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Short Note

Chichewa and Hindi Back Translations of the Bible: A Comparative Check of Translation Techniques

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The Bible in India has been seen by some as an offshoot of the missionary movement in pre- and post-independence times. Such allegations of mainly elites belie a technical or stylistic reading of the translated scriptures into Hindi (the standardized and Sanskritized register of the Hindustani language as well as the lingua franca and official language of India), which is the great unread aspect of the Bible. On the other hand, these various efforts at systematic disengagement have proven incapable of demotivating many readers who love to read the Bible. Nowadays there is also another reason for a great reversal, as the Bible Societies of India and South Asia are very actively engaged in spreading the Bible without seeking exorbitant profits from the popular market. In this widespread effort, various scholars and associations have cooperated to translate the Bible into more than 200 languages. The Bible translated into Hindi is titled *Dharmasastra*. The India-Sri Lanka Bible Organization placed an authentic copy of this version on their website, which is taken as the primary text for this paper.

The preceding overview introduces the present study, which aims to compare the Hindi version referred to above with another translation in a completely different part of the world, namely, several version of the Chichewa Bible (Wendland 1998; Chichewa is a Bantu language widely spoken in SE Africa). Wendland's chapter from this book, titled "A Comparative Check: Illustration of the Difference in Translation Technique," provides a catalyst for translation scholars to engage in a comparative linguistic and pragmatic study of translation processes, procedures, and methods of transmission.

This paper examines Wendland's back translations from Chichewa (CHW) of three versions: the *Buku Loyera* [BY], *Buku Lopatulika* [BL], and *Malembo Oyera* [MO].[1] Thereafter, side-by-side the canonized Hindi translation of the Bible (HIN) shall be considered with reference to the former translations as axillaries in this comparative study. The present author has provided a back translation of the Hindi text for those who do not read this language. It turns out that the Hindi translation of the Bible is surprisingly close to the BY translation, a fact which might motivate further comparative research into these two languages and cultural domains. Being strongly influenced by his research into African oral traditions, Wendland emphasizes the oral-aural aspect of translation, and he recommends always reading draft and final drafts aloud as a means of testing and polishing them. So the first point of comparison is the phonetic versus pictorial (graphic) substance of translations of the Bible: from extroversion to internal-extroversion; from the curved flows of phonetics to the projection of sound-images into the "vague images in the mirror" of mind (1 Corinthians 13:12). Faulty translations of a poetic text will create vague images which cannot be easily heard or appreciated. With the following examples I will endeavor to illustrate this.

In the first example below (only), back-translations of all three CHW versions are given to suggest the difference in translation technique—the BL and MO being more literal renditions, while the BY is a dynamic version that seeks to convey the biblical text idiomatically in the language.

Numbers 6:24–27

HINDI TEXT	BACK TRANSLATION	BL BACK TRANSLATION
[२४] Yehova tujhe ashish de, aur teri raksha kare:	[24] May Jehovah bless you and **protect** you:	[24] May Jehovah bless you [sg.] and **keep** you;
[२५] Yehova tujh par apne mukh ka	[25] May Jehovah reflect light of His on	[25] May Jehovah cause his face to shine on you, and give you **good fortune**!

[1] The various notes below will make it clear that the BY differs considerably in its form from both the MO and the BL, which tend to be much closer to one another in wording. The important thing to remember is that BY's variation in translational form, including individual words as well as larger discourse segments (such as paragraphs), is specifically designed to convey the intended meaning (content + purpose) of the Scriptures more clearly, naturally, and also more 'hearably' to contemporary mother-tongue speakers of Chichewa (Wendland 169).

prakash chamkayen, aur tujh par anugrah kare.

[२६] Yehova apna mooh teri aur kare, aur tujhe shanti de.

[२७] Is riti ve mere naam ko Israliyon par rakhe, aur mai unhe ashish diya karunga:

your face and **favor** you.

[26] May Jehovah **turn his face towards** you, and give you peace.

[27] This way he puts the name of (**children missing**) Israel, and **I will keep blessing them**.

[26] May Jehovah **elevate** his face upon you, and give you peace.

[27] Thus let him put my name on the **children of Israel**; and **I will bless them**.

MO BACK TRANSLATION

[24] May Jehovah bless you [sg] and keep you!

[25] May Jehovah shine for you his face and give you **his free gift**!

[26] May Yahweh **cause you to see his face** and give you peace!

[27] In doing this, he will cause my name to rest in the midst of the **children of Israel**, and as for me **I will bless them**.

BY BACK TRANSLATION

[24] May Chauta bless you [pl.] and may he keep you.

[25] May Chauta **look** upon you in love, and may he **favor you [in his] heart.**

[26] May Chauta **look upon you in mercy**, and may he give you peace.

[27] And Chauta said, "Whenever they mention my name in **blessing the Israelites**, as for me **I will bless them** for sure."

a) Num 6:24, (HIN) mentions the name of Jehovah (/dʒəˈhəʊ.və/) as Yehova (/jəˈhəʊ.və/) (यहोवा) but not according to the original word and its pronunciation; the term here represents a deviation from CHW and perhaps the original. Also, the God in HIN "protects" its subject. But in BL, MO and BY translations He ''keeps them.'' One can support this choice in that there are similarities in actual literal meaning and Hindu roots of India. There are specifically written *kavacham* or *Kavachas* (the mantras to protect) for every God and Goddess in Hinduism. These *Kavachas* work like cymatics which protect our astral body (Dantreliya 3).

b) BL and MO back translations suggest that Jehovah gives "good fortune" and "free gifts." In HIN and BY translations God "favors" its followers. Here the meanings of both translations are almost the same. But what could be the reason for sameness is a matter of further cross-cultural research. More prominently, in the word prescribed here from Num 6:25, HIN back translation and BY back translation are similar.

c) In Num 6:26, the God 'turns his face' (HIN) towards His devotee. It gives the impression that the God and the earthlings are present on this earth standing shoulder-to-shoulder, parallel on this earth, on the same station. In other versions, verbs such as "elevate" (BL), "shine" (MO) and "look" (BY) are used. Unlike other translations, HIN does not use the grammatical modal here ("*Yahova apna muh teri aur karen*"). Here it seems that it is a command given to the God, rather than a humble request which is there in CHW.

d) In Num 6:27, HIN uses a future continuous tense to indicate the ongoing blessings of the God. But in all other translations (BL, MO and BY) the promise of blessings comes in some future indefinite tense.

e) In Num 6:27, the use of the noun "children" communicates the emotive strings of *Vatsalya Rasa* (parental affection) in BL and MO. HIN should have included this plural noun in its translation as it would have massively expanded its limits within the 'emotive' roots of India. But we can see here that both in HIN and BY versions the word "children" is missing.

Psalm 23:1–6

HINDI TEXT	BACK TRANSLATION	BY BACK TRANSLATION
[१] Yehova mera charwaha hai, mujhe kuch ghati na hogi.	[1] Yahova is my herdsman, nothing ill can happen to me.	[1] Chauta he is my herdsman. I will surely not lack a [little] thing, not at all.
[२] Vah mujjhe hari hari chariyon me bithata hai; Vah mujhe sukhdayi jal ke jharne ke paas le chalta hai:	[2] He lets me sit in green pastures. He takes me to the pleasurable waterfalls.	[2] He lays me down on a pasture of **new grass.** He guides me to **still waters** to go and **rest** there.
[३] Vah mere jee me jee le aata hai. Dharma	[3] He gives strength to my heart.	[3] He **receives my life-force**. He leads me

ke maarg me Vah apne naam ke nirmit meri aguvahi karta hai.	He leads me to the path of religion.	in a righteous path in accordance with the glory of his name.
[४] chahe mai ghoor andhkaar se bhari hui tarai me hokar chalo, to bhi hani se na darunga, kyonki Tu mere saath rehta hai; Tere soothe aur laathi se mujhe shantih milti hai.	[4] If I walk in the lowland of darkness, then also I will be not scared of any harm, because You always remain with me. Your stick and walking stick give me peace.	[4] It may be that I walk in a ravine of black darkness, but I will not fear any kind of **evil**, for You Lord you stay with me. Your **warclub** and walking stick **protect** me.
[५] Tu mere satanewalon ke samne mere liye meij bichata hai; tu ne mere sar par tail mala hai, mera katora umad raha hai.	[5] You set a table in front of those who trouble me; You have rubbed oil over my head, my cup is overflowing.	[5] You **prepare food** for me, as my enemies look on. **You welcome** me well by anointing my head with oil, you fill my cup to overflowing.
[६] nichaye bhalai aur karuna jeevan bhar mere saath bani rahegi; aur main Yehova ke dhaam mei sarvada vaas karunga.	[6] Your goodness and pity will remain with me for life; and I will always live in the house of Yahova.	[6] Truly, your good things and your **love** will stay with me all the days of my life. I will live in Your House my whole **life long.**

a) In Psalm 23:2 (HIN) the pastures are depicted as "green," so we have in BY.

b) God in Psalm 23:2 (HIN) also takes the devotee to "pleasurable waterfalls." "Pleasure" is an added adjective here. In *Yoga Darshana Upanishad* (6.35), the sound of waterfall is related to pleasure of the atman (the soul):

> [You] will hear the reverberation
> of a mountain waterfall,
> and your atman, taking **pleasure** in this sound,
> will in truth show himself to you. (Varenne 218)

c) In Psalm 23:2 the verbs "give" (HIN) and "receive" (CHW) have been used. But despite the apparent difference in the verbal action, the literal meanings remain intact in both the cases.

d) In Psalm 23:3, the use of "religion" in HIN is more theological than the moral word "righteous path" as we have in the back translation of Chichewa.

e) The Hebrew "deep dark valley" and the ideophone "*bii"* (in Chichewa) or *"*darkness*!"* can be used in the context of death (Wendland 150). But the noun "lowland" (HIN) here in the context of India suggests the abhorrence and problematic areas of religious confrontation (as we had in Bengal): "Christians and Buddhists, of semi-aboriginal and distinctly non-Aryan races… [are] regarded the lowland Hindus" (Black 564).

f) In Psalm 23:4, HIN, the word "soothe" (सोठे**)** is derived from Punjabi language. Punjab has been a land of warriors and fighters. Maybe that is why this word somewhere touches the values of the word "warclub." The stick of God gives "*shantih"* (शांति) (HIN), "peace" and "protects" in other translations. This stick somehow appears to be a Divine Wand which lets us dwell into "peace" again. Since, in India, whether we talk of Buddhism or Hinduism, the word "peace" has a lot of cultural and religious relevance. No doubt then that much has been invested in the word "peace" in India. Even TS Eliot ended his exemplary *The Wasteland* with this word which is used as formal ending of *The Upanishads*: "*Shantih shantih shantih*" (WL 433–44)**.** Thus the translator has rightly put this word here which surely connects with the Hindi reader of the Bible.

g) In Psalm 23:5, HIN uses the regular verb "rubbed." This use is culturally correct here as in Indian marriage ceremonies, especially Hinduism, oil is rubbed by the near-relatives of brides and bridegrooms on the to-be wed couples' head before marriage. So if we even see it as a ceremony in Biblical terms then also it has a close association with the Indian roots. Furthermore, in Chichewa translation there is use of to infinitive "to overflowing" which is absent in HIN.

h) In Psalm 23:6 (HIN), the noun *karuna* or "pity" somehow seems to be an emotive equivalent to catharsis of Aristotle. There is a rasa of the name of *Karuna* in *Natyasastra* which has been referred to as the "pathetic sentiment" in Indian aesthetics. Thus this word really invokes cultural equivalence as also the *Karuna Rasa* in the given context.

i) As mentioned by Wendland: "the initial Hebrew exclamation of v.6 'surely!' (אַךְ) is correctly reproduced in Chewa by *zoonadi* 'truly'" (150). But in HIN we can see that no word represents this exclamation.

j) "House of Lord" in Hebrew is directly reproduced into HIN as "in Your house" as we have seen in BY.

Luke 1:68–75

HINDI TRANSLATION	BACK TRANSLATION	BACK TRANSLATION OF CHICHEWA
[६८] ki Prabhu Israel ka Parmeshwar dhanya ho ki Us ne apne logon par drishti aur un ka chutkara kiya hai.	[68] That the God of Israel be praised because he had looked at the people and redeemed them.	[68] May the lord, the God of Israel, be praised, because he came to move among his people, and to come and redeem them.
[६९] aur apne sewak Daud ke gharane mei hamare liye ek uddhaar ka seeng nikala.	[69] And he raised the horn of salvation from his servant Daud from his clan.	[69] He raised up a certain person, Someone of the clan of his servant **David**, **that he might be our mighty Saviour**.
[७०] [jaise Us ne apne pavitr bhavishyavaktaon ke dwara jo jagat ke aadi se hote aye hai, kaha tha]	[70] [Like he said about the holy prophesiers who had been there since the origin of the world]	[70] These are the very things that He had prophesied about long ago the **power of all those who hate us.**
[७१] arthath hamare shatruon, aur hamare sab baireyoon ke haath se hamara udhaar kiya hai.	[71] This means that He gave us salvation from the hands of our own rivals.	[71] Thus He had promised that he would **save us** from our enemies, and from the power of all those who hate us.
[७२] ki hamare baap-dada par daya karke apni pavitr vacha ka smaran kare.	[72] That He had mercy on our ancestors **(only males)** and **will remember** your holy words.	[72] Thus He truly had mercy upon our ancestors of old, and he **remembered** his holy covenant.
[७३] aur vo shapat jo us ne hamare pita Ibrahim se khaayi thi.	[73] And that oath which He made to Abraham, our father.	[73] He also promised Abraham, **our ancestor,** by making an oath.
[७४] ki Vah hame yeh dega, ki hum apne shatruon ke haath se choothkar.	[74] That he will release us from the hands of our enemies.	[74] that he would save us from our enemies, **that we should serve him without fear,**
[७५] ki Uske saamne pavitrta aur dharmikta se jeevan bhar nidar rehkar us ki seva karte rahen.	[75] And we might be holy and religious and whole life **serve Him** fearlessly.	[75] that we might be holy in heart and righteous in his eyes, all the days of our life.

a) Lk 1:68 (HIN) and Lk 1:69 (CHW) are similar except for the word David which has been translated as Daud in the Hindi version. The word *drishti* is very tough to translate in English as it carries it with Indian theological connotations. But here it is used correctly by the translator.

b) In Lk 1:70, the back translation of Wendland "the power of those who hate us" is completely eliminated in Hindi Back Translation. There should have been a note attached with this translation for the Hindi readers.

c) Lk 1:71: God promised to save us from our enemies in the CHW but in HIN it is suggested that the evil protected us because of the directions of the God. Then there is a bit difference between the words "rivals" (HIN) and "enemies" (CHW). The word "rivals" gives us feeling of some competition whereas the word "enemies" foretells threats of life.

d) Lk 1:72 by using the name of male ancestors HIN clearly contextualizes the patriarchal structure of Indian society. Hence, it is a beautifully-rendered cultural equivalence in translation. Again in Lk 1:73 there is reference of Abraham who is not mentioned as "ancestor" but "father" (HIN).

e) The contents of Lk 1:74 (CHW) are explained in Lk 1:75 (HIN).

f) Lk 1:75 HIN uses the additional action verb "serve" ("whole life serve Him fearlessly").

Luke 2:29–32

HINDI TRANSLATION	BACK TRANSLATION	BACK TRANSLATION OF CHICHEWA
[२९] He Swami, ab tu apne daas ko Apne vachan ke anusaar shanti se vida karte hai.	[29] O Lord now as per your promise you peacefully bid farewell to your servant.	[29] Lord God, now allow me your servant, let me go with peace for you have really done those things you promised.
[३०] kyonki meri aankh ne tere uddhaar ko dekh liya hai.	[30] because my eyes have seen Your salvation.	[30] With my own eyes I have indeed seen that salvation,
[३२] ki vah anya jaatiyon ko prakaash dene ke liye jyoti, aur Tere nij log Israel ki mahima ho.	[31] It will light up other castes for You are the honor of your people and the people of Israel.	[31] You have given this brightness to light up the way for people of other tribes, which will be the glory of your people Israel.

a) In the back translation rendered by Wendland, the seeker seeks for permission "now allow me your servant," but in HIN the God fulfills his promise to bid farewell, of His oath. In Luke 2:30 (HIN) the translator uses *tere*, a second person pronoun which is usually used to address the younger ones. If used for the elder ones it is considered disrespectful and derogatory. But in Indian tradition, the God is often addressed by second person plural pronoun. Hence, the use is appropriate here.

b) In Luke 2:32, use of "castes" (HIN) instead of "other tribes" truly captures the caste based gaps in Indian society. But this sentence is so complex and unreal in Hindi that it is really very difficult for a common reader to understand its meaning. That is why this sentence lacks emotive substance.

Corinthians 13:8–13

HINDI TRANSLATION	BACK TRANSLATION	BACK TRANSLATION OF CHICHEWA
[८] prem kabhi talta nai, bhavishyavaniyan hon, to samapth ho jayangi, bhashayen ho, to jaati rahengi, gyan ho, to mit jayega.	[8] Love can never be postponed. Prophecy will end, **languages** will end and wisdom will be eliminated.	[8] Love is **unending**. But prophecy will come to an end. Speaking **unknown languages** will cease. And human wisdom will end.
[९] kyonki hamara gyan adhura hai, aur hamari bhavishyawani adhuri.	[9] Because our knowledge is incomplete as is our prophecy.	[9] For we can only know things insufficiently, and our preaching is insufficient.
[१०] parantu jab Sarvsiddh ayega, to adhura mit jayega.	[10] But when the **Proven** will come, the incomplete will end.	[10] But when the **perfect** shall appear, the insufficient will come to an end.
[११] jab mai balak tha to balakon ki nai bolta tha, balakon ka sa man tha, balakon si samajh thi; parantu jab sayana ho gaya to balakon ki baten chod di.	[11] When I was a child I used to speak in a childish way, I had childish mind and I would understand things in a childish way. But when I grew up I stopped those childish things.	[11] When I was a child. I used to speak in a childish way, and I would understand things in a childish way. But when I grew up, I stopped those childish things.
[१२] ab hame darpan me dhundla sa dikhai deta hai; parantu us samey amne samne dekhenge, is samay mera gyan adhura hai; parantu us samay aisi puri riti se pehchanuga, jaisa mai pehchana gaya hun.	[12] Now we see vaguely in the mirror, but then we'll see each other face to face. Now I only know things insufficiently, but at that time I will understand completely, even as God knows me completely	[12] Now we see things as if in a glass mirror, not very clearly at all. But at that time we will really see With our own eyes. Now I only know things insufficiently, but at that time I will understand completely, even as God knows me completely.
[१३] par ab vishwash, asha prem ye teeno sthayi hai, par in sab se bada prem hai.	[13] But now these three: faith, expectation and love **are stable**. But of all these, the greatest is love.	[13] So then for now there are these three things: faith, expectation and love. But of all these, the greatest is love.

a) The verb "postponed" is used with the value verb "love" (HIN). It will need some more time to philosophically comprehend the differences between these two back translations: The "languages" will end (HIN) versus "unknown languages" (CHW) will end.

b) The "Proven" is used for the God (HIN). Whereas, "perfect" is used in the back translation of Wendland. But what is Proven is not Perfect always. But the Proven is always and already Perfect.

c) In Corinthians 13:13 the translator takes liberty in declaring faith, expectation and love as "stable" (HIN).

Revelation 11:15–16

HINDI TEXT	BACK TRANSLATION	BACK TRANSLATION OF CHICHEWA
[१५] aur jab saatve doot ne turhi funki, to swarg me is vishya ke bade bade shabd hone lage ki jagat ka rajya hamare prabhu ka, aur us ke Messiah ka ho gaya.	[15] After this the seventh angel sounded his trumpet. When he did so, in heaven there were heard loud voices/words. The voices said that the world belongs to our Lord and now also of his Messiah.	[15] After this the seventh angel sounded his trumpet. When he did so, in heaven there were heard loud voices/words. The voices said, "Now the power of ruling the world it is in the hands of our Lord and in [those of] that Anointed One of his, and so he shall rule forever."
[१६] aur vah yuganug rajya karega aur chaubis pracheen jo Parmeshwar ke samne apne apne sinhasan par baithe the, muh ke bal gir kar Parmeshwar ko dandvad karte	[16] He will continue to reign eternally this State and the 24 **Ancients** who sat in front of the God , on their thrones, **prostrated in front** of the God.	[16] Then the 24 Elders who sit on their royal thrones before God, threw themselves to the ground face
[१७] yeh kehne lage, ki he Sarvshaktiman Prabhu Parmeshwar, jo hai, aur jo tha, hum Tera dhanyavaad karte hai, ki Tune apne badi samarth kaam me laakar rajya kiya hai.	[17] They said that O Almighty God, what is and what was, we are thankful to You as You have reigned efficiently.	[17] down and worshiped God. They said, Lord God, the Almighty One. You who are present and who were always present, we praise you because you have manifested your great power, and you have begun to establish your kingship.
[१८] aur anya jatiyon ne krodh kiya, aur Tera prakoop aa pada, aur vah samay aa pahunch hai, ki mare huon ka nyay kiya jaye, aur tere daas bhavishyvaktyon aur pavitr logon ko aur un chote badon ko jo tere naam se darte hain, badal diya jaye, aur prithvi ke bigadnewale naash kiye jayen.	[18] Other castes were angry but your wrath came upon and it is the time for judging the dead and your servant prophesiers and sacred people as also those who are scared of your name shall be changed. The time has come for you to destroy those who destroy the world.	[18] Pagan people became angry, but the time has come to show your wrath, that is the time for judging the dead. The time has come for you to give a reward to your servants, the prophets, and to your people, that is all of them, the small ones and the great ones, who reverence your name. The time has come for you to destroy those who destroy the world.

a) Revelation 11:1, HIN bears the connotation that the heaven now belongs to Messiah which is more clear than what we have in Chichewa that the heaven belongs to the "Anointed One." Then one more point to be noticed here is that there is no use of direct speech in HIN which makes the Bible an essay sans narration, sans speech acts and direct address to the reader.

b) In Revelation 11:16 the use of "ancients" (HIN) is out of place.

c) But the verb "prostrated" (HIN) is very similar to the cultural tradition of *dandvat pranaam* (wishing the elders while prostrating on the ground) in India.

d) By reading Revelation 11:18 (HIN) "*badal diya jaye*" one can subscribe to the notion that everyone (including servant of the God, prophesiers and the sacred people) shall be changed. But in the Chichewa version these people shall be rewarded by the God. Here, HIN slightly indicates a religious conversion of others.

Conclusion

In the preceding comparative research, Wendland's back translation of the BY version of Chichewa has served as a catalyst to enable to author to more fully explore the translation technique of the HIN version, which is his mother tongue. The sound of Divine Voice is surely healing as it has emotive and social reverberations: to oneself and the people who hear it. Hindi is a phonetic language—we pronounce what we write. Thus, it becomes quite natural for Hindi readers to automatically form images in the mind while one is actually engaged in reading the text. The present research which investigated a Bible translation in another language via the bridge of English aimed to deepen the author's experience of the nature of this complex interlingual, intercultural work and its diverse challenges. This study revealed that although the immediacy of the effect of reading the text in one's mother-tongue is powerful and compelling, there were some aspects that could be criticized, for example, a general lack of using direct speech and abstaining from truly poetic language. No doubt the typography of HIN text is eye-catching, but on the other hand, this version provided no explanatory notes to the reader to indicate where there are some omissions, some failure to communicate, or a need to elaborate in relation to the meaning of the biblical text. But the point of interesting convergence is that there was a surprising amount of communicative similarity between the BY and HIN versions. In this respect, they seem to be quite faithful to each other! The causes which led to such faithfulness indicate the importance of further investigation and the undertaking of similar comparative cross-cultural studies of translations involving widely recognized "high-value" texts such as we have in the Bible.

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