

TRANSLATING A WELSH HYMN INTO CORNISH

Dr Ken George
Cornish Language Board¹

INTRODUCTION

On Sunday evenings I usually watch S4C's *Dechrau Canu Dechrau Canmol*², which I find both musically and spiritually uplifting. On October 31st 2021, the programme lasted a whole hour, and was devoted to the top ten hymns chosen by viewers, presented by Huw Edwards. I had previously heard the winner several times; it was *O tyred i'n gwaredu, Iesu da*, (titled *Gweddi Heddiw*), with words by John Roberts, set to the tune Bro Aber by J. Haydn Phillips.

Being very impressed by this hymn, I thought of translating it into Cornish, with proper rhyming and scansion, enabling it to be sung. I have translated over forty hymns into Cornish from English, but working with a Welsh source proved a challenge. The lyrics are quite unlike those of most English hymns. They have clearly been composed by a native Welsh speaker.

Given the closeness of the two Brittonic languages, one might expect the translation to be straightforward, just by substituting cognates: in some of the lines (e.g. the fifth line of the second verse), the two versions are certainly very similar. Welsh, however, is immensely richer in its vocabulary than Cornish³ and thus contains many words without a Cornish equivalent. In other cases, the words are similar, but have a different number of syllables, which upsets the scansion. The task of translation is not so easy, then, as one might imagine. The Cornish text uses the spelling in the *Gerlyver Meur* (2020).

RHYMES

As a first step in translation, it was necessary to find acceptable rhymes. The rhyming scheme in the hymn is relatively simple; in each verse it is ABABCC, and all of the rhymes are stressed single syllables. Although nearly all the rhyming words in Welsh have Cornish cognates, they do not necessarily rhyme in Cornish, and alternatives have to be sought

First verse

da / pla

It would have been possible to use the same rhyming words in Cornish, but I wished to use the word **mas** 'morally good' in Cornish, instead of **da**; this meant finding a different rhyme in third line, and the obvious one is **bras** 'great'.

gwedd / hedd

The neologism **gwedh** has been used in Cornish to mean 'phase' (of the Moon); it is used here to mean 'form': the Welsh rhyming word **hedd** 'peace' appears in Cornish only as the root of the verb **hedhi** 'to stop', so a different rhyme is needed in Cornish. It is important in line 4 to keep the word for 'peace': **kres** in Cornish, so the end of line 2 was remodelled with the rhyme **nowydhhes** 'renewed'.

nawr / mawr

Welsh **mawr** 'great' has **meur** as its Cornish cognate. The rhyming word **nawr** < **yn awr** is often used to mean 'now', but the Cornish equivalent ***neur** does not exist. I therefore sought a different rhyming pair.

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the author, not the corporate views of the Board.

² Colour-coding is used as follows: English in black, Welsh in blue, Cornish in green, Breton in red.

³ Much of the traditional Cornish vocabulary was probably never written down, and therefore lost.

Second verse

hyd / byd

Both words exist in Cornish, in the assibilated forms **hys** and **bys**. In the third line, **bys** is used, and in the first line the expression **o hyd** ‘still, always’ is translated by **pup-prys** ‘always’.

brau / rydhheu

The Cornish cognates of the Welsh rhyming words are **brew** ‘broken’ and **rydhhe** ‘to free’, which evidently do not rhyme. My solution is to keep **rydhhe** and move the translation of **ni ddaw** ‘comes not’ to the end; this would normally be **ny dheu**, but there are plenty of examples in the Cornish texts of the unrounded development being used as a rhyme; this is **ny dhe**’ [nɪˈðe:], rhyming with **rydhhe**.

dyn / cytun

The word **dyn** ‘man’ has a large number of rhyming words in Welsh, but because the Cornish cognate **den** has a different sound, its rhyming words are different. The one which I have chosen is **men** ‘strong’.

Third verse

rhan / gwan

No problem here; the Cornish **rann** and **gwann** may be used.

oes / croes

This is more difficult; in Cornish, the cognates of Welsh **oed** ‘time’ and **oes** ‘age’ fell together as **oes** [ˈoːz], which does not rhyme with **krows** ‘cross’, the cognate of Welsh **croes**. Line 4 is so powerful that it seems wise to retain as far as possible the same structure, and therefore use **krows**, but there are no suitable rhyming words with it for line 2. My solution is to use the close compound **krowspenn** ‘crucifix’ instead of **krows**, allowing a rhyme with **byw dre ven** ‘as long as we be alive’ which is close to the meaning of the Welsh **drwy ein hoes** ‘throughout our time’.

trugarha / da

Having decided upon **mas** to express Welsh **da**, the simplest solution is again to use **bras** ‘great’ as the rhyming word. No equivalent of the verb **trugarhau** is found in Cornish, but the noun **tregeredh** ‘mercy’ is known. There is no indication of its gender in the texts, so the feminine gender quoted in dictionaries has been taken from Breton. Thus the line can end with **tregeredh vras**.

SCANSION

In the early years of the Cornish Revival, many hymns were translated from English without taking enough notice of the scansion; the result was the stress pattern of the translation did not fit the beat of the tune, making the hymn virtually unsingable. When translating hymns from English into Cornish, I have made correct scansion a priority, even over the accuracy of translation. The stress-pattern of **O tyred i'n gwaredu** is comparatively simple; all of the lines are iambic pentameters. This is not so obvious on listening to the hymn, however; the intricate rhythm of the superb tune partly masks the simple alternation of unstressed and stressed syllables. The lines have the following stress-pattern:

x / x \ x / x / x /

where x denotes an unstressed syllable;

/ a strongly stressed syllable, underlined and bold in the text below;

\ a weakly stressed syllable, underlined in the text below;

I have taken care in the translation to follow the iambic stress-pattern, and succeeded in most places. At first I did not find it easy to fit the Cornish words to the tune, trying to sing them while listening to a recording of the Welsh hymn; this was because in many places there is more than one note per syllable. Repeated practice and a lot of fine tuning to the words improved matters.

TECHNICAL DETAILS

In the left-hand column, for each line, are listed the Welsh words, an English translation⁴ thereof, the Cornish words, and an English translation of these for comparison. In the right-hand column are notes on points of interest.

First verse

Text	Notes
O tyred i'n gwaredu, Iesu da , O come to deliver us, good Jesus A fysk rag ri dhyn gweres , Yesu mas , O hasten to give us aid, good Jesus,	Welsh tyred has no cognate in Cornish (but cf. Breton diredek 'run backwards'); fyski means 'to hasten', as in "O Lord, make haste to help us". The phrase rag ri dhyn gweres sounds more natural than ra'gan gweresa .
fel cynt y daethost ar dy newydd wedd , as before thou camest in thy new form, 'vel kvns y teuthys gans gwedh nowydhhes , as before thou camest, with renewed form,	The first half of the phrase fits the Welsh closely; the second half is remodelled for the sake of rhyme. The word gwedh is a neologism, hitherto used to mean 'phase' (of the Moon).
a'r drysau 'nghau, at rai dan ofnus bla , with the doors closed, to those in fear of adversity, deges darasow, orth re ownek bras closed doors, to those with great fear	The primary meaning of pla is 'plague' (this is the only meaning in Cornish), but here 'adversity' is meant; the disciples are behind closed doors, in fear of the Jews (John 20).
a'u cadarnhau â nerthol air dy hedd : and fortified them with the mighty word of thy peace: ha'ga hannertha i dre'th ger a gres : and strengthen them through thy word of peace:	No cognate of cadarnhau in Cornish; replaced by kennertha ; there is no space to translate nerthol .
llefara dy dangnefedd yma nawr declare thy peace here now y'n prysweyth ma avow an kres eus dhis at this moment declare the peace which thou hast	Cornish lavar has only two syllables, so has not been used; yma nawr would be omma lemmyn in Cornish, but since this does not scan, the phrase y'n prysweyth ma 'at this moment' has been substituted.
a dangos inni greithiau d'aberth mawr . and show to us (the) scars of thy great sacrifice ha diskwedh kreythyow dhyn a'th sakrifis . and show scars to us of thy sacrifice.	Welsh dangos 'to show' is not found in Cornish, which uses diskwedhes (cf. Breton diskouez). Nicholas Williams borrowed aberth in his Cor.-Eng. dictionary, but the usual word is the loan sakrifis .

Second verse

Text	Notes
Yn d'aberth di mae'n gobaith ni o hvd , In thy sacrifice is our hope always, Y'th sakrifis govenek 'ma pup-prys , In thy sacrifice there is always hope,	Welsh has disyllabic words for 'sacrifice' and 'hope', whereas the Cornish words are trisyllabic; but the Welsh uses two extra syllables in enclitic pronouns di and ni .
ni ddaw o'r ddaear ond llonyddwch brau ; from the Earth will come but fragile tranquillity; a'n norvys ma's kosolet h yrew ny dhe ; from the world only fragile quietness comes;	The order of the phrase is reversed in Cornish for the sake of rhyme. For daear , dor means 'earth, ground'; 'the Earth' is an nor (with nasal mutation); here the fuller form norvys is used.
o hen gaethiwed barn rhyfeloedd byd from old narrowmindedness from world wars a gethneth goth a vreus breselyow bys from old bondage of the sentence of world wars	Different vocabulary in Cornish, but the same structure, and a bit of alliteration.
hiraethwn am y cymod sy'n rhyddhau : we long for the reconciliation which liberates: y yeunyn an kevambos 'wra rydhhe : we long for the agreement which will liberate:	The noun hireth has been borrowed into Cornish, but not the verb, so yeuni is used.
tydi , Gyfryngwr byw rhwng Duw ha dyn , thyself, living mediator between God and man, dell os Medhador byw 'tra Duw ha den , as thou art living mediator between God and man,	This Cornish line is perhaps the closest to the Welsh, yet there are three differences: dell os 'as thou art' instead of tydi (tejy is found only as an enclitic), medhador (a neologism from 2009 with the same stress-pattern as cyfryngwr), and 'tra < yntra for rhwng .
rho yn ein calon ras i fyw'n gytûn . put grace in our heart to live in harmony. roy y'gan kolonn gras kesvewnans men . give in our heart (the) grace of firm communal life.	No equivalent of cytûn exists in Cornish, so the last part of the line has been remodelled, with the extra word men 'strong' to make a rhyme.

Third verse

Cyd-fyw'n gytûn fel brodyr fyddo'n rhan, May living together as brothers be our lot, Kesvevnans breder re bo agan rann, May communal life of brothers be our lot,	No room here for translating fel.
a'th gariad yn ein cynnal drwy ein hoes; and may thy love sustain us throughout our life; ha'th k'rensa a'gan gwitha byw 'dre ven; and may thy love sustain us as long as we live;	The trisyllabic length of <i>kerensa</i> 'love' often causes problems in translation, but it may be reduced to two syllables (cf. Late Cornish <i>crengah</i>). The phrase <i>byw 'dre ven</i> is shortened from <i>byw hedre ven</i> 'as long as we may be alive'.
na foed i'r arfog cry' orthrymu'r gwan, may the strong armed men not oppress the weak, na wrello arvek krev arwaska'n wann, let not the armed man oppress the weak,	This phrase is close to the Welsh.
ac na bo grym i ni ond grym y groes: and let us have no power save the power of the cross: ha na vo nell dhyn ni saw nell krowspenn: and let us have no power save the power of the cross:	The word <i>grym</i> is found twice in Bewnans Ke, but appears to be the English adjective <i>grim</i> ; so <i>nell</i> has been used.
rhag gwae y dilyw tân, O trugarha for fear of the anguish of the flood of fire, O have mercy rag own liv tan, gront dhyn tregeredh vras	Because the second phrase is expanded from four to six syllables, the first has to be compressed from six to four.
a thyred i'n gwaredu, Iesu da. and come to deliver us, good Jesus. ha fysk rag ri dhyn gweres, Yesu mas. and hasten to give us aid, good Jesus.	The last line repeats the first; a satisfying idea.

COMPARISON OF WELSH AND CORNISH TEXT

O tyred i'n gwaredu, Iesu da,
fel cynt y daethost ar dy newydd wedd,
a'r drysau 'nghau, at rai dan ofnus bla,
a'u cadarnhau â nerthol air dy hedd:
llefara dy dangnefedd yma nawr
a dangos inni greithiau d'aberth mawr.

Yn d'aberth di mae'n gobaith ni o hyd,
ni ddaw o'r ddaear ond llonyddwch brau;
o hen gaethiwed barn rhyfeloedd byd
hiraethwn am y cymod sy'n rhyddhau:
tydi, Gyfryngwr byw rhwng Duw ha dyn,
rho yn ein calon ras i fyw'n gytûn.

Cyd-fyw'n gytûn fel brodyr fyddo'n rhan,
a'th gariad yn ein cynnal drwy ein hoes;
na foed i'r arfog cry' orthrymu'r gwan,
ac na bo grym i ni ond grym y groes:
rhag gwae y dilyw tân, O trugarha
a thyred i'n gwaredu, Iesu da.

A fysk rag ri dhyn gweres, Yesu mas,
'vel kyns y teuthys gans gwedh nowydhhes,
deges darasow, orth re ownek bras,
ha'ga hannertha i dre'th ger a gres:
y'n prysweyth ma avow an kres eus dhis
ha diskwedh kreythyow dhyn a'th sakrifis.

Y'th sakrifis govenek 'ma pup-prys
a'n norvys ma's kosolet h vrew ny dhe';
a gethneth goth a vreus breselyow bys
y yeunyn an kevambos 'wra rydhhe:
dell os Medhador byw 'tra Duw ha den,
roy y'gan kolonn gras kesvevnans men.

Kesvevnans breder re bo agan rann,
ha'th k'rensa y'gan gwitha byw 'dre ven;
na wrello arvek krev arwaska'n wann,
ha na vo nell dhyn ni saw nell krowspenn:
rag own liv tan, gront dhyn tregeredh vras
ha fysk rag ri dhyn gweres, Yesu mas.

Postscript

All I need now is to persuade a choir to sing it!

O tyred i'n gwaredu, Iesu da,
fel cynt y daethost ar dy newydd wedd,
a'r drysau 'nghau, at rai dan ofnus bla,
a'u cadarnhau â nerthol air dy hedd:
llefara dy dangnefedd yma nawr
a dangos inni greithiau d'aberth mawr.

Yn d'aberth di mae'n gobaith ni o hyd
ni ddaw o'r ddaear ond llonyddwch brau;
o hen gaethiwed barn rhyfeloedd byd
hiraethwn am y cymod sy'n rhyddhau:
tydi, Gyfryngwr byw rhwng Duw ha dyn,
rho yn ein calon ras i fyw'n gytûn.

Cyd-fyw'n gytûn fel brodyr fyddo'n rhan,
a'th gariad yn ein cynnal drwy ein hoes;
na foed i'r arfog cry' orthrymu'r gwan,
ac na bo grym i ni ond grym y groes:
rhag gwae y dilyw tân, O trugarha
a thyred i'n gwaredu, Iesu da.

O come to deliver us, good Jesus
as before thou camest in thy new aspect
and the doors closed, to those under fear of plague,
and strengthen them with the mighty word of thy peace:
declare thy peace here now
and show to us scars of thy great sacrifice.

In thy sacrifice is our hope always,
from the earth comes only fragile tranquillity;
from the old bondage of world war views
we long for the reconciliation which will liberate us:
thou, living Mediator living between God and man,
give in our hearts grace to live in harmony.

Living together as brothers will be part
and thy love sustain us all our lives;
let not the armed men oppress the weak,
and let us have no power save the power of the cross:
before the flood of fire, O have mercy
and come to deliver us, good Jesus.

