

TRANSLATING *LÚA* INTO CORNISH

Lúa is a nursery-rhyme in Galician; it includes all the elements of verse set to music, except rhyme, and its being in a Romance language makes it particularly challenging. The lyrics are first presented with a literal translation into English. Stressed syllables are underlined.

Refrain

Lúa, Lúa, que bonita es! Moon, Moon, how beautiful you are!
Lúa, Lúa, quérote coller!! Moon, Moon, I want to pick you up!!

Verse 1

Eu quero a Lúa (×2) I want the Moon (×2)
O Mami, Mami, cólleme a Lúa Oh Mummy, Mummy, get me the Moon

followed by three other verses, with the lines

O Papi, Papi, cólleme a Lúa Oh Mummy, Mummy, get me the Moon
O Ruí, Ruí, cólleme a Lúa Oh Roddy, Roddy, get me the Moon
O Avoa, Avoa, cólleme a Lúa Oh Granny, Granny, get me the Moon

The principal problem here is the rhythm of the tune. The stressed syllables in the tune are underlined, and they correspond fairly well to the natural stress pattern of Galician; so the tune was probably composed to fit the lyrics. Finding Cornish words for the lyrics presents no great problem, but the obvious ones do not fit the rhythm at all.

Take just the first line of the refrain: the simplest Cornish is *Loer, Loer, ass oz teg!* (lit. ‘Moon, Moon, how thou art beautiful!’), which has only five syllables compared with nine in the source text. Although *lúa* and *loer* look remarkably similar words, probably from the same Proto-Indo-European source, their pronunciations are substantially different: [ˈluːvə] and [ˈloːr]. We need two syllables in Cornish instead of one. A *Loer* ‘O Moon’ will not work, because its stress is on the second syllable, and it needs to be on the first. One could use *loergann* ‘moonlight, light of the Full Moon’, which is beautiful, so fits the rest of the line; but the second line, ‘I want to pick you up’, surely refers to the satellite rather than its light. In that case, a solution is to create a new word, *loervyz*, literally ‘Moonworld’, which has the required stress-pattern. For the remainder of the line, expanding *oz* to give *ass oz teiy teg* gives the right number of syllables, but the stress-pattern is wrong. The same applies to *ass os sy fethus*. I am inclined towards *ass yw teg dha fas* ‘how beautiful is thy face’.

The second line, surprisingly, does not rhyme with the first. In fact, there are no rhymes to worry about. Direct translation gives *my a vynn dha dhrehevel*, seven syllables instead of the five required. We can reduce *dhrehevel* to *sevel*, though that is usually intransitive. Then can obtain the correct number by using *mynnav dha sevel*, but the stress-pattern is wrong. The syntax is almost the same: Galician *auxiliary verb + pronoun object + main verb*, versus Cornish *auxiliary verb + pronominal preposition + main verb*. It is the stress-pattern of the main verb which differs: Galician [koˈjer] and Cornish [ˈsɛːvəl]. A Cornish verbal noun stressed on the final syllable would fit, but there are few: those ending in *-he* come to mind. Lhuyd’s word *barrhe* comes close, but its meaning is ‘to lift up’ in the sense of ‘to exalt’. The best which I can come up with is to use poetic licence to omit the final syllable of *synzi* ‘to hold’ (not quite ‘to pick up’ but not far off), and to go for *my a vynn dha synz’*.

The first line of each verse, *Eu quero a Lúa*, apparently has six syllables, but the tune has only five notes. To squeeze the lyrics in, the <o> of *quero* and the following <a> are sung as a diphthong [ʊə] on one note. We thus need to translate ‘I want the Moon’ yn five syllables with the stress-pattern x / x / x. ‘I want’ is often translated using the verb *mynnez*, but this auxiliary verb is followed by a main verb, not a noun object. The verb chosen here is *yeuni* ‘to yearn, to crave’, which can take a noun object. In order to fit the rhythm of the song, the order of words needs to be changed, to *An Loer a yeunav*, lit. ‘the Moon I crave’.

The second line of each verse begins with O. This is not a vocative particle corresponding to *O* in English, (which would be *Ó* in Galician) but rather the exclamation represented by English *Oh*. It is important to distinguish these, because in Cornish the former would be *A* with soft mutation of the following word, and the latter would be *Ogh* without mutation.

The translation of the phrase *cólleme a Lúa* ‘get me the Moon’ is *kyrgh ragov an Loer*, lit. ‘fetch for me the Moon’. Again we substitute *Loervyz* for *Loer* to give the correct number of syllables. In the original, the keyword *Lúa* is the ending of both lines in the verses. Although not a different rhyme, it is euphonious and emphasizes the theme. In the Cornish, *Loervyz* similarly appears in both lines.

This leaves just the words *Mami*, *Mami*, easily expressed by *Mammik*, *Mammik*; likewise *Papi*, *Papi* becomes *Tazik*, *Tazik*. *Ruí* is the shortened form of the personal name *Rodrigo*, from Gothic **Hroþareiks* ‘famous ruler’. English *Roderick* may come from the same source, but it can also be an anglicization of Welsh *Rhydderch*, from *rhi* ‘ruler’ + *derch* ‘exalted’. These elements are found in Cornish as *ruw* and *dergh*. We have enough material to devise a short Cornish form *Rudhi*, corresponding to English Roddy. In the fourth verse, in the second occurrence of *Avoa* [a'βo'və] ‘grandmother’, the A is dropped in performance.

We are now in a position to give the complete translation.

Refrain

Lúa, Lúa, que bonita es!
Lúa, Lúa, quérote coller!!

Loervyz, Loervyz, ass yw teg dha fas!
Loervyz, Loervyz, my a vynn dha synz'!!

Verse 1

Eu quero a Lúa (×2)
O Mami, Mami, cólleme a Lúa

An Loer a yeunav (×2)
Ogh Mammik, Mammik, kyrgh ragov an Loervyz

followed by three other verses, with the lines

O Papi, Papi, cólleme a Lúa
O Ruí, Ruí, cólleme a Lúa
Avoa, Avoa,
cólleme a Lúa

Ogh Tazik, Tazik, kyrgh ragov an Loervyz
Ogh Rudhi, Rudhi, kyrgh ragov an Loervyz
Ogh Mammwynn, Mammwynn,
kyrgh ragov an Loervyz