



TRANSLATOR'S COMMENTARY

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I joined the Brazilian Translation Club in early March 2019, having heard about the group when in London at a Forum where I was giving a presentation about my research. I mentioned my research because having the chance to be in this club was especially fruitful as I focus on L2 translation (translation into one's second language), as we in Portuguese call "versão". Growing up in Brazil and studying translation for my undergraduate degree at UFRGS, I had no idea that one direction of translation was the norm. We always translated both ways, and many professional translators in our context work in both directions. Then, especially in Anglophone translation studies, the L1-direction (into the translator's first language) is the norm. When directionality is mentioned at all in translation manuals, encyclopedias and theoretical publications, it is used to reinforce the L1 translation norm. I would even go as far as saying that the L1 translation norm is, in fact, a translation meme, borrowing terminology from Andrew Chesterman's proposition in *Memes of Translation* (CHESTERMAN, 1997). Taking the definition of a meme as the cultural equivalent of a gene, and, therefore as a unit of cultural transmission, of mere replication or imitation (DAWKINS, 1976), memes, in this context, can be viewed as ideas that spread like genes, when it is conducive to the survival of their carriers. In this case, who is benefitting from such a translation meme as the L1 translation norm? The very fact that in English there is not a terminological consensus to deal with L2 translation points to an invisibility of directionality thinking in the anglophone context. When looking for reading material on L2 translation in English one can find different terminology for this practice: Inverse Translation, Service Translation, Bilingual Translation, and wordier ones like Translation into a Non-Mother Tongue.

My PhD proposes to name this practice Exophonic Translation. I believe this puts the translator and their creative output at centre stage. The culture of translation into English is highly target-text based, where there is fear that the translation will show itself as a translation. Furthermore, there are cultural and ideological issues at heart when someone is forbidden from translating into a major language like English. In the specific case of the Brazilian Translation Club, with the mixture of participants, it comes down to one simple conclusion: a translator does not need to be Brazilian to translate Brazilian literature into English, and at the same time one does not have to be a native English speaker to translate Brazilian Literature into English.

When I went to participate in my first workshop with the group, back in February pre-pandemic, I was pleasantly surprised by the fun, diverse group I found. Hidden somewhere in one of the buildings of the UCL campus, on a rainy, cold February evening, I found myself among peers, who had all somehow come together in that place to talk about translation and Brazilian literature. Then, right after this, having fallen in love with



the project, I volunteered to be the translator of the month for an upcoming workshop. When the pandemic was a reality and lockdown made us all get cooped up at home for the unforeseeable future, I was invited to be the translator for the first online meeting of the club. So much responsibility! Since it was online, it meant that those who could not join in the club because they weren't locals now could join in, from anywhere and everywhere. We had around 25 people in attendance that night, and we were all testing out the water in this new environment. I was incredibly lucky to have the author herself, Eltânia André, in attendance that night. It must have been an incredibly strange affair for the author to see all of us dissect her text by every minutiae, and that is exactly what we did. Eltânia in fact said that after participating in that meeting, she felt like changing many words, to which we said she definitely did not need to.

I strongly believe that every translation is a reading exercise, and my reading of "Memories of a Woman" is undoubtedly going to be different from that of any reader and translator in attendance that day, or even to yours, reader, who comes across this commentary. "Memories of a Woman" is heavily placed in time and space, and at the same time, it is timeless. It has strong feminist undertones, and it provides a poetic glimpse into a traumatic episode in the narrator's childhood. In the process of translating it, I found myself transported to Minas Gerais, to an image that resembles my mother's generation and her experience much more than my own. Still, André paints a perfect picture of that humble Brazilian childhood that most of us can imagine, relive, we can almost taste it.

The attendants discussed at length several translation choices, especially for culture-specific items (AIXELÁ, 1996). Certain elements, like the papaya tree ("mamoeiro") certainly located the text in a specific space, as it was not an easily identifiable reference for the British reader. A specific object, "carrinho de rolimã", roller-cart (is it roller-cart? Go-cart?), resulted in a long discussion of the various types of carts that children used to play with and cultural differences in childhood experiences. One of the great points of debate was the process of whitening clothes under the sun. "Quarar", a process that has a simple verb to describe it in Portuguese, but which, for readers who live in a land where the sun is nowhere near as present and strong as in the Southern Hemisphere, might seem like a rather different scenario. We had chemists in attendance, and it turned into a conversation about the process of "quarar" that took us to some fun and enlightening tangents. "Água com açúcar", the calming sugar-water, was another point of cultural difference, something that for Brazilian readers automatically means a beverage to calm you down, for the English speakers, it needed more clarification, as sugar mixed with water is not a particularly a widely-known antidote for stress in their context. At the same time in which I believe in making some additions here and there to aid the reader in understanding cultural references, I also believe in making the reader work for it. I am aware that this all comes down to the publisher, the intended audience, etc. But since we are speaking among friends, I can tell



you that in some instances I deliberately left some references for the reader to gloss over and, if they want to, they can try and look for a meaning. As the meme phrase going around Brazil lately says “Os gringos que lutem”, let them work for it. I believe, however, that these do not hinder the reading experience, and make it taste all the more like the delicious piece which Eltânia André presents us with. I consider myself to be extremely fortunate to have had this experience, and to be able to share this with you.

REFERENCES

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