
Watu *sio wa* sabatu.	Vowel shift for rhyme *Sabato* - *sabatu*