



BRAZILIAN TRANSLATION CLUB: INTRODUCTION

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Toda tradução é composta de mudança, e talvez não venha ao caso nenhuma ideia de traição neste deslocamento, já que não vem ao caso a impossível fidelidade.

[Every translation entails change, and perhaps any notion of treason in this displacement is beside the point, given the impossibility of total fidelity. (my translation)]

Luis Maffei (2013)

One of the aims of the Brazilian Translation Club (BTC) is to foster a collaborative translation environment for the dissemination of prominent Brazilian writers and emerging translators working into English. If it is a general assumption that translators should work into their first language, in this sense the project has adopted an unusual, and often controversial dynamic in that we have encouraged many of our translators to work in the opposite direction, into their second language. In this context, the idea of collaboration became especially crucial. That is not to say that translations produced by “non-native” speakers should not be viable or even recommendable without the input of a “native speaker”; it is more that the quality of the end-product in these circumstances can be significantly improved by the exchange of expertise among “native speakers” of the languages involved. Indeed, the same dynamic can be applied to the translators who worked into their first language – English – who no doubt benefited immensely from the fruitful exchange of resources with Brazilian translators which was promoted by the club. This magnificently creative framework included collaboration with the authors themselves, particularly with regard to decoding and scrutinizing cultural and linguistic intricacies of the Source Text. Across these many forms of participatory inquiry stretches a fertile continuum through which two different cultures, Lusophone and Anglophone, to be unashamedly generic, simultaneously assert and question their cultural character.

From a theoretical perspective, a number of contentious issues, such as “equivalence” and “untranslatability”, occupied their inevitable space in the workshops. Within a broad spectrum of discussions, these and other complex topics made the conversation about translation all the more rich, connected as they were with a wider range of knowledge and insight, as well as the multiple perspectives of our translators, coordinators, authors and participants. We believe that by engaging more people with the complexities, paradoxes and processes of telling someone else’s story, it may be possible to find new shared meanings for a multitude of translational conundrums, celebrating the gains rather than lamenting the losses in translation. One of the values of this bi-lingual publication, we hope, is that it demonstrates how translation might be able to highlight, rather than silence linguistic and cultural difference, without falling into the traps of excessive assimilation (domestication) or exoticization (foreignisation).



It is worth emphasizing that any attempt to define either the study or the process of translation in terms of linguistic equivalence, i.e., words or linguistic signs which have “equal value” in Source and Target Text, is bound to be restricted. Indeed, if the notion of equivalence, with its vaguely mathematical heritage, has been understood until not so long ago primarily in connection to ideas of accuracy, correspondence, fidelity, correctness, identity and so on, at the BTC we strive collectively to achieve other important theoretical and pragmatic approaches to language, context, meaning and translation. In this way, the texts translated in the workshops maintain a flirtatious alignment with the ideas of scholars like Mary Snell-Hornby, who considers the concept of equivalence as presenting an illusion of symmetry between languages (SNELL-HORNBY, 2006), an assertion which is rightly complemented by the theorist Anthony Pym, who asserts that equivalence creates a presumption of interpretative resemblance and, in this sense, it is always “presumed” (PYM, 2010). In other words, to quote David Bellos, “a match cannot be the thing it is matching” (BELLOS, 2012). Fundamentally, the fruitful collaborative environment of the BTC enabled the translators to consider features of the English and Brazilian Portuguese languages at their most crucial stages: at the point of linguistic production where literary characters are constructed and social individuals speak, interact, read, write, translate and adapt. If the task of translators is to provide answers to questions such as how linguistic features in different languages can correspond to each other, stand for one another, or recreate each other’s meaning, the result of their work may be no less than to offer different insights into the nature of meaning.

Crucially, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic our workshops were transferred to an online environment. Despite the catastrophic impact of this global crisis on each of us – not least on those who lost family members or loved ones to the virus – the scope of the project increased significantly, with participants logging in from each corner of the world, and most authors being able to join the meetings remotely. Whereas previous to the lockdown we had the pleasure to have the physical presence of few participating authors (Ana Maria Machado, Nara Vidal and Claudie Vasli), the new digital space enabled us to host a greater number of contributors, which in turn, improved the quality of the project’s outcome. Remarkably, some writers, in reflecting on the close reading of their own work by the translators and considering the technical discussions which followed, made the point that they would have written certain phrases or sentences differently. In fact, Décio Zylbersztajn went as far as to say that he would have been able to improve his text after discussing it with the translators. This is a refreshingly significant realization. It not only directs us to questions such as “in what ways can translation influence writing?” – an issue already addressed, although partially and through a different perspective, by the scholar Rebecca L. Walkowitz in her book *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (WALKOWITZ, 2017) – but also, and more crucially, opens up space, scope and opportunity for further research in the field of literary translation.



Suitably enough, each translation in this project is followed by a translator's commentary which records and discusses the translation process, developing a descriptive analysis of the strategies, problems and procedures involved during the various stages of the intricate practice of "re-homing" a text that had its origin somewhere else. We feel that these commentaries are necessary in part because translators, to some extent, are largely invisible and often excluded from newspaper reviews, blurbs and articles; they are hardly ever mentioned in the promotional material of books, anthologies and other publications, and therefore they scarcely appear in any critical discourse or academic debate surrounding the material they translate. Consequently, questions of accountability, authorship and critical assessment of literature in translation become obscured. There is a suggestion throughout these pages that the practice of writing, reading and listening to translations as actual translations, as opposed to some kind of misrecognized "sameness" that disregards the processes of translation, could be instrumental in creating a new ethics of translation, one which privileges transparency, accountability, fair exchange and reciprocity, rather than cultural or linguistic hegemony.

We hope to have contributed with this project to the creation of a new collaborative ethics of translation, as well as to the necessary debate about the visibility of the translator and the directionality of the translation. Part of our intention is to supplement discussions involving particular aspects of literary production and ultimately, to help advance new forms of thinking about diversification and the literary canon. From the beginning, it has been our goal and our pleasure to celebrate Brazilian Literature and to expand its franchise outside of the Brazilian literary system.

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