

**SOME REMARKS ON COMPARATIVE STYLISTICS APPLIED TO  
TRANSLATION FROM ENGLISH INTO PORTUGUESE**

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This paper was presented as part of a course on Translation Methodology given in the "II Encontro de Tradutores e Intérpretes de Minas Gerais" (Belo Horizonte, July 1982). It does not aim to be an exhaustive study of stylistics of either English or Portuguese, which would require a lifetime's work. It is, rather, the result of my seven-year experience as a translator, as a teacher of translation, and mostly as the Supervisor of the English Translation Laboratory at the "Faculdade de Letras da UFMG." My observations have led me to assess an interesting phenomenon in the translation process: very often we find people who comply with the basic requirements of a good translator, i.e., fluency in the source language (SL) and a good command of written structures in the target language (TL), yet they cannot produce successful translations. It is a unique situation, for the translation cannot be said to have errors; however, the end product either does not sound like Portuguese at all or, compared to the source text, it may give the impression of being understated or overstated. It is this deficiency in the process of transcoding that this paper attempts to account for.

Several writers have provided different explanations for difficulties in the translation process - Paulo Rónai, Edmond Cary, Eugene Nida, Agenor Soares dos Santos, Vinay and Darbelnet, to mention just a few. Paulo Rónai and Edmond Cary claim that translation is an art and, as such, is successful to the extent that the translator is endowed with a gift for decoding and transcoding

meaning. Agenor Soares dos Santos has published an exhaustive and valuable study on the false cognates of English and Portuguese; however, we cannot say that a thorough knowledge of cognates will render a translation successful, for the process is not restricted to the lexicon. Nida provides interesting insights into cultural differences affecting the process of transcoding, but an experienced translator manages somehow to overcome the problem using adaptations or equivalences followed by a translator's note. However, it is Vinay and Darbelnet in their work on the comparative stylistics of French and English who seem to get closer to the mark. Their book has proved very useful as a starting point for the discussion of the problems affecting the translation process from English into Portuguese, together with Stockwell, Bowen and Martin's *The Grammatical Structures of English and Spanish*. For logistical reasons, Vazquez-Ayora's *Introducción a la Traductología*, a work on the comparative stylistics of English and Spanish, could not be used.

Below are some striking stylistic differences between English and Portuguese, followed by the procedure the translator should use. These are cases in which a literal translation would be semantically correct but stylistically inadequate.

#### 1. Portuguese is more Oratorical than English

Many people are familiar with the painstaking task of translating a letter from Portuguese into English and the disappointing comment that follows, "The original letter was not that short!" This points to a marked stylistic difference between the two languages. English is a highly objective language which relies on simple, direct and concise modes of expression. Portuguese, on the other hand, tends to use more elaborate and wordier modes of expression. Rodrigues Lapa, in his *Estilística da Língua Portuguesa*, has even remarked that Portuguese is "descomedido em palavras."<sup>1</sup>

The translator from English into Portuguese should be always attentive to this stylistic difference, lest his translation will sound poor in Portuguese. The following example and its respective translation shows that simple conjunctions such as *how* or phrases such as *policy-making* may have to be translated by transposition<sup>2</sup> rather than literal translation; it also shows that repetition, e.g., "this chapter," which is a device for clarity in English, would not be acceptable in Portuguese:

*This chapter is concerned with how the organic intellectuals of the multinational and associated economic interests formed a political-military organization, the IPES/IBAD, whose purpose was to counteract the national-reformist government of João Goulart and the alignment of social forces that supported his administration. This chapter sets out to describe the international organization of these organic intellectuals, their policy-making channels, and their strategies for public and discreet, direct and indirect action.<sup>3</sup> (my underlining).*

*Este capítulo aborda o processo pelo qual os intelectuais orgânicos de interesses multinacionais e associados formaram um complexo político-militar, o IPES/IBAD, cujo objetivo era agir contra o governo nacional-reformista de João Goulart e contra o alinhamento de forças sociais que apoiavam a sua administração. Concomitantemente, é feita a descrição da organização internacional desses intelectuais orgânicos, sua formulação de diretrizes políticas, seus canais de tomada de decisão e suas estratégias de ação pública e reservada, direta e indireta.<sup>4</sup> (my underlining).*

## 2. Portuguese is more Analytical than English

Portuguese tends to express forms and states by means of

analysis, which is shown by a strong preference for nouns, especially abstract ones. This often gives a static feature to Portuguese texts, as compared to English ones. English prefers action-words such as verbs and adjectives, which makes English texts sound more dynamic. Vinay and Darbelnet provide some examples which apply to Portuguese as well:

to surface - chegar à superfície  
 to scruple - ter escrúpulos  
 to erupt - entrar em erupção  
 insufficient force - inferioridade numérica.

Still related to the oratorical and analytical features of Portuguese is its tendency to use phrases where English uses a mere preposition. E.G.:

Passengers *to* Berlin - Passageiros *com destino a* Berlin.  
*To* the trains - *Acesso à* plataforma de embarque.  
 He came *for* his mail - Ele veio *para apanhar* sua correspondência.

Those are again cases of transposition, i.e., change in grammatical category, rather than literal translation.

### 3. Cohesion Works Differently in the two Languages

The cohesive feature that is pertinent to our study is the English use of the demonstrative pronouns *this/that* to refer back to an antecedent in the previous sentences or paragraphs. Translators tend to render these cohesive items in Portuguese as *isto/isso/aquilo*, which does not satisfy our need for clarity. For example, the English sentences

This has radically changed the situation

This proved to be extremely resistant

should not be translated into Portuguese simply as

\* Isto mudou a situação radicalmente

\* Isto revelou-se extremamente resistente.

Given the analytical feature of Portuguese, the translator should insert nouns such as *medida, iniciativa, procedimento, caso, proposta, observação, etc.*, according to the antecedent. Thus, a better translation will result:

Esta medida mudou radicalmente a situação

Este material revelou-se extremamente resistente.

This need for clarity and for a higher degree of specification expressed in Portuguese cohesive features is also reflected in the lexicon. Some generic English words have several specific equivalents in Portuguese. E.g.:

Head → chefe, superintendente, diretor, presidente, etc.

Wages, pay, fee → ordenado, salário, vencimentos, soldo,  
honorários, pagamento, fêria, etc.

Sir (vocative) → senhor, diretor, comandante, capitão, etc.

The translator who fails to take this particularization into account may give the reader the wrong impression that the writer of the source text is vague and unable to specify things.

#### 4. Agreement Works Differently in the two Languages

Still related to cohesive features is the way agreement works in the two languages. I refer specifically to possessive adjectives and pronouns. In English, possessives agree in gender with the possessor, whereas in Portuguese they agree with the thing possessed. The translator who fails to notice this may produce ambiguous target texts. The following example taken from the article "Women Battle Bias" (Time Magazine) and its respective translation shows a typical case of resulting ambiguity:

His income alone was not sufficient... and her income could not be counted because she was of "childbearing age."

\* Sua renda isoladamente não era suficiente... e sua renda não podia ser considerada porque estava em idade fértil.

The ambiguity can be resolved in Portuguese by the use of *dele/dela*:

A renda dele isoladamente não era suficiente... e a dela não podia ser considerada porque estava em idade fértil.

#### 5. Portuguese Tends to Use more "Scholarly" Words and Expressions

Another striking stylistic difference between English and Portuguese is that the former prefers simple words of Anglo-Saxon origin, whereas the latter prefers more "scholarly" words of Greek and Latin origins. The following words and expressions are examples of this preference:

land reform - reforma agrária  
 drinking water - água potável  
 fingerprints - impressões digitais  
 five-year plan - plano quinquenal  
 family tree - árvore genealógica.

This means that sometimes a change in register may be necessary in the transcoding process.

#### 6. Portuguese is more Hyperbolic than English

Translators should pay special attention to source texts aimed at creating an impact or suspense. English writings tend to be true to the fact, whereas Portuguese ones tend to decorate and exaggerate things a little. Therefore, if the translator does not "add a little spice to the basic ingredients," the target text will sound flat and understated and will create no impact at all. If an English text describing an accident reads, "People ran to the scene of the accident", the translator could make it a bit more emphatic

and true to our own language saying that "Uma multidão correu para o local do acidente."

This was the device the translator of a text from *Time Magazine* (August 10, 1981) used for *Manchete* (August, 1981). The occasion was Lady Di's wedding. The following passage from the source text, compared to the target text, shows that, for example, "the majesty" was translated as "a pompa majestática":

"The majesty of the royal wedding was abundant in its ritual splendors, but its soul was in the small things."

"A pompa majestática do casamento real foi abundante nos esplendores do ritual, mas seu verdadeiro espírito estava nas pequenas coisas."

The example below and its respective translation are further evidence that sometimes we should not translate just words, but a "Weltansicht" or, as Mattoso Câmara puts it, "estilo é a definição de uma personalidade em termos lingüísticos."<sup>5</sup> The passage below aims to show the impact of the 1964 Revolution upon the Brazilian bourgeoisie and entrepreneurs:

*"On April 2, 1964, the bourgeoisie celebrated the removal from office of President Goulart with a great "March of the Family with God for Liberty," through the streets of Rio de Janeiro, an event which the organizers had been looking forward to for more than a week. By the time the "Marcha da Família com Deus, pela Liberdade" was scheduled to begin, the centrally located "Avenida Rio Branco" contained a sea of anti-Communist placards, carried by an estimated crowd of over eight hundred thousand. While the throngs were walking in "Avenida Rio Branco", the presidential succession was being extensively discussed. Entrepreneurs in the office of IPES, in Rio, which overlooked the March, pleased with the cheers in the streets below and*

*highly satisfied with the result of their anti-Communist work, spoke with General Heitor Herrera, one of their key link-men with the ESG officers, 'about the qualifications that they wanted to see in the next president of Brazil.'*<sup>6</sup>

*"A 2 de abril de 1964, a burguesia comemorou a deposição do Presidente Goulart com uma gigantesca marcha de famílias pelas ruas do Rio de Janeiro, um acontecimento cujos organizadores aguardavam com ansiedade há mais de uma semana. Na hora marcada para o início da marcha, a Avenida Rio Branco continha um mar de faixas contra o comunismo, carregadas por uma multidão calculada em oitocentas mil pessoas. Enquanto as multidões percorriam a Avenida Rio Branco, a sucessão presidencial era extensivamente discutida. Os empresários que assistiam à Marcha do escritório do IPES no Rio, contentes com as aclamações e entusiasmo nas ruas, e muito satisfeitos com o resultado de seu trabalho anti-comunista, conversavam com o General Heitor Herrera, um dos seus elos-chave com os oficiais da ESG "sobre as qualidades que desejavam ver no próximo presidente do Brasil."<sup>7</sup>*

Items such as "great march," "looking forward to" and "cheers" were made more emphatic in Portuguese, otherwise Brazilian readers would underestimate the impact of the Revolution.

The above example is also evidence that sometimes, in translating, we have to eliminate the unnecessary detail, such as the information that Rio Branco Avenue is centrally located.

#### *7. English is Richer in Concrete Details*

If Portuguese tends towards a higher level of abstraction, English has a strong preference for the concrete. Particles, prepositions and verbs in English make a text so dynamic and rich in concrete details that we cannot always reach the same effect in



Portuguese. An analogy comes to mind. If we try to visualize a description in English, we have the impression of seeing a film. On the other hand, a description in Portuguese may sound as static as a picture, if compared to English.

A sentence such as "Lift your tongue *up* to the roof of your mouth," where *up* has a kinetic effect and is an important stylistic device in English, could not be literally translated; if we insist on translating *up*, an unacceptable pleonasm would result in the target language. Portuguese does not require concrete details to be so specific. A further example of this stylistic difference is the number of possibilities to express "this place" in English (*up here, down here, in here, out here, over here, back here, etc.*); in most cases, these can be translated simply as *aqui*.

This particularization of concrete details is also shown in words related to sense perceptions. Let us consider sounds, for example. English is such an onomatopoeic language we will inevitably have a loss of meaning when we translate words related to sounds into Portuguese. Nuances such as *grating, creeching, squeaking, crash, bang, boom, clatter, slam, thud, buzz, rustle, scraping, clink, squelch, crack, etc.* cannot be rendered with the same precision and vividness as in English. This also applies to words related to visual perception, e.g., *glimmer, gleam, glow, glisten, glint, glitter, etc.*

Other metalinguistic distinctions, related to geographical or historical facts, have a strong bearing on the lexicon of the two languages. Even though these lexical distinctions seem to lie beyond the scope of this paper, they deserve to be referred to. Let us consider, for example, the number of English words related to humidity (*damp, humid, dank, moist, clammy, etc.*) which cannot be translated with the same precision into Portuguese. The same happens when the translator comes across groups of words such as *politics,*

*policy* and *polity*; it seems that our brief historical past has not enabled our lexicon to develop that far; therefore the translator will have either to use a vague equivalent or to resort to explanations, namely, *diretrizes políticas, organização política da sociedade, forma de governo*, etc.. Conversely, the translator will feel at home and will have a wide range of choice when he has to translate from English into Portuguese words related to *heat* or to tropical fruit, for example.

#### 8. Aspect Expressed by a Particle in English

English has several ways of expressing aspect, i.e., the way the action is carried out. Sometimes we have a perfect equivalent in Portuguese and a literal translation will work, e.g., the expression of the aspect of continuity in *nibble* (*mordiscar*) or in *sip* (*bebericar*). However, aspect expressed by particles in English seems to be a problem for translators, who may fail either to see that in many cases transposition is preferred to literal translation or to render this aspect at all in Portuguese. Let us consider some cases:

##### a) Aspect of continuity expressed by the particle "away"

*Away* often expresses the aspect of continuity, as in the sentence "The little girl was laughing away." This is a typical case of transposition, for the particle *away* is conveyed in Portuguese by an adverb phrase ( *A menina ria sem parar* ).

##### b) Inchoative aspect expressed by a particle

The inchoative aspect may be expressed by a suffix (e.g. *redde* ) and can be thus literally translated into Portuguese (*avermelhar*). However, when the inchoative aspect is expressed by a particle, literal translation does not apply and again we have a case of transposition. Examples:

fly away - começar a voar  
doze off - começar a cochilar  
shine forth - começar a brilhar

c) Gradual aspect expressed by a particle

When the gradual aspect is expressed by a particle, we have a case of transposition of a particle into an adverb. Thus, in the sentences

The sun faded away

The sea breeze died away in the evening

*away* is translated by such adverbs as *gradativamente*.

d) Perfective aspect expressed by a particle

The perfective aspect conveyed by a particle in English can be expressed in several ways in Portuguese, but there always seems to be a case of transposition.

Examples:

She gave her belongings *away*. Ela doou *todos* os seus pertences.

She tore up the letter. Ela rasgou a carta *em pedacinhos*.

She washed up. Ela lavou *todas as vasilhas*.

He has sold out. Ele vendeu *tudo o que tinha*.

9. *Aspect of Emphasis Expressed by Do-Insertion in English*

The aspect of emphasis or insistence does not have a perfect syntactic equivalent in Portuguese. However, it is very important in semantic terms; therefore the translator, instead of simply not translating it, could use transposition. Examples:

Do be careful	Tenha <i>muito</i> cuidado
He <i>did</i> answer my letter	Ele <i>de fato</i> respondeu à minha carta.
He had decided not to join	.....
us but he <i>did</i> come	... mas veio <i>assim mesmo</i> .

10. *Uncountables Have Different Distribution in the two Languages*

Uncountable English nouns may require a unit if the sense of number is relevant, e.g.:

a piece of	{	information
		advice
		news
		furniture

a flash of lightning

a clap of thunder.

But uncountables have different distribution in Portuguese, i.e., several uncountable nouns in English are actually countable in Portuguese and vice versa. Therefore, units such as *a piece of/ a flash of/ a clap of* do not have to be translated, for the indefinite article will suffice in Portuguese. If the translator insists on a literal translation and uses a unit in the target language, there will be a case of over-translation.

11. *Different Symbols or Comparisons*

We have examined so far the cases where a literal translation is semantically correct, but the target text could be stylistically improved by the use of other strategies such as transposition, modulation, insertion, etc. To end, we shall examine a situation where literal translation does not seem to work at all. I refer specifically to proverbs, idioms, set phrases, and everyday metaphors. The translator should be on the look out for these cases, since different symbols and comparisons are likely to occur in the two languages. Below is a classical example provided by Vinay and Darbelnet and its Portuguese equivalent:

Before you could say Jack Robinson.

Num piscar de olhos.

Faced with the impossibility of going into particulars of such

a wide topic. I will just provide examples of English proverbs and set phrases, and their possible Portuguese equivalents. The Portuguese ones seem to have a highly indigenous and local flavour to them, when compared to English:

Every man to his job.  
Cada macaco no seu galho .

Once bitten, twice shy.  
Macaco velho não pisa em taquara seca.

Needs must when the devil drives.  
Necessidade faz sapo pular.  
Carro apertado é que canta.

You can say goodbye to that.  
Pode tirar o cavalinho da chuva.

Set a beggar on horseback and he will drive to the devil.  
Dar asa "pra" cobra.  
Quem nunca comeu melado, quando come se lambuza.

To leave two lovers alone.  
Juntar o fogo e a pólvora.

Jack of all trades.  
Pau "pra" toda obra.

One makes the best of a bad job.  
Quem não tem cão, caça com gato.

The kettle shouldn't call the pot black.  
O roto não pode falar do esfarrapado.

The examples above seem to be the clearest evidence of the argument underlying this paper - different "Weltansichte" result in different styles, which has a strong bearing for the translation process.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> M. Rodrigues Lapa, *Estilística da Língua Portuguesa* (Lisboa: Livraria Popular de Francisco Franco, n.d.), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> E. Brinton et al in their *Translation Strategies* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Limited, 1981) thus explain *transposition*: "Since no two languages have the same grammatical structure, a literal translation often fails to convey the same idea or the same impression as the original. It is then necessary to normalize the language of translation: change word order, parts of speech, constructions. This process is called Transposition."(p.188).

<sup>3</sup> René Armand Dreifuss, "State, Class and the Organic Elite: The Formation of an Entrepreneurial Order in Brazil (1961-1965)," Diss. Glasgow 1980, p. 245.

<sup>4</sup> René Armand Dreifuss, *1964: A Conquista do Estado - Ação Política, Poder e Golpe de Classe*, trans. Ayeska Farias, Ceres de Freitas, Else Vieira (Supervisor) and Glória Carvalho (Petrópolis, Ed. Vozes, 1981), p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> J. Mattoso Câmara Júnior, *Contribuição à Estilística Portuguesa* (Rio de Janeiro: Ao Livro Técnico, 1977), p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Dreifuss, "State..." *op. cit.*, p. 688.

<sup>7</sup> Dreifuss, *1964... op. cit.* , pp. 419-20.

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