

**ENGLISH TRANSLATION AND CONNOTATIVE-SEMANTIC EXPLICATION
OF THE KANURI POEM *LEMINI LEMINI YANI CHARI***

Abubakar Bukar

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF MAIDUGURI

BORNO STATE, NIGERIA

baakauwa64@gmail.com

Abstract

This work is a translation of the poem Lemini Lemini Yani Chari which was originally composed in Kanuri language into English and then carrying out an explication of the message conveyed by the poem which ordinarily would not be understood by the reader by just reading through. The work is divided into two major sections. First, the poem is presented in its original form (that is in Kanuri language) and a translation/interpretation is given in English for those who don't understand Kanuri language to comprehend the literal message of the poem. The second major section then explicates the deeper meaning that the poem conveys, that is, the migration of Prophet Muhammad, the founder of the Islamic faith to Medina from Mecca when he and his followers were persecuted by the people of Mecca for bringing a new religion (Islam). The poem explains his journey, his hiding in a cave in the bush when pursued by the Meccans ~~and~~, his triumphant entry into Medina, and how he chose the place where he built his house and mosque.

KEYWORDS: Translation, Interpretation, Literal, Connotative, Poem.

1. Introduction

This work is a literal interpretation of the Kanuri oral poem *Lemini Lemini Yani Chari* which usually is relayed orally through singing and explicating its connotative-semantic meaning. This is done to give a literal explanation of the meaning of the poem and bringing out the deeper message it conveys for people to understand what the poem is all about. This research is a linguistic explication of a literary work, specifically a poem originally sung in Kanuri language. Poetry is a genre of literature and literary works are products of language and this is so because literature is expressed through language. As language is a very complex phenomenon involving

lots of choices available to writers, literary artists exploit and manipulate the choices available to them in putting literary works together. It is this use of language that is studied in this work to explicate/decode the message of the poem. Literature is a product of –society, and in relation to this Esan (2005:92) points out that:

Literature has often been conceived as a mirror of the society; as a reflection of life and as a potential source of sociological and anthropological documentation. Events and happenings in the society are the raw material which is manipulated and utilized by the literary artist in the production of their texts.

This general view about literature is concurred by Amali (2006: 148) when she explains poetry which is a genre of literature thus:

Poetry as a genre of literature reflects society. It is a means by which the feelings of individuals and society are communicated. Poetry can be used as a means of educating the society, criticizing evil deeds, ridiculing individuals, the government and other organisations and promoting our culture. Therefore, poetry can be said to be a mirror of the society.

As a product that reflects society and as an art that is read or sung to be enjoyed, poems need to be explicated for their messages in order for the reader to comprehend and enjoy them. The explications might sometimes need translations from the original language with which the work is composed to another so that those who don't understand the language would be able to understand. Sometimes, explications of poems are needed because even those who understand the language might not get the message clearly as there might be hidden messages apart from the surface ones that the poem relays. It is in view of this that this work is carried out in order to

translate the poem from its original language (Kanuri) to English and then explain the message that the poem relays.

The poem *Lemini Lemini Yani Chari*, according to Modu and Abdulkadir (2015), is made up of five different poems and each is titled:

1. Lemini Lemini Yani Chari
2. Lemini Lemini Tintilo
3. Lemini Lemini Hajja Gana
4. Lemini Lemini Yagana
5. Lemini Lemini Yagana Askillam.

This work, however, is an explication of only one of the poems, *Lemini Lemini Yani Chari*. This is because each of the poems has its own theme(s) and needs to be explicated separately.

Many languages are dying (becoming extinct) in so many parts of the world and one of the reasons advanced by linguists for this is the inability of their speakers to code their languages into writing. Linguists believe that one of the ways of preserving languages or for languages to continue existing is by coding languages or putting languages (their linguistic forms, songs, poems, and culture of the people) into writing. This work, therefore, codes this oral poem into writing by also decoding its meaning for readers to comprehend what it relays. There are many Kanuri speakers who know the poem Lemini-Lemini Yani Chari but when one asks them of the deeper meaning it is relaying, one can hardly find one out of five that can do so. This, therefore,

makes this work important research as it gives an interpretation of the meaning of the poem so that readers would understand its deeper or connotative meaning apart from its literal meaning.

2. The Kanuri People

The Kanuris are a group of people who reside along the shores of the Lake Chad Basin in the present-day Borno state in Nigeria. According to Opoku and Bulakarima (1987), the Kanuris are the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria coming after Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. According to Bulakarima and Shettima (2012), based on the 1992 census, the Kanuri language is spoken by over three million people as their first language in the present-day Borno and Yobe States of Nigeria. Apart from Borno and Yobe States, the Kanuris are also dominantly found in Diffa Province in the Republic of Niger. They are found in minorities in places like Alkaleri, Azare, Gamawa, and Missau in Bauchi State; Lafiyan Bari-bari in Nasarawa State; Kirikasamma, Moduri and Hadejia in Jigawa State; Girei and Garun Dole in Adamawa State and Bajoga and Gamawa in Gombe State all in Nigeria. Apart from Nigeria:

In Niger Republic, the major groups or dialects of Kanuri are

Bilma, Dagera and Manga. They are spoken in quite large

number of people in the area stretching from Zinder in the

west down to the Lake Chad region in the east. In the Republic

of Chad, there live the Kanembu speakers who are concentrated

in the Kanem region. A few Kanembu speakers live on the western

side of the Lake Chad in Nigeria and in Niger Republic. In the Republic

of Cameroon also found a substantial number of Kanuri-speaking community in the towns of Kolofata, Marwa, Kusuri, Mokolo and Ngaundere (Bulakarima and Shettima, 2012: 01).

This shows that the speakers of the language (Kanuri) are found not only in Nigeria where majority of them reside but also in countries like Niger, Cameroon and Chad.

Historically, the Kanuri people trace their lineage to one great Arab hero called Saif Ibn Dhi Yazan who is believed to have come from Yemen and established a dynasty known as the Kanem-Bornu Dynasty until 1846 (Alkali: 1983). The dynasty was later taken over by the El-Kanemi Dynasty and since then the Kanuris are ruled by the El-kanemi Dynasty which had its capital cities in the towns of Ngazargamu, Kukawa, Dikwa and Bama and presently Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State in Nigeria.

3. Theoretical Model

Pragmatic theory is used in the explication of the message of the poem. Mey (2001:6) explains that 'pragmatics is the study of the way human beings use their language in communication, bases itself on the study of those premises and determines how they affect and effectualise human language use'. The language of the poem is analysed based on Mey's model where he asserts that pragmatics concerns itself with human language in communication. The poem is written in Kanuri language and its translated into English and explication of the message carried out for readers in English to understand the message.

4. Literal Translation/ Interpretation of *Lemini Lemini Yani Chari*

The poem can be interpreted in two ways; literally by translating it from its original language into English and then explicating the message of the poem. This section gives a literal interpretation/translation of the poem in order for those who do not speak the language to know the literal message of the poem. The Kanuri version of the poem is presented in stanzas and following each stanza an English translation is given.

Lemini Lemini yani chari

Yani chari bula d̄ambar̄armbe

d̄ambar̄armbe duwa makkabe

Makkabe, Madinnabe

Al-Amin Al-Amin, my elder, the old one

The elderly one from the town of d̄ambar̄armbe

d̄ambar̄armbe the town of Mecca

of Mecca and Medina

Ḡadi Kau S̄al̄amben k̄ambolwa

K̄ambolduro moduwane/adune

Moduwane k̄endon̄am

There is a moon on the east of the black hill

Meditate (pray) towards the moon

Meditate (pray) of whatever you have (know)

Wawami Wami

Shuwa karagan zəbkono

Karaga sələmmin zəbkono

Fulata fərlan

Shuwa kalimolan

Talanger langar yaajurus.

Woe unto you if you refuse

Shuwa sojourned in the bush

Sojourned in the dark bush

Fulata riding on horses

Shuwa riding on camels

moving around until they came to a stop.

The poem is made up of three (3) stanzas and the poem is presented in the language in which it was composed originally, that is Kanuri and an accompanying English translation of each stanza is given.

5. Explication of the Message of the Poem

While the poem can be interpreted literarily as presented above, it has a deeper connotative message conveyed than the translation/interpretation given in the section above. The poem expresses the journey of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) from Mecca to Medina when he was persecuted by his people in Mecca for bringing them a new religion (Islam). He and his followers left Mecca and migrated to Medina which is known in Islamic History as Hijra (migration). Apart from this, the poem presents some advice given to the prophet vis-a-vis his followers on the direction towards which they should meditate, supplicate or pray.

The first stanza gives a brief about the prophet as an honest man and introduces us to where he hailed from. The first line of the poem tells us the other name with which he was addressed by the people of Mecca when he stayed there. ‘Lemini Lemini’ is from a Kanuri name, ‘Allemin’ which itself comes from the Arabic name ‘Al-Amin’ (the trustworthy). The poem, therefore, tells us the other name with which the prophet was referred to in Mecca, that is, Al-Amin (the trustworthy). *Yani Chari* in the same first line which simply means ‘my elder the old one’ is a phrase used in Kanuri as a sign of respect to somebody. Usually, women in the Kanuri Society refer to their husbands as *Yani Chari* instead of calling them by their names which to the Kanuri people denotes the women showing respect to their husbands. This phrase ‘yani chari’ is, therefore, used in making reference to the prophet with respect and dignity in the poem. The second and the third lines of the first stanza tell us where the prophet hailed from. The lines tell us that he is from *d̄am̄bar̄arm̄be*, referring to the towns of Mecca and Medina where the prophet was born and carried out his Islamic crusades. The poem also tells us of the second city where the prophet dwelt during his lifetime and carried on with his crusade when he left Mecca and migrated. This city the poem relates to us is Medina. The poem, therefore, relays to us a bit of

the history of the prophet by telling us the two places where he lived, that is, he was born and grew up in Mecca and later migrated to Medina where he spent the rest of his lifetime.

The second stanza lives history and gives a piece of advice to the prophet and Muslims in general. It tells Muslims about the holy site of Ka'aba in Mecca towards which the Muslims pray which in Arabic/Islam is referred to as the *Qibla*. The location of the Ka'aba is *gədi kau sələmben kəmbolwa*, that is, 'in the east of the black hill, there is a moon'. Possibly, in the old city of Mecca, the Ka'aba was built in the east of a hill. *kəmbol*, a Kanuri word for 'the moon', is here used metaphorically to mean 'light', referring to the Ka'aba as *the house of light* because of its importance to Muslims. The importance of the Ka'aba lies in the fact that all Muslims throughout the world pray towards the Ka'aba (i.e. facing the direction of the Ka'aba) wherever they find themselves. In the poem, Muslims are advised to meditate or supplicate or pray towards the Ka'aba, that is, *kəmbolduro moduwane* (supplicate or pray towards the moon, which is, the Ka'aba), *moduwane kəndonəm* (supplicate with whatever you know), that is, the Muslims should supplicate with all the religious (Islamic) incantations or recitations they have learned in the religion while facing the Ka'aba during prayers.

The last and third stanza of the poem recounts the historical migration (Hijra) of the prophet in the midst of the night from Mecca to Medina. However, before this, the stanza begins with a brief warning to the Muslims (woe unto you if you refuse). This has a link to the previous stanza where Muslims are asked to supplicate and to pray facing the Ka'aba and woe unto them if they refuse to heed this call/injunction. From then, it (the stanza) went on to tell us about the prophet's migration. The prophet left Mecca in the thick of the night and journeyed (migrated) to Medina (Shuwa sojourned in the bush; sojourned in the dark bush). The Arabs are referred to

as Shuwa by the Kanuris. In fact, there is a tribe who speak a dialect of the Arabic language in Borno State today who are called Shuwa by the Kanuri people and referred to as Shuwa-Arabs in linguistic circles. This is why the prophet and those who migrated to Mecca are referred to as Shuwa in this poem. The prophet, during his journey to Medina, hid himself in a cave when he noticed that the Meccan pagans were on their heels wanting to kill him. He ‘Sojourned in the dark bush’ refers to his stay in the cave for some time before he finally continued and made his journey to Medina. The last three lines of the last stanza describe how the prophet was received by the people of Medina. ‘Fulata riding horses and Shuwa riding camels’ metaphorically signifies that a large crowd of people from different clans in Medina riding camels and horses came out to welcome him. The people of Medina moved together with the prophet until the prophet’s camel stopped at a location (talangar langar yaajurus) in Medina where the prophet built his house and his mosque. There is a historical account where it was relayed that when the prophet reached Medina, many people wanted to take him as their guest. The prophet then asked them to allow his camel to move and wherever it stopped, that would be his place of abode and that is how the prophet chose where he lived in Medina until his death. That is where the mosque of the prophet resides up to the present day. This account is what the last three lines of the poem captured.

6. Conclusion

Lemini Lemini Yani Chari is, therefore, an oral Kanuri poem usually sung which needs to be codified by translating it into English and then decoding its inner message for those reading it to comprehend the message it is relaying. This work was conceived in order to do so so that the

poem is codified by translating it into English and transliterating it to understand its message easily by the reader.

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