

## Re-oralizing the Word for Empowerment: A study of re-translation in Chichewa, with special reference to Psalm 124

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### Abstract

Chichewa is a major Bantu language widely spoken as a primary or secondary mode of communication in many areas of south-east Africa. Three major translations of the Bible were produced in this language during the twentieth century: the Protestant *Buku Lopatulika* (1922), the Catholic *Malembo Oyera* (1966), and the Interconfessional *Buku Loyera* (1998). The present study briefly investigates the different methods of translation that were employed for these Bibles in order to suggest how the last-mentioned ecumenical version has served to greatly “empower” the people, readers and hearers alike, with regard to their language, culture, theology, and a broader sense of Christian community. To illustrate this claim, selected aspects of the short Psalm 124 in these three versions are comparatively analyzed. This leads to a consideration of several additional strategies that might be implemented in order to further improve this version’s essential comprehensibility on the one hand, and its oral-aural quality, or audience-engaging popularity, on the other. In conclusion, some possible implications of this research for preparing a future enhanced, multimodal re-translation of the Chichewa Bible is proposed.

### Keywords

Bible translation, contextualization, orality, theology, performance, empowerment, Chichewa

### About the Author

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## 1. Introduction

In keeping with the main theme of the 2019 European Society for Translation Studies Congress in Stellenbosch, entitled *Living Translation: People, Processes, Products*, I wish to briefly explore one of the assembly's designated subtopics: "Translation as empowerment—new Bible (re)translations." I will do this with special reference to Psalm 124 by means of a short survey of Bible translation history in Chichewa (hereafter, "Chewa"), which is spoken as a first or second language by some 15–20 million people in the SE African nations of Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe.<sup>1</sup> During this overview we will consider the three major Bible translations that have been produced over the last century in order to see how, after an initial long period of inactivity, the Chewa-speaking people were progressively empowered through a program of (re)translation that featured new principles and procedures along with some new products that made a new version more widely and readily available to the masses. In conclusion, we will reflect on some further measures and means that can keep this process of sociocultural and scriptural revitalization going in the twenty-first century.

## 2. Three Chichewa Bible Translations

In this section I will sketch the history and nature of the three major Chewa Bible (re)translations that have been published and widely used to date.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1. *Buku Lopatulika (BP)*

Work on this ground-breaking initial Chewa translation was begun in the 1880s by a team consisting of several missionaries (David Clement Scott, Alexander Hetherwick) of the Church of Scotland Mission and their Chewa-speaking language assistants (only Che Ndombo named).<sup>3</sup> The New Testament was published in 1886, but people soon realized that this version needed revision, a task that was undertaken around the turn of the century by a newly-established joint Bible Translation Commission. A missionary team working under the leadership of Dr. Hetherwick and another gifted linguist, Rev. W. Murray of the Dutch Reformed Mission, assisted by two unnamed African teachers, finally completed their work which was published by the Bible Society of Scotland in 1906.<sup>4</sup>

Work on the Old Testament began shortly thereafter, but progress was delayed for various reasons (administrative burdens, inadequate funding, and WWI) until at last Rev. Murray's expanded team, consisting of missionaries and national translators, was able to complete the full

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**1** Chichewa is arguably the most widely-spoken "second-language" in this entire region. It used to be the "national language" of Malawi; for Zambia, as an "official language" it is referred to as Cinyanja, or more colloquially as "Nyanja" (see Ohannessian and Kashoki 1978, 40, 134, 206, 220, 232, 234, 380).

**2** For additional information about each one of these translations, see Wendland (1998, ch. 1).

**3** The names listed above were the most prominent in the sources that I referenced; however, other persons are found on the internet, for example: "Murray, William Hoppe, 1866–1947; Napier, R. H.; Ndombe (sic), Che; National Bible Society of Scotland; British and Foreign Bible Society; Union Nyanja Translation Committee; Dutch Reformed Church Mission; Church of Scotland Mission" <https://archive.org/details/bukulopatulikand00murr/page/n4>.

**4** It may be significant to point out that in these early years of colonial history, it was largely Protestant and Catholic missions that took the lead in establishing, funding, and maintaining various educational and other training institutions at the basic and advanced level for local people.

Chewa Bible in 1919. Several more years of typesetting and proof-reading were required, with the texts being slowly shuttled back and forth by land and sea mail between Africa (Nyasaland) and Europe (Scotland), before the full Bible finally appeared in published form in 1922.<sup>5</sup> This eagerly-awaited version was called the *Buku Lopatulika* (“Sacred Book”) and subtitled, *ndilo Mau a Mulungu* (“it is the Words of God”). Following the prevailing method of the time, the BP was a formal-correspondence version, one that generally followed the original wording of the Hebrew and Greek texts as closely as legible Chewa wording would allow. In addition, the initial drafts were made by non-mother-tongue missionaries, a factor that undoubtedly contributed to the periodic unnaturalness of lexical and syntactic usage that the text exhibits. However, this version has served the Protestant churches of Malawi (formerly Nyasaland) admirably well over the years, right up to the present day where it functions, in effect, as the “KJV” Bible in Chewa (Nyanja in Zambia). Minor revisions of the text and paratext (supplementary features, e.g., cross-references, section headings) were undertaken in 1936 and 1966 until a major revision was carried out more recently by national staff of the Bible Society of Malawi. This two-year project was completed in 2016 and features the following seven improvements:<sup>6</sup>

- The adoption of current Chichewa orthography rules throughout the text, e.g., *pfuko* > *fuko*; *bvuto* > *vuto*; *ciyambi* > *chiyambi*;
- Greater consistency in the use of key words and technical terms, e.g., sanctuary, linen;
- Replacement of archaic words, e.g., *makumbi* > *makonde*, *likole* > *chipinda*; *cholowera* > *chitole*, *maguta* > *makoma*, *cimbudzi* > *pamwamba penipeni*;
- Clarification of erroneous and ambiguous translations, e.g., James 2:1;
- Explanation of several textual problems, e.g., Matt. 17:21; Mark 7:16;
- Reduction of overly long paragraphs and sections;
- Addition of a glossary, table of weights and measures, parallel references, and book introductions with main themes and outlines.

So how, or in what significant ways did this particular translation of the Bible operate as a notable means of empowering Chewa-speaking people and enriching their language and culture? Leaving aside its principal spiritual or religious use, the BP was the longest piece of literature, other than dictionaries and similar reference works, available in the Chichewa language, that is, until the next translation appeared nearly forty-five years later. In audio or printed form, the verbal patterns of this Bible have also to a greater or lesser extent intertextually influenced a host of other verbal works, oral and written, sacred and secular, over the years—poems, short stories, novelettes, plays, songs, magazines, newspapers, school textbooks, radio broadcasts, and so forth.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This was a joint publication venture of the Bible Society of Scotland and the British and Foreign Bible Society.

<sup>6</sup> This information was made available at the Bible Society of Malawi website (accessed on 21/03/2019: <http://biblesociety-malawi.org/index.php/2016/02/24/buku-lopatulika-has-been-revised/>).

<sup>7</sup> Such influence occurred through actual citation, indirect allusion, or the adoption of certain of its familiar key-terms and unnatural linguistic peculiarities—i.e., Chibaibulo “Bible-ese”). In order to promote the Chichewa language, a number of out-of-print and hard-to-find publications have been posted at the following website: <https://sun.academia.edu/EWENDLAND/Chewa-Nyanja-and-Bantu-Languages>.

## 2.2. Malembo Oyera (MO)

If the *Buku Lopatulika* was the standard “church Bible” of Protestant speakers of Nyanja-Chewa, the *Malembo Oyera* (“Holy Letters/Writings”) performed that service for Catholics living in the same region of Africa. In further contrast to the BP, the MO translation was largely the product of the lifelong work of one man, Fr. Louis Villy of the White Fathers. Having learned Cinyanja during his early missionary years in Nyasaland, Fr. Villy completed a translation of the four Gospels and Acts in the 1930s. A severe illness prevented any progress in his work for many years until he was finally able to resume it twenty years later when he completed a translation of the entire New Testament (early 1950s).<sup>8</sup> Fr. Villy carried on with the Old Testament and Deuterocanonical books which were finished in draft stage about a decade later. He then undertook a revision of his complete manuscript, but now with the capable assistance of a linguistically-gifted Malawian priest, Fr. Patrick Kalilombe, who later became the Bishop of Lilongwe, the country’s capital city.<sup>9</sup> The full Bible was finally published by the Episcopal Conference of Malawi in 1966 and immediately became the officially recognized translation for all Chewa-speaking Catholics in this region of Africa. In addition to being somewhat more idiomatic stylistically than the *Buku Lopatulika*, the MO includes several other important features that distinguish it from the BP: for source texts, it is based largely on the Vulgate Latin version and the French La Sainte Bible; in addition, it includes individual book introductions as well as many helpful expository footnotes throughout the text.

## 2.3. Buku Loyera (BL)

The pair of translations surveyed above, the BP and MO, served their respective macro-church communities, Protestant and Catholic, very well over the years. But in the 1960s, when the spirit of ecumenism was especially strong throughout the world, some crucial questions arose in many parts of Africa, including the SE macro-region. For one, why do Christians still continue to rely on older missionary versions of the Scriptures in their language? And related to this, why can Christians not cooperate to produce a common version that might be used in all of their churches? Taking on this challenge, the Bible Society of Malawi, in conjunction with their colleagues in Zambia, decided to produce an “ecumenical version,” one that would be widely acceptable as a liturgical Bible by Catholics and Protestants alike, thus creating a much broader Christian community based on a common Scripture text.<sup>10</sup> This was also intended to be a completely new translation that would highlight and enrich the Chichewa (Cinyanja) language since it was drafted and produced by mother-tongue speakers, the most capable and experienced national experts that could be found for the work to serve as translators and reviewers. This broadly-based enterprise was undertaken in the mid-1960s and resulted in the publication of the *Buku Loyera* New Testament (*Chipangano*

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**8** Unfortunately, I was not able to find specific completion dates for many of these early publications, Catholic or Protestant, prior to the appearance of the full Bible.

**9** This latter detail is significant since many national priests, pastors, or professors who assisted in the work of Bible translation, whether in Chewa or other languages, Protestant or Catholic, were unable (or not permitted) to devote their full time to the task, but more often than not had to share this work with many other church-related duties. This unfortunately limited their potential contribution in diverse respects and to varying degrees, thus also making the continued assistance of expatriate advisors necessary.

**10** This aim did not include a vision of a unified theology; thus, the new translation would be carefully, sometimes specifically, worded so that it would not deny or exclude the teachings of any of the major churches that sponsored and supported this joint project. For further details regarding the organization of this project, see Wendland (1998, 26–58).

*Chatsopano*) in 1977.<sup>11</sup> It took another twenty years for the full Bible to be completed (1998) and then published by the Bible Society of Malawi,<sup>12</sup> in two separate versions—that is, with the Catholic edition including the Deuterocanonical Books.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to its ecumenical (Catholic-Protestant) foundation, there are a number of other important qualities that characterize this retranslation and distinguish it from the two earlier versions; the following is a listing of some of these distinctive features:<sup>14</sup>

- The BL is a “popular language,” meaning-orientated version, that is, composed as a dynamic “functional equivalent” of the original Hebrew/Greek text (Nida and Taber 1969, 14)<sup>15</sup> in natural (idiomatic) “contemporary language in a form that is shared by the entire population that speaks it” (Wonderly 1968, 3).<sup>16</sup> This necessitated the establishment of a detailed set of translation principles and procedures that would guide the diverse aspects of production and also serve as a means of progressively evaluating the work (Wendland 1998, ch.3).
- Similar to a “common language” version, the BL specifies its primary target audience as having a special focus on the following: lay-Christians (being intelligible to them); the younger child-bearing generation (20–35 years old); and women (who often do not have as much opportunity as men for education or travel and dialect expansion).<sup>17</sup>
- Another major concern for the target audience is BL’s focus on the needs of those who may only be listening to the biblical text, not reading it, with respect to typographical features that are unavailable to hearers for clarifying meaning, such as capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and other aspects of the page format (Nida and Taber 1969, 29–30).
- On the other hand, for readers, certain features that increase the clarity of the printed text have been introduced, such as a larger, more legible typeface, shorter paragraphs with indents, more readable footnotes, and other types of reference, like verse numbers.
- The introduction of periodic illustrations, tables, and charts is a prominent visual educative supplement for readers of the BL, while a glossary provides an explanation of important biblical concepts and technical terms.
- The project organization of the BL was much more elaborate and extensive than that of its predecessors, with a full-time translation team of three members (two Protestants and a

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**11** Note the compromise even in the name of this new Bible: *Buku* (“Book,” from the Protestant *Buku Lopatulika*) and *Loyera* (“Holy,” from the Catholic *Malembu Loyera*).

**12** The involvement of the present writer began in the early 1970s and focused mainly on the translation of the Old Testament plus a subsequent revision of the New Testament.

**13** After the appearance of the Catholic edition of the BL, no further publications of the MO were made.

**14** This is a summary listing excerpted from the much longer description and discussion in Wendland (1998, chaps. 2-3). There is also an overview of this translation from a “frames-of-reference” perspective in Wilt, ed. (2003, 259–262).

**15** As a “dynamic equivalence” (DE) translation the BL greatly differed from both the BP and the MO, which were essentially more literal, “formal correspondence” (FC) versions. Nida and Taber’s classic definition of DE translating is that it “consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style” (1969, 12 and further explained in 13–28). “Meaning” is defined with special reference to the “informative,” “expressive,” and “imperative” functions of language (1969, 24–27).

**16** This type of version is closely related to what is termed a “common language” version, that is, composed in language found in “the ‘area of overlap’ of usage common to both upper and lower classes—a variety of language which, while *acceptable* to the former, is *accessible* to the latter” (Wonderly 1968, 4, original italics). The social differences in dialect that call for the limitations of a common language translation are not as extreme in a popular language setting, and so greater freedom and flexibility is available to translators in their “use of fully contemporary language” that avoids “unnatural and unfamiliar expressions” (*ibid.*, loc cit.).

**17** These audience-defining characteristics are further described and exemplified in Nida and Taber (1968, 31–32).

Catholic) being assisted by a rather large group of reviewers, both professional (focusing on various technical aspects of the translated text) and public (laypersons who concerned themselves largely with language usage and intelligibility). Thus, a significant number of the target audience were both aware of and engaged in the process of translation from beginning to end. This greatly “democratized” the BL version and enabled future readers to give critical input regarding its production along the way, well before final publication (Wendland 1998, ch.2).

- The new translation being produced was also regularly tested for popular feedback by means of occasional one-book sample publications, by printed drafts that were widely circulated among the churches, and through periodic workshops that brought laypersons and clergy together to meet the translation team for discussions on all manner of issues pertaining to the work. Selections were also made available for broadcast on the radio and for special major public events such as annual church or synod conventions.

After the preceding overview of the three most important Bible translations in Chichewa,<sup>18</sup> we are ready to undertake a comparative study of their differing styles in order to discern firsthand and in some detail how the process of re-translation has progressively improved the relative understandability of the biblical text, thus making it clearer and more comprehensible, hence potentially useful, to an ever widening circle of the general reading and listening public.

### 3. Psalm 124: A Comparative Textual Example

This section first sets out the Hebrew text of Psalm 124 accompanied by the English Standard Version. Next, the psalm is reproduced as translated into Chichewa and formatted in each of the three versions described above; alongside, a more or less literal back-translation into English is presented. Footnotes will provide more detailed information concerning the Chewa translation and/or its English back-translation. After each translation several more general critical and/or comparative comments are given, and these will form the basis for a concluding summary and prospect for the future.

#### 3.1. Psalm 124 in Hebrew and literal English (ESV)

<p>1 שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת לְדָוִד לֹאִלֵּי יְהוָה שְׁהֵיָה לָנוּ יֵאמְרֵנָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל: 2 לֹאִלֵּי יְהוָה שְׁהֵיָה לָנוּ בְּקוֹם עָלֵינוּ אָדָם:  3 אִזֵּי חַיִּים בָּלְעוּנוּ בְּחַרֹּת אַפָּם בָּנוּ: 4 אִזֵּי הַמַּיִם שָׁטְפוּנוּ</p>	<p><b>Song of Ascents—of David</b> 1 If it had not been the LORD who was on our side— let Israel now say— 2 if it had not been the LORD who was on our side when people rose up against us, 3 then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; 4 then the flood would have swept us away,</p>
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**18** Several other Chewa translations have appeared over the years, but these may be comparatively shown to have “borrowed” rather heavily from either the earlier published BP or BL versions. Copyright laws are not often enforced in this part of the world, thus making such infringement a ready option for new “start-up” translation projects. In 2017, for example, one of these derivative versions was publicly advertised as being “the first ever Chichewa full Bible” <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/chichewa-full-bible-first-malawi/>. More recently, a new Zambian “Nyanja” re-translation project was undertaken, with the hope of publishing the NT in 2021 (Rev. Gift Nyirenda, Translation Advisor, Zambia Bible Society; personal correspondence 20/08/2020). It remains to be seen whether this version will be more SL-based or TL-oriented in style.

נַחֲלָה עָבַר עַל־נַפְשֵׁנוּ:  
 5 אֲזִי עָבַר עַל־נַפְשֵׁנוּ  
 הַמַּיִם הַזֹּדֵדִים:  
 6 בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה שֶׁלֹּא  
 נִתְּנָנוּ טֶרֶף לְשִׁנֵּיהֶם:  
 7 נַפְשֵׁנוּ כַּצִּפּוֹר נִמְלְטָה  
 מִפֶּחַ יוֹקְשֵׁים הַפֶּחַ  
 נִשְׁבַּר  
 וְאַנְחֵנוּ נִמְלְטָנוּ:  
 8 עֲזָרָנוּ בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה  
 עָשָׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ:<sup>19</sup>

the torrent would have gone over us;  
 5 then over us would have gone  
 the raging waters.  
 6 Blessed be the LORD,  
 who has not given us as prey to their teeth!  
 7 We have escaped like a bird  
 from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is  
 broken,  
 and we have escaped!  
 8 Our help is in the name of the LORD,  
 who made heaven and earth.

### 3.2. Buku Lopatulika

<p><i>Mulungu yekha walanditsa anthu ace.</i></p> <p>Nyimbo yokwerera: ya Davide</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Akadapanda kukhala nafe Yehova, Anene tsono Israeli;</li> <li>2. Akadapanda kukhala nafe Yehova, Pakutiukira anthu:</li> <li>3. Akadatimeza amoyo, Potipsera mtima wao.</li> <li>4. Akadatimeza madziwo, Mtsinje ukadapita pa moyo wathu;</li> <li>5. Madzi odzikuza akadapita pa moyo wathu.</li> <li>6. Alemekezedwe Yehova, Amene sanatipereka kumano kwao tikhale cakudya cao.</li> </ol>	<p><i>God alone delivers his people.</i></p> <p>Song for climbing up: of David<sup>20</sup></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If he had not been with us Jehovah,<sup>21</sup> So let him speak Israel;<sup>22</sup></li> <li>2. If he had not been with us Jehovah, When people rose up against us.<sup>23</sup></li> <li>3. They could have swallowed us alive, Burning against us in their heart.<sup>24</sup></li> <li>4. That water could have swallowed us,<sup>25</sup> A stream might have gone [up]on our life;<sup>26</sup></li> <li>5. Proud water might have gone upon our life.<sup>27</sup></li> <li>6. May Jehovah be praised, Who did not deliver us to their teeth (that) that we might be their food.<sup>28</sup></li> </ol>
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**19** Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: with Westminster Hebrew Morphology (2001) (electronic ed., Ps 1241–1248 (inclusive range)). Stuttgart; Glenside PA: German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary. The ESV text was made available at the following website: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/esv/psalms/24.html>.

**20** This heading does not make much sense, either in Chewa or in English.

**21** It would have been more natural in Chewa as well as English for the subject, Yehova, to have been placed at the head of the first clause to begin the psalm; the present word order would work for the repetition in v. 2a (see the PR version below).

**22** This clause is as unclear in Chewa as the English back-translation suggests.

**23** There is no reason for the use of a colon here; it simply renders the text more difficult to understand.

**24** The idiom “burning against us in their heart” is good and graphic, but it does not connect well semantically with the preceding line.

**25** The referent of “that water” is not clear, though it might possibly be construed as a metaphor referring to the “people” of vv. 2–3.

**26** This is another unnatural lexical collocation, lit. “water going [up]on”; note that the hyphen actually breaks the pronoun “our” in Chewa.

**27** The apparent figure “proud water[s]” might be an attempt to render the literal Hebrew (adjective זָדִיד), but the result is opaque in Chewa.

**28** This verse sounds as clumsy in Chewa as it does in English.

7. Moyo wathu unaonjoka ngati mbalame mu msampha wa mso-dzi; Msampha unatyoka ndi ife tina-onjoka.	7. Our life escaped like a bird in (the) trap of a fisherman. <sup>29</sup> A trap broke and we escaped. <sup>30</sup>
8. Thandizo lathu liri m'dzina la Yehova, Wolenga kumwamba ndi dziko la-pansi.	8. Our help is in the name of Jehovah. <sup>31</sup> Creator in heaven and earth below. <sup>32</sup>

Following the tradition of Scripture publications of the time (a century ago, but often continuing up to the present day), the text of the BP translation is set off in two columns of print on the page that are strictly regulated in terms of horizontal length, resulting in many awkward poetic line breaks and periodic hyphenation. Artificial typographical procedures such as this, plus overly long sentences (increased as a result of misuse of the semicolon), detracts from legibility and hence makes reading of the text rather challenging, especially when performed orally in public. The difficulty for readers is significantly increased due to the literal nature of the translation itself, coupled with the use of occasional unnatural (foreign-sounding) lexical or grammatical constructions and irregular lexical usage, as pointed out in the footnotes above. Characteristic of the Chewa version is its transliteration of the so-called “Tetragrammaton” (YHWH) by *Yehova*, a term for God’s name that was (is) not used by Catholic Christians at all (see below).

### 3.3 Malembo Oyera<sup>33</sup>

<b>Kuthokoza Ambuye Mpulumutsi</b>	<b>Thanking the Lord Savior</b>
1. Nyimbo yokwerera. Ya Davide. Yahve adakapanda kukhala nafe, Ndimu Israele anenere tsopano, 2. Yahve adakapanda kukhala nafe, M'mene anthu anali kutiukira, Adakatimeza amoyo. 3. M'mene ukali wao unali kutayikira Madzi adakatimiza;	1. 1 Song for climbing up. Of David If Yahve had not been with us, <sup>34</sup> That is how Israel should speak now, <sup>35</sup> 2. If Yahve had not been with us, <sup>36</sup> While people were rising up against us, <sup>37</sup> They could have swallowed us alive. 3. While their rage was being thrown out at us, Water could have submerged us. <sup>38</sup>

**29** There is an obvious semantic clash here involving the concepts of “bird” and “fisherman.”

**30** The Chewa word for “trap” (*msampha*) requires an appropriate demonstrative back-reference.

**31** This is a typical “biblicalism” in both Chewa and English that laypersons would have difficulty in explaining or, indeed, understanding in the first place.

**32** This translation wrongly suggests that Yahweh is creating in heaven and earth.

**33** This is numbered as Psalm 123 in MO, which follows the Vulgate numeration.

**34** The subject Yahve is correctly placed in terms of word order at the beginning of the clause (cf. BP).

**35** Similar to the BP, this line is very difficult to understand as rendered in the MO.

**36** The MO uses a non-standard Chewa form of the contrary-to-fact conditional infix on the verb, thus reversing BP’s *-kada-* to *-daka-*.

**37** As in the BP, the “people” being referred to are not clearly defined as to who they might be.

**38** The semantic relationship between the two lines of this verse is ambiguous in the translation.

4. Mfleni udakapitirira pa ife, Madzi otupa adakapita pa ife.	4. A stream could have gone past upon us, <sup>39</sup> Swollen water[s] could have gone [up]on us.
5. Ngwodala Yahve, amene sanatipereke Kuti tikhale cakudya ca mano ao.	5. Blessed [be] Yahve, who did not give us over That we might be food for their teeth.
6. Mzimu wathu anauonjola ngati mbalame, Mu msampha wa anthu osaka.	6. Our spirit he released like a bird, In a trap of hunters. <sup>40</sup>
7. Msampha unasweka, Ndipo ife tinapulumuka.	7. [The] trap broke, <sup>41</sup> And we were rescued.
8. Cithandizo cathu ciri m'dzanja la Yahve, Amene anapanga dziko la kumwamba ndi dziko la pansi pano.	8. Our great help is in the hand of Yahve, <sup>42</sup> Who made the land of heaven <sup>43</sup> and the land of here below.

On the one hand, the text of the MO is easier to read because of the complete lines (no breaks); on the other hand, in order to achieve this, the font size of the published Chewa text had to be reduced to a point where it is hardly legible on the printed page. A more natural lexical and syntactic Chewa style is generally manifested in the text (more than in the BP), but as described in the footnotes, many difficult readings still remain due to the basically literal rendering of the original text and usages that point to a non-MT translator. Finally, the use of *Yahve* for YHWH (“Yahweh”) clearly marks this as a Bible for Chewa-speaking Catholic Christians!

### 3.4. Buku Loyera

<b>Mulungu, Mpulumutsi wa anthu ake</b>	<b>God, Savior of his people<sup>44</sup></b>
Nyimbo ya Davide yoimba Pokwera ku Yerusalemu	A song of David for singing When climbing to Jerusalem
1. Chauta akadapanda kukhala pa mbali yathu, Israele anene choncho tsopano,	1. If Chauta had not been on our side, <sup>45</sup> Israel, speak like this now, <sup>46</sup>
2. Chauta akadapanda kukhala pa mbali yathu, pamene anthu adatiwukira,	2. If Chauta had not been on our side, when people rose up against us,
3. bwenzi atatimeza amoyo, muja mkwiyo wao udatiyakira,	3. then they might have swallowed us alive, since their anger had ignited against us,
4. bwenzi chigumula chitatisesa, madzi amkokomo atatikokolola,	4. then a flood might have swept us away, thunderous water might have carried us,

**39** Besides being unclear, the term stream/watercourse/canal (*mfuleni*) also has an unwanted homonym—a castrated ram/bull/hog! It is also a dialectal (Ngoni) word—not “pure” Chewa.

**40** The MO shifts the agency of the main verb “escape” from “we” to “he” (i.e., *Yahve*); however, the object of the verb is also changed—from the expected “us” to “our (ancestral) spirit” (*mzimu*), which greatly confuses the intended meaning of this verse.

**41** It is not clear whether the trap “broke” fortuitously of its own accord, or whether it was broken by Yahweh.

**42** The change from Yahweh’s “name” (BP) to his “hand” in MO is somewhat clearer, but it still sounds rather unnatural.

**43** The qualifier “land” (*dziko*) works for earth, but not in parallel also with the preceding “heaven.”

**44** The heading should state, more precisely: *Chauta* for “YHWH,” rather than *Mulungu* “God.”

**45** *Chauta* is the name used to refer to the traditional Creator-God of the Chewa people (see further below).

**46** Though more understandable than either the BP or MO, the sense of this line in the BL is still puzzling.

5. bwenzi madzi amphamvu atatimiza.	5. then powerful water might have submerged us. <sup>47</sup>
6. Atamandike Chauta, amene sadatipereke kwa anthuwo kuti atiwononge.	6. May Chauta be praised, who didn't hand us over to those people so that they could destroy us.
7. Taonjoka ngati mbalame mu msampha wa osaka, msampha wathyoka, ndipo ife tapulumuka.	7. We escaped like birds in a trap of hunters, [the] trap broke, and we were delivered.
8. Chithandizo chathu chimachokera kwa Chauta, amene adalenga kumwamba ndi dziko lapansi.	8. Our help comes from Chauta, who created [in] heaven and the earth. <sup>48</sup>

Even in translation (via English), readers can readily discern that the BL is a more meaningful, “user-friendly” translation of the original Hebrew psalm of thanksgiving<sup>49</sup> than its two predecessors, the BP and MO. More natural, contemporary lexical usage and syntactic constructions are manifested throughout the text, which results in a translation that is more “readable”—that is, orally—and hence also understandable audibly alone, namely, without reference to the written text. There is still a problem posed by the lineation since width restrictions resulting from the dual-column format cause unnatural breaks and carry-overs in the text of the translation. On the other hand, the two distinct portions of Psalm 124 are clearly indicated by a line-space between verses 5 and 6. A major feature that distinguishes the BL, not only from its two predecessors but also from most Bibles throughout the world, is its use of *Chauta* to designate the Tetragrammaton, Yahweh. This was a strategic and well-considered decision, based on these major factors: (a) *Chauta* is the popular (familiar) and specific Chewa name for the Creator-deity (hence analogous to Yahweh) and thus distinct from the generic classifying noun “God” (~ *Elohim*); (b) neither *Yehova* (BP) or *Yahve* (MO) could be used so that the translation team would not be accused of favoring either Protestants or Catholics respectively; (c) typical English (and other) language ways of dealing with this issue—e.g., use of the term “LORD” in small caps—encounters the same problems, namely, referential ambiguity in certain biblical contexts and in a Chewa sociolinguistic setting, where the term *Ambuye* (a plural of the singular noun *Mbuye*) may refer to: (a) most frequently, the Lord [Jesus Christ], as in the NT, (b) a lord/master in a socially-superior sense, (c) a grandparent or clan leader, and (d) one’s maternal uncle.<sup>50</sup>

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**47** A more current and natural form of the contrary-to-fact conditional construction is marked by the initial word *bwenzi* at the onset of the “then” portion.

**48** As in the BP, the reference *kumwamba* is ambiguous; it would naturally mean “in/at heaven” (lit., “to up above”), but it is obviously intended to mean “the heavens” (as an object of the verb “create”), which is, more accurately expressed, *zakumwamba* “the things up above” (see the PR below).

**49** A “psalm of thanksgiving” typically praises the Lord God (vv. 6–8) for having delivered the psalmist, and in this case also his people (a “communal” psalm), from some dire situation in life (e.g., illness, death), or a dangerous enemy (vv. 1–5).

**50** For more background information on the choice of *Chauta* to designate YHWH and explanation concerning other key biblical terms as translated in the BL, see Wendland (1998, ch. 4).

## 4. Towards Further Re-oralization in Translation

We have concluded that the *Buku Loyera* Chichewa translation is a version that may rightly be characterized as being democratically “of, by, and for” the people in the sense that this project was largely planned, administered, managed, composed, as well as published by, and intended for, the majority of mother-tongue speakers of the language. It is undoubtedly a “re-translation” because the translation team made continual reference to both the BP and the MO versions as they carried out their work, especially when dealing with difficult or challenging passages of Scripture and corresponding key biblical-theological terms, such as, sin, law, grace, mercy, save, baptize, and so forth. As a result, this ecumenical version has also “empowered” the people in various important ways, for example: by promoting a better understanding of the Bible and the Christian religion; by acting as a model for contextualizing, or localizing, key biblical concepts; by serving as the basis for new musical (hymns) and liturgical resources; by serving as an important resource text for the purposes of evangelism as well as in catechetical and theological training; and—significantly, moving now beyond the boundaries of Chichewa—by being utilized as a “model version” for other (related) Bantu language Bible translation projects in the region (e.g., Sena and Tumbuka of Malawi; Tonga and Bemba of Zambia).<sup>51</sup>

However, the preceding overview of Psalm 124 in the BL has also revealed several ways in which this version might be revised, or re-translated again, with a view towards improving its communicative potential in these respects, through introducing: (a) a more legible, “readerly” typographical format, (b) a more poetic literary style in Chichewa,<sup>52</sup> and (c) a translated text that readily lends itself to an oral-aural articulation in public performance. This new “poetic rendition” (PR, displayed below) was prepared with the assistance of seminary students who participated in my Psalms exegetical course (2019).<sup>53</sup>

### 4.1. Poetic Rendition (PR)—Spoken

<b>Chauta ndiye Mpulumutsi wa anthu ake</b>	<b>Chauta he is [the] Savior of his people</b>
<i>Nyimbo ya Davide yoimba opembedza okwera ku Yerusalemu</i>	<i>A song of David for singing worshippers climbing to Jerusalem</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Chauta akadapanda kukhala nafe, (Aisraele onse inu, muvomeretu!)</li> <li>2. akadapanda Chauta kukhala nafe, pamene adani athu adatiwukira,</li> <li>3. bwenzi iwowo atatimeza amoyo, muja mkwiyo wao uja udatiyakira.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If Chauta had not been with us, (may all you Israelites respond!)</li> <li>2. if he, Chauta, had not been with us, when our enemies rose up against us,</li> <li>3. then those ones would have swallowed us alive, Since that rage of these [people] had burned against us.</li> </ol>

**51** As a Translation Consultant for the United Bible Societies in this sub-region for over 30 years, I can attest to this wider, interlinguistic usage of the BL in many other translation projects that I was responsible for overseeing. Having such a reliable model version available in a major Bantu language makes the drafting of texts in any related language much easier and generally more accurate than the use of English versions, which frequently are not very well understood by the translators.

**52** My study of traditional and modern Chichewa poetry (*ndakatulo*) and its application to Bible translation is documented in Wendland (1993, ch. 3; 2017, ch. 7).

**53** I prepared the initial draft which was printed out and critiqued by the students; the most helpful comments and suggested revisions were offered by David Kalimankhoma (see also below).

4. Bwenzi chigumula chitatisesadi— madzi amkokomo atatikokolola,	4. Then a watery flood would have swept us away—thunderous waters might have carried us along,
5. bwenzi mafunde aatali atatimiza.	5. then high waves would have submerged us.
6. Atamandike Chauta, Mpulumutsi, amene sadatipereke kwa adaniwo kuti ationonge ifetu kungoti psiti!	6. May Chauta be praised, Savior, who did not hand us over to the enemies so that they might destroy us—completely!
7. Inde, ife tinaonjoka nga' mbalame mu msampha wa osakawo, komaa— msampha adauthyola, tapulumuka!	7. Yes, we escaped like unt[o] birds In a trap of those hunters, but— [the] trap broke, we escaped!
8. Amene amatilanditsa ndiye Chauta, Wolenga zakumwamba ndi pansipo.	8. The one who delivers us is Chauta, Creator of the things above and below.

We note how the PR has been “re-oralized” and made readable to a much greater degree than even the BL, for example, with respect to these two principal features: (a) individualized poetic “lines” with no overlapping, which creates natural “utterance units,” and (b) a larger typeface accompanied by standard punctuation (e.g., not capitalizing every line). In addition, the text has been further “poeticized” linguistically in several important respects, including: (a) a balanced, rhythmic lineation, (b) introduction of more demonstratives and emphatic or intensifying words and enclitics, (c) a more flexible word order and lexical combinations to highlight the audible “soundscape” of the text, and (d) an increased use of literary devices, such as: authorial parenthesis [v. 1b], verbal specification [“enemies” for “people,” v. 2b], figurative language [v. 5], ideophone [v. 6c], intensifier plus abbreviation [v. 7a], enjambment [v. 7b], and more specification [v. 8a].

#### 4.2. Poetic Rendition—Sung

One of the students in the Psalms class, Mr. David Kalimankhoma, produced a hymned version of Psalm 124 as a paraphrase of the *Buku Loyera* version above. The text of this hymn, which is sung to a traditional Chewa melody, is as follows:<sup>54</sup>

Atamandike Mulungu Wathu	May Our God Be Praised
1. Atamandike Mulungu wathu potiteteza ife. Sanaloletu kuti adani, ationongetu.  <i>Akanapanda kukhala nafe pomwe anthuwo 'natiukira, bwenzi atatimeza amoyo— 'we Israyeli, imba! [chibwezere]</i>	1. May our God be praised for protecting us. He never allowed our enemies to totally destroy us.  <i>If he had not been with us when those people rose against us, they would have swallowed us alive, O you Israel, sing! [refrain]</i>
2. Ndi mkwiyo wao 'datiyakira, bwenzi atatisesa. Madzi amphamvu atatimiza ndikutikokolola.	2. With their rage burning against us, they would have swept us away. Mighty waters would've submerged us and carried us away.

<sup>54</sup> A recording of Mr. Kalimankhoma's sung performance of this psalm may be heard at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QRdXNpnQjc>.

<p>3. Taonjakatu ngati mbalame; taombolewa ife. Msampha watyoka, tapulumuka mu gonga la oipa.</p>	<p>3. We completely escaped like birds; we have been delivered. The trap broke, we've been saved from the snare of wicked people.</p>
<p>4. Thandizo lathu limachokera kwa Chauta wa m'mwamba, Wolenga zonse ndi kuzisunga— atamandike Yahweh!</p>	<p>4. Our help comes from Chauta of heaven, Creator and Keeper of all things— may Yahweh be praised!</p>

It is difficult to appreciate the preceding written version in silence—and even when recited aloud, it does not greatly impress. But when the text of this rendition is combined in song with its familiar melody, it conveys a powerful, impactful message indeed. The words of this lively psalm thus find their proper, most likely intended medium of communication.

## 5. Greater Audience Engagement via Enhanced Multimodal Translation

To conclude, in this short study we have seen a progression in (re)translation technique that has moved slowly over the years, right up to the present day and towards a greater measure of communicability in overall message transmission. These developments have involved aspects of form, content, and function—for example, with respect to the format of the translated text for increased legibility;<sup>55</sup> a translation methodology that seeks greater linguistic naturalness and clarity of meaning in the target text;<sup>56</sup> and the ideal goal of producing an ecumenical translation (one serving the entire Chewa-speaking Christian community) that is more easily read and heard in public performance, which in the case of the Scriptures is the most frequent venue of usage. A more participatory, context-perceptive, listener-oriented version of this nature has the additional aim of educating as well as empowering the people by promoting increased access to the Word of God in terms of both clearly understanding the biblical text and applying it locally within their contemporary social and religious environment.

Nowadays, with the increased technologies and means of communication that are available, it should be possible to make much faster progress in these, and other areas, through “multimodal” translation (Kress 2010). This is a translated text conveyed more manifestly through several media virtually simultaneously (e.g., audio and visual) and by making various paratextual aids available for immediate oral or written access (e.g., descriptive-expository notes,<sup>57</sup> introductions, intertextual cross-references, a glossary, lexical concordance, pictures, illustrations, graphs, charts, and so forth). There are many electronic tools available today for creating such multimodalized texts

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**55** This might include the use of novel formatting and design features that highlight the structural contours of a printed text, for example, the chiasmic structural arrangement of the second portion of Psalm 124, i.e., (A) praise Yahweh (6), (B) reason: escape from snare (7a); (B') reason: broken snare allows escape (7b), (A') reason: praise Yahweh! (8) (see Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; Wendland and Louw 1993).

**56** For example, the application of a literary functional-equivalence (LiFE) translating approach (Wendland 2013, 64–66; 2017, 289–294).

**57** Such notes would be carefully contextualized to apply the biblical text at hand to the local sociocultural setting of the primary consumer audience (Wilt and Wendland 2009, *passim*; 2017, 371–372, 415, 432–433).

and also for transmitting them,<sup>58</sup> whether in some local setting of worship and Bible study—or worldwide via the internet using ubiquitous cellphone technology. Through such diverse means it is also possible to encourage more widespread audience personal engagement, and thus also greater “enablement,” via online feedback mechanisms that can make people’s concerns, criticisms, and contributions immediately available to the translation’s producers (and subsequent revisers) for serious consideration, corrective action, and in the end, greater responsibility and accountability with respect to their envisaged typical “consumers” of God’s Word.<sup>59</sup>

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**58** For example, a multifaceted website could be created that could display new (draft) poetic translations of the Psalms (or selected psalms) accompanied by links to sound recordings (YouTube—e.g., Psalm 6 in Chewa: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZA-gIP2FP5c>), varied visual aids, and background study notes that pertain to both the original Hebrew text and its TL translation. Electronic devices also make periodic revised or even new (re)translations more feasible in terms of time, cost, and staff involvement (of translators, reviewers, technical consultants, and text producers).

**59** Though conveyed by a mass medium of communication, a translation should still be targeted as much as possible in terms of a specific group of potential users—for example, a more dynamic poetic rendition of Psalm 124 with Christian youth groups in mind, for their adaptation to song and/or oral recitation.