

# Do Literary Translators Have a Style of Their Own? Lessons from C.S.Z. Ntuli's Translation of D.B.Z. Ntuli's Short Story *Uthingo lwenkosazana* (*The Rainbow*)

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## Summary

Translators have been preoccupied with translations since Babel. Different texts have been translated from one language into another to enable target readers to access the source text message. Literary translation is not exempt from this. Literary translation is done with the purpose of allowing the reader of the translated literature to be as inspired, moved and aesthetically entertained as the reader of the original text. Since translation has for a very long time been considered a derivative of the original text, translators are said not to have a style of their own on the basis that they reproduce the work of the original writer. However, this assumption is repudiated by scholars such as Baker (2000), who maintains that "it is impossible to produce a stretch of language in a totally impersonal way. It is like handling an object without leaving one's fingerprints on it". On the basis of this assumption, this article seeks to illustrate that translators can leave their own trademark on a translation and still preserve effects similar to those found in the source text. The paper will focus on C.S.Z. Ntuli's translation (1997) of D.B.Z. Ntuli's short story *Uthingo lwenkosazana* (1978) (*The Rainbow*) as illustration. An exposition of style in translation will be carried out with the intention of placing C.S.Z. Ntuli's style of writing in its proper perspective. This article will mirror his manner of using the target language to convey the source text message.

## Opsomming

Sedert die tyd van Babel het vertalers hul besig gehou met vertalings. Verskeie tekste, insluitende letterkundige werke, is van een taal na 'n ander vertaal om die brontekstboodskap toeganklik te maak vir teikenlesers. Letterkundige vertaling word gedoen met die doel om die leser van 'n vertaalde werk op 'n soortgelyke manier te inspireer, aan te raak en esteties te vermaak as die leser van die oorspronklike teks. Aangesien vertaling vir 'n lang tyd as 'n blote afleiding van die oorspronklike teks beskou is, word gemeen dat vertalers nie 'n styl van hul eie het nie, omdat hulle slegs die werk van die oorspronklike outeur reproduseer. Hierdie aanname word egter weerlê deur vakkundiges soos Baker (2000) wat beweer dat dit onmoontlik is om 'n stuk taal op 'n totaal onpersoonlike manier te produseer. Teen die agtergrond van hierdie aanname, beoog hierdie artikel om te illustreer dat vertalers hulle eie stempel

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op 'n vertaling kan afdruk en nog steeds dieselfde uitwerking kan behou as dié in die bronteks. Die artikel fokus op C.S.Z. Ntuli (1997) se vertaling van D.B.Z. Ntuli se kortverhaal *Uthingo lwenkosazana* (1978) (*Die Reënboog*) ter illustrasie. Die vertalingstyl sal uiteengesit word met die doel om die skryfstyl van C.S.Z. Ntuli in sy regte perspektief te plaas. Hierdie artikel sal die outeur se gebruikstyl van die teikentaal om die brontaalboodskap oor te dra, weerspieël.

## Introduction

The translation of several English literary works has boosted many literary systems of the indigenous languages of Southern Africa. Writers whose works came into these languages through translation include Shakespeare, Kahlil Gibran, Zakes Mda and Chinua Achebe. It is an undisputed fact that these works would not have entered the literary systems of these languages if it were not for translators. Translators, who mediate between source and target languages and cultures are often considered not to have a style of their own, on the basis that they reproduce the work of the original writer. This assumption is repudiated by scholars such as Baker (2000) who maintains that “it is impossible to produce a stretch of language in a totally impersonal way. It is like handling an object without leaving one’s fingerprints on it”. This paper seeks to illustrate that translators can leave their own trademark on a translation and still preserve the same effects that are in the source text. The paper focuses on C.S.Z. Ntuli’s translation (1997) of D.B.Z. Ntuli’s short story *Uthingo lwenkosazana* (1978) (*The Rainbow*) as illustration. The article also attempts to demonstrate that mastery of both the source and target language is decisive in producing a translation that is faithful to the original in every sense. An exposition of what style is places C.S.Z. Ntuli’s style in its proper perspective, followed by an analysis of his language patterns.

The focus of this article is an isiZulu short story that has been translated by C.S.Z. Ntuli (C.S.Z. henceforth) into English. Relatively little translation has been produced in South Africa from the indigenous languages into English. This dearth of translated texts from the indigenous languages could be ascribed to the lack of translators with perfect mastery of both the source and target language. Against this background it creates a feeling of esteem and pride that literary works in the African languages will also be read by foreign language speakers, consequently exposing them to the culture of these languages.

The translation of *Uthingo lwenkosazana* into English is one among several in the collection entitled *The Rainbow Flute*, which includes works translated from various indigenous languages of Southern Africa, namely, isiZulu, Northern Sotho, Siswati, isiXhosa, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Setswana, Sesotho and Chishona.

## Equivalence

Although the notion of equivalence holds a central position in Translation Studies, it has been the focus of many varied debates over the years. Controversy about the notion of equivalence centred round its nature, definition and applicability. Notwithstanding this, the notion of equivalence underpins the arguments that are presented in this article on the basis that proponents of equivalent-based theories regard equivalence as a relationship that holds between the source text and target text, and that it is this relationship that allows the target text to be considered a translation of the source text (Shuttleworth and Cowie 1997: 49). Bardenstein asserts that

formulations of what equivalence is and what it should be between a source text and its translation have ranged from the intuitive and impressionistic, to the overly narrow based on mathematical models, to the highly elaborated and complex, with detailed differentiation between levels and types of equivalence, for different lengths of segments of given texts.

(2005: 7)

Toury (1980, 1995) distinguishes between the prescriptive and non-prescriptive conceptions of equivalence. He contends that prescriptive formulations require certain kinds of equivalence relationships, and are the most common within the domain of applied translation studies. However, formulations that are non-prescriptive take as their object of study either possible, theoretical relationships of equivalence, which he locates as belonging to the domain of translation theory, or actual relationships of equivalence “realised” in existing translations, which he identifies as belonging to the realm of descriptive translation studies. He dissociates his use of the concept of equivalence in descriptive translation studies from what he identifies as prescriptive, rigid and ahistorical usages, and from those that honour the authority of the source text. He considers translations as facts of the target cultures (Toury 1995: 29).

The discussion presented here draws much from Toury’s (1980: 35) target-text oriented approach to translation, which considers translations to be actual textual-linguistic products, which belong first and foremost to the system of texts written in the target language. These notions accentuate features of the translated text that conform to the norms and conventions within the target literary system and culture.

Though the application of the concept of equivalence is fraught with controversies in the translation, Baker (1992: 6) suggests that the concept of equivalence should be “seen as a textual (not systemic) relationship which emerges from situations in contact and is shaped by a variety of dynamic factors, including the translator’s interpretation of the source text, the requirements of the commissioner, the context of translation, and of course the translator’s own ideological make-up”. She explores the notion of

equivalence from different levels, mostly distinguishing equivalence at word level and above word level.

Baker's (1992) description of equivalence at word level perfectly suits this analysis, because she asserts that "when the translator starts analyzing the source text he or she looks at the words as single units in order to find equivalent terms in the target language. This type of equivalence focuses on one of the smallest linguistic units of a language, the word". However, Baker (1992) further alludes to the fact that "there is no one-to-one correspondence between orthographic words and elements of meaning within and across languages". Lack of equivalence at word level is, therefore, a problem in translation, and demands that translators should draw linguistic equivalents from the reservoirs of the target language to address such problems.

On the notion of equivalence, Baker (2004) concludes by stating that

It would seem then that we still cannot throw "equivalence" out of the window. Even the idea of producing a target text that addresses a specific reader – rather than one that is faithful to the original – still implies transferring some part of the source text that is considered to be of value in the particular exchange situation. The concept of equivalence is thus likely to be with us for a long time to come.

(2004: 6)

## **Literary Translation**

To translate a literary text with a view to conveying its message undistorted has always been a matter of concern to translators. What literary translators are after is yielding a translation in which the techniques, beauty, meaning and the form of the original have been preserved. This is what makes the task a real challenge. Abbasi and Dastjerdi (2005) assert that

Being open to interpretation on different levels, a literary text challenges the translator who has to explore the true meaning and reshape it in another system. The translator of a literary text should also interpret the text according to the cultural setting it was written in. The dominant ideology of the time does not leave literature unaffected and much of the semantic weight of the text might have been shaped accordingly.

(22 August 2013)

According to Ketkar literary translation is the rendition, in a new language, of texts that are originally written in literary language. It is not only meaning preservation but is also form, style, mood, voice, experience and effect maintenance. More often the problem of literary translation is to find equivalents not just for the lexis, syntax or concepts that are translated but also to address features such as style, genre, figurative language, historical

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stylistic dimensions, poly-valence, connotations as well as denotation, cultural items, culture specific concepts and values.

(20 May 2013)

Maher (2011:161) believes that translators are, to some degree, allowed to be creative, but they have an obligation towards the source text and their readers. Maher states that

The translator's role involves a delicate balance between catering to the target audience's background and needs, and expanding their outlook through translation. Creativity in translation does not, of course, equate to unfettered freedom. What distinguishes translation from other kinds of creative writing is its close relationship with the obligation to its source text, as well as to its readers. This is a kind of creativity whose constraints and limitations make it all the more challenging.

(2011: 161)

### **Style in Translation**

Since translations are considered to be reproductions of the originals, the assumption that they do not have a style of their own has been advanced in translation circles. It is assumed that in translations, translators model their translation along the styles of the original authors. This assumption is repudiated by scholars such as Baker (2000) who maintains that "it is impossible to produce a stretch of language in a totally impersonal way, it is like handling an object without leaving one's fingerprints on it". Baker continues to allege that

there has been little or no interest in studying the style of a translator, or group of translators, or a corpus of translated material that belongs to a particular historical period. This is clearly because translation has traditionally been viewed as a derivative rather than a creative activity. The implication is that a translator cannot have a style of his/her own, because his/her task is simply to reproduce as closely as possible the style of the original.

(2000: 244)

She emphasises the fact that a study of a translator's style must focus on the manner of expression that is typical of a translator, rather than simply instances of intervention. It must attempt to capture the translator's characteristic use of language, his or her individual profile of linguistic habits, compared to other translators. Baker interprets the study of style in translation as involving description of preferred or recurring patterns of linguistic behaviour, rather than individual or once-off instances of intervention. According to Landers (2001: 90) "in practice, individual translators do have styles, which are as important for them to avoid as for the source

language author”. He continues to state that “style can be defined as a characteristic mode of expression, and consciously or unconsciously the translator displays one.”

The statement that translators cannot have a style of their own is also refuted by Hermans (1996). He purports that “in translation, just as with interpreting, one can observe two ‘voices’; one belonging to the original author, and the other to the translator, which may be more or less overt in the translated text”. Hermans further points out that

while it is characteristic of translation that the translator’s discursive presence tends to be subsumed under that of the original speaker, it never disappears completely, even when translators do not set out deliberately to foreground their own voice. One reason for this lies in the cultural and temporal displacement which translation brings with it, and the consequent adjustment of the discourse to its new intended environment, which often entails adjusting the text’s cognitive structure.

(1996: 198)

Boase-Beier (2006: 1) also follows the same line of thought by advocating that in the “re-creative” process, the translator’s individual style is bound to become a part of the translation.

### **Style in C.S.Z.’s Translation of *Uthingo lwenkosazana* “The Flute”**

As indicated previously, the direction of translation in the collection of short stories that is the object of this article is from isiZulu, wherein D.B.Z.’s short story *Uthingo lwenkosazana* has been translated by C.S.Z. into an English short story entitled *The Rainbow*. Landers (2001) advances the notion that through literary translation the aim of a translator is to share the final result with target language readers for whom the translated work would otherwise have remained inaccessible.

In the following section, the focus is on C.S.Z.’s distinctive style. It should be noted that some target text examples, that is, C.S.Z.’s translation, will not be accompanied by their source text equivalents, namely, D.B.Z.’s original in instances where the researcher is of the opinion that this has not been expressed in the source text. Instances where the target text has information that is absent in the source is a common occurrence in literary translation. As Lefevere (1999: 237) puts it

[d]ifferent languages reflect different values and cultures; therefore, in an attempt to mediate different languages, values or cultures, translations nearly always contain attempts to naturalize the different culture to make it conform more to what the reader of the translation is used to.

Lefevere (1992) further alludes to the fact that

translation is produced on the basis of an original text with the intention of adapting the original to a certain ideology or poetics of a different audience, and it is an activity performed under constraints of patronage, poetics and ideology initiated by the target systems, as such it is an act of *rewriting* of an original text to conform to certain purposes instituted by the receiving system.

(1992: 9)

Therefore, as Lefevere (1992) suggests, the inclusion by Ntuli of information that has not been supplied in the source text should be regarded as some form of rewriting on the part of C.S.Z.'s translation because rewritings manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way (Snell-Hornby et al (1997: 126). Literary translation is fraught with problems that emanate from cultural and linguistic differences between source and target language. Toury (1978: 200) argues that "translation is a kind of activity which involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions." This implies that translators are permanently faced with the problem of how to treat cultural aspects that they come across in the source text and also find the most appropriate technique of successfully conveying these aspects in the target language. "Problems that related to cultural differences between source and target text vary in scope depending on the gap between the two languages concerned" (Nida 1964: 130).

Newmark (1988: 94) contends that culture is "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression". He thus acknowledges that each language has its own culturally specific features.

### **Translation of Culture Specific Concepts**

Literary translators face the challenge of finding ways in which the desired meaning can be expressed, and this requires a full understanding of the source language and target language, linguistic elements and figures of speech. Culture specific concepts always tend to pose a challenge for the translator. If the source language is culturally far apart from the target language, due to differences in customs, beliefs, worldviews and other factors, chances are that there will be lack of lexical equivalents in the target language. D.B.Z.'s short story is based in a traditional Zulu milieu, so culture specific concepts abound.

The following examples illustrate how C.S.Z. has translated culture-specific items.

D.B.Z.: ... *lensizwa iyangabaza njengoba ibona abalobokazi laba bengangenangeni nje endlini kayisezala.* "... the young man was doubtful as he that considered daughters-in-law did not go into their father-in-law's house."  
(Ntuli 1978: 3)

C.S.Z.: The young man hesitated for a moment. Mpiyakhe's wives very seldom entered the house of their father-in-law.  
(Ntuli 1997: 24)

Respect is a highly regarded attribute among the Zulu people. Young women who are married into a Zulu family have to express respect in a variety of ways. One way of showing respect was by not going into their father-in-law's house. To soften the effect of this custom to someone not familiar with it, C.S.Z. translated this as that Mpiyakhe's wives very seldom entered the house of their father-in-law. He has also translated *abalobokazi*, a Zulu word referring to a daughter-in-law which also expresses respect when used by a father-in-law, as "Mpiyakhe's wives", because of the cultural connotations that are at play between the use of *abalobokazi* and Mpiyakhe's wives in both the source and target languages.

In translating the form of greeting reserved for royalty, *Wena wakomkhulu* (Ntuli 1978: 3) "Oh hail you who are from the royal house" (Ntuli 1997: 24), C.S.Z. has used an expression which is familiar to the target reader, which is "Your Highness".

It is evident from the above translated examples that C.S.Z. tried to present what is foreign to his readership in a manner that is close to what is familiar to their cultural environment, something with which they can identify.

Linguistic differences between source and target languages will be dealt with in the next section. As meanings are not universal, languages do not equally categorise their lexicons, and their transference is not always easy.

## Sentence Structure

D.B.Z. mostly uses one word or short sentence structures, which are succinct and to the point, whereas C.S.Z. uses longer sentence structures, which express the message in a manner that distinctly paints an impeccable picture of the source text message, as illustrated by the following examples:

D.B.Z.: *Nx! Lenyoka!* (Ntuli 1978: 1) "Damn, this snake!"  
C.S.Z.: He cursed the meddling snake.  
(Ntuli 1997: 22)



To address the lack of an equivalent interjection, C.S.Z. has used words that express the meaning of the interjection. C.S.Z. is aware that exclamations are those types of linguistic devices that have no one-to-one correspondence between languages and thus, has rendered the meaning of the interjection in the target language. Lack of equivalent terms in the target language is a problem that translators face from time to time. It is skilful translators who can creatively address such problems in literary translation. The description of the snake as a meddling snake also shows how vivid he can paint pictures of his object of discussion.

Here is another example that typifies the use of different sentence structures:

DBZ: *Uqathake.* (Ntuli 1978: 1) “It fell.”

C.S.Z.: He picked up his spear, but it fell from his trembling hand.  
(Ntuli 1997: 22)

C.S.Z. translated *Uqathake* “It fell” as “it fell from his trembling hand”. Here C.S.Z. supplies additional information that has not been made explicit in the source text. It is from the context that the source reader will infer that the character was trembling, but this information has been made explicit in the translation.

Another example that typifies the use of different sentence structures is the following:

D.B.Z.: *Awunagazi. Akayigwazanga inyoka. Abuye axhokoxhe futhi.*  
(Ntuli 1978: 1) “It has no blood. He did not stab the snake. He thrust the spear again.”

C.S.Z.: No sign of blood! The snake had not been stabbed. He knelt again and stabbed repeatedly, thrusting as deep as possible.  
(Ntuli 1997: 22)

From these examples it is evident that although D.B.Z. uses sentences that range from one word to simple sentences very effectively to achieve an aesthetic effect, C.S.Z. translates these sentences using longer sentences, which explain the meaning of the original very effectively.

A linguistic device that contributes immensely to the short sentence structure, which is employed in Ntuli’s short story, is the ideophone. Ideophones are defined in different ways by different people. Dingemans (2011: 133) sees ideophones as marked words that evoke sensory imagery. He further points out that ideophones are a common feature in many languages of the world, but are underdeveloped in English and other Indo-European languages. If ideophones are a feature that is not very common in English, it is interesting to see how C.S.Z. deals with this linguistic form in his translation.

Illustrations of C.S.Z.'s translation of the ideophones used in the short story are the following:

- D.B.Z.: **Phangqu uDunguzela.** (Ntuli 1978: 5) "Dunguzela rushed out."  
C.S.Z.: Dunguzela tottered out of the house.  
(Ntuli 1997: 26)


C.S.Z.'s use of the English verb "tottered" remarkably summarises Dunguzela's movement. It paints a vivid picture of the ailing Dunguzela walking with the faltering pace of a sickly person out of the house. The picture C.S.Z. paints is not as vivid in D.B.Z.'s ideophone, even though use of this device is intended to evoke sensory imagery.

Another example that illustrates C.S.Z.'s amazing skill at translating ideophones is the following:

- D.B.Z.: **Mpu mpu mpu**, imithi **do.** (Ntuli 1978: 5) "He searched everywhere but could not find the medicine."  
C.S.Z.: He searched where he thought the little parcel should be, relying on his sense of touch more than on his eyes. He neither saw nor felt what he was looking for.  
(Ntuli 1997: 26)

D.B.Z.'s ideophone conveys the thought of thoroughly searching, but C.S.Z. goes further to interpret that the search also included more than the sense of sight. He further explains that though Dunguzela used these senses in his search, he did not find what he was looking for.

In the following example the sense of hearing is evoked by the use of the ideophone:

- D.B.Z.: **Goqogoqo!** Akunamsebenzi noma ingabuyaimgofoze futhi ngoba vele usefile. **Goqogoqo! Xhokoxhoko!** (Ntuli 1978: 1).  
"Poke, poke! It does not matter if the snake can strike again because he is already a dead person."  
C.S.Z.: He stabbed more vigorously. Again and again he stabbed.  
(Ntuli 1997: 22).

Lack of an equivalent word in the target language is very obvious in this example. However, C.S.Z. has tapped into his expertise of the source language and expressed the ideophones as stabbing vigorously, again and again.

Translators have the tendency to simplify the language used in translation. Baker (1993) refers to this phenomenon as simplification. Laviosa-Braithwaite (1998: 289) distinguishes three types of simplification, namely,

lexical simplification where less words are used than those that appear in the source; syntactic simplification which relates to the fact that complex syntax in the source text is simplified and stylistic simplification which has to do with the tendency to break up long sequences and sentences, replacing elaborate phraseology with shorter collocations, reducing or omitting repetitions and redundant information, shortening overlong circumlocutions and leaving out modifying phrases and words.

C.S.Z. has not used any of these types of simplification in his translation, but has devised his own. He has explained all the notions that he considers will be difficult for the target reader to understand.

### Use of Descriptive Terms

The selection of descriptive linguistic devices such as adjectives and adverbs can significantly alter the readers' attitudes towards the subject matter in literature. C.S.Z. has taken advantage of this and used adjectives and adverbs exceptionally well in his translation. The main functions adjectives serve in literature is to give more description to the entities found in a text; so, the use of more adjectives will result in the descriptive richness of the text.

C.S.Z. has himself shown to be exceptional in his use of adjectives and adverbs to describe and modify the objects of his discussion. The following exemplify C.S.Z.'s use of adjectives to describe the antecedent nouns that he has used to collocate with the specific adjectives:

D.B.Z.: *Agxume agelekeqeke uMpiyakhe, umkhonto uwele laphaya, kusale ihawana kuphela. Uma ephakamisa amehlo, ayibone ihushuzela kancane inyoka ize ingene emgodini.* (Ntuli 1978: 1) "Mpiyakhe quickly jumped, the spear fell over there, he only had the spear. When he raised his eyes, he saw the snake slowly moving until it entered into a hole."

C.S.Z.: Mpiyakhe performed a curious combination of the high jump and the long jump, breaking all existing records in these events. *A blood-chilling sight* met his *startled eyes* and he stood paralysed with fear; a large snake was *gracefully making its way* towards a hole in the ground.

(Ntuli 1997: 21)

C.S.Z. uses language in a way that creates images in the reader. Information that has been added in the translation (*a blood-chilling sight, startled eyes*) typifies the use of adjectives to portray the scene for the reader. It is interesting to notice how C.S.Z. describes the vision of the main character. The use of *blood-chilling*, explicitly indicates to the target reader how

frightened the character was. The same notion is expressed by *he stood paralysed with fear*. Both these notions fully explain why Mpiyakhe hastily jumped.

C.S.Z. has also used adverbs to describe the verbs in relation to manner. An example that aptly characterises the use of adverbs to describe a scene is the following:

D.B.Z.: *Izulu lathi ukuphenya kancane. Ilanga lize likhanyise lapho ekhona. Bube buhle ngokunye utshani obuluhlaza, obunempilo, namazolo lana angubuhlalu obumenyezela ngobukhulu ubuhle.* (Ntuli 1978: 2) “The weather cleared slightly. The sun shone where [Mpiyakhe] was. The beauty of the green lively grass was amazing and the dew which are beautiful as shining pearls.”

C.S.Z.: The weather was beginning to clear slightly. A ray of sunshine threw a patch of light around him. Never before had he noticed so much beauty in the fresh green grass. He was enchanted by the beauty of the dew which *hung delicately* like dangling pearls on the grass blades.

(Ntuli 1997: 23)

C.S.Z. has used literary language, which differs from ordinary language, which D.B.Z. has used, in describing the beauty of the dew. He uses the expression *the dew hung delicately* to show the manner in which the dew appeared to an onlooker. He completes the picture he has drawn of the dew hanging on the grass by adding a simile *like dangling pearls on the grass blades*, which complements the picture.

## Conclusion

The translation of prestigious works from languages like English has given character to the literary system of the indigenous languages of South Africa, even though there is not much that has been translated into English from these languages.

There has always been controversy as to whether translators could have a style of their own, because translations have been considered derivative. Despite this being the case, it has been shown that this statement is not strictly true, since each literary translator has his or her own way of telling the same story. In translation circles this is called a thumbprint, a voice or a presence.

By using his language in a very remarkably way, C.S.Z. has shown that his style of writing is different from that of the original author. He has used different sentence structures and explanations in areas where he felt the

source text is foreign to the target reader, avoided culture-specific concepts that might confuse the reader who is not familiar with such ideas. He has instead replaced culture-specific concepts with notions with which the target reader is familiar. C.S.Z. as a writer in his own right has been faithful to the original author by conveying the essence of the short story, but he has successfully shown that as translator one can contrive a style of one's own.

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