

Challenges and Strategies in Translating Chinese and English Prepositions into Standard Shona

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Introduction

The present paper seeks to explore challenges and strategies in translating either Chinese or English prepositions into Shona. Prepositions exist in English and Chinese as distinct words and due to their absence (or rather unclear nature in Shona) a number of native speakers of Shona language find it difficult to acquire them when learning these two languages. Also, as a native speaker of Shona working as a Chinese language teacher, I have seen firsthand the difficulty language learners experience between the prepositions of Chinese and Shona. According to Myers, prepositions from English are not captured in Shona language as independent lexical items; rather they exist as inflecting morphemes (850). This however contradicts the general definition of the term *prepositions* as will be discussed later. In this paper, we examine prepositions in Chinese and English in relation to how they are translated into Shona. There are 150 prepositions in English and about 120 prepositions in Chinese (Campbell & Matuz, 26); however, when these prepositions are translated into Shona they become morphemes or locatives.

Hagège argues that while “English has prepositions, some languages have postpositions, others have both; and yet others have kinds that are not quite either” (1). Shona being a synthetic-agglutinative language (Dechaine, Burton and Bateson 197), it is therefore likely that prepositions in other languages are translated into some form of morphemes which are not recognized as prepositions.

It is rare to find teachers of Shona language teaching prepositions to native speakers of Shona. However, when learning other languages such as English or Chinese, teachers will have to teach how to use prepositions in these languages. For instance, when teaching Shona to learners whose native language is that kind of language where prepositions have equal importance as other grammatical words or when native speakers of Shona learn such languages it becomes challenging for learners. It is under these circumstances that it becomes necessary to translate a given English or Chinese preposition into Shona.

Prepositions are a grammatically distinct class of words. They refer to those elements in a phrase used “to express a relation in space between two or more entities or a relation in time between two events, or various other abstract relations such as instrument and cause” (Carter and McCarthy 462). In English, words such as *on*, *under*, *between*, *during*, *with* and *at* are examples of prepositions. In English prepositions precede their complements as in the sentence “he is **at**

home”, however in languages such as Chinese prepositions follow their complements as in the following Chinese phrase:

房间里 (*house in*)

Fangjian li

In the house

In the above example, the Chinese preposition 里 (li) which is translated as “in” is placed after its object. In both languages the words 里 (li) and “in” are both identified as prepositions. However, in Shona the equivalent of these words is not termed *preposition*, rather it is a noun prefix for classes of nouns that begin with the prefix *mu-*. Translating a preposition into a prefix is the major challenge that native speakers of Shona face when they learn other languages. It is therefore necessary to document the different challenges faced when translating English or Chinese prepositions into Shona language. In order to assist native speakers of Shona learning foreign languages, it is also necessary to identify the strategies which are used when translating Chinese or English prepositions into Shona language.

Data Collection

To achieve the goals of the study, the present research largely used desk research. Data was collected mainly from textbooks and the internet. For Chinese prepositions, 50 commonly used prepositions cited in Lǚ’s (2002) book “Eight Hundred Words in Modern Chinese” were selected. Lǚ’s book “Eight Hundred Words in Modern Chinese” discusses 800 words which are commonly used in Chinese language. Out of these 800 words, 60 of them are prepositions. A large number of commonly used Chinese prepositions were selected in order to accommodate the various types of prepositions that exist in Chinese.

These prepositions were then used as key words on search engines such as *Baidu.com* and *google.com* to find simple phrases where these prepositions are used. The phrases were then translated into Shona. The aim was to find the closest possible equivalents of these phrases in Shona in order to equate each Shona word to the corresponding words in Chinese and English. This helped in comparing and contrasting the English and Chinese sentences with prepositions and their possible equivalents in Shona, hence it was then possible to identify the possible substitutes of prepositions in Shona.

A Brief Survey of Equivalence of English Prepositions in Shona

In this section we will present a brief survey of equivalence of English prepositions in Shona as implied in other authors’ works. A general survey of the available literature shows that there are few studies of prepositions in Shona. What is available are sketchy paragraphs related to prepositions in Shona. For instance Hawkinson and Hyman mention that *ku-* in the phrase ‘*Akanyorera tsamba kumwana*’ (S/he wrote a letter **to** his/her child) is a preposition equivalent to the English preposition “to” (57). This equivalent of the preposition “to” is regarded in Shona as a locative noun prefix.

Cameron Smith, a Shona second language learner born in Scotland, made remarkable contributions towards the subject of prepositions in relation to Shona. Smith on his website www.shonalanguage.info offers Shona language lessons and Shona language research links. According to Smith there are three main prepositions in Shona which are: *ku-* (to, from), *pa-* and its allomorphs *pe-* and *po-* (on, around, by, at) and *mu-*(in). Smith mentions that ‘these are just the main ones’ giving the impression that there are other minor ones. On the other hand, Bliss proposes that, in Shona, the noun class prefixes that are used with locative applied objects function as prepositions to assign lexical case to the applied object. Thus Bliss’ proposition is that noun prefixes in class 16 /*pa-*/, 17 /*ku-*/ and 18/*mu-*/ should be defined as prepositions. Consequently, the majority of English prepositions are translated into Shona noun prefixes.

On a website called “Learn101: Learn Languages”, which is run and maintained by unknown authors with lessons for about 104 languages, there is more information on prepositions in Shona. On their eighth lesson of Shona grammar, 20 English prepositions were translated as follows:

English	Shona	English	Shona
above	<i>pamusoro</i>	behind	<i>kumashure</i>
under	<i>pasi</i>	far from	<i>kurene</i>
before	<i>pamberi</i>	near	<i>pedyo</i>
after	<i>pashure</i>	in	<i>mu-</i>
inside	<i>mukati</i>	outside	<i>panze</i>
<u>and</u>	<i>uye</i>	in front of	<i>kumberikwe-</i>
with	<i>na-</i>	about	<i>nezve</i>
without	<i>pasina</i>	<u>but</u>	<i>asi</i>
between	<i>pakati</i>	for	<i>nokuda</i>
from	<i>kubva</i>	to	<i>ku-</i>

This is one of the few attempts ever done to present direct equivalents of English prepositions in Shona. However, there are problems associated with the translation. For instance, their inclusion of the above underlined conjunctives “and” (*uye*) as well as “but” (*asi*) as prepositions seem to contradict the linguistic definition of prepositions. Apart from the above noted error, all the bold Shona equivalents given above, such as *pakati*, *kubva* and *panze*, are Shona nouns known as locatives (also known as nouns of locality). Does this mean that prepositions in Shona are actually nouns of locality? It is important to note that Smith thinks that there are three main Shona prepositions; however, what he identified as prepositions are actually prefixes for Shona nouns of class 16, 17 and 18. On the other hand, on <http://learn101.org/> lessons what is translated as prepositions are actually nouns of Shona classes 16, 17 and 18.

Kimenyi mentioned that just as in Zulu, the morpheme “*nga-*” (lets) is used in Shona as a preposition (1). His analysis presents two major problems: (1) The examples he gives are

dialectal phrases such as “titaureny **ngehukudzenyu**” (tell us about your chickens) which is supposed to be “titaureny **nezvehuku dzenyu**” in standard Shona; (2) In his examples /*nga*/ does not seem to have any justified prepositional function since the examples he gives are actually a variation of /*ne*/ which is realized as /*nge*/ in the Manyika and Ndau dialects. The morphemes /*nga*-/ and /*nge*-/ are not interchangeable, but are rather distinct morphemes independent of each other even when they are used in the Ndau dialect. This error is likely a result of the researcher’s inadequate knowledge of the Shona language.

The work already done by researchers mentioned above, such as Kimenyi, Smith and Bliss, is enough to give a starting point for the present research on the challenges and strategies in translating Chinese or English prepositions into Shona. It can be concluded that locatives or locative prefixes as well as adverbial words function as informal equivalences of prepositions in Shona. In Shona there are some morphemes that, in one way or another, substitute for prepositions.

Organization and Analysis of Translated Prepositional Phrases

The challenges and strategies in translating Chinese and English prepositions into Shona is principally based on the question: what happens when prepositional phrases are translated from other languages to Shona? After translating English and Chinese prepositional phrases, the data was then grouped according to the changes that took place in the preposition after translation of the whole phrase. In the translations, as already mentioned, an attempt was made to maintain the formal equivalence of each phrase both at the lexical and the semantic levels. Cross translation of prepositional phrases into Shona equivalent phrases shows that there are at least three strategies by which prepositions in other languages are translated into Shona. These strategies include: (1) Total exclusion of the preposition; (2) Substitution of the preposition with other grammatical words and (3) Substitution with close equivalents which will be termed semi-equivalents.

Preposition Exclusion

Translation of Chinese and English prepositions showed that there are certain prepositions which are totally excluded when translated into Shona. These prepositions do not seem to have any equivalence in the translated phrases. This was common in those phrases where the preposition is derived from a verb or noun as in the following examples:

你	给	我	站住
<i>Ni</i>	<i>gei</i>	<i>wo</i>	<i>zhanzhu</i>
you	give	me	stop

The above phrase translates into Shona as “*ive mira*,” which means in English “you, stop!” In this phrase the Chinese preposition “*gei*” (also not available in English), which sometimes functions as a verb (give), disappears when translated into either Shona or English. The same

happens with the sentence that uses the preposition 把, which is also derived from the traditional Chinese verb “to hold” as in the phrase 把书放在桌子上.

把	书	放在	桌子	上
<i>ba</i>	<i>shu</i>	<i>Fang zai</i>	<i>zhuozij</i>	<i>shang</i>
take	book	Put on	table	top

The above phrase in Shona, *isa Bhuku pamusoro petafura*, translates into English as “put the book on the table.” In this prepositional phrase, the preposition **ba** disappears when translated into Shona as shown in the following translated phrase; (*isa bhuku patafura*; put the book on the table). A similar trend was also observed with some prepositions that show direction of action, as in the following example;

他	一直	向	窗户	看
<i>ta</i>	<i>yizhi</i>	<i>xiang</i>	<i>chuanghu</i>	<i>kan</i>
He	continuously	towards	window	look

(Shona: *aramba akangotarira panze*)
 (English: He keeps looking **towards** the window)

In the following example, the Shona *aramba akangotarira panze* translates into English as “He keeps looking *towards* the window.” The preposition *xiang* (translated as towards in English) is a preposition that indicates an action performed towards a given referral point and that could not be translated into Shona, thus there was exclusion of the preposition in the Shona equivalent phrase. The same happens with all other Chinese prepositions which are similar to “向*xiang*” such as “往*wang*” and “朝*chao*”.

Substitution of Prepositions

In substitution, a given preposition from a foreign language does not disappear as seen in the above examples where there is total exclusion of the equivalent word. Rather, another linguistic item from a different grammatical category substitutes for the preposition. The majority of English and Chinese prepositions translated into Shona are normally substituted by adverbs or verbal extensions. In this comparative analysis, three forms of substitutions of prepositions that take place in Shona were identified. The first one is when Shona adverbs take precedence over prepositions as in the following examples.

她	跟	同学	聊天
<i>ta</i>	<i>gen</i>	<i>tongxue</i>	<i>liaotian</i>
she	with	classmates	chat

(English: She chats **with** classmates')

(Shona: *arikukurukuranevaanodzidzanavo*)

昨天	她	与	他	的	爸爸	说话了
<i>zuotian</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>yu</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>baba</i>	<i>shuohua le</i>
Yesterday	she	and	he	Possessive	father	spoke
				particle		

(English: 'she spoke to his father yesterday')

(Shona: *akataura nababavakenezuro*)

In these phrases **na-** and **ne-** were identified as substitutes of Chinese prepositions 跟 *gen* and 与 *yu* (English preposition "by" or "with"). Fortune (1984) states that /*na-*/ (and its allomorphs *ne-* and *no-*) is an adverbial inflecting morpheme in Shona which shows how an action was accomplished, for instance; *arohwa nesimbi* (she/he was hit by an iron object), shows that the act of hitting was done using an iron object.

Prepositions from Chinese and English are also substituted by verbal extensions in the Shona language. For instance, 给 *gei* (for) has two different prepositional functions in Chinese and is equivalent to Shona verbal extension ‘-*er-*’. 给 *gei* and 为 *wei* are normally used to show that the subject did some action for the object. When such phrases with the preposition 给 *gei* and 为 *wei* are translated into Shona, they become applied verbal extensions as in the following example:

他	为	我	买	了	一	个	手机
<i>ta</i>	<i>wei</i>	<i>wo</i>	<i>mai</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>yi</i>	<i>ge</i>	<i>shouji</i>
he	Preposition	me	buy	Past	single	Measure	Cell
	showing			tense		word	phone
	direction of						
	action						

The above phrase which means "She bought me a phone: *anditengera fon*?" can be also written as 她给我买了一个手机 [*ta gei wo mai le yi ge shouji*] (Shona: *anditengera fon*. English: She bought a phone **for** me). In this example, *gei* and *wei* (for) are equivalent to the applied extension /-*er-*/. When 给 *gei* is used as the preposition 被 *bei* (by), it will translate into a Shona passive extension followed by an adverbial inflection *ne-* as shown in the following examples.

冰箱	里	的	冰淇淋	被	我	吃	光了
<i>bingxiang</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>bingqilin</i>	<i>bei</i>	<i>wo</i>	<i>chi</i>	<i>guang le</i>
fridge	in	particle	ice-cream		me	eat	<i>all</i>

(English: all the ice-cream which was in the fridge has been eaten by me
 Shona: *Aizikirimu yese yanga irimufirijiyadyiwa neni.*)

我	的	包	被(给)	小偷	偷	走	了
<i>wo</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>bao</i>	<i>bei(or gei)</i>	<i>xiaoton</i>	<i>ton</i>	<i>zou</i>	<i>le</i>
me	particle	bag	Passive particle	thief	steal	walk	Past tense

(English: My bag has been stolen by a thief)
 Shona: *bhegirangurabiwanembavha*.)

In the following example **gei** and **bei**, which are frequently used prepositions in Chinese, are also substituted by Shona passive extension *-w-*.

Semi-equivalents

Those phrases which are grouped into semi-equivalents include some Shona morphemes with meanings equated with the Chinese prepositions and are mentioned by other scholars as “prepositions” in Shona. These prepositions will be termed semi-equivalent prepositions in this research, mainly because the enquiry into the nature of Shona prepositions still needs more clarification. Some examples include the following phrases:

妈妈	在	家
<i>mama</i>	<i>zai</i>	<i>jia</i>
mother	at	home

(English: mother is at home)
 (Shona: *mai vari pamba* or *mai vari kumba*)

In the above phrase, **pa-** and **ku-** are both identified as equivalent morphemes of the Chinese preposition **zai** (English preposition **at**). The Chinese preposition **zai** translates into noun prefixes 16 (pa-), 17 (ku-) and 18 (mu-). Also, when the Chinese preposition 对 *dui* (to or for) and its related preposition 对于 *duiyu* (to) are translated into Shona, they also seem to fall into this class of locatives because they indicate the direction of an action, as in the following example:

他	对	你	说	了	什么?
<i>ta</i>	<i>dui</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>shuo</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>shenme?</i>
He	To	you	say	(Past tense Particle)	What

(English: What did he say to you?)
 (Shona: *ati chii kwauri?*)

In this example **kwa-** is a semi-equivalent of the Chinese preposition **dui** (or **to** in English) which indicates an action performed towards a reference point without any movement being involved. **Kwa** has the same function as **ku**; however, the two complement each other. For instance one can say **kwaChivi** (in Chivi) [Chivi is a name of a place in Zimbabwe] but cannot say **kuChivi**, at the same time one can say **kuHarare** (in Harare) [Harare is the capital city of Zimbabwe] but it is not possible to say **kwaHarare**. **Kwa-** is used when the preceding name of place originates from a name of person, thus giving the sense that the place is owned by that given person.

Discussion of the Nature of Prepositions in Shona Language

Through a cross comparative examination of the appearance of English and Chinese prepositions in translated Shona phrases, it is possible to understand the various strategies used in capturing prepositions in Shona. These strategies can only be achieved by somebody who has a high command of the source language (Shona) and target language (in this case either Chinese or English). However, for a Chinese or English beginner learner, it is not easy to translate prepositions or any post-prepositions. Beginners to intermediate level learners are bound to make serious errors when it comes to translating or constructing prepositional phrases. This is the core of this present research. Since there are no equivalent of Chinese or English prepositions in Shona, learners of these two languages will find it hard to acquire such components of the language.

This study, therefore, helps teachers and learners to have a better understanding of the nature of prepositions in Shona. As already noted above, when some Shona non-prepositional phrases are translated into another language they become prepositional phrases. Also, in some cases, substitution of prepositions by other Shona inflectional morphemes takes place. The most controversial occurs when some prepositional phrases are translated into what can be termed semi-equivalent prepositional phrases.

From the above analysis it can be argued that the locative prefixes that exist in Shona class 16, 17 and 18, which are */pa-, ku-, mu/* respectively, are noun prefixes in Shona, thus they are not regarded as possessives. The syntactic behaviour of these locative markers is described by Caha and Pantcheva as distinct from that of adpositions (1). Adposition is a general term to cover preposition, postposition, and circumposition (Zhang 1). These locative markers are, in a way, complex prefixes in the sense that they have a double function; they serve to indicate location of the preceding stem while at the same time they are noun prefixes. Thus, they are bound morphemes. These morphemes (*pa-, ku- mu-*) are part of a superior construction (nouns) that absorbs the function of prepositions. Instead of defining locative markers as prepositions Shona locative nouns should be understood as special nouns that substitute for the function of prepositions. The nature of these nouns self-defines the spatial relationship with the subject.

From the above examples it can be argued that Chinese and English prepositions are translated into other Shona grammatical words which make them insignificant especially to

native speakers of Shona. As already stated equivalents of Chinese and English prepositions in Shona are captured basically as bound morphemes, they are therefore inseparable from certain nouns in a specific class, which makes it easy to grasp and unnecessary to enquire much on their use in the broader perspective. In short, the understanding of noun classes seems to supersede the necessity of learning the use of prepositions in Shona. This is the reason why there are few native speakers of Shona who write about prepositions in Shona. Those who try to equate English prepositions to Shona language parts do so in order to identify those parts of speech that might be equivalent to their own understanding of the language as guided by their native languages. This is quite common in second language learning. Lado (1957) argues that when we are confronted with a new language, we naturally use our own native languages to find similar aspects. In this respect it is clear that our curiosity about prepositions is quite low because we do not have them in our native language (Shona).

Lado also observes that for second language learners, “those elements which are similar to [the learner's] native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult” (2). This suggests that when native speakers of Shona language learn either Chinese or English they might have problems in acquiring prepositions. Fries noted that, “the most effective materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner” (9).

Conclusion

This study reveals that prepositions from Chinese and English are translated into Shona equivalents, which are realized as adverbs, verb extensions, and locative prefixes depending on the type of relationships that are being conveyed. The cross translations of Chinese and English phrases with prepositions to Shona show that certain Shona equivalent phrases do not have direct equivalent prepositions. As a result, some English or Chinese prepositional phrases are translated into Shona phrases with no prepositional equivalence. The major challenge that is faced by native speakers of Shona when they learn English and or Chinese is that it is difficult for them to construct propositional phrases in target languages. This challenge is mainly caused by the fact that in Shona, the propositions (from other languages) do not appear as independent words, rather they are morphemes which are attached to either nouns (as noun prefixes) or to verbs (as in verbal extensions). This challenge calls attention to researchers who are native speakers of Shona with adequate linguistic knowledge to investigate the concept of prepositions in Shona as well as methods of translating prepositions from other languages into Shona, which include translation through substitution of prepositions and translation through total exclusion of preposition equivalents.

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