

# Translation Matters

Vol. 7 No. 2, Autumn 2025



# TRANSLATION MATTERS

Volume 7, Issue 2, Autumn 2025

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However, in the interests of transparency, and out of respect for the attention and professionalism that peer reviewers bring to their task, from Spring 2025 we will be making their (anonymous) reports available on the TM website, whenever possible.

### ***Translation Matters* Vol. 7, No. 2**

The following specialists participated in the reviewing and evaluation of articles for this general issue:

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Editor's Introduction: The Seven-Year Itch</b> <i>Karen Bennett</i>	1-5
<b>EPIGRAPH</b> <i>Claire Keegan &amp; Isabel Gouveia</i>	6
<b>ARTICLES</b>	
<b>Complexity thinking in translation studies: A critical reflection</b> <i>Kobus Marais</i>	8-25
<b>An affordance-based integration of sports and translation pedagogies</b> <i>Andreia Musumeci</i>	26-47
<b>Perspectives on translation in the EFL classroom in Portugal: An exploratory study</b> <i>Phillippa May Bennett</i>	48-68
<b>Interpretation and translation of indigenous languages in Peru: Specialty without exclusivity</b> <i>Julie R. Wechsler</i>	69-88
<b>Self-translation, rewriting or self-censorship? The amendment of a misogynistic lyric in Taylor Swift's song 'Better Than Revenge'</b> <i>Araceli María Alanís-Corral</i>	89-105
<b>DOSSIER: IBERO-AMERICAN TRANSFICTION</b>	
<b>Introduction: Traductores de papel: Creación y traducción en obras literarias peninsulares y latinoamericanas</b> <i>Esther Gimeno Ugalde &amp; Isabel Araújo Branco</i>	107-110
<b>Repensar los márgenes desde la ficción. Literatura con notas al pie transficcionales</b> <i>Esther Gimeno Ugalde</i>	111-127
<b>A tradução enquanto viagem, trabalho intelectual e performance amorosa: <i>El Viajero del Siglo</i>, de Andrés Neuman</b> <i>Isabel Araújo Branco</i>	128-150

<b>Traducción y creación en <i>El Vecino de Abajo</i>, de Mercedes Abad</b> <i>Fátima Fernandes da Silva</i>	151-163
<b>O tradutor, rebaixado funcionário da palavra escrita: The translator, a demoted functionary of the written word</b> <i>Carina Infante do Carmo</i>	164-173
<b>INTERVIEW</b>	
<b>João Guimarães, diretor musical e tradutor de canções</b> <i>Daniel Galvão</i>	175-182
<b>BOOK REVIEWS</b>	
<b>Translation and community</b> <i>Amami Shofiya Al Qorin &amp; A. Faizul Mubin</i>	184-187
<b>Decolonisation without consensus: The praxis of Global South translation</b> <i>Yeisil Peña Contreras</i>	188-191
<b>Translating sensuously: Exploring indigenous knowledges through the lens of translation</b> <i>Margarita Savchenkova</i>	192-195

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: The Seven-Year Itch

*Translation Matters* has reached the end of a seven-year cycle. And like many married couples after a similar period of time, it is starting to feel the itch for change.

A lot has happened in those seven years. When the journal was first launched back in 2019, it was a small provincial affair, edited solely by myself and Gisele Dionísio da Silva (who had extensive editorial experience, having worked for years at an academic publisher in Brazil). It aimed to be, above all, a training journal for the various students of translation that were coming through the ranks at our university and other institutions with which we had close ties. Consequently, most of the contributors to the first issue, and to the general issues that followed, had a personal relationship with us in some way: they were our students, our colleagues, people that we knew from conferences, and *their* students and colleagues.

In those early years, Gisele and I put a lot of effort into those articles, working intensely with the authors to ensure that their offerings were of a standard to be presented to an international public. Being an online journal, *TM* had an exposure that print journals did not have. We were aware that, if we made mistakes at this stage, and brought out an issue that was substandard, we couldn't just pile those unwanted copies into a cardboard box and push it to the back of a cupboard. The mistake could never be erased but would colour our reputation for years to come. Hence, we scrupulously requested peer reviews – usually from our immediate colleagues and friends – and if they came back with negative feedback, worked with the authors until the articles were put into shape. In part, this was because we didn't have much of a pool of material to draw on. Like all young journals that had yet to make a name, we had to procure articles, rather than wait for them to be freely submitted.

The thematic issues, however, operated according to a different dynamic. We found out in our first year, when we put out the call for the special issue on *Intersemiotic Translation and Multimodality* (Vol. 1, No. 2, 2019), that there were people out there in the wider world that would be interested in submitting to us if we could just reach them. And with the second special issue (*Translation Under Dictatorships*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2020), which had initially been created to offer a platform for the many TS scholars in Portugal researching translation under the Estado Novo, we found we actually received more submissions from outside the country than we did from Portugal itself. As a result, that special issue covers dictatorships in Spain, Italy, Brazil, Norway and the Arab world, in addition to the Portuguese Estado Novo.

In fact, it was those thematic issues that really brought *Translation Matters* to the attention of the outside world, and the ones that followed – *Picturebooks and Graphic Narratives* (Vol. 3.2, 2021) and *Translation and Money* (Vol. 4.2, 2022) – cemented this trend. Thus, in 2023, we took the decision to produce two special issues in the year rather than the usual one – *Experiential Translation* (Vol. 5.1) and *Translation in and From the*

*Middle Ages* (Vol. 5.2, guest-edited by J. Carlos Teixeira), only reverting to a general issue in the second semester of 2024.

In the meantime, the editorial committee increased, as other colleagues came on board – most notably, Elena Galvão as book reviews editor, Marco Neves as webmaster and Imren Gökce as copyediting coordinator (as well as a few others that came, stayed for a year or so, and left). The academic advisory board also expanded, as we found ourselves having to reach much further afield to find peer reviewers with the specialist knowledge necessary for the articles that we were now receiving.

However, it was a fortuitous circumstance – the visit to Lisbon of an exceptional young PhD student from Salamanca, Margarita Savchenkova, in 2023 – that really propelled *Translation Matters* to a whole new level. With her technological and bureaucratic expertise, combined with an admirable patience for form-filling and statistics, Margarita took it upon herself to get *Translation Matters* indexed, first in directories like MLA, Crossref, ERIHPLUS and Latindex, and then finally, in the much-coveted Scopus database. To our amazement, when Scopus indexation was awarded in 2024, we went straight into the top quartile (Q1) in the category of Literature and Literary Theory,<sup>1</sup> proving that the scholarship we were producing was indeed having an impact on the outside world.

With Scopus indexation, we overnight became a journal in which scholars all over the world wanted to publish. Since then, we've been inundated with submissions, so many that only a small percentage could actually be published. There was also a noticeable shift in the kind of articles that were being submitted. Probably due to our investment in avant-garde or experimental conceptions of translation (particularly in the special issues of 2023-4, though also in some of the earlier ones as well), the most interesting articles coming onto the platform no longer seemed concerned with the technical/technological/pragmatic aspects of interlingual translation that animate most of the journals in the TS ecosystem, but instead assumed translation to be something much broader: a transformational process by means of which anything that is a carrier of meaning is reworked for a new purpose.

That is to say, without really intending to, we found we had already carved out a niche for ourselves as a humanistic/literary/philosophical journal as opposed to the broad-spectrum translation periodical that we presented ourselves as on the website.

This is why we are now feeling the seven-year itch. *Translation Matters* has grown up and it is no longer satisfied with the identity that it had assumed back in its infancy. However, unlike those married couples mentioned in my opening paragraph, it is not dreaming of greater promiscuity. On the contrary, it is considering consolidating the relationships that it has already developed with experiential and experimental forms of translation, inter-epistemic translation, literary/artistic translation and translation

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<sup>1</sup> This went down to Q2 in 2025. We also have Q2 indexation in Linguistics.

philosophy/theory, by cutting itself free from the more conventional understandings of the term from which it developed.

Such a transformation cannot come overnight, however. With so many articles already in the pipeline at different stages in the editorial process, we have to first ensure that we honour our responsibilities to those authors before narrowing our focus. Hence, from 2026, articles that are not immediately connected to a thematic issue will be published on a rolling basis on the platform,<sup>2</sup> so that both of the official issues can be devoted to a particular theme. As can already be seen on the [Calls for Papers](#) section of the website, we have four thematic issues already announced: *History as Translation* (Vol. 8.1, guest-edited by Margarita Savchenkova), *Retranslation* (Vol. 8.2, guest-edited by Ahu Selin Erkul Yağci, Selahattin Karagöz and Merve Engin Kurt), *Media Ecologies of Translation* (Vol. 9.1, edited by Raluca Tanasescu) and *Eco-Translation* (Vol. 9.2, edited by Xany Jensen van Vuuren, Helen-Mary Cawood and James Kelly).

The present issue, therefore, is the last of the general issues in the old mould before the big shake-up next year. To some extent, it can be seen as a transitional issue: for although the articles selected for publication in it are not thematically linked, they do already bear some of the marks of the new 'grown-up' version of the journal that will make its appearance next year. It is also the first issue to have been brought out by our new expanded editorial board.

The first article, for example, is a meditation on complexity thinking by **Kobus Marais**, whose writings about the emergence of knowledge through translational semiotic processes (Marais, 2019, 2024) have positioned him unequivocally at the forefront of the new paradigm. This article aims to take stock of the development of complexity thinking within Translation Studies by reviewing its historical trajectory and engaging with some of the criticisms that it has received, most notably from figures such as Douglas Robinson (2022) and Anthony Pym (2023). The conclusions that Marais reaches, namely that the construction of knowledge is as constrained by the non-human inert Other (i.e. matter-energy in its various manifestations) as it is by human concerns, not only bring ethical and ecological consequences, but also implications for the whole philosophical debate about how we acquire knowledge in the first place.

At first sight, the next article, by **Andrea Musumeci**, is more conservative in nature, in that it is concerned with the training of translators for "a service profession demanding business acumen and adaptive problem-solving". However, it soon becomes apparent that his approach goes beyond the parameters of conventional translator-training. In fact, to the extent that the article borrows its theories (game-based approaches and ecological dynamics) from sports pedagogy and asks how they may be "be translationally adapted to enhance the development of strategic, extra-textual competences in translation education", it may also be considered as a sophisticated exercise in inter-epistemic translation of the kind explored in Vol. 6 (1) of *Translation Matters*.

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<sup>2</sup> These will be collated into a general issue at a later opportunity.

**Phillippa May Bennett's** article, which follows, is also about education, but rather than focusing on translator training, it returns to the age-old question of how translation may be used in foreign-language education. From the onset of the 'communicative approach' in the early 1980s, translation was effectively banned from the EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom on the assumption that it prevented learners from acquiring the mental flexibility to think in the new tongue. In recent years, however, a 'translation turn' in foreign-language teaching has been trumpeted (Carreres and Noriega-Sánchez, 2021; Fehaima, 2022) and translation has begun to return as a teaching method to the EFL classroom. Bennett has sought to find out the extent to which this shift has impinged upon the Portuguese education system by conducting a short survey of university trainers of EFL teachers to ascertain their attitudes towards the use of translation in the English language classroom. Her results show that Portuguese university trainers seem to take a pragmatic attitude to the matter, approaching translation as a strategy that could be used in combination with others, though "not as a crutch that prevents immersion in the target language".

**Julie Wechsler's** article, which comes next, also uses ethnographic methods, this time to explore the work of indigenous interpreter-translators in Peru. Drawing on a pool of interpreters and translators trained by the Ministry of Culture and registered at the National Registry of Interpreters and Translators of Indigenous Languages (*Registro Nacional de Intérpretes y Traductores de Lenguas Indígenas, ReNITLI*), she attempts to find out how interpreting functions in healthcare contexts in indigenous parts of Peru and make some recommendations for how the service could be improved with a view to increasing the inclusivity and accessibility of public spaces in Peru.

The fifth article, by **Araceli María Alanís Corral**, moves into different territory to look at the musical cover version as a form of translation. Alanís Corral takes as her case study a song by American singer-songwriter, Taylor Swift, which the artist re-recorded as a way of taking back control of her work after the original recording was sold without her consent. The focus is on one particular lyric, which was changed in what appears to be an act of ideological reframing. Presenting this as a case of 'intra-lingual self-translation', Alanís Corral discusses the extent to which the change was motivated by changing social mores, and forms part of the negotiation of her present identity.

The *Articles* section of the issue closes, uncharacteristically, with a self-contained dossier in Spanish and Portuguese on *Ibero-American Transfiction*. Involving four articles by **Esther Gimeno Ugalde**, **Isabel Araújo Branco**, **Fátima Fernandes da Silva** and **Carina Infante do Carmo**, and framed by an Introduction jointly authored by the first two, this dossier theorizes the phenomenon of transfiction and presents case-studies from the Ibero-American world in which the figure of the translator becomes a character in a fictional narrative.

In addition to the book reviews, this issue also contains an interview by **Daniel Galvão** of the Portuguese music director and song translator João Artur Guimarães, which explores the question of song translation for dubbing. Covering the interviewee's personal

Bennett, K. - Editor's Introduction

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experience, dubbing culture in Portugal, the problems affecting this kind of translation and possible solutions to them, this interview offers precious information for anyone interested in entering this very specific area of translation practice.

With its coverage of themes like (inter-)epistemic translation and music translation, and introduction of a new language (Spanish) into the traditional mix, this issue of *Translation Matters* not only signals the end of an era, but also points forward to some of the issues that processes that are likely to be attracting our attention in years to come.

**Karen Bennett**

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## EPIGRAPH

Mrs. Kinsella stands then, and they say their goodbyes. I follow them out to the car with my mother, who still has the baby in her arms. Mrs. Kinsella takes out the cardboard box with the pots of jam. Kinsella lifts a four-stone sack of potatoes out of the boot. "These are floury," he says. "Queens they are, Mary."

My mother thanks them, saying it was a lovely thing they did, to keep me.

"The girl was welcome and is welcome again, anytime," the woman says.

"She's a credit to you, Mary," Kinsella says. "You keep your head in the books," he says to me. "I want to see gold stars on them copybooks next time I come up here." He gives me a kiss then, and the woman hugs me. I watch them getting into the car and closing the doors and I feel a start when the engine turns and the car begins to move away.

"What happened at all?" Ma says, now that the car is gone.

"Nothing," I say.

"Tell me."

"Nothing happened." This is my mother I am speaking to but I have learned enough, grown enough, to know that what happened is not something I need

ever mention. It is my perfect opportunity to say nothing.

I hear the car braking on the gravel in the lane, the door opening, and then I am doing what I do best. It's nothing I have to think about. I take off from standing and race on down the lane. My heart feels not so much in my chest as in my hands. I am carrying it along swiftly, as though I have become the messenger for what is going on inside me. Several things flash through my mind: the boy on the wallpaper, the gooseberries, that moment when the bucket pulled me under, the lost heifer, the third light on the water. I think of my summer, of now, of a tomorrow that I can't entirely believe in.

As I am rounding the bend, reaching the point where I daren't look, I see him there, closing the gate, putting the clamp back on. His eyes are down, and he seems to be looking at his hands, at what he is doing. My feet batter on along the rough gravel, the strip of tatty grass in the middle of our lane. There is only one thing I care about now, and my feet are carrying me there. As soon as he sees me, he grows still. By the time I reach him, the gate is open and I am smack against him and lifted into his arms.

For a long stretch, he holds me tight. I feel the thumping of my heart, my breaths coming out, then my heart and my breaths settling differently. At a point, which feels much later, a sudden gust blows through the trees and shakes big, fat raindrops over us. My eyes are closed now and I can feel him, the heat of him coming through his good clothes, can smell the soap on his neck. When I finally open my eyes and look over his shoulder, it is my father I see, coming along strong and steady, his walking stick in his hand. I hold on as though I'll drown if I let go, and listen to the woman, who seems, in her throat, to be taking it in turns sobbing and crying, as though she is crying not for one but for two now. I daren't keep my eyes open and yet I do, staring up the lane, past Kinsella's shoulder, seeing what he can't. If some part of me wants with all my heart to get down and tell the woman who has minded me so well that I will never, never tell, something deeper keeps me there in Kinsella's arms, holding on.

"Daddy," I keep calling him, keep warning him. "Daddy."

A Senhora Kinsella levanta-se e ambos se despedem. Sigo-os até ao carro com a minha mãe, que ainda leva o bebé nos braços. A Senhora Kinsella tira o caixote com os frascos de compota. Kinsella levanta um saco de 25 kg de batatas do porta-bagagens.

— Estas são farinhentas, Mary. Verdadeiras Queens.

A minha mãe agradece-lhes, dizendo que foi uma coisa bonita o que fizeram, ao ficarem comigo.

— A pequena foi e será sempre bem-vinda — diz a mulher.

— Parabéns, Mary, ela é muito bem-educada — diz Kinsella. — E tu, minha menina, mantém a cabeça nos livros — diz-me. — Quero ver só estrelas douradas nos cadernos de cópias da próxima vez que cá vier. — Dá-me um beijo e a mulher abraça-me. Vejo-os entrar no carro e fechar as portas e sinto um sobressalto quando o motor arranca e o carro começa a afastar-se.

— Afinal, o que é que aconteceu? — pergunta a mãe, agora que o carro se foi.

— Nada — digo.

— Diz-me.

— Não aconteceu nada. — É com a minha mãe que estou a falar, mas aprendi o suficiente, cresci o suficiente, para saber que o que aconteceu não é algo que eu precise de mencionar. Esta é a minha oportunidade perfeita de não dizer nada.

Ouço o carro a travar na gravilha do caminho, a porta a abrir-se e, de repente, sem pensar, faço aquilo em que sou melhor. Arranco e corro caminho abaixo. Sinto o coração a bater mais nas minhas mãos do que no meu peito. Sou tão rápida como se me tivesse tornado a mensageira do que se está a passar dentro de mim. Várias coisas percorrem a minha mente: o rapaz no papel de parede, as groselhas, o momento em que o balde me puxou para baixo de água, a bezerra perdida, a terceira luz para além da água. Penso no meu verão, no agora, num amanhã em que não consigo acreditar verdadeiramente.

Quando faço a curva, até onde nem me atrevo a olhar, vejo-o ali, a fechar o portão, colocando de novo o gancho. Tem os olhos baixos e parece estar a olhar para as mãos, para o que está a fazer. Os meus pés batem no cascalho áspero, a faixa de relva gasta no meio do nosso caminho. Apenas uma coisa me interessa agora e os meus pés conduzem-me até ela. Assim que me vê, fica imóvel. Quando chego ao portão, já aberto, vou de encontro a ele, que me ergue nos seus braços.

Durante um bom bocado abraça-me com força. Sinto o bater acelerado do meu coração, a minha respiração ofegante, depois o meu coração e a minha respiração a acalmarem, cada um à sua maneira. A certa altura, que parece muito depois, uma rajada repentina sopra através das árvores e sacode grandes e pesadas gotas de chuva sobre nós. Fecho os olhos e sinto-o, o calor da sua roupa de sair, o cheiro a sabonete no pescoço. Quando finalmente abro os olhos vejo, por cima do seu ombro, o meu pai a aproximar-se, forte e firme, de bordão na mão. Agarro-me com força, como se me pudesse afogar se não o fizer e ouço a mulher a soluçar e a chorar, como se agora chorasse não por um, mas por dois. Não me atrevo a manter os olhos abertos e, no entanto, faço-o, olhando para o caminho, para além do ombro de Kinsella, a ver o que ele não consegue. Parte de mim quer, do fundo do coração, chegar junto à mulher que me cuidou tão bem para lhe dizer que nunca, nunca direi nada, mas algo mais profundo mantém-me firme nos braços de Kinsella.

— Papá — continuo a chamar-lhe, a avisá-lo. — Papá.

From *Foster* by Claire Keegan

Translated by Isabel Gouveia

## ARTICLES

# COMPLEXITY THINKING IN TRANSLATION STUDIES: A CRITICAL REFLECTION<sup>1</sup>

**Kobus Marais\***

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**ABSTRACT:** Taking stock of the emergence of a scholarly trajectory like complexity thinking is required every so often in order to orientate oneself to the developments, the problems and the unfinished tasks that remain ahead. This paper therefore invites a critical considering of a complexity approach to translation by engaging with some of the criticism. The main task, however, will be to map an agenda for further research, based on the critical reflection, to continue the development of the approach. The paper deals with the latest literature on complexity thinking generally and the complexity of constraints and absentials in particular to work out a nuanced conceptual framework with which to study the emergence of any semiotic trajectory through a process of translation. In addition, it considers a soft causality for social-cultural studies that is able to reflect the complexity of causality in these domains by further exploring the notion of 'propensity'.

**KEYWORDS:** Complexity; Translation; Soft Causality; Propensity

## 1. Introduction

I have a sense that the notion of complexity, in whichever form, has entrenched itself in scholarly thought all around the world over the past five decades or so. A simple Google Scholar search with the search term 'complexity' delivers a virtually endless list of scholarly sources on the topic, ranging from physics (Kauffman, 1993; Prigogine, 1996), mathematics (Nicolis and Nicolis, 2012) and biology (Deacon, 2013; Kauffman, 2019) to medicine (Barker, Toye and Seers, 2023), management and business sciences (Stacey and Griffin, 2006), philosophy (Cilliers, 1998), and theology (Van Kooten Niekerk and Buhl, 2004). Stochastic and probabilistic logic and calculation (Kruger, Daston and Heidelberger, 1987; Kruger, Gigenrenzer and Morgan, 1987) seem to be the norm in quantitative research these days. In the humanities and social sciences, both qualitatively and quantitatively, complexity is used widely (Byrne and Callaghan, 2023; Cilliers, 1998; Ingold, 2015; Williams, 2021). Even in cases where scholars do not expressly use complexity terminology or identify their approach as 'complexity', one can often pick up strands of complexity thinking. In translation studies itself, Toury (1995, pp. 259-279), Kiraly (2013), Robinson (1991, 2001, 2022a) and Pym (2023) are examples of scholars who use aspects of complexity thinking to varying degrees. I have not yet seen any wholesale refutation of the approach, which I think might mean that complexity thinking is taking up its position in the smorgasbord of onto-epistemological options available to translation studies scholars. Even criticism by the likes of Douglas Robinson (2022a, 2022b) and Anthony Pym (2023)

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does not amount to a rejection of complexity thinking. On the contrary, they both find it a valuable contribution, despite some reservations and suggested amendments.

The ubiquity of complexity thinking requires some reflection,<sup>2</sup> I think. In this paper, I reflect on the relevance of complexity thinking for translation studies roughly a decade after the publication of my first work on complexity. I start off with a brief recap of the origins and basic tenets of complexity thinking. Then I consider some of the criticism in how I, in collaboration with colleagues such as Reine Meylaerts and Kalevi Kull, went about explaining complexity thinking. I would then like to zoom in on one important contribution that I think complexity thinking could make to translation studies, namely a 'soft causality'. I close with a brief reflection on the relevance of complexity thinking for cultural sustainability, i.e., a broader cultural-political perspective.

## **2. Complexity thinking: origins and tenets**

Opinions on the origins of complexity theory differ widely. Hence, my narrative here is one construction among many. In my view, the origins of complexity theory can be traced back to the mid to late 1800s in the natural sciences, in particular in mathematics and thermodynamics.<sup>3</sup> It stemmed from the basic insight in thermodynamics that not all causality is as linear as Newtonian physics argued. As Prigogine (1996, p. 20) explains, linear causality argues that one cause creates one effect, and this line of argument became problematic with the realisation that, in many cases, many causes create an effect or many effects. In response, complexity theory developed as an effort to understand and deal with non-linear or complex causality. After the initial interest in the 1800s, complexity thinking developed through a number of phases such as the emergentist thinking of the 1920s and 1930s (Juarrero and Rubino, 2010), the development of computational power from the 1940s onwards, chaos theory in the 1980s and the current wave of complexity thinking, since the 1990s (Coveney and Highfield, 1995; Kauffman, 1993, 2000; Mitchell, 2009; Waldrop, 1992). One should also keep in mind that complexity theory, like all scholarly endeavours, is not a monolithic approach. The probability theory approach, as a subsection of complexity theory, very much still operates on reductionist principles while philosophic approaches to complexity entail a much more poststructuralist interest (Cilliers, 1998). In translation studies, Pym (2023) is an example of a proponent of probability theory and its semi-reductionist interests while Robinson (2022a, 2022b) seems to be a proponent of a more poststructuralist, hermeneutic approach. It is interesting that responses to complexity thinking in translation studies very quickly fall into this binary while a complexity approach itself would try to avoid a choice between the binaries and find ways to integrate them or to maintain both options in some kind of complex conceptual system.

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<sup>2</sup>I would like to acknowledge Reine Meylaerts, Kalevi Kull and the various members of the Complexity Discussion Group for working with me and helping me to work out some of the implications of complexity theory for translation studies, as much as I do not think the work is done.

<sup>3</sup>For instance, see Prigogine (1996), who situates it a bit later.

Over the past 150 years or so, a number of basic features of complexity theory have been proposed (Marais, 2014, pp. 26-43). The first would be that complex systems are sensitive to initial conditions. This feature is well known from the chaos-theory formulation in the 1980s about the butterfly flapping its wings somewhere and causing a massive storm on the other side of the globe. In other words, minor differences in initial conditions can have major consequences because the causality that follows the initial conditions is not linear. Also, non-linear causality is not reversible. In contrast to Newtonian causality, where the direction of causality is reversible, complexity means that, even in matter-energy systems, time plays a role, and the trajectory of the system is irreversible. In translation studies, this phenomenon is known through the problems with back-translation. Thirdly, in complex systems, the trajectory of the system also tends towards what is known as an 'attractor'. This means that complex systems can have similar trajectories without these ever being exactly similar. Here one can think about patterns in the economy or traffic or, in interlingual translation, patterns in retranslations. Fourthly, complex systems are said to operate at the edge of chaos. In other words, one would find both some stability and some instability in the system, but efficient systems, so the argument goes, tend towards the instability side of the spectrum without being completely unstable. Fifthly, complex systems are also said to self-organise. There is no invisible hand that organises traffic flow, thinking or the economy, and yet patterns emerge as if out of the blue. This would lead to the next point, namely that complex systems show emergent properties. Emergence means that the future of a complex system cannot be predicted from the characteristics of the parts. In addition, complex systems tend to be viewed as hierarchically ordered. Hierarchy here does not mean that one level of the system is more important than the other but that historically one level emerged before the other – or ontologically, that the existence of one level is required for the next to emerge. An 'interdependent heterarchy' is therefore perhaps a better term than 'hierarchy'.

One of the major implications of complexity theory is that it argues that it is impossible to predict perfectly the future trajectory of a truly complex system. Pym (2023) in particular rallies against this problem, arguing that scholarship is aimed at solving problems and that the complexity of problems needs to be reduced in order to solve them. This is exactly what one component of complexity theory suggests through their work on probabilistic mathematical calculations to at least make some predictions despite the unpredictability (Kruger, Daston and Heidelberger, 1987; Kruger, Gigenrenzer and Morgan, 1987). Others like Paul Cilliers (1998, 2000, 2002, 2005; Osberg, Biesta and Cilliers, 2008; Richardson, Cilliers and Lissack, 2001) argue that endeavours to reduce complexity is not really complexity theory because it still assumes reductionism as the solution to problems. I take a position midway between these two extremes. In other words, a complexity approach to the problem at hand should argue that there are many types of causality and many types of approaches to deal with those, ranging from reductionism through reductionist complexity through completely unpredictable complexity. As much as I agree with Pym that, if the management of a problem is your goal, some kind of reduction is

inevitable, I would also argue that one should honour the complexity of the factors that influence your managerial decisions as far as possible. I do, however, not agree with Pym's utilitarian argument that solving problems is the only goal of scholarship and would argue, from a complexity perspective, that scholarly work has a complex of goals.

In my view, the history of complexity has given us at least three broad approaches to complexity. The one is complexity theory, which originated and is steeped in the natural sciences and probability theory (see references in the introduction). The second is complexity philosophy, of which Morin (2008) and Cilliers (1998) are prime examples, taking a philosophical and not a theoretical approach. Reine Meylaerts and I have used the term 'complexity thinking' to indicate a combination of the theoretical and philosophical approaches (Marais and Meylaerts, 2019, 2022; Marais, Meylaerts and Li, 2022), which mean that we worked at combining the philosophy of complexity with a qualitative version of complexity theory in our version of complexity thinking.

### **3. Critical voices**

In this section, I briefly deal with criticism expressed against a complexity thinking approach to translation studies in my (and Reine Meylaerts)<sup>4</sup> work. As much as I do not agree with all aspects of the criticism, I value the critical engagements because they allow me to clarify my own ideas and adapt or strengthen them where necessary. Robinson (2022a; 2022b) mainly directed his criticism against what he perceives to be a lack of agency in (my version of) complexity thinking. To some extent, I agree with this criticism, for two reasons. On the one hand, I acknowledge that my thought was biased towards systems thinking, with its concomitant lesser consideration of individual agency, because one of the strands of complexity theory is complex-adaptive systems theory with a strong influence from general systems theory. I have to point out, however, that complex adaptive systems theory does not, per definition, exclude individual agency as it is indeed interested in the very micro changes that have non-linear effects. In addition, the complex adaptive systems version of complexity theory makes compelling arguments about self-organization, arguing that these systems self-organize without 'anyone' overseeing or constructing the self-organization. In a human body, for instance, there is no homunculus (Deacon, 2013, pp. 46-79) that controls the processes of the body. Rather, the body self-organizes and distributes control throughout the whole body. In other words, one could look at semiotic processes like translation as self-organizing (Queiroz and El-Hani, 2006a, 2006b; Queiroz and Loula, 2010). Admittedly, that would then only be one perspective on an extraordinarily complex process, and Robinson is at least correct in arguing that one should also consider the agency of semiotic agents, as do Sharov and Tønneson (2021). I worked out my understanding of translational agency in two following monographs (Marais, 2019a, 2023a), arguing first that this agency is semiotic in nature and second that

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<sup>4</sup>I take sole responsibility for the views expressed in this paper.

agency is a complex interplay between material and ideational constraints as instantiated in organisms.

Robinson (2022b) also critiqued my use of complexity thinking as positing a binary between reductionism and complexity thinking. As much as some of my formulations could have been clearer, I think that Robinson misunderstood my intention with complexity thinking. Throughout *Translation theory and development studies: A complexity theory approach* (Marais, 2014), I proposed complexity thinking as a 'meta' position, not a binary to any other position. A complexity thinking approach to reality, including social-cultural reality, suggests that one should not reduce everything to complexity but allow for a rich complex of causalities, where rich complex does not signify large numbers, primarily, but non-linear interactions. There are cases where reductionism is sufficient to explain what needs explanation, and I granted that back in 2014. There might also be cases where some reductionism is required to explain what needs to be explained or to serve as ground for action, e.g. probability theory (Pym, 2023). And there might be cases where reductionism is insufficient to explain what needs to be explained. This insight would lead to two claims. Firstly, one needs to judge the situation at hand and decide how much of which epistemological position is needed to study or explain what you are studying or explaining. Complexity thinking suggests that that judgement need not be reduced to one answer but might entail a complex of answers. The second implication is that complexity thinking usually tries to move one level of observation or thinking higher than the binaries that it tries to overcome. I say usually because as Peirce has argued, there are also binaries that need to be considered as such.

Robinson (2022a, pp. 158-176, 2022b) also took umbrage at my reservations about activism and constructivism. In my view, these two concepts are related in current humanities thought in that constructivism sees the agency of knowledge in the human constructor, which gives her the power to activism. Both concepts are, in my view, steeped in Western humanism, if not anthropocentrism, where humans are special cases endowed with constructive and activist powers – in contrast to other living organisms and inanimate matter (Barad, 2007; Cronin, 2017). As much as I would agree that all knowledge is constructed, an ecological and sustainable approach to knowledge creation should, for ethical reasons at least, allow for the thing or organism or idea about which knowledge is constructed to co-constrain the construction process (Marais, 2024). Secondly, as much as we, as a species, are thankful to the activists of our time such as Mandela, Ghandi, Tutu, King, or Greenpeace, this kind of visible and strong activism is not the only thing that sustains and drives a society or culture. This argument was behind my point that the 'proverbial translator' in her stuffy office also has agency, also contributes to the emergence of a society and that translation studies should also consider this kind of 'invisible' agency. Ethically, translation studies has the responsibility to acknowledge the complexity of agency and constructivism by not limiting its interest to humans and by acknowledging 'small' acts of activism that contribute to the emergence of a society. Writing at a time when 'great men' around the globe are again trying to shape the world

in their image, everyday people standing their everyday ground provides a complex counterpoint to the notions of individual agency and construction.

Anthony Pym (2023) more recently suggested that complexity thinking, as practiced by Reine Meylaerts and myself, does not allow for empirical thinking, a point that the empirical work in our publications easily refutes. He further argues that it is only empirical work that creates new knowledge. I would counterargue that empirical research is crucial in knowledge construction, but a complexity perspective suggests that empirical and conceptual work are entangled in the emergence of new knowledge. Pym further suggests that all empirical research should be of a probabilistic nature and that probabilism is the answer to managing the threat of complexity thinking, namely that it might lead to knowledge that is too relative/complex to act upon – and for Pym, knowledge is meant to be acted upon in order to solve problems. A complexity approach to this problem would again relativise Pym's strong claims about empiricism and probabilism, arguing that there might be cases where old-fashioned linear reductionism suffices, although these cases would be severely limited in the domain of culture-society. There might be cases where probabilism, with its mathematical underbelly, suffices, but there might also be cases where a soft, non-reductionist, qualitative argument is required. For example, in the sociology of translation, probabilistic theory could well explain large-scale publication tendencies while a softer, qualitative argument might be needed to explain the habitus of a particular translator. There are cases where one needs knowledge upon which you can act, and in those cases, the complexity of the data that informs the knowledge should indeed be acknowledged and managed – and reductionism of some kind seems to be the only solution. When one does reduce the complexity of the data, one should, however, acknowledge your political act in reducing the complexity and take responsibility for the outcomes of such a reduced process (in management sciences usually known as 'unintended consequences' and in medicine as 'side effects'). However, there are also cases in which knowledge is not necessarily linked to socio-political action, e.g., literary interpretation. There are also genuinely complex cases, such as ethical conundrums that require action, where no amount of reductionism will help. So, I find Pym's insistence on empiricism valuable but one-sided or reductionist – reducing the broad spectrum of knowledge creation to one aspect thereof. The way in which Pym reduces scholarship to an instrumentalist goal is in itself an argument for a complexity thinking approach to translation studies.

After ten years and the interactions upon which I commented above, I think it is fair to say that complexity thinking, as an onto-epistemological approach, not a theory or a methodology, is a valuable addition to the conceptual toolkit in translations studies, and neither Robinson nor Pym seems to disagree on this score. Work in translator education (Király, 2013), language and translation policy (Meylaerts, Gonne, Lobbes and Sanz Roig, 2017), hermeneutics (Robinson, 1991), Bible translation (Naudé, Miller-Naudé and Wilson, 2022) and the sociology of translation (Tyulenev, 2011a, 2011b) have used aspects of complexity thinking with great success. Whether complexity thinking needs to be an

identifiable approach or just be integrated into the conceptual tools is for the field to decide.

#### **4. Towards a soft, complex, qualitative causality**

In my view, however, the most useful contribution that complexity thinking could make to translation studies at this point in time is to provide a framework for a soft(er) non-linear causality. I am not suggesting a soft causality as a binary to stronger causalities. Rather, I view it as an expansion of the options available when thinking about social-cultural emergence and the role of translation in it. I think we need a softer causality when we deal with living organisms and their social-cultural work because as much as they are simultaneously matter-energy, living organisms and their social-cultural work are not only subject to the laws of physics. They are also biological and semiotic systems that do not follow 'laws' but evolve and develop under sets of constraints. Except for the fact that living organisms are caused not by force alone but also by evolution, living organisms, through their semiotic abilities, bring absent things like ideas and intentions to the table. Ideas, in my view, do not cause in the same way that matter causes. These differences, therefore, suggest that a softer version of causality might be valuable.

Juarerro (1999, 2023) argues that the 'billiard ball' model of causality still mostly holds sway in most domains of scholarship. Causality is, in this view, a linear – or even non-linear (Prigogine, 1996) – bumping of one thing into another, and it is this bump that causes the other thing(s) to behave in a certain way. It is highly improbable that translation studies scholars would conceptualise translational causality in terms of 'bumping', but the popularity of Dawkins' application of genetic biology in cultural studies through meme theory still suggests that scholars are comfortable with explaining causality in terms of small parts bumping or carrying information from one domain/brain to another, i.e., a kind of discrete causality. To be fair, bumping obviously accounts for some causality. Juarrero's argument is just that it does not account for all causality.

If one looks at conventional wisdom in translation studies regarding causality, it is not always clear what translation studies scholars think causality is. Gideon Toury (1995, pp. 264-267) proposes probabilistic laws that explain causality in translation. As much as Toury is looking for scientific laws in translation studies, he grants that these cannot be completely linear. Therefore, he suggests laws of the nature of "if x, then y" or "if x, then the greater/the lesser likelihood of y" (p. 265). He also suggests ordinal ordering of the probabilities under observation, for example "if  $X_1$  and  $Z_1$ , then the likelihood that Y is greater than if  $X_1$  and  $Z_2$ , and even greater than if  $X_1$  and  $Z_3$ " (p. 266). In my interpretation, therefore, Toury's views on causality include probability as a factor to consider, and probability is, to some extent, linked to complexity, though they are not necessarily similar. In this sense, Toury has already in 1995 proposed aspects of a complexity, i.e., non-linear, probabilistic, theory of causality. A given variable(s) raises or lowers the probability of a particular effect. However, I think we could be clearer on the way in which this non-linear, probabilistic causality plays out. In other words, how are things caused, how do things

emerge, how do things come to be? And what is the role of other things in them being caused, emerging, or coming to be?

Another influential thinker about causality in translation is Andrew Chesterman. He formulated his view of causality in translation as follows: '*Causal models*, in their simplest form, look like this: Causal conditions > Translations > Effects' (Chesterman, 2017). In as much as he also makes it clear that causality in translation is not linear and quite often of a complex nature, he does argue that translations are both causes and consequences. I think Chesterman's is a valid argument (Marais, 2019b), but the question remains: How does it happen? What exactly do we mean when we say that translations 'cause' or that translations are 'effects'?

For Douglas Robinson (2017), translations are caused by human brains that interpret texts that came before the translation. Translations are therefore caused hermeneutically through the biological interpreting processes of the brain and distributed icotically in a society through mirror neurons and the material markings left by patterns of interpretation. Translations are therefore caused by and cause effects through the agency of a human brain and its interpretation and communication processes, which are all complex adaptive processes. Apart from the problem that Robinson seems to ignore translation processes in non-human living organisms, his theory does indeed suggest a softer causality that is embedded in the indeterminate and complex nature of hermeneutic process.

In Mona Baker's (2006) narrative approach, which is clearly closer, though not similar, to Robinson than to the Toury-Chesterman-Pym approaches, she considers the possibility that translations cause and are caused through the ways in which they are narrated within larger narratives or systems of meaning-making. Translation is causative to the extent that translations themselves are narratively framed and to the extent that they are used in larger narratives.

Piotr Blumczynski embeds translation in process philosophy based on Whitehead's work. It seems that Blumczynski tries to equate causality and translation when he writes: "When we assume a causal (i.e., translational) relation ..." (2016, p. 112). This is a position with which I would not agree because causality entails a relation, as Blumczynski rightfully argues, but there are, in my view, relations that are not translations as much as all translations entail relations. However, Blumczynski (2016, p. 111) does move the debate in the direction of "conditioning", which is much closer to the kind of causality that complexity thinking suggests. Referring to Whitehead again, he argues that events, occasions and occurrences "condition" the formation of events, occasions and occurrences that might follow (Blumczynski, 2016, pp. 111-112). It is this conditioning or the creation of possibilities that I think complexity thinking proposes for translation studies.

In my view, scholars in translation studies, including the ones cited above, are suggesting a conceptualisation of causality that tends to be, firstly, non-linear and, secondly, trying not to follow the billiard-ball version of causality that is dominant in the natural sciences. Despite the differences between them, they all seem to espouse a

conceptualisation of causality built on the work performed by constraints to create enabling possibilities, opportunities, or conditions rather than directly causing things to happen as suggested in Newtonian causality. What complexity thinking can add to these insights is a more nuanced approach to non-linearity that goes broader than mere probability.

I would like to contribute to this debate on a nuanced causality and suggest a complex, soft causality built on the notions of constraint, propensity, and trajectory. My point of departure is my earlier conceptualisation of translation in terms of semiotic process, i.e., a process that entails the negentropic semiotic work performed under a complex of constraints, including matter-energy constraints (Lotman, 2019; Marais, 2023b). If one argues that translation entails work, or action in the functionalist tradition, one needs to explain what work entails. Work, Kauffman (2019, p. 19) argues, entails the constrained release of energy into several degrees of freedom. This means that work entails the utilisation of energy, and energy only emerges as a difference between two states of affairs. This difference or energy gradient is used to perform work. The simplest example of this would be that the air in my garage is all in equilibrium, under normal conditions. This lack of difference means that I cannot perform work with this air. However, if I applied constraints to the air, e.g., a metal tube with a plunger on one side and a tiny outlet on the other side, I could squeeze the air to such a high pressure that I could pump the tyres of my bicycle. It is the constraints on the air that create difference in air pressure that can be used to perform work, i.e., pumping the tyres. The first point, therefore, is that for anything to happen, there must be constraints that cause differences that are harnessed as energy to perform work. Kauffman (2019, p. 22) formulates it simply yet elegantly: "So surely, no constraints, no work. And often, no work, no constraints. Call this the Constraint Work cycle." To summarise, difference emerges when constraints operate on the states of affairs, and this difference can then be harnessed as energy with which to perform work.

#### **4.1 Constraint**

This raises the question: What are constraints? Terrence Deacon (2013) presents a philosophical argument for reverting to constraints when thinking about causality. On the one hand, he uses Eastern philosophy to argue that absence has causal effect. He does so to be able to explain how something that is materially absent, such as an intention, can cause changes in matter-energy. If intentions are constraints, his argument goes, one could explain the causal effects of mind on matter. On the other hand, he is aware of the criticism against downward causation (Kim, 2008), and therefore, he shifts the causality to the context or environment, i.e., outside of the system. It is therefore not the system as a whole that constrain its parts, but the constraints that operate on the system that do the work.

Stuart Kauffman also thinks along these lines. His focus is on the notion of possibility or what is known as the 'adjacent possible'. This means that every state of affairs entails a

number of possible future states of affairs. Not all these possible future states of affairs are realised, but the one (or more) that is realised, was realised because it was possible for it (them) to be realised. This might at first sight seem like a tautology, but it has far-reaching implications. Kauffman (2019, p. 3) argues that “(h)istory enters when the space of the possible is vastly larger than what can become actual”. Physicists call this feature of history ‘nonergodic’. Each thing that comes into existence or each event that happens creates a new set of possibilities that makes possible the emergence of things that were not possible before because constraints limit possibilities and hence also allow for the emergence of new possibilities. In Kauffman’s (2019, p. 117) own words, “‘(e)nablement’ not ‘cause’, enters our explanatory vocabulary”. Rather than think in a strict cause-and-effect paradigm, Kauffman suggests that we consider a causality of enablement. In his view, when something new comes into existence, it creates a new context, which entails new opportunities or possibilities that do not strictly cause but rather enable other things to come into existence (p. 110). One could also say that with each new thing that comes into existence, new adjacent possibles emerge (p. 124). In Kauffman’s (2019, pp. 130-132) view, this holds as much for biology as for the economy, society, and culture. It is clear that these opportunities or possibilities are possibilities for a living organism, or semiotic agent, that can be seized. It is the positive, complexity version of Murphy’s law: If something can happen, it eventually might. That said, it is only actuality that attest to which of the possibilities did happen.

Another influential scholar working on the notion of constraint is Alicia Juarrero who has written two monographs on the topic (1999, 2023). Juarrero has two main interests, namely, to be able to explain how wholes come to exist in the first place and to provide a broader theory of causality than the billiard-ball model. Her argument is that constraints offer us a fruitful alternative to universalist and physicalist versions of causality. I think this aligns well with and further develops efforts in translation studies to explain causality, as discussed above. I quote a conceptualisation directly from Juarrero (2023, p. 40):

Constraints are entities, processes, events, relations, or conditions that raise or lower barriers to energy flow without directly transferring kinetic energy. Constraints bring about effects by making available, structuring, channeling, facilitating, or impeding energy flow. Gradients and polarities, for example, are constraints; others include catalysts and feedback loops, recursion, iteration, buffers, affordances, schedules, codes, rules and regulations, heuristics, conceptual frameworks, ethical values and cultural norms, scaffolds, isolation, sedimentation and entrenchment, and bias and noise, among many others.

Anything under the sun could therefore operate as a constraint. One identifies constraints by their influence on energy flow, which means that the effects that constraints entail are not of the billiard-ball or final-cause kind. Rather, constraints have influence on or effect through “... making available, structuring, channelling, facilitating, or impeding energy flow” (Juarrero, 2023, p. 40). If one takes the argument further and posits a close link between energy and information (Bateson, 2002), and hence significance (Deacon, 2007, 2008; Marais, 2023a), it becomes clear that constraints are relevant in the humanities,

generally speaking, and in translations studies, in particular. Researching constraints on information, whether material or ideational, is thus one of the ways in which humanities scholars can use constraint theory. Lotman (1990, 2019) built his translational theory of culture on this notion of difference, and with the theory of constraints we can now be more specific about it. Whether in the realm of matter-energy or that of society or that of culture, difference between systems is what drives the emergence of new forms of existence, and these differences are caused by constraints. To quote Juarrero (2023, p. 50) “The point is a general one: conditions that promote or impede energy flow need not be material walls; they are inhomogeneities in possibility space.”

Juarrero identifies two broad types of constraint. The first is context-independent constraints. These could probably be described as the universal laws of physics, where they still make sense as explanations. If one considers the point that, had there been no constraints, all of reality would have been in equilibrium, meaning that nothing would have existed, it becomes clear that context-independent constraints take conditions away from equilibrium (Juarrero, 2023, p. 49). Taking conditions away from equilibrium is what allows for energy that can be harnessed to perform work – and create things. Most constraints are, however, context dependent. Whereas context-independent constraints take conditions away from equilibrium, context-dependent constraints take conditions away from independence (Juarrero, 2023, p. 67). In other words, context-dependent constraints have a mereological function, i.e., as things start to emerge once conditions are no longer in equilibrium, those emergent things themselves become constraints that form ‘wholes’ or systems out of the individual parts. For instance, as atoms emerged, they were constrained into existing in patterns such as H<sub>2</sub>O (water) or NaCl (table salt) or societies. One of the advantages of thinking in terms of constraints is summarised as follows by Juarrero (2023, p. 64):

But because complexity and hierarchy theory are sciences that traffic in contextual constraints and not universals, they can reveal phenomena at much finer-grained resolution. Complexity science and hierarchy theory focus on subtle individuating differences, not on commonalities and averages. In consequence, understanding complex dynamics can facilitate context-sensitive and timely decision-making and action.

It is clear from this formulation that complexity thinking holds advantages for nuanced or fine-grained decision-making and action, a point about which Pym (2023) is justifiably concerned.

Juarrero also identifies two types of context-dependent constraints, namely enabling and governing constraints. Enabling constraints constrain any number of parts so that they become interdependent, which means that they have now become “a whole” (2023, pp. 71-73). Interdependence does not mean that the parts change. Rather, it means that the relationships or organization between parts change, thus giving rise to the emergence of novelty. This is related to but somewhat different from simple bottom-up emergence because it situates the cause of the emergent process outside of the emerging system. It

is constraints 'on' the parts that make them interdependent, hence a whole. This also means that enabling constraints make the probability of an event occurring conditional on other events. The second type of context-dependent constraint is governing constraints, which are akin to what is traditionally known as top-down causation, and it means that the newly emerged whole now also constrains the parts (Juarrero, 2023, pp. 79-82). As with enabling constraints, governing constraints do not change the parts, but they do change the relationships between the parts or the degrees of freedom that parts have once they have become part of a whole. These governing constraints stabilizes the process of emergence, i.e., it creates a pattern or a whole. The governing constraints is therefore what allows for coherence to emerge (Juarrero, 2023, p. 80). As governing constraints could also be described in terms of the control that the whole exercises over the parts, governing constraints are relevant to social and cultural studies, including translation studies. As an aside, I think that the role of enabling constraints in the emergence of culture is something that requires attention, but I do not have space in this paper to address it. To quote Juarrero (2023, p. 82) directly:

I submit that human cognitive and value frameworks are likewise evolved versions of top-down constraints; they, too, are second-order constraints that regulate and control behavior in terms of emergent properties.

One could therefore say that constraints create possibilities for the emergence of new forms of matter-energy and society-culture. I follow Juarrero (2023, p. 47) in her argument that "... possibility spaces are not solely epistemic; they are real, bounded, and sculpted by constraints. These can be physical, chemical, linguistic, axiological, psychological, sociocultural, ecological, and so on." The conceptualisation of causality that emerges here is therefore one that considers the process of emergence as starting with possibilities. Because of constraints, not all possibilities are realised, hence the notion of probability, i.e., some possibilities are more likely to be realised than others, or complexity, i.e., it is not possible to predict the outcome of a process. Stuart Kauffman (2019) argues that life emerged because it was possible for it to emerge. This means that not everything is caused as explained by the billiard-ball theory of causation. Some things become because it was possible for them to become. Reversely, they would not have become if it were impossible for them to become.

The next point in this argument is thus that constraints create propensities for certain things to happen rather than other things. Kauffman argues that constraints create possibilities and then probabilities. In his view, the way in which life and later on society-culture emerges is through the creation of possibilities. Each new step in the evolution of life/society/culture makes it possible for new things to happen. However, these possibilities are never equally realisable because they themselves emerge under constraints, i.e., the possibilities exist under a propensity for one or a combination of them to happen rather than the other or another combination.

This line of argument, which also features elsewhere in scholarship (Popper, 1990 [1995]) has been picked up by at least two British sociologists, David Byrne (2005, Byrne and Callaghan, 2023) and Malcolm Williams (2021). They expanded the argument to the emergence of society or culture, which means that society-culture also emerges under the imposition of constraints. Because certain constraints apply, a particular society-culture is more likely to emerge in way A than in way B. The argument starts with the notion of trajectories. If, as Juarrero and Kauffman have argued, one think in terms of constraints and the possibilities of emergence, any given state of affairs could be regarded as entailing possibilities for the future of that state. Byrne and Callaghan (2023, p. 27) then say that any future developments of that state of affairs can be regarded as the trajectory of the system. Trajectory, one could also say, entails the process of the emergence of a particular system. In Byrne's (2005) sociology, one can use comparable cases to help sociologists understand the emergence of particular trajectories. Byrne points out that cases are always nested in larger complexes of cases, and they have nested in them smaller complexes of cases. Byrne's method entails identifying as many of the influences in a particular case as possible, comparing those with the influences in other cases. Thus, by studying trajectories of social-cultural emergence in different contexts, one could compare them in an effort better to understand them.

The point about historical trajectories is, however, that not all possible trajectories are equally probable, which means that not all possible trajectories eventually emerge. This is where Malcolm Williams' (2021, pp. 39-68) notion of propensities is, in my view, handy in explaining the kind of causality that happens in living systems, including society-culture. A given state of affairs, by not being in equilibrium, has entailed in it the propensity for the adjacent possible itself to be skewed towards a particular trajectory rather than others. Put simply, any state of affairs makes possible some rather than other trajectories or, one could say, because of the constraints that a state of affairs exercise on the future of the state of affairs, i.e., its trajectories, a propensity has been created that make some trajectories more probable than others. What Deacon, Kauffman, Juarrero and Williams have in common is that they are adding, as it were, another layer to the causal chain. Where Chesterman had 'Conditions>Translations>Effects', this softer causality suggests 'Conditions/States of affairs>Propensities>Translations>Propensities>Effects'. In other words, the conditions do not cause. Rather, they create propensities that enable the emergence of effects.

Above, I used life and society-culture as examples of emergent phenomena. One could also apply this logic to micro-contexts. For example, the interpretation of a text in order to translate it is subject to constraints such as genre, style and context of production and reception. None of these constraints strictly speaking causes the translation, but they create propensities under the influence of which a translation emerges.

The kind of causality that we are talking of here is therefore soft or weak. Things become because it is possible for them to become. They are not caused per se, as pushed by a force. Rather, the existing constraints at a given moment allow for or create a

propensity for something else to emerge. This propensity is non-linear in that it does not, in determinate fashion, cause something. It is also probabilistic, whether qualitative or quantitative. Rather, the propensity makes it possible for something to emerge and makes it more likely that thing A will emerge than thing B, but none of this means that either thing A or thing B will necessarily emerge. It should be clear that a soft causality is not a binary to stronger causalities. Rather, it is an effort to expand the complex of causal explanations available.

In my view, this soft causality can be useful in a variety of approaches to translation studies. In descriptive translation studies, it can be used as a more nuanced version of Toury's probabilistic logic. In functionalist approaches, it can be used to provide a fine-grained analysis of the relative influence of brief, source text, target culture, et cetera on the translation process. In social-cultural analyses it can be used to describe historical trajectories and the complex of propensities that allow for their emergence. In multimodal translation studies, it provides the vocabulary to describe how the affordances of each mode contribute to a propensity to interpret the multimodal text in a particular way. I also suspect that it could be useful in cognitive translation studies to explain the cascading effect in the brain. In interpreting studies, this framework for soft causality might be useful in describing the complexities of interpreting, i.e., various coping strategies, the role of context in interpreting, the positionality of the interpreter.

## **5. Conclusion: Complexity and cultural sustainability**

One of the major challenges of doing scholarship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the ecological crisis, which is in my view closely related to the problem of cultural sustainability. In my view, it is as much an ethical crisis as anything else. The ethical problem is the status of the 'Other', be that inert matter-energy, living organisms of all kinds, or fellow human organisms. A part of this ethical problem is therefore a problem of onto-epistemology. If we denounce ontology or relegate it to biology, as Pym (2023) does, both the living and non-living 'Other' exists in the humanities and translation studies only as representations or ideas, only in relation to what human organisms have made of them. If one operates with a strong idealist or constructivist epistemology (Robinson, 2017; 2022a; 2022b), the 'Other' yet again has only the status that human ideas or constructions afford it. This epistemological reductionism, in my view, contributes to the ethical problems that contribute to the ecological crisis.

It seems to me that complexity thinking suggests that we consider the ontological as well as epistemological status of reality. By refusing to reduce our relationship with the 'Other' to epistemology, by insisting on the complex of ontology and epistemology, we at least start to provide a way of thinking about the other as an existence in its own right, as something that also constrains the knower while the knower constrains it. In other words, an onto-epistemological position based on complexity is interested in the question: "What is the role of the (human, non-human, inert) Other in the construction of human

knowledge?” as much as it is interested in the question “How do humans construct knowledge of Others?”

A complex onto-epistemology is what Deely (2001, 2009) calls the real postmodern position, which holds that matter-energy and idea-culture mutually constrain each other in the ‘web of experience’. A complex onto-epistemology could therefore make a modest contribution to a stance towards a complex reality, be that material or spiritual, biological or cultural, energetic or ideational, overcoming these binaries and reductionisms.

I realize that this is a speculative ethical position, and only time will tell whether it holds any value.

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# AN AFFORDANCE-BASED INTEGRATION OF SPORTS AND TRANSLATION PEDAGOGIES

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**ABSTRACT:** While translation pedagogy traditionally emphasised technical and textual competences, contemporary research increasingly highlights strategic skills (e.g., metacognition, adaptability). Although situated learning methods (roleplays, dramatisations, simulations) are well-established, the systematic integration of sports pedagogy's affordance perception, i.e., the ability to detect and act on environmental invitations for actions, remains underexplored in the translation classroom. This theoretical position study engages in an act of inter-epistemic translation, bridging sports science and translation studies by adapting 'game-based approaches' (GBAs) and 'ecological dynamics' (ED) to translation education. Emerging from research conducted with undergraduate and postgraduate translation learners at a Hong Kong university, the paper contends that principles such as performer-environment interactions and affordance perception can augment embodied, situated learning. By aligning plausibly situated learning with structured reflection, this approach fosters acclimatisation to the extra-textual, practical aspects of translation as a profession. Ultimately, the goal is enabling educators to equip learners with a holistic adaptability needed to navigate the language services industry.

**KEYWORDS:** Translation Education; Sports Pedagogy; Affordance Perception; Situated Learning; Performer-Environment

## 1. Introduction

Building on, yet diverging from, the behaviourist and cognitive traditions, social constructivism posits that learning is an active process of knowledge construction emerging within a cultural and social context, where practical experience, interaction, and collaboration are paramount (Vygotsky, 1978; Amineh and Asl, 2015). In sports education, the Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) model, proposed by Bunker and Thorpe in 1982, exemplifies social constructivist, learner-centred pedagogy. The model emphasises tactical awareness and decision-making in dynamic, game-like contexts over decontextualised skill drills (Kirk and MacPhail, 2002).

In translation studies, the theorisation of social constructivism was pioneered slightly later (Kiraly, 1990; Vienne, 1994; Kussmaul, 1995). Translation education was initially rooted in (comparative) literature and second language acquisition (Hurtado Albir, 2020). For instance, throughout the 1900s, many European countries taught classical languages such as Latin and Greek through the grammar translation method (Richards and Rogers, 2001), a translation drill that excluded context to focus only on grammatical accuracy and vocabulary acquisition. A shift towards communicative and functional elements began in the 1980s (Gouadec, 1981; Holz-Mänttari, 1984; Reiss and Vermeer, 1984; Nord, 1991).

Kiraly (2000) notably argued against knowledge-transmission models that sought to impart onto learners 'the correct' way of translating. His work contributed to establishing context-aware, translator-specific competence formation, evidenced by the development

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of situated (González-Davies, 2004), project-based (Kiraly, 2005; Li, Zhang and He, 2015), and competence-based approaches (PACTE, 2020; Yang and Li, 2021; European Commission, 2022). Currently, translation pedagogy emphasises active learning, skills transfer, and employability (Li, 2013; Hao and Pym, 2022; Schlager and Risku, 2023).

Sports education underwent a similar pedagogical evolution, which complemented behaviourist-inspired drill-practice with holistic, performance-based strategic training (Bunker and Thorpe, 1982; cf. Light, 2008). Equally grounded in social learning, this article bridges sports and translation pedagogies through game-based approaches (GBAs) and ecological dynamics (ED).

Before exploring these frameworks, certain terminological clarifications are needed. A critical distinction is required to avoid confusing GBAs and gamification. GBAs employ 'game situations', i.e., structured game environments reproducing game dynamics, to help learners develop tactical awareness and adaptive expertise collaboratively, in a social constructivist stance (Krath, Schürmann, and von Korflesch, 2021). Gamification, however, applies game-like rewards (e.g., points, badges) to non-game contexts, prioritising benefits for individual learners, in a more cognitive constructivist orientation (see Section 2.2). While gamification may boost short-term engagement, its efficacy in long-term performance is limited, and often risks trivialising learning (Nicholson, 2015; Almeida et al., 2023). This contrast underscores the extent to which GBAs' dynamic 'game situations', designed to foster collaborative problem-solving, tactical awareness, and adaptability (Kirk and MacPhail, 2002), offer richer potential for developing the strategic decision-making skills vital for translators, especially when combined with ED.

ED, partially rooted in Gibson's (1986) affordance framework in ecological psychology, focuses on learning through functional performer-environment interactions (Seifert and Davids, 2017). This proposal operationalises affordances as "perceived invitations for translatorial action" (Musumeci, 2025, p.10) emerging from the interaction between environmental information and the learner/translator, with their unique set of skills and experience. The communicative environment of interest here is the translation situation (t-situation), where affordances arise from information such as client requests, project specifications, or time pressures. A vague client-request may afford an experienced practitioner a clarification of functional needs, thereby adding value by unravelling the client's expectations. Learners, however, may not yet perceive such an affordance; their ability to negotiate and prioritise constraints (for instance, balancing accuracy and efficiency) is still developing. Therefore, a feasible goal for well-designed translation learning activities is helping learners hone affordance perception.

Extending functionalist (Nord, 2018) and situated learning frameworks (González-Davies, 2004), which emphasise context-awareness, this sports-inspired perspective addresses how learners perceive likely courses of action within dynamic environments. A GBAs and ED inspired approach also aligns with non-linear models of translation competence acquisition (see Section 2.3), which characterise learning as a dynamic, iterative process going from preliminary understanding to full expertise (PACTE, 2020, p.

104), as well as action-oriented language pedagogy (Piccardo and North, 2019). In addition, an ecologically and game-derived approach advances research on strategic metacognition and practical skills (Pietrzak, 2022; Dong and Chen, 2025) in translation education by foregrounding affordance perception, i.e., the ability to detect and act on environmental invitations for actions (see Section 3). Together, insights from sports pedagogy and translation studies enhance current methods by:

- Framing translating as a performative process akin to athletic performance, to facilitate experiential engagement with theoretical concepts
- Designing pedagogically controlled t-situations that elicit strategic reactions to the work environment
- Co-constructing shared realities to boost learner motivation and enrich the quality of learning (see Section 2.3).

This theoretical bridge can be further understood as an instance of interepistemic translation (Robinson, 2017, p. 200), intended as the “transmission of information between different epistemic systems” (Bennett and Neves, 2024, p. 1). Integrating sports and translation pedagogies constitutes precisely such an interepistemic endeavour, seeking novel pedagogical understanding and material applications. To operationalise this interdisciplinary synthesis, this article addresses the question: how can frameworks from sports pedagogy, specifically GBAs and ED, be translationally adapted to enhance the development of strategic, extra-textual competences in translation education?

The argument is partially informed by action research, conducted in a workplace-simulation implemented within translation theory courses at a Hong Kong university (see Section 4). Observations prompted reflection on performers’ adaptation to dynamic constraints. The article first provides the conceptual foundations of GBAs and ED. It then examines their potential for translation education before presenting practical learning activities designed to target strategic skills (see Section 5). These pedagogical examples are grounded in a specific operationalisation of translation, conceived through two complementary lenses that underpin this study. First, from a linguistic perspective, translation is defined as “the serial, agentive process of approximating linguistically expressed information from a source language into a target language to the best of one’s expertise” (Musumeci, 2025, p. 9). Second, from a professional perspective, translation is understood as a service profession demanding business acumen and adaptive problem-solving (Gouadec, 2007; Katan, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Conceptual foundations

In sports education, the limitations of decontextualised practice in preparing athletes for the dynamic unpredictability encountered in actual performance was what drove the shift from technique-focused drills towards models that prioritise adaptability in realistic contexts (Rink, 2001; Light, 2013). A parallel evolution occurred in translation pedagogy,

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<sup>1</sup> The proposed framework applies to other language service provisions (interpreting, subtitling, audio description, etc.), given shared professional demands (e.g., real-time problem solving, client interaction).

from a text-centred to a collaborative, competence-based pedagogy, aimed at bridging academic and vocational training (Kalinowski, 2002; Kearns, 2008; Mulder, 2017). The next subsections will first detail the key drivers for this pedagogical shift before exploring how GBAs and ED that can be productively adapted.

### **2.1 Collaborative and competence-based translation pedagogy: key drivers**

Alongside the broader educational shift from behaviourism to constructivism, the move towards a collaborative, competence-based pedagogy in translation studies was more directly prompted by (at least) three key drivers: functionalist theories, new policy initiatives, and advances in research on translation competence.

Functionalism laid the theoretical groundwork: Holz-Mänttari's "translational action" conceived translation as a goal-oriented process involving "actors", or "players" (initiator, client, source-text producer, translator, translation user, recipient; 1984, p. 109). This perspective inspired pedagogical roleplays, dramatisations (e.g., Robinson, 2003; Nord, 2018), and simulations (e.g., Konttinen, Holopainen, and Salmi, 2017; Buyschaert et al., 2018). The influence of functionalist principles is later evident also in their citation within industry standards (ISO, 2012).<sup>2</sup>

Policy catalysts further institutionalised these changes. The Bologna Declaration (1999), operationalised through the European Master's in Translation network, and later, China's Belt and Road Initiative (2015), promoting translation training and cross-cultural communication projects (Tian, 2024), created a demand for standardised, outcomes-based curricula and a focus on employability. Meanwhile, extensive empirical research on strategic competences, including decision-making, problem-solving, and reflective practice, provided validation (e.g., PACTE, 2020; Fernández and Zabalbeascoa, 2012; Pym and Hao, 2025).

Despite these advancements, practising strategic decision-making in the classroom under authentic, dynamic conditions remains challenging. Seeking solutions, this inquiry turned to sports pedagogy. For decades, GBAs and ED have investigated how performers (learners, athletes) learn to perceive information and practise adaptive decision-making (Kinnerk et al., 2018; Pan, Huang, and Hsu, 2023).<sup>3</sup>

### **2.2 Teaching games for understanding: A tactical model for translation pedagogy**

The Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) model emerged as a response to the technique-centred paradigm in sports pedagogy. This dominant tradition, exemplified by Metzler's (2011) 'pass-command' method and rooted in Mosston and Ashworth's (2008) 'Practice Style' teaching (originating with Mosston, 1966), prioritised technical execution

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<sup>2</sup> The now retired ISO/TS 1169 (2012) cited only three academic works: Vermeer's *Skopos theory* (1996), House's *Translation quality assessment* (1997), and Nord's *Translating as a purposeful activity* (1997). Notably, the updated ISO 11669 (2024) omits these references.

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Prof. Dominic Glynn (Université d'Évry Paris-Saclay), who first pointed out the potential relevance of sports science during a 2020 research meeting at City University of Hong Kong.

over tactical understanding, requiring learners to replicate ‘correct’ movements demonstrated by educators (Kinnerk et al., 2018).

TGfU introduced a tactical paradigm complementing drill practice (Richardson et al., 2023), preceding the shift from prescriptive ‘correctness’ to situated problem-solving championed by Kiraly in translation pedagogy (2000). Rather than solely isolated drills, TGfU uses ‘game situations’ (or ‘game structures’), pedagogically controlled learning environments prioritising tactical game dynamics and collaborative interaction. TGfU’s ‘game situations’ are performative spaces where learners engage with stakes inherent to the sport, in contradistinction to gamification’s reliance on extrinsic rewards (see Section 1). For example, in a modified volleyball game, a tactical stake is defending space to keep the ball from hitting the ground, mirroring the objective of the actual discipline. In a translation classroom, a project simulation might involve negotiating a deadline with a client or making a terminological choice affecting consistency in a large project.

The original ‘TGfU curriculum model’ proposed a recursive learning progression, linear in its pedagogical structure, allowing learners to revisit earlier stages and improve their ‘performance’, intended as the learners’ ‘doing’: their technical and tactical contribution to the aims of the “game situation” (Bunker and Thorpe, 1986, p.10).

Gradually, learners develop ‘game appreciation’, i.e., they internalise rules, objectives, and strategic nuances of the game. Through the lens of affordance theory, appreciating these nuances coincides with learning to perceive and assign value to constraints and affordances within the ‘game situation’. A player begins to see open space not just as empty ground, but as an affordance for scoring. Cultivating this strategic mindset mirrors the acquisition of a professional outlook on translation, which Robinson named “internal point of view” (2003, p. 170). Just as players learn to read the game, translators learn to perceive t-situations as landscapes of constraints and affordances inviting specific translatorial actions.

After ‘game appreciation’, the learning progression leads to the development of ‘tactical awareness’, the ability to read and respond to situational dynamics (Bunker and Thorpe, 1986). Learners improve ‘off-the-ball’ positioning in team sports by anticipating defensive gaps without direct ball-contact. Similarly, translators develop ‘off-the-word awareness’ of situational dynamics (Nord, 2018; Musumeci, 2025; cf. Schlager and Risku, 2023 on situated cognition), that is, sensitivity to extra-textual translatorial action (e.g., client negotiations, business positioning, project risk assessment).<sup>4</sup> Subsequent TGfU stages involve ‘making appropriate decisions’ and ‘execution’. Later modifications included ‘emerging understanding’ (preceding ‘appreciation’), then renamed ‘game concept’, leading to ‘strategic thinking’, and ‘pedagogical cues’ to nurture the learner’s acquisition of ‘game sense’, adaptive skill application (Kirk and MacPhail, 2002; Light, 2004).

The ‘Game Sense Approach’, developed by Thorpe and the Australian Sports Commission in the mid 1990s, marked a significant advancement (Light, 2013; Stoltz and

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<sup>4</sup> One can also think of a goalkeeper organising defenders before a free kick, and a medical translator pre-emptively researching institutional protocols.

Pill, 2013). It addressed TGfU's linear conception of learning by focussing on emergent behaviour and integrating 'constraint-led coaching' (Newell, 1986), in which learning is envisaged as a self-organisation process emerging from interacting 'task, environmental, and performer' pedagogical constraints. Task constraints are the specific activity's rules and goals. For example, a modified badminton game allows only long shots (Chow et al., 2013). Environmental constraints consist of the physical and social context of the performance. For instance, practising penalty kicks in football with crowd noise played through speakers to simulate the affective pressures of a match (Oldfield, Oldfield and Holmes, 2024). Performer constraints are learner(s)-specific characteristics, including current skill level, height, fitness, cognitive traits, or emotional state. Curricula are thus adapted for beginners or elite athletes.

### ***2.3 Plausibilising practice: Game-based approaches and translation simulations***

Game-based approaches (GBAs) are founded on representative design, which posits that learning environments ought to replicate perceptual, cognitive, and decision-making demands of the actual performance context (Renshaw et al., 2010). This philosophy aligns with socio-constructivism in translation pedagogy, seeking to prepare learners for the dynamic translation industry (Kiraly, 2005; Calvo, 2015). Another intrinsic value of GBAs is the emphasis on trainer development. By employing tools like teaching portfolios and pre-/post-instruction interviews with peers/observers, educators engage in reflective practice, well-documented in sports coaching (Light, 2004; Forrest, 2014), and applicable to translation trainer training (Massey, Kiraly and Ehrensberger-Dow, 2019).

The interdisciplinary synergy is evident when the four signature GBA techniques (Stoltz and Pill, 2013, p. 39) are brought to bear in collaborative translation pedagogy (cf. Kelly, 2014). First, 'sampling' involves isolating critical elements, such as rehearsing a specific pass under pressure. A translation parallel is scaffolding micro-tasks (e.g., mastering the pragmatic nuances of emails in client negotiations) before assigning larger projects (Calvo, 2015). Second, 'exaggeration' amplifies specific aspects of professional practice. In translation practice, requiring documented proof of all client communication during a simulation amplifies the already stringent traceability requirements of ISO certifications, making tacit procedures explicit. Third, 'representation' is the commitment to preserving the authenticity of the performance environment. In translation, this means designing simulations with authentic workflow stages, text genres, and the collaborative or hierarchical structures of professional translation settings. Finally, 'questioning' is a (Socratic) technique by means of which coaches guide learners to discover solutions by themselves. An educator might ask a learner to infer a client's priorities and unstated needs from an email's tone or a brief's wording. Fundamentally, this technique helps learners perceive and act upon situated affordances (invitations for action), thereby developing critical reasoning and problem-solving autonomy.

GBAs techniques underscore a pedagogical paradox: cultivating authentic capabilities, requires distorting normal practice through carefully designed pedagogical

constraints. Modified aims, tools, spatial arrangements, or instructional framing add boundaries guiding learners towards solutions (Renshaw et al., 2010). Sports education research reveals how subtle differences in presenting instructions impact performance outcomes (Chow et al., 2013). Arguably, the effectiveness of controlled environments hinges on what Robinson identifies as two processes making any social performance “feel real” (Robinson, 2017, p.183). One is *icosis*, or ‘plausibilisation’, from Koine Greek *eikos*, ‘plausible’: the collective construction of believable realities (p.182). The other is *ecosis*, or ‘normative polarisation’, from Ionic Greek *oikos*, ‘household’, ‘community’: the community’s accepted distinction between right and wrong behaviour (p.182).

Through these enactive processes, cognition emerges as “worlds enacted in the mind” (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, 1993, p. 9), facilitating “neurocultural somatisation” (Robinson, 2017, p.185), bodily internalisation of reality. It is through this somatisation that communities then develop shared normative filters for performing and evaluating actions (cf. Bartsch, 1987; Raz, 1999). In the translation classroom, one way in which this internalisation manifests is the “normativisation as real” (Robinson, 2017, p.39) of simulations.

Educators become ‘peri-performers’, following Sedgwick’s (2003) concept of “communal interactivity enabling performativity” (Robinson, 2017, p. x) by designing plausible activities, scaffolding preparatory conditions, and guiding collective behaviour validation. Educators co-create and accompany learners’ performance. This conception of *class-icosis* offers significant potential, advancing functionalist dramatisations (see Section 2.1) and established simulations such as the translation company or bureau designs (e.g., Buyschaert et al., 2018; van Egdom et al., 2020). While such simulations have markedly improved workflow management training (Konttinen, Holopainen, and Salmi, 2017), challenges remain with addressing the “less proceduralised” aspects of practice (Toury, 2012, p. 287): handling time-induced stress and authentic unpredictability (Nord, 2005, 2018), managing emotional labour inherent in client relations and affective responses to critical feedback (cf. Risku, 2014; Lehr, 2014), or adhering to business etiquette in complex communicative situations. To address such challenges, educators have increasingly turned to experiential methods such as prolonged roleplays, simulated workflows, or involving practitioners (Gouadec, 2003; Toury, 2012), choices that help catering for educational contexts in which instructors lack industry experience (Venuti, 2017).

The efficacy of such activities can be powerfully reframed through the lens of sports pedagogy, which posits that expertise develops through the simultaneous engagement of an individual with a task-rich environment and their own perceptual-motor systems (Davids et al., 2013). This focus on embodied engagement aligns with growing research on embodied and situated cognition in translation studies (cf. Kiraly, 1995; Risku, 2014), challenging older, linear models of skill acquisition that oversimplify the non-linear, complex nature of learning (PACTE, 2020; see Section 1). In sports science, this critique of linear learning models has evolved into ED (Davids, Handford, and Williams, 1994; Davids, et al., 2013). ED advocates for “non-linear pedagogical approaches” (Kinnerk et al., 2018,

p.14) grounded in continuous learner-environment interaction. Section 3 will examine how ED provides a robust theoretical foundation to augment GBAs by specifically harnessing the learner's ability to perceive and act upon environmental affordances.

### **3. Ecological dynamics: affordances for translation education**

Ecological dynamics (ED) is a theoretical framework that integrates phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), ecological psychology (Gibson, 1986), and enactive cognition (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, 1993). Developed to understand how skilled performers navigate complex environments, ED is based on a key observation: expertise emerges from the functional interaction of physical and cognitive processes within a specific context. Consequently, pedagogical design focuses on creating learning environments where learners can interact with rich, task-relevant stimuli to optimise their perception of affordances and thereby foster adaptive expertise development (Davids et al., 2013).

A core principle of ED is the manipulation of environmental constraints to cultivate learners' readiness to perceive affordances, invitations for action (Gibson, 1986; Davids et al., 2013). Since their seminal definition in ecological psychology, affordances are inherently relational, arising from interaction between 'organisms' and their environment. Gibson's canonical example illustrates this: a clear and visible physical path, by its presence, shape and size, "affords pedestrian locomotion" (1986, p. 26) for a mobile creature, just as apples hanging from a tree invite picking. This concept, rooted in Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology of perception as active interpretation of the world for action, has been applied to areas such as design (Norman, 1999), robotics (Asaro, 2009), organisational studies (Leonardi, 2013), and musicology (Schiavio and Kimmel, 2021). In translation studies, Robinson (2022) builds on embodied perception to posit a philosophical reading of W. Benjamin's 'abilities' inherent in texts (translatability, reproducibility) as affordances. In this study, the focus is pedagogical operationalisation of affordances: how to design plausible environments to render specific translation-relevant actions perceptible and possible for learners.

ED frames affordance perception as a metric of expertise and a diagnostic tool for learning efficacy (Seifert and Davids, 2012, 2017). Taking the performer-environment relationship as the unit of analysis shifts emphasis from assessing internal knowledge to evaluating "functional knowledge application", i.e., how learners adapt behaviour to achieve goals in a specific context (Light, 2008, p. 24). ED operationalises expertise as "the continuous functional adaptation of behaviours to a set of interacting constraints in order to exploit them to the fullest in achieving specific intended performance goals" (Seifert and Davids, 2017, p. 3). This definition is congruent with the view that translation expertise is "adaptive as a result of its acquisition in variable and unpredictable environments" (Shreve, 2018, p. 102). It also serves as a theoretical framework for understanding the highly situated and distributed cognitive processes characterising professional translation practice (Shreve, 2020; Schlager and Risku, 2024). Translation educators can apply the ED paradigm by designing learning environments that foster "perceptual attunement" (Davis

et al., 2013, p. 25) as a key strategic competence. The ability to transform a client's vague email into an actionable 'invitation to clarify' depends directly on the translator's attunement to environmental cues.

Furthermore, ED highlights that attunement is both individual and collective. Collective attunement is achieved via "shared affordances", defined as "sources of information that can be perceived by groups of players attuned to them" (Araújo, Brito, and Carrilho, 2023, p. 26). Research in team sports shows that this focus enhances a group's ability "to adapt to the momentary characteristics of the performance environment" (Araújo, Brito, and Carrilho, 2023, p. 26). These insights apply to scenarios involving teams of translators or groups involving project managers and clients. The ED framework allows educators to target performance metrics related to strategic competence, aligning with extant competence frameworks from industry (e.g., ISO certification) or academic institutions (e.g., PETRA e-framework; ILOs).

This approach nurtures a translator's capacity for adaptive problem-solving and the ability to perceive, interpret, and act upon the affordances of each t-situation. Having now established the theoretical framework, its validity requires empirical grounding.

#### **4. Methodological clarifications**

As a theoretical paper, this study's primary contribution is the conceptual integration of sports and translation pedagogies. This synthesis, however, is empirically grounded and critically informed by a three-year action research project conducted between Fall 2020 and Spring 2023 at a university in Hong Kong. The project was implemented across two undergraduate and one postgraduate 'Theory of Translation' courses, core programme components designed to provide the discipline's conceptual foundations. Within these courses, a six-week workplace simulation served as a Discovery Enriched Curriculum term assignment, during which learners performed the roles of project managers and translators. It is crucial to note that while these simulations were grounded in situated learning and partially employed GBA techniques (at least in the later editions in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023), they did not fully implement the performance-oriented, affordance-based pedagogy proposed in this study.

Methodologically, insights were developed through an iterative process of educator reflection and learner feedback. Initial reflection on undergraduate (Year 3) performance in the 2019-2020 simulation (N=78) prompted a pilot feedback initiative with a master's cohort in Fall 2020 (N=78), which garnered qualitative responses from 14% (n=11) via a focus group and open-ended surveys. Building on these findings, a more extensive data collection was implemented with an undergraduate cohort (Year 3, N=70) in Spring 2022. This round achieved a 100% (n= 70) participation rate for close-ended surveys, while a 37% participation rate yielded rich qualitative data from two semi-structured focus groups (n=6) and written surveys (n=25), complemented by interviews with two educators responsible for the courses. A separate publication (Musumeci, 2025) provides a comprehensive analysis of this (nevertheless modest) dataset.

The insights gleaned from the data, particularly concerning engagement with complex, unpredictable professional problems, prompted a deeper conceptual investigation of sports pedagogical frameworks. Therefore, this is not a direct report of the project's findings but rather a theoretical synthesis developed as a reflective educator's response to them. It is also informed by first-hand experience as a translator and researcher across European and Asian contexts, suggesting that a more systematic integration could yield significant benefits.

The proposed integration supports learners across the two dimensions of translation defined in Section 1: the agentive, linguistic process and the adaptive, service-oriented profession. GBAs and ED offer a structured approach to enhance task and project-based situated learning. Such integration is operationalised via systematic constraint design, cultivating attunement to ease affordance perception, and assessing adaptive behaviour as a metric of expertise. As discussed in Section 2.3, these components synergise with 'plausibilisation' (Robinson, 2017), here pedagogically reframed as *class-icosis*: the collective, co-constructed belief in the simulated learning environment. Through *class-icosis*, educators sustain engagement and legitimise the learning process. Section 5 illustrates the application of this framework through examples of pedagogical practice.

## **5. Activity design: Applying GBAs and ED to translation education**

To demonstrate the proposed synthesis, this section presents two prototypical situated learning activities, each in a dedicated subsection. The first (5.1) focuses on textual and strategic problem-solving, while the second (5.2) emphasises interpersonal negotiation and business acumen in freelance settings. These activities are testable propositions for research and flexible templates for contextualised application. Each activity description employs a consistent structure for clarity: 'stage headings' are presented in bold font; 'general learning goals' are bulleted and bolded; 'pedagogical measures' appear in italics with circular bullets; 'targeted skills' are italicised and marked with star bullets.

### **5.1 GBA and official document translation practice**

#### **Stage 1: Class-icosis (plausibilisation)**

- **Establishing shared reality and conditions for embodied awareness**
- *Discuss real-world official translations settings: proceedings, immigration applications, civil registrations (marriage, citizenship), emphasising implicit expectations of maximum accuracy, clarity, and punctuality. Market entry insights (e.g., regional certifications, translator qualification requirements) can also be implemented here.*
- *Guest speaker/expert: if feasible, invite active certified translators or consular/embassy representatives to share insights and challenges, such as whether certified translators serve on a freelance or in-house basis.*
- ★ *Emergent game sense and appreciation: learners share initial thoughts and feelings on certified translations and the broader context of relevant authorities, qualifications, or professional communication skills required.*

### Stage 2: Constraint-based design

- **Functionalist translation theories, GBAs, and ED: A dramatised scenario**
  - *Role: certified translators process a birth certificate for visa applications.*
  - *Sampling; constraint: obscure acronym resolution (under time pressure).*
  - *Exaggeration: remove readily available digital solutions (search /AI 'fail').*
  - ★ *Emergent tactical awareness: learners discuss potential meanings based on available information, and how to find a solution.*

### Stage 3: Adaptive response practice

- *Pedagogical cue: give partial cues about the issuing office/department.*
- ★ *Representation: add concurrent tasks (e.g., urgent invoice request).*
- ★ *Perceptual attunement; adaptive response; making appropriate decisions: learners may choose to write an email, or call (time pressure, if activated) to enquire directly about the acronym's meaning.*
- ★ *Game sense; strategic thinking: experience how digital searches do not always solve everything; direct communication can be a strategically.*

### Stage 4: Affordance debriefing

- **Embodied reflection**
- **Guided discussion: what worked well, what challenges and feelings arose. The discussion can also be directed towards assessing emotional states.**
- **Questioning: "Beyond the cue, what environmental signals could have indicated the acronym was critical/uncritical?" (e.g., document's purpose, client's visa urgency, textual positioning, legal consequences of errors).**
- **Educator prompt: "Compare perceived and missed affordances".**
- ★ *Strategic Metacognition: "What alternatives existed beyond the cued bureau contact?" (e.g., professional networks, forums, asking the client).*

Learners can compare their initial assumptions with this experience, also reflecting on the importance of achieving clarity in professional communication. Practising assertive but polite enquiries to clients, colleagues, or authorities may also be integrated.

## 5.2 Constraint-led approach in freelancer's client email negotiation practice

### Stage 1: Class-icosis

- **Establishing shared reality and conditions for embodied awareness**
  - *Real-case (redacted) email threads analysis: showing typical client negotiations patterns and prompting learners to consider implications of client management on a freelancers' life.*
  - *Discuss income volatility (e.g., "Your rent depends on this client").*
  - *Guest translator/expert: demonstrate email protocols, time-management techniques, and, where possible, research-backed best practices.*

- ★ *Emerging understanding, game appreciation, game sense: learners gain perspective on professional communication from the internal point of view of a practitioner (see Section 2.2).*

### **Stage 2: Constraint-based design**

- **The T-situation scenario**
  - *An email reaches the freelancers/learners' inbox. 'Delivery' can be on a projector for in-class TLAs, or individual via virtual learning environments.*
  - *Sampling: extra-textual focus on the email; source text can be withheld.*
  - *Exaggeration: client requests a translation without any specification: "Your services were recommended to me by Prof. Jones. Please translate this text at your earliest convenience and give me your best price."*
  - *Questioning: "How to react to such a request?"*
- ★ *Emergent tactical awareness: learners share potential reactions.*

### **Stage 3: Adaptive response practice**

- *Pedagogical cue: "Three available courses of action will be considered. First, let us examine two".*
- *Questioning: "Can you hypothesise the third?"*
- ★ *Game appreciation, perceptual attunement, tactical awareness: two potential courses of action are shared with class:*
  - 1) *Accept immediately.*
  - 2) *Elicit specifications from the client first.*
  - 3) *Not shared ("Any guesses?").*

### **Performance options**

- *Pedagogical cue: "You might want to incorporate Nord's (2005) list of essential information to gather before starting a translation task", eliciting how theories of translation can inform practice.*
- ★ *Constraint prioritisation, affordance perception, making appropriate decisions: 1) affords speed, with a potential risk of quality/reputation loss. 2) abides by professional standards but engenders client's impatience.*
- ★ *Skill execution: with acquired tactical awareness, learners draft answers.*

### **Stage 4: Affordance debriefing**

- **Embodied reflection: learners share insights on the importance of formulating polite and concise requests to elicit information from clients, transferability of these skills to other professions, and how/if translation theory informed their practice. They can also consider how stressful this experience felt.**
- *Questioning: "How did you physically react during decision points?"(Mapping stress levels to professional consequences).*

- ★ *Strategic metacognition; perceptual attunement: “What in the email signalled this might have been high-risk?” (e.g., sender’s domain, no deadline, vague ‘best price’). “Why rejecting this job might demonstrate higher professionalism than accepting it?” (E.g., client-educator role boundary; client portfolio selectivity).*
- *Professional calibration: compare learners’ draft emails with professional ones, and ISO 11669 requirements.*
- *Elicit or share the third option: rejecting the job.*

The two activities are practical illustrations of how translation education, GBAs and ED can be integrated. The following section abstracts their core design logic and proposes a corresponding method for evaluation.

### 5.3 Synthesis and assessment

To visualise the theoretical underpinnings of each design choice and offer a template for generating further activities, Table 1 maps the conceptual alignment between the sports pedagogy principles and their instantiation in the translation activities.

**Table 1.** Sports pedagogy-inspired translation learning activities

<b>Pedagogical Component</b>	<b>Certified Translations (TLA 1)</b>	<b>Client Email Negotiation (TLA 2)</b>	<b>Conceptual Alignment</b>
<b>Representative Design</b>	Birth certificate with ambiguous legal acronym	High-stakes email with missing specifications	ED: Davids et al. (2013) perceptual-motor coordination challenges
<b>Constraint Types</b>	<i>Task:</i> ambiguous acronym; <i>Environmental:</i> time pressure; <i>Performer:</i> novice vs. advanced differentiation	<i>Task:</i> zero-specification request; <i>Environmental:</i> simulated inbox context; <i>Performer:</i> freelance role enactment	ED: Seifert and Davids, (2017) Newell’s (1986) constraint-led approach
<b>Affordance Focus</b>	Detecting document/institutional cues	Interpreting email subtext (urgency, risk)	Gibson (1986)/ED: performer-environment unit of analysis
<b>Tactical Development</b>	Institutional contact strategies	Client education protocols	TGfU: Bunker and Thorpe (1982) tactical layers
<b>Debriefing Method</b>	Embodied recall of stress responses Mapping missed/utilised affordances	Physical reaction analysis; Professional email benchmarking	ED: Guignard et al. (2017) perception-action review
<b>Class Icosis</b>	Guest speaker on consular translation realities	Redacted email threads + "rent dependency" framing	Translation studies: (Robinson, 2017) icosis and ecosis

<b>Assessment Metrics</b>	Cue detection breadth; Prioritisation speed	Professionalism in reply; Risk signal identification	Aligned with provisional rubric (Table 2)
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Moving from design to assessment and building on prior work that established the initial conceptual viability of applying sports pedagogy approaches to translation education (Musumeci, 2022, 2023), this synthesis suggests performance-oriented assessment complementing output-based evaluation. Indicators could include:

- *Attunement speed*: latent/timely strategy adjustment after client communication;
- *Perceptive breadth*: range of textual, interpersonal, environmental constraints and affordances detected;
- *Solution flexibility*: ability to generate multiple viable approaches;
- *Constraint prioritisation*: ability to identify and act on most critical constraints.

Table 2 proposes a provisional assessment rubric directly derived from the principles in Table 1. This rubric shifts the focus towards evaluating how the learner navigates the process of perceiving and acting upon affordances.

**Table 2.** Affordance-based assessment rubric

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Emerging</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Expert</b>
<b>Attunement</b>	Identifies only explicit cues (text content)	Notices some contextual cues (document format)	Detects subtle professional signals (tone, legal implications)	Anticipates latent cues (institutional norms, client urgency)
<b>Strategic Adaptation</b>	Adapts only if guided throughout	Able to adapt with only initial guidance	Able to adapt with almost no guidance	Adapts optimal strategies independently
<b>Solution Diversity</b>	Proposes 1 linear solution	Generates 2+ alternatives	Develops 2+ context-sensitive options	Creates tiered strategies (priority-based)
<b>Constraint Prioritisation</b>	Treats all constraints equally	Recognises key constraints post-feedback	Weighs constraints proactively	Dynamically re-prioritises prior to and mid-task
<b>Professional Calibration</b>	Relies on trial-and-error	Demonstrates basic awareness of professional standards	Adapts to cultural/organisational norms	Innovates beyond standards and can mentor others

These activities and tools are designed to develop 'off-the-word' strategic competences essential to translation service provision through situated practice, perceptual training, and professional socialisation in plausibly realistic learning environments. The intent is not to condition learners to associate specific events with rigid responses, but to create an

ecology of conditions fostering flexible perceptual engagement and readiness to identify actionable pathways. This approach encourages autonomy, allowing individuals to navigate complex situations without prescribing specific actions. Future iterations could explore communication between translator and author, payment negotiations, or purpose-driven translation briefs. Section 6 will consider the implementation challenges and future research directions.

## 6. Discussion

This framework is designed for application across educational contexts. Three key principles derived from GBAs and ED guide its implementation:

- Manipulating pedagogical constraints to foreground critical affordances.
- Promoting perceptual attunement through representative design.
- Leverage affordance perception and shared affordances in collaborative tasks.

These principles map directly to translation contexts: where basketball players read defenders (affordance perception), translators sense clients' needs; where swimmers adapt to water resistance (attunement), translators suit stylistic choices to audiences; where football teams coordinate passes (shared affordance), translators and project managers align on assignment-specific constraints.

The framework is scalable. Preliminary implementation and action research suggest effective application across different class sizes, from small tutorial groups to large cohorts, and in blended learning configurations, based on observations of learners' engagement and feedback on their learning experience. However, cross-institutional adoption presents predictable yet significant challenges.

A primary hurdle is educator readiness. Limited time and divergent pedagogical philosophies can hinder engagement with these methods that require continuous development and may not align with all teaching styles. Addressing practical workloads could mitigate this challenge, depending on institutional organisation and the establishment of clear protocols. In some contexts, like certain universities in Hong Kong, trained Teaching Assistants (TAs) could offer essential support in assessment and feedback, lightening the educator's workload.

Another challenge is access to resources. Not every translation department has a direct connection to industry professionals. Digital solutions, such as open-access resources from professional organisations and structured virtual events with practitioners can help address this issue.

A critical challenge and key area for future investigation is assessment. Developing robust frameworks evaluating performer-environment interaction is complex. In addition, the problematic relationship between collaborative professional practices and individual assessment is another venue of tension that also emerged during the action research project (Musumeci, 2025 p. 178). Educators must grapple with evaluating individual perceptual attunement in team-performance without undermining the collaborative values the framework aims to foster. While the provisional rubric (Table 2) is a step

forward, and the framework's flexibility allows educators to customise rubrics according to their institution, standardising reliable criteria for cross-institutional adoption would enhance the impact of this framework integration.

## 7. Closing remarks

This study has proposed a bridge between sports and translation pedagogies through an ecological framework grounded in affordance perception, constraint-led design, and co-construction of plausible simulated environments (*class-icosis*). By framing learning as a dynamic performer-environment relationship, this synthesis is an initial structure to cultivate the strategic, adaptive competences required in the practice of translation. This interdisciplinary bridge attempts to go beyond “mapping the coordinates of one epistemic system onto another” (Robinson, 2024, p. 12) or analogic application of techniques. Being enriched and informed by practice, this translational process is not “limited to theoretical projects” (Robinson, 2024, p. 13).

Instead, it demonstrates how knowledge and pedagogical principles from one epistemic system (sports science) can be translated to address core challenges within another (translation education) to create a novel, integrated methodology. As Bennett and Neves (2024, p. 2) suggest, such translation puts different epistemic systems “into dialogue”, fulfilling the basic translational need of connecting, of becoming infrastructure where nothing stood, between previously disconnected plots.

The contribution brought by GBAs and ED to translation education is the theoretical foundation for designing, implementing, and assessing situated learning environments, intentionally targeting and developing these competences. This framework offers a systematic pedagogy focused on perception and action, ensuring contextualised and representative tasks that build transferable skills.

Therefore, this research does not seek to supplant existing situated learning activities but to augment them integrating sports pedagogy's rigorous focus on the quality of adaptive responses to dynamic environments. GBAs and ED provide a unique lens on adaptation, operationalised through constraint manipulation and affordance perception assessment, offering concrete tools that were previously lacking.

Ultimately, the goal is to equip learners not with a rigid checklist of procedures, but with a calibrated perceptual and strategic agility to perceive, navigate, and adapt to the ever-shifting demands of professional practice in the language service sector.

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# PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSLATION IN THE EFL CLASSROOM IN PORTUGAL: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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**ABSTRACT:** Over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, translation was, in the most part, “outlawed” (Cook, 2010, p. xi) from most major English language teaching theories. Precedence was given to monolingual English classrooms rather than the use of L1 or translation to teach English as a foreign language (EFL). Now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is argued that EFL has undergone a ‘translation turn’ (Carreres and Noriega-Sánchez, 2021; Fehaima, 2022) and translation is returning as a teaching method. But has this changed attitudes to the use of translation in Portugal? This paper presents the findings of a short survey of university teacher trainers aimed at ascertaining their attitudes towards the use of translation in the EFL classroom, exploring how translation might be used and understanding whether translation has a place in classrooms of the future in Portugal. It is hoped this study will pave the way for future research into translation in EFL teaching.

**KEYWORDS:** Translation Turn; English as a Foreign Language; Translation; Teaching Methods; Foreign Language Classroom

## 1. Introduction

Translation has long been viewed as a foe or “pariah” of language teaching (Pennycook, 2008, p. 35) and for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was largely “outlawed” in most major English language teaching theories (Cook, 2010, p. xi). Precedence was given to monolingual English classrooms, rather than using students’ mother tongues as a way of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has been argued that EFL has undergone a ‘translation turn’ (Carreres and Noriega-Sánchez, 2021; Fehaima, 2022; Boukranaa and Sandy, 2024) and we are now seeing translation return as a teaching method to the EFL classroom. But has this ‘turn’ changed attitudes towards the use of translation in the classroom? What is the state of play in Portugal? This study seeks to explore teacher trainers’ attitudes towards the use of translation as a pedagogical tool in EFL classrooms in Portugal.

According to Carreres and Noriega-Sánchez (2021), the “translation turn” was in part due to questioning of the “monolingual principle in language pedagogy” (pp. 83–84), which for many years was the principal context in which English was taught. They also suggest that this ‘turn’ can be attributed to developments in audiovisual translation, the advent of the language learning platform Duolingo, which is based on translation and “crucially, the introduction of the notion of mediation in the CERF”<sup>1</sup> (Carreres and Noriega-Sánchez, 2021, pp. 83–84). Fehaima (2022) goes as far as to suggest that translation may indeed have become the fifth skill after reading, writing, listening and speaking and that it is a

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<sup>1</sup> Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/> (Accessed: 23 April 2025).

“valid method that helps learners consolidate difficult grammar issues” leading to them “improving their knowledge of English” (p. 542). This is echoed by Carreres & Noriega-Sánchez (2021) who suggest that translation is a “useful tool to enhance linguistic competence” (p. 83). In order to investigate this ‘translation turn’ in Portugal, a short questionnaire was administered among trainers of EFL teachers at Portuguese universities. The purpose of this questionnaire was to: 1) to gain an insight into whether there has been a ‘translation turn’ in EFL practices in Portugal; 2) ascertain whether translation now plays a role in EFL classrooms; and 3) to analyse opinions towards translation as a pedagogical tool among trainers of EFL teachers in Portuguese universities.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 History of translation in the EFL classroom**

The first major teaching theory that involved the use of translation was the Grammar-translation (GT) method, developed in eighteenth century Prussia (Cook, 2010). Under this teaching method, students were more than often taught in their L1 (Pinho, 2020) and classes were always oriented towards a specific language; there were no classes with students with different L1s (Cook, 2010, p.9). Grammatical rules were memorised and then using exercises designed to focus on grammar and they were then translated into the target language (the students’ L1). Students were encouraged to focus uniquely on the structure and grammar of the phrases rather than the content. The emphasis was on the written word and the translation of “canonical texts” for assessment purposes (Pinho, 2020, p. 39), with the “ultimate aim of enabling its students to read the literary classics of the language they were learning” (Cook, 2010, p. 9). This method of teaching grammar was highly criticized and often viewed as the “villain” (Cook, 2010, p. 9) in EFL. Critics highlight the lack of focus on oral skills and fluency and that although students would become very familiar with the language rules, they would have a ‘lack of ability to use’ the language. GT has been referred to as “unnatural, authoritarian and dull” (Cook, 2010, p. 14).

In the late nineteenth century, the Reform Movement took hold in English language teaching. It emerged in juxtaposition to the strict rules of GT and emphasised the spoken language and phonetics, teaching grammar through context, rather than via the presentation of grammar rules. The subsequent Direct Method (DM), also known as the Berlitz method, was similarly a reaction against the draconian and authoritarian nature of the GT method. DM “neither used translation nor first-language explanation” (Cook, 2010, p. 7) and was grounded in four key concepts: monolingualism, naturalism, native-speakerism and absolutism. DM was perceived as “the one true path to success” (Cook, 2010, p. 9); the use of L1 in the classroom was avoided (Pinho, 2020, p. 40) and the L2 was to be used as much as possible. As argued by Pinho (2020), this had the effect of transforming the passive learner into an active participant in their learning process (Pinho, 2020, p. 41). Students were expected to think in their L2 and never to resort to translation.

Other methods that arose subsequently centred on the oral needs of learners. Two such examples are the Army Method (AM) and the Communicative Method (CM). AM

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reflected the needs of soldiers during the Second World War and focused on repetition and drilling (Pinho, 2020); its use continued into the 50s and 60s (Pinho, 2020). CM, in contrast, focused primarily on the communication between users of English, placing more emphasis on active communication competence rather than the formal learning of grammar (Cook, 2010). This method characterised many of the teaching of EFL qualifications at the start of the 2000s, such as the Certificate of English Teaching to Adults or Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA),<sup>2</sup> as it is now called. The principal characteristic of communicative classrooms was their monolingual nature; this was the norm in EFL classrooms throughout the 1980s and 1990s across Europe. Monolingual EFL teaching was “big business” and the huge amount of money circulating in the “promotion of an English-only methodology” was “commercially expedient” (Pennycook, 2008, p. 35). This meant that even if translation had been more in ‘favour’, it would not have made financial sense to include it as a teaching methodology. Translation continued to be actively excluded from EFL classrooms.

## **2.2 The return to translation**

The striking absence of translation from EFL methodologies, attributed principally to its negative association with the strict GT methods (Carreres and Noriega-Sánchez, 2021) and the money-making machine that sustained monolingual English language teaching in the 1980s and 1990s (Pennycook, 2008), has finally begun to garner attention among EFL scholars and linguists. In a 2007 article, Cook argued that there needed to be a change in attitudes towards the use of translation. Similarly, Pennycook pushed for the return to translation, as in his words, “the global enterprise of ELT ought to present the possibility of bringing millions of people into the global traffic of meaning” (Pennycook, 2008, p. 33), rather than focusing on monolingual contexts, particularly those in English.

It is important to note that while translation was absent from most ‘acceptable’ EFL pedagogical strategies and there was a general lack of interest in translation on the part of most second-language acquisition researchers (Carreres, 2014), the practice of using translation in EFL classrooms had continued over the last 100 years outside of central Europe. While “inner-circle literature”<sup>3</sup> (Cook, 2007, p. 397) rejected translation as a teaching strategy, in teaching manuals written and produced locally, it “stubbornly refused to die” (Cook, 2007, p. 397). In countries such as Algeria, China, Kazakhstan, Libya, Morocco, and Türkiye, not only did translation continue to be used as a teaching strategy, but studies were also conducted into the role it plays in EFL (Calis and Dikilitas, 2012;

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<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/teaching-english/teaching-qualifications/celta/> (Accessed: 10 April 2025).

<sup>3</sup> This is a reference to Kachru’s World Englishes model in which English is distributed in three circles, the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle model refers to areas dominated by L1 speakers of English; the Outer Circle refers to countries in which English plays a role as an L2 and is used in governmental institutions. This group includes former English-speaking colonies. The Expanding Circle includes countries where English is taught as a foreign language (Kachru, 1985, pp. 12-13).

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Mohamed, 2014; Aktekin and Gliniecki, 2015; Huang, 2023; Boukranaa and Sandy, 2024; Smagul, 2024).

Where qualitative research has supported the reintroduction or return of translation in EFL in Europe, most studies were published more than seven years ago (Dagilienė, 2012; Kelly and Bruen, 2015; Marinac and Barić, 2018) and one of these studies related to languages other than English (Kelly and Bruen, 2015). While Anthony Pym did conduct a study into English language teaching and translation for the Directorate General of Translation (European Commission, Directorate General for Translation, 2013), Portugal was not included among the case reports. One of the most interesting findings of this report was that translation was found to “enhance the learning of an L2” and that teachers found that translation was “not a language-learning method in itself” but could be used as a scaffold or “combined with a number of general teaching approaches” (European Commission, 2013, p. 135). The report ends with guidelines for translation in language teaching; however, the report suggests that “more profound change [...] should come once teachers and learners begin to experiment with translation” (European Commission, 2013, p. 139). This makes my exploratory study even more relevant as it is hoped that it could lead to further qualitative research and the observation of translation activities in the classroom and to more up-to-date data on translation in EFL classrooms.

While some studies have explored the role of translation as a teaching methodology, the majority of them have been theoretical in nature, discussing the pros and cons of translation in language teaching (Cook, 2007; Pennycook, 2008; Koletnik, 2013; Carreres, 2014; Carreres and Noriega-Sánchez, 2021). In Portugal, the most notable example of the exploration of translation as a teaching method is a 2020 article advocating for the use of translation in English language teaching from a theoretical perspective (Pinho, 2020). It explored the different ELF strategies over history and positioned translation as a valid method, with a comprehensive examination of the pros and cons of its usage. In Brazil, studies have been conducted in a similar light (Tecchio and Bittencourt, 2011). Neither study provided any qualitative data on the use of translation in the classroom or surveyed attitudes towards translation. Notably, there has been, as far as I am aware, no research into the use of translation in an ELF classroom in Portugal.

There are signs that attitudes towards translation in EFL may be changing. The long held belief that translation in EFL is negatively associated with the GT method (Cook, 2010) may be waning, with some authors going as far as to suggest that translation may now be the ‘fifth language skill’ (Carreres, 2014; Fehaima, 2022) after the ‘classic’ reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. More recently, authors have posited that we are now experiencing a ‘translation turn’ in language teaching (Carreres and Noriega-Sánchez, 2021; Boukranaa and Sandy, 2024) and that “the huge success of translation-based digital platforms such as Duolingo, and crucially, the introduction of the notion of mediation in the Common European Framework for languages” (Carreres and Noriega-Sánchez, 2021, p. 84) may have led to translation once again being reconsidered as a viable teaching method.

### **2.3 Hypothesis**

The hypothesis that underpins this study is that opinions on the use of translation in the classroom are changing in Portugal and translation is now an accepted tool for EFL teaching. I posit that respondents with a background in non-professional or professional translation will be more open to the use of translation in an English-speaking classroom than those from a pure educational or language background.

To answer the research question and test my hypothesis, I surveyed higher education trainers of EFL teachers on the eight Portuguese university accredited courses in an attempt to gauge their opinions on the use of translation to teach EFL. This is innovative given that the majority of studies conducted focused on teachers (Kelly and Bruen, 2015; Marinac and Barić, 2018; Smagul, 2024) or students (Liao, 2006; Karimian and Talebinejad, 2013; Aktekin and Gliniecki, 2015) rather than teacher trainers. This paper reports the results of this survey, which as far as I am aware, is the first of its kind in Portugal.

### **3. Methodology**

The methodology for this study involved three main stages:

1. Selection of positive and negative statements regarding translation in EFL from the literature review on the use of translation in EFL teaching
2. Creation of a survey for EFL trainers regarding opinions on the use of translation in EFL, and the
3. Surveying of EFL trainers at Portuguese Universities (March 2025).

#### **3.1 Questionnaire**

The choice of a questionnaire over and above other methods of enquiry such as interviews or participant groups was based on this being an exploratory study with a view to conducting future research involving interviews or observational methods. It was limited to 11 questions, which I considered to be as “short as possible so as to avoid non-completion” (Saldanha and O’Brien, 2013, p. 154). Although questionnaires “consume less time than individual interviews” (Saldanha and O’Brien, 2013, p. 152), they do provide preliminary data, which although can sometime be incomplete, can be useful to ascertain whether future research should be conducted. In this case, although I was interested in the reasons that led to a trainers’ choice to include or exclude translation as a teaching method, I was at this stage only trying to gain an understanding as to whether it would be worth conducting future research into the use of translation in the classroom. I took particular care to ensure that jargon was “avoided, even in cases where the researcher expects that the participants would be familiar with, or even users of such jargon.” (Saldanha and O’Brien, 2013, p. 155) to rule out any issues of misunderstanding. This meant that terms such as ‘EFL’ were written out in full.

The questionnaire was organised in three sections: 1) six questions on the respondents' educational background/experience in EFL/Translation; 2) four questions on their training of EFL teachers and 3) one question on attitudes to translation in an EFL classroom. Before examining the issue of translation, I deliberately asked respondents about their attitudes towards the use of L1 in the classroom. It is important to note that the use of L1 and the use of translation in the classroom are not the same. While adopting translation in an EFL classroom involves the use of L1, the use of L1 does not automatically mean translation is being used (Smagul, 2024; Cook, 2010).

To create this questionnaire I drew upon Smagul 2024's study of 100 secondary school teachers of EFL, in which she used a five-point Likert scale to assess attitudes towards the use of L1 and translation in the classroom. Five-point Likert scales are not frequently used in Translation Studies, perhaps due to the fact that they can encourage respondents to choose responses in the middle that are neither positive or negative (Saldanha and O'Brien, 2013, p. 156). However, in the case of this survey, I really wanted to discover whether the trainers felt strongly about the use of translation or whether they were indifferent to it and a score in the middle might help me ascertain this. I had initially anticipated phrasing the same questions in "opposite ways" (Saldanha and O'Brien, 2013, p. 156) to ensure that respondents were answering as they intended. However, I was aware that the questionnaire needed to be short, as respondents do not often have time to answer (Langdridge, 2009). By the time I had drafted the first version it already had 19 statements, so to prevent it from becoming unmanageable I decided not to include opposite questions.

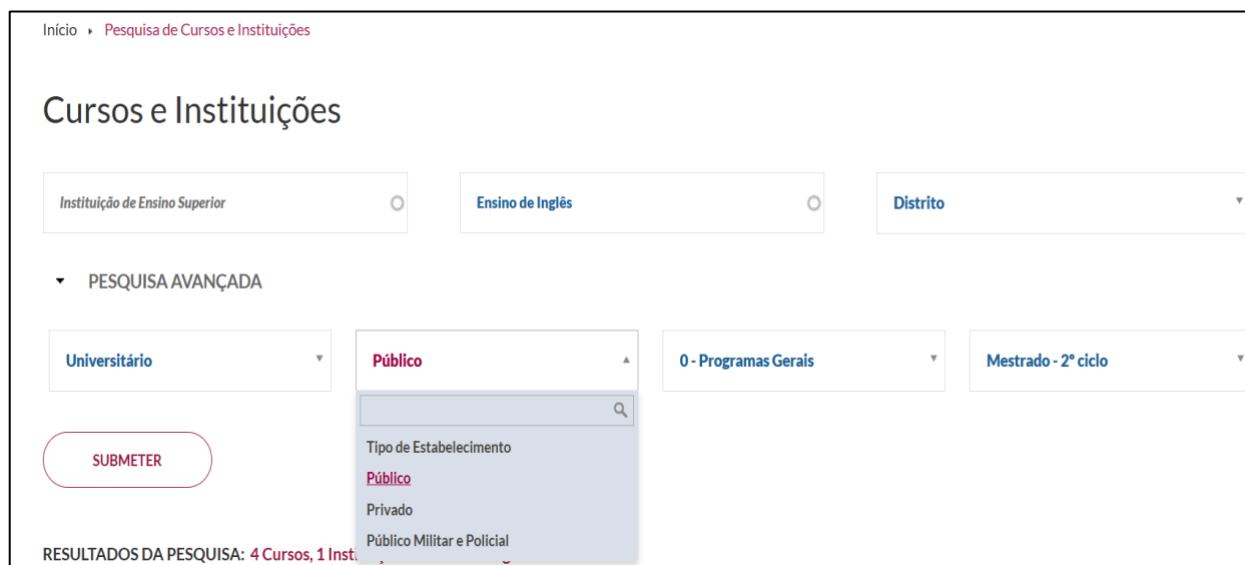
Smagul (2024) also consulted Calafato 2020's Multiteach questionnaire when formulating her study on L1 and translation used in Kazakhstani classrooms. I found this questionnaire particularly useful when considering how to phrase the questions related to my respondents' educational background. For the final question I chose a selection of statements drawn from the literature (See Table 1). These were based on a mixture of positive and negative statements related to the use of translation in EFL and how it can be used to help learners. Table 1 illustrates the list of statements and corresponding evidence in the literature.

**Table 1.** Positive and negative statements regarding translation in ELT gathered from the literature

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Literature</b>
Translation is a support to language learning	(Duff, 1994, Cook 2010)
Translation is detrimental to language learning	(Directorate General for Translation., 2013; Kelly and Bruen, 2015)
Translation fosters cross-cultural understanding	(Pinho 2020, Fois 2020)
Translation fosters mediation between languages	(Fois, 2020; Boukranaa and Sandy, 2024)
Translation exercises can be chosen to assist students with particular grammatical difficulties in English, such as prepositions, 'if' clauses or the passive tense.	Cook, 2010
Translation exercises can be chosen to assist students with particular lexical difficulties (e.g. false friends)	(Cook, 2010; Smagul, 2024)
Translation prevents fluency	(Cook, 2010; European Commission. Directorate General for Translation., 2013)
Using translation makes students think language is only understood if it is translated	(Koletnik, 2013)
Translation results in simplification	(Cook, 2010)
Translation encourages reliance on L1	(Koletnik, 2013)
Translation prevents development of skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) in L2	(Koletnik, 2013)
Translation reduces student anxiety, especially at low levels	(Cook, 2010)
Translation encourages discussion about different possible answers and encourages group discussions	(Duff, 1994)
Translation results in transfer from L1	(Malmkjær and Windle, 2011; Smagul, 2024)
Translation encourages cultural mediation which is essential to language learning	(Boukranaa and Sandy, 2024)
Translation results in students learning isolated phrases or unauthentic discourse	(Cook, 2010)
Translation leads students to believe there is direct equivalence between languages	(Malmkjær and Windle, 2011)
Translation helps students work through grammatical difficulties in L1 and discover links between grammar and usage	(Kelly and Bruen, 2015)
Translation makes students more aware of language context and register by making comparisons with their L1.	(Duff, 1994; Marinac and Barić, 2018)

### 3.2 Inclusion criteria

To ascertain the opinions of EFL trainers at higher education establishments in Portugal, I initially ran a search for all the fully accredited Masters in teaching English as a foreign language in Portugal on the Directorate General for Education's website (Figure 1).



The screenshot shows the search interface on the DGES website. At the top, there is a breadcrumb trail: 'Início > Pesquisa de Cursos e Instituições'. Below this is the main heading 'Cursos e Instituições'. There are three search filters: 'Instituição de Ensino Superior' (set to 'Ensino de Inglês'), 'Distrito' (set to 'Distrito'), and 'PESQUISA AVANÇADA'. Under 'PESQUISA AVANÇADA', there are four filters: 'Universitário' (set to 'Universitário'), 'Tipo de Estabelecimento' (set to 'Público'), '0 - Programas Gerais' (set to '0 - Programas Gerais'), and 'Mestrado - 2º ciclo' (set to 'Mestrado - 2º ciclo'). A 'SUBMETER' button is visible. At the bottom, it says 'RESULTADOS DA PESQUISA: 4 Cursos, 1 Insti...'. A dropdown menu for 'Tipo de Estabelecimento' is open, showing options: 'Público', 'Privado', and 'Público Militar e Policial'.

**Figure 1.** A print screen from the Portuguese Education Authority (DGES) website search tool for accredited English language teaching courses.<sup>4</sup>

This returned a universe of 13 courses across Portugal where students are trained to be English teachers (Figure 1) in the equivalent of the British secondary education system.<sup>5</sup> Of these 13, I excluded five universities, where either no 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle of the Portuguese education teacher training courses for English were taught or they were not a public university. As this was an exploratory study for future research, I decided to limit the inclusion of courses to those taught at Portugal's universities; I did not take into account the five polytechnic universities where masters in English language teaching are also taught. This resulted in a total of eight universities: University of Aveiro; University of Coimbra, University of Évora, University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, University of Minho, University of Porto, University of the Azores and New University of Lisbon. I selected the contact details available on the individual university websites and asked for the questionnaire to be circulated among EFL teacher trainers for the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle of the Portuguese education system.

<sup>4</sup> Available at: [https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pesquisa\\_cursos\\_instituicoes?plid=372&instituicao=&cursos=Ensino%20de%20Ingl%C3%AAs&distrito=3&tipo\\_ensino=1&tipo\\_estabelecimento=1&a=&area=&tipo\\_curso=9](https://www.dges.gov.pt/pt/pesquisa_cursos_instituicoes?plid=372&instituicao=&cursos=Ensino%20de%20Ingl%C3%AAs&distrito=3&tipo_ensino=1&tipo_estabelecimento=1&a=&area=&tipo_curso=9) (Accessed: 23 April 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum> (Accessed: 23 April 2025). This was chosen as I am most familiar with the British education system having followed it until the age of 18.

### **3.3 Language**

The language chosen for the questionnaire was English, because the level of Portuguese of the respondents was not known in advance, and as the questionnaire was about the teaching of English, it made sense to conduct it in English. In addition, by conducting the research in English it removes what call Saldanha and O'Brien call "another layer of interpretation of data" (Saldanha and O'Brien, 2013, p. 177), which occurs when respondents' data needs to be translated. Given that all respondents were expected to have a high level of English, it is not thought that answering in English would result in any imprecision or possibility of the respondents not feeling comfortable in responding in English (Saldanha and O'Brien, 2013).

### **3.4 Analysis**

The results of this study will be presented using descriptive statistics, including absolute frequencies, mean and standard deviation (SD). Mean and SD will be used for question 12 (Likert scale). These will help me determine the average answers on the Likert scale and also which answer was also the most popular in terms of level of agreement. Where comments are provided, I will examine them based on beliefs towards translation in EFL, using the statements outlined in Table 1 as a basis, to ascertain whether there are patterns in the answers provided by the respondents.

## **4. Results and discussion**

From the eight universities consulted, I received 13 responses, six of which were incomplete. These were, excluded, as respondents had only completed the first two questions. I analysed the seven remaining survey answers based on the responses to the different sections of the survey.

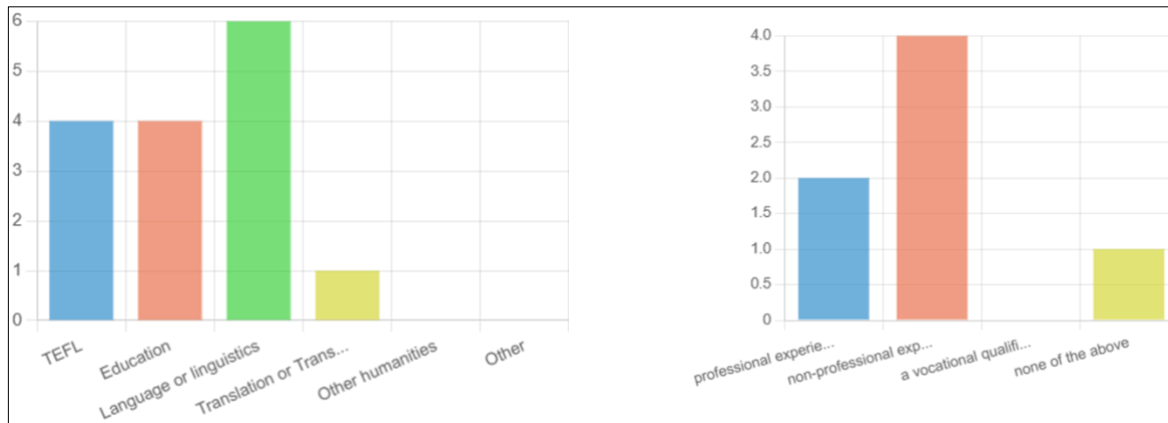
### **4.1 Profile**

All respondents reported their level of English to be C2; it is important here to note that proficiency in English is considered to be high in Portugal; data from the 2024 English First Report<sup>6</sup> reveal that among the 137 countries surveyed, Portugal was classified in the top 10, at position 8. Of the seven respondents, three stated English was their L2, two considered it their L1 and two selected 'other'. Figure 3 illustrates that the respondents were from the humanities; some held specific degrees in education and TEFL, while the majority had a background in linguistics or language; only one respondent had an academic degree in translation (Figure 3a). All respondents held doctorates. As the translation profession is in the most part unregulated, I wanted to understand whether respondents' attitudes might have been influenced if they had a background in non-professional or professional translation. The results show that all but one respondent had some type of experience in translation; four respondents reported having non-professional experience

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<sup>6</sup> Available at: <https://www.ef.com/epi/> (Accessed: 12 April 2025).

and two stated they had been involved in some type of professional translation in the past (Figure 3b). In terms of teaching experience, one respondent had more than 15 years of experience, four had between 0 and 10 years' experienced and one 10 and 15 years' experience. However, unlike the findings of the large-scale DGT report into translation and language learning, which found that the greater the number of years of experience of teaching, the more likely the teachers were to consider translation (European Commission. Directorate General for Translation., 2013, p. 41), the respondent with the most experience reported being unlikely to recommend translation to their trainees.



**Figure 3a.** Academic background of the respondents **Figure 3b** Experience in translation

#### 4.2 Teaching practices

In response to question 7 ('In which circumstances do you teach your trainees that L1 can be used in the classroom'), none of the respondents believed that L1 should never be used in the classroom. This is interesting as it would appear that the respondents no longer believed that English should be taught exclusively in a monolingual environment, which has been the dominant force in EFL for many years. However, one respondent did then state that they teach trainees to 'to minimise reliance on L1 to ensure maximum target-language exposure', which may suggest that use of L1 is still associated with issues of interference, as cited by one respondent in their answer to question 7. Alternatively, as argued by Smagul, it may reflect the "complexity of teachers' perspectives on incorporating learners' L1 and translation in EFL classrooms, as they [teachers] simultaneously recognise the value of translation skills while endorsing English-only instruction" (2024, p. 6). Six out of seven respondents stated that L1 could be used at lower levels 'among students who were still gaining basic competences' (Respondent 1), with L1 being use as a 'support' (Respondent 4), especially when the trainer wanted to convey information they 'know the sts [sic] wouldn't understand [in] the FL' (Respondent 4). No respondents reported that L1 use was a solution for long classes; in these cases they recommended 'more practical classes' (Respondent 2) or stated simply that 'lack of focus will not be solved by the use of L1' (Respondent 4). In response to whether L1 could be used for explanations, most respondents agreed that L1 could be used when the 'concepts are too complex' (Respondent 1), for grammar items (Respondent 5) or to 'facilitate

communication' (Respondent 4). L1 for translation purposes provided some interesting examples: Respondent 2, who has no background in either professional or non-professional translation, replied that translation was valid if it was a 'translation class', in deep contrast with Carreres' (2014) and Fehaima (2022)'s framing of translation as the 'fifth skill' in the foreign language teaching classroom. However, this concept of translation as only being valid in a translation classroom is not new and is reported by Koletnik (2013) as one of the common objections to EFL methods involving translation. In contrast, five of the respondents stated they would use translation to 'highlight linguistic differences and aid comprehension' (Respondent 1), 'sometimes to compare with L1' (Respondent 3), in 'vocabulary acquisition' (Respondent 4) and specifically 'in lower levels of English and for more abstract terms' (Respondent 5). Similar responses were encountered by Kelly and Bruen (2015) in their study conducted among 12 language lecturers in Ireland. Their study revealed that seven out of 12 respondents considered vocabulary learning was a reason for using translation and also where there are "gaps in learners' knowledge" (Kelly and Bruen, 2015, p. 157). In my study, other examples of possible reasons for the use of L1 in the classroom included: 'for discussions, as it promotes participation' (Respondent 5), 'whenever there is economy of class time [sic] or speech' (Respondent 7) or as Respondent 1 claims 'I advocate for the strategic use of L1 in the EFL classroom, particularly when it facilitates comprehension, supports learner autonomy, or enhances metacognitive awareness', but that over-reliance on L1 should be discouraged (Respondent 1). While other authors have found that teachers have "neutral" (Smagul, 2024, p. 6) opinions towards L1, the respondents in this study appear to acknowledge the value of L1, but that it must be restricted to the particular circumstances cited above. This reflects the findings of the Directorate General of Translation's 2013 report, which found that "translation can make an effective contribution under some circumstances" (European Commission, 2013, p. 37). Perhaps it also indicates that the concept of a monolingual English classroom still prevails among trainers of EFL teachers. This could, however, only be confirmed with a larger sample and also in a study involving trainers throughout Europe or the rest of the world.

#### **4.3 Attitudes to translation**

While the literature would suggest that translation has frequently been associated negatively with the GT method (Cook, 2007, 2010; Kelly and Bruen, 2015; Pinho, 2020; Smagul, 2024), the following word cloud (Fig. 3), which was generated based on the responses to question 8 (word associated with the use of translation in an English as an EFL classroom) (Figure 3), illustrates how, among the respondents, the most popular words ('beginners', 'comprehension', 'scaffolding', 'respect' and 'support') were positive in nature and linked to cases in which translation is used as tool to support students with the main purpose of achieving comprehension. To my surprise, there was no mention of the GT method or terms such as "unnatural, authoritarian and dull" (Cook, 2010, p.14) or comments related to the lack of "real" (p.14) or authentic use of language. The only two

potentially negative items were 'interference' and 'equivalence' both of which were cited by the same respondent. It is noteworthy that the use of translation is associated with words such as 'respect' and 'inclusiveness' and also terms such as 'migration' and 'translanguaging', all terms associated with the new multilingual context (Bennett, 2023).



**Figure 3.** Word cloud of associations with translation

Where respondents were asked directly if they thought translation were a valid method for language teaching (Question 9), four responded affirmatively. These respondents all had some type of background in translation, be it an academic qualification (Respondent 6) or professional or non-professional experience (Respondents 4, 5 and 7). Interestingly, it was the respondent with a PhD in Translation Studies who expressed some reservations that 'it should not be overused' in an English language classroom, while another believed it was vital for 'participation, effective learning and promoting social justice' (Respondent 5). This would suggest that some participants view the use of translation as a way of creating a more egalitarian classroom. Although I have not encountered examples of translation being used for social justice reasons in my own classroom perhaps due to teaching students who are mostly from Portugal (with the exception of a handful of Erasmus students) and of a similar socio and economic background, there is evidence of translanguaging techniques, in which students draw on their language repertoire and engage with each other in this way (Canagarajah, 2013). The three respondents who answered 'no' to question 9, stated that translation could be 'valuable [...] but not necessarily as a standalone method' (Respondent 1). This would appear to suggest that although they responded 'no', there is a slight contradiction in their response, as although they do not teach it as a valid method, they believe it could be helpful. One respondent raised the issue of terminology, suggesting that translation was a 'strategy' rather than a 'method', but that even so it should only be used under specific circumstances. This is echoed in the Directorate General for Translation report (European Commission, 2013) where translation is put forward as a scaffolding strategy but not a standalone method. The remaining respondent suggested that some students at lower levels 'might not have the language to translate from one language to another' (Respondent 3). They were categoric and stated that they advise trainees to 'avoid' the need to 'translate everything'

as it ‘encourages learners to be over reliant on translation. ‘If they believe the teacher will translate, they won't try to understand in English.’ (Respondent 3). Marinac and Barić’s similarly reported that, in their sample, translation was not necessarily viewed “appropriate for all levels of proficiency” (2018, p. 909) and that some teachers believed they should try to ‘avoid’ using their L1 in their teaching practice.

**Table 2.** Responses to the question: ‘in which circumstances do you teach your trainees that L1 can be used in the classroom?’

Context & register	Word order & reference	Time, tense, mood & aspect	Concepts & notion	Idioms	Listening skill	NEVER
No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Table 2 illustrates the instances in which respondents believed that it was acceptable to use translation in the classroom. While the majority believed it was not acceptable to use translation for context and register, only two respondents believed it could be used for word order and reference and similarly for time, tense and mood. A larger number of respondents (four out of seven) believed that translation was useful for teaching concepts and notions and also for idioms. Only one respondent believed it was useful for listening; however, they also answered that translation should never be used in the classroom. It is important to note here that this may be a false positive, in the sense that the respondent may have made a mistake, given that they answered positively for all of the other categories in which translation could be used. While using translation to teach grammar was advocated by some respondents (four out of seven), the highest number of positive responses was for ‘concepts and notions’, following by ‘idioms’. In this context, respondents commented that idioms ‘are a bridge to cultural differences (or similarities)’ and that the ‘use of equivalent idioms is a way to understand both cultures’ (Respondent 2) and encourage ‘participation and respect for diversity’ (Respondent 5). Here the use of translation is advocated for mediation purposes. Mediation, in this context, encompasses three principal categories: mediating a text, mediating concepts and mediation communication, in which ‘translating a written text’ is listed under mediating a text (North and Piccardo, 2019). It is interesting to consider whether this signals a break with the past or whether this is indeed validation of translation as a method for teaching foreign languages across Europe.

The final question of the survey asked respondents to rate the extent of their agreement with the statements listed in Table 1. Table 2 shows the statements with the average response and the SD<sup>7</sup> in the mean. Overall, respondents were mostly in agreement

<sup>7</sup> Standard deviation (SD) represents the extent to which there are variations around the mean. A low SD means there is not much variation, whereas a higher SD would suggest there is a higher level of variation or extremes.

that translation is a support to language learning (mean 4, SD: 0.82). This is supported by the mean response to translation is detrimental to language learning standing at 1.57 with a SD of 0.79. This means that the majority felt translation could or should be used in some way in EFL teaching. Overall, the responses to the positive statements all fell between the 3 and 4 range, with the majority close to 4. This means that most respondents agreed that translation could be used in these circumstances, but at the same time, it was not a resounding 4 in full agreement. The most positive statement overall was 'Translation encourages cultural mediation which is essential to language learning' which achieved a 4 rating with a SD of 0.58, meaning there was very little deviation in the responses. This is particularly interesting given that above the status of mediation on the CEFR was discussed. This would suggest that translation in the EFL classroom is indeed viewed as mediation and in a positive light. However, in the case of 'Translation fosters mediation between languages', the mean was 4 (SD: 1.15), thus meaning that there were responses at the opposite ends of the spectrum. In this case, there was one respondent who responded with a 2 in disagreement with this statement. This would appear to suggest that the concept of translation as mediation in EFL needs to be explored further, perhaps in the context of interviews or focus groups.

With regard to the negative statements, the mean responses were all situated in the 2 (disagree range); however, when using mean for statistics, the outlying figures must also be taken into account. So for example, some responses to the negative data actually revealed more of a range in extent of agreement. For example, 'Using translation makes students think language is only understood if it is translated', although the mean is 2.86 which is between disagree and neither agree or disagree, it is important to note that 3 respondents agreed with this statement, while 3 disagreed and 1 neither agreed nor disagreed. This is worthy of note as it reveals that some teacher trainers still do have concerns about the use of translation in an EFL classroom. Similarly, in 'Translation encourages reliance on L1', although five respondents disagreed, 3 remained unsure.

**Table 3.** Statements listed in Table 1 with the mean and standard deviation statistical values

Statements	Mean	SD
Translation is a support to language learning	4	0.82
Translation is detrimental to language learning	1.57	0.79
Translation fosters cross-cultural understanding	3.71	0.49
Translation fosters mediation between languages	4	1.15
Translation exercises can be chosen to assist students with particular grammatical difficulties in English, such as prepositions, 'if' clauses or the passive tense.	3.71	0.49
Translation exercises can be chosen to assist students with particular lexical difficulties (e.g. false friends)	3.86	0.69
Translation prevents fluency	1.57	0.53
Using translation makes students think language is only understood if it is translated	2.86	1.21

Translation results in simplification	2	0.82
Translation encourages reliance on L1	2.57	0.98
Translation prevents development of skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) in L2	2	0.82
Translation reduces student anxiety, especially at low levels	3.86	0.9
Translation encourages discussion about different possible answers and encourages group discussions	3.14	1.46
Translation results in transfer from L1	2.57	0.53
Translation encourages cultural mediation which is essential to language learning	4	0.58
Translation results in students learning isolated phrases or unauthentic discourse	2.29	0.95
Translation leads students to believe there is direct equivalence between languages	2.29	1.11
Translation helps students work through grammatical difficulties in L1 and discover links between grammar and usage	3.57	0.79
Translation makes students more aware of language context and register by making comparisons with their L1.	3.57	0.79

SD: Standard deviation

1= Strongly disagree

5= Strongly agreed

In the final section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to leave general comments on the use of translation in EFL. Here, the overwhelming pattern was that respondents believed translation was ‘useful’ (Respondent 1) and ‘relevant’ (Respondent 5) and definitely not ‘harmful’ (Respondent 2) nor ‘should it be avoided at all costs’ (Respondent 4), but that it should be used in ‘particular circumstances’ (Respondent 5) and could be successful ‘when used selectively and purposefully’ (Respondent 1). However, it was overwhelmingly viewed as one of several teaching strategies that could be used in combination with others, but ‘not as a crutch that prevents immersion in the target language’ (Respondent 1).

## 5. Limitations

There are three principal limitations to this study. One is that the study sample is very small; however, as I am positioning and framing this paper as exploratory, I do not feel that this affects its overall validity. I hope that it will pave the way for future research into this field, including my own. Secondly, I did not provide definitions of terms such as L1, L2 and translation at the start of the questionnaire. Given that all the respondents were working in English language teaching, I assumed that providing definitions of these terms might have been viewed as somewhat condescending. Also, with regard to translation in the context of language teaching, I did not want to induce respondents into considering particular methods such as GT, due to the negative associations between it and translation.

In retrospect, I could perhaps have provided some simple and neutral definitions of L1, L2 and translation in the context of EFL. However, another option could have been to ask the trainers what they understood by translation, as Anthony Pym did in the Directorate General of Translation's report (European Commission, 2013, p. 36). This would have ensured that 'translation' was understood in its multitude of forms. Another aspect that could have made the statistics in Question 12 easier to understand, is that I could have chosen an even Likert scale, which would have prevented respondents from choosing '3' which is neither in agreement nor disagreement with the statements.

## 6. Conclusion

Although this paper is only exploratory, it does raise some key issues that will require further reflection and research. Attitudes do appear to be changing, and translation is no longer "outlawed" (Cook, 2010), but I do not think in the case of the sampled population that we cannot argue that translation is a fully integrated and an accepted methodology in an EFL classroom. It would appear to be one of a multitude of 'strategies', 'tools' or 'methods' that might be employed by teachers. One respondent suggested that the 'current multilingual context of EFL classrooms makes it necessary to use inclusion and mediation strategies and using translation is one of these strategies' (Respondent 5). There was a slight correlation between respondents who had a background in professional or non-professional translation and them being more favourable to translation, but at the same time the respondent with a PhD in translation, was the one who had greater reservations about its use.

With regard to my own position, although my background is as a professional translator and more recently in Translation Studies, I completed my CELTA qualification in 2007 at a time when the monolingual English classroom dominated, in spite of some calls for change (Cook, 2007; Pennycook, 2008; Carreres, 2014; Carreres and Noriega-Sánchez, 2021). This means that my own teaching strategies have been influenced by the monolingual teaching paradigm. However, as I have discovered through translation and more recently in my own classroom, L1 use and translation can be positive for both the teacher and student alike.

As regards the future, I view this study as a stepping stone toward further research into the use of translation in the classroom. In the short-term future I plan on conducting a literature review of how translation can be incorporated into an EFL classroom. Based on this, I would like to run an observational study that will explore how students and teachers receive translation activities and their perceptions of their success for language learning/teaching. I hope that the results of the observational study will lead to the creation of manuals for the inclusion of translation in EFL teaching. In addition, it would be important to organise workshops with teachers of English as a foreign language to introduce them to techniques for using translation in the classroom. And as Pym argued 12 years ago in the Directorate General for Translation report into translation and

Bennett, P. M. - Perspectives on translation in the EFL classroom in Portugal: An exploratory study *Translation Matters*, 7(2), 2025, pp. 48-68, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm7\\_2a3](https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm7_2a3)

language learning, teachers and learners should “begin to experiment with translation” (European Commission, 2013, p. 140). I wholeheartedly agree.

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## QUESTIONNAIRE

### **Profile**

This section contains information about your educational and professional background.

1. Is English your...

L1

L2

Other?

2. How would you classify your English proficiency?

C1

C2

B1

B2

3. What is your educational background?

CELTA (or equivalent)

DELTA (or equivalent)

BA

MA

PhD

4. Were any of your academic degrees in the following subject fields?

TEFL

Education

Language or Linguistics

Translation or Translation Studies

Other humanities

Not applicable

5. Do you have...

any professional experience in translation?

non-professional experience in translation?

a vocational qualification in translation?

None of the above.

6. How long have you been training EFL teachers?

0-5 years

5-10 years

10-15 years

15+ years

**Your training of English language teachers**

7. In which circumstances do you teach your trainees that L1 can be used in the classroom?
- Never
  - For lower levels of EFL
  - During classes that are long, in which students may not be able to concentrate in English
  - Where students have previously used L1 in a classroom (past learning experiences)
  - For explanations
  - As a contrastive tool
  - For translation
  - Other

Please justify your answers.

8. Please list the first five words that you associate with the use translation in an English-as-a-foreign-language teaching classroom.
- 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  - 5.

9. Do you teach your trainees that translation is a valid method for teaching English as a foreign language?  
Yes/No.

10. In which of the following circumstances do you think it might be acceptable to use translation in the classroom?
- To teach context and register
  - To teach word order and reference
  - To teach time: tense, mood, aspect
  - To teach concepts and notions
  - To teach idioms
  - To improve reading skills
  - To improve listening skills
  - Translation should never be used in the classroom
  - Other (please state)

Please justify your answer.

11. On a scale of 1-5, to what extent do you agree with the following views on the use of translation in the classroom:
- Translation is a support to language learning
  - Translation is detrimental to language learning
  - Translation fosters cross-cultural understanding
  - Translation fosters mediation between languages
  - Translation exercises can be chosen to assist students with particular grammatical difficulties in English, such as prepositions, 'if' clauses or the passive tense.

Translation exercises can be chosen to assist students with particular lexical difficulties (e.g. false friends)  
Translation prevents fluency  
Using translation makes students think language is only understood if it is translated  
Translation results in simplification  
Translation encourages reliance on L1  
Translation prevents development of skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) in L2  
Translation reduces student anxiety, especially at low levels  
Translation encourages discussion about different possible answers and encourages group discussions  
Translation results in transfer from L1  
Translation encourages cultural mediation which is essential to language learning  
Translation results in students learning isolated phrases or unauthentic discourse  
Translation leads students to believe there is direct equivalence between languages  
Translation helps students work through grammatical difficulties in L1 and discover links between grammar and usage  
Translation encourages the development of skills essential to language learning (accuracy, clarity, flexibility)  
Translation makes students more aware of language context and register by making comparisons with their L1.

**About the author:** Phillippa May Bennett holds a PhD in Translation and Terminology from NOVA University of Lisbon, Portugal. She is a teaching fellow in English and Translation at the University of Porto and has been a professional translator in the life sciences since 2007. She is also a Chartered Linguist (Translator).

## INTERPRETATION AND TRANSLATION OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN PERU: SPECIALTY WITHOUT EXCLUSIVITY

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**ABSTRACT:** Peru's National Registry of Interpreters and Translators of Indigenous Languages (Registro Nacional de Intérpretes y Traductores de Lenguas Indígenas, ReNITLI) comprises more than 400 trained interpreter-translators offering services for healthcare, justice, education, and community consultations in 37 out of 48 Peruvian indigenous languages. This qualitative study details the work of ReNITLI members, asking where, in what contexts, and how often interpreter-translators provide their services. It was revealed that Registry members' work is heterogeneous in type (interpretation vs. translation), frequency, and especially specialization, demonstrating that the profile of a solely 'medical interpreter' or 'justice interpreter' does not exist in this context. This suggests that diverse perspectives and experiences widen the scope of interpreter-translators' practice, and that the utility of specializing in a particular area varies depending on context. Sharing the varied work of ReNITLI members underscores the importance of interpreter-translators and ensures the inclusivity and accessibility of public spaces in Peru.

**KEYWORDS:** Interpretation; Translation; Peru; ReNITLI; Specialization; Certification

### 1. Introduction and background

In multilingual spaces, the provision of public services is not always equitable. In healthcare, education, and justice systems, speakers of languages other than the primary language often encounter communication difficulties. Interpretation and translation—tools for spoken and written language, respectively, that facilitate the exchange not only of words, but also of ideas and perspectives—are indispensable to ensure that these communities have sufficient access to resources. With its rich linguistic and cultural diversity, Peru has a considerable population that must deal with such difficulties and therefore can benefit from strong interpretation and translation services. As such, it serves as a fascinating example for a study of interpretation and translation. The goal of this project was to explore the current landscape of translation and interpretation for indigenous languages in Peru, and to highlight government efforts to develop such supports.

In particular, this study focuses on the National Registry of Interpreters and Translators of Indigenous Languages (Registro Nacional de Intérpretes y Traductores de Lenguas Indígenas, ReNITLI). ReNITLI is an initiative headed by the Indigenous Languages Department of the Peruvian Ministry of Culture. This type of program is unique in Latin America; apart from a similar registry in Mexico—the Padrón Nacional de Intérpretes y Traductores en Lenguas Indígenas (PANITLI), whose inception in 2007 slightly predates ReNITLI—it is the main example of a national program recognizing the importance of supporting indigenous language speakers in such an intentional way (Stallaert et al., 2020). With more than 400 registered interpreter-translators, ReNITLI serves 37 of the 48

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recognized Peruvian indigenous languages and covers 23 of Peru's 24 regions (Oficina de Comunicación e Imagen Institucional, 2020; Chata Bejar, 2021). In addition, 2025 marks ten years since the Registry was officially created by Supreme Decree in 2015, and thirteen years since the idea first arose via a list of interpreter-translators prepared to work in Prior Consultation (*Consulta Previa*), Peru's system of convening indigenous communities and State or business entities in matters regarding them (Andrade et al., 2019). About a decade after the initial implementation of the concept, this is an opportune time to assess the efficacy of the Registry.

The initial goal of this project was to study ReNITLI with a particular focus on healthcare. This focus was based on two initial motivations: first, that interpretation constitutes an integral part of effective communication, which is critical in medical situations (Andrade and Pérez, 2013; Flores, 2005; Jacobs et al., 2001; Karliner et al., 2007). Of the numerous difficulties that indigenous communities face in seeking good medical care—including distance, finances, and negative perceptions of providers in state-run medical centers—language barriers are a significant challenge (Badanta et al., 2020; Bussalleu et al., 2021a, 2021b; Frisancho-Arroyo, 2013; Ishida et al., 2012).

Second, although previous research has established the critical importance of medical interpretation, much of the existing scholarship, especially in the Peruvian context, focuses more on interpreting and translation in the area of justice and legal matters. Findings from the present study thus expand our knowledge of interpretation and translation in other sectors. The study of ReNITLI as a unique government program also reinforces the utility of such initiatives in other multilingual regions, as it is a significant recognition and validation of indigenous language speakers' needs. To examine the impact of ReNITLI, this exploratory study employed a survey and qualitative interviews to investigate translation and interpretation services in various public spheres, as well as the individual experiences of interpreter-translators themselves.

Prior work on interpretation, particularly in the United States, generally centers on those interpreters who have specialized in a given area, such as medical interpreters, court interpreters, and the like. Researchers such as Kelly and Zetzsche, in their 2012 book *Found in Translation*, argue that to be able to manage the specific and often complex terminology and concepts of certain subjects, passing along messages as accurately as possible, interpreters need strong, specialized training in their particular field. This argument especially applies when considering how a setting like healthcare, in which conversations include body parts, scientific processes, and medical jargon, differs in such a stark manner from something like the justice system, which instead requires familiarity with court systems, legal proceedings, and lawyers' particular styles of speech.

Nevertheless, the preliminary survey of ReNITLI members in this investigation revealed something surprising: less than a fifth of respondents indicated that they interpret and translate for only one sector (in this paper, 'sector,' 'field,' and 'area' are used interchangeably to refer to a particular setting in which interpretation and translation are conducted). Because such experience with different fields appears to contradict the

idea that specialization produces better work, the fact that interpreter-translators in Peru generally do not specialize merits further study. It also urges us to take an inter-epistemic view of the issue, recognizing the value of knowledge systems outside of the Global North and the imperative to avoid an 'epistemological monoculture' (Bennett, 2015; Santos, 2016). This work thus aims to investigate how and why interpreter-translators in Peru provide their services in a variety of public spaces. With a more detailed portrait of how ReNITLI members operate, we can better understand Peru's provision of these important public services and potentially see a model for other multilingual spaces.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Survey and interviews**

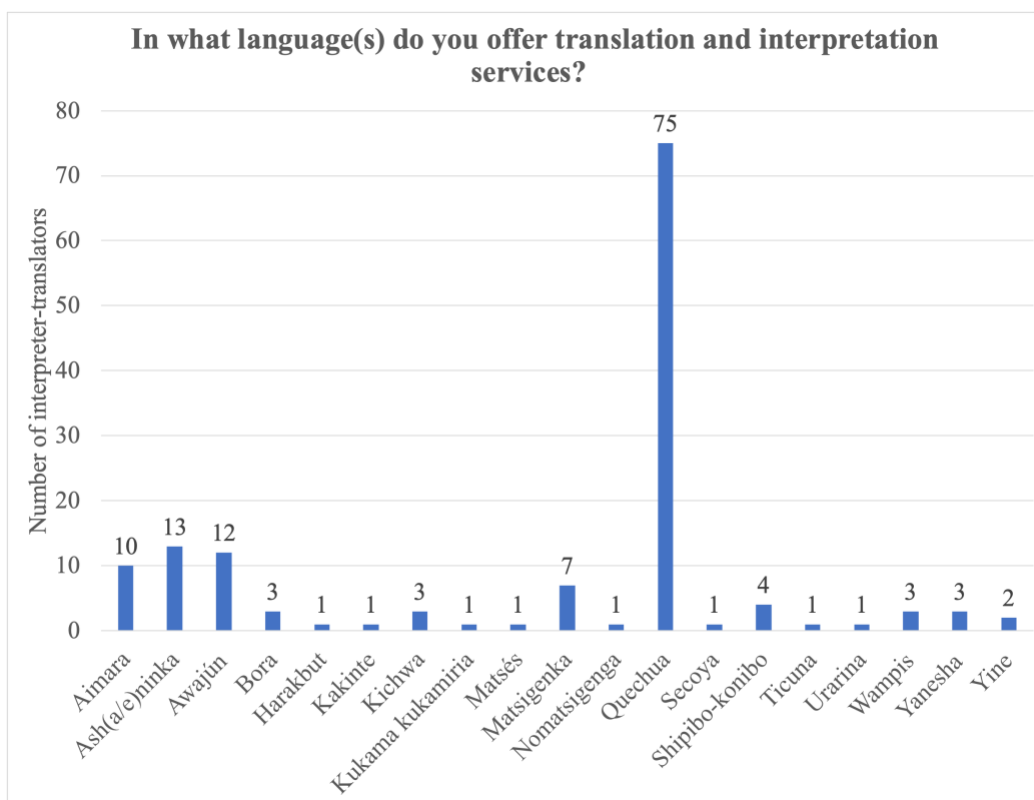
A Google Forms survey was created and sent out to interpreter-translators from an updated list of ReNITLI members in 2022, which was obtained thanks to a collaboration with the Indigenous Languages Department at the Ministry of Culture of Peru. The survey (see the full Spanish version in the Appendix) began with demographic questions addressing language, origin, age, current location, and occupation. It then asked about interpreter-translators' experiences: in what fields, with what frequency, and where specifically they had provided their services. Though the initial list contained 508 names, some did not provide email addresses and other email messages were returned to the sender. In total the survey was successfully emailed to 440 interpreter-translators. Of those, 144 submitted complete responses (response rate: 33%).

The survey results revealed that participant characteristics varied widely. They are originally from different regions of Peru and currently live all over the country, they speak different indigenous languages, they have different occupations, and they have had experiences with translation and interpretation in many different cases and fields. What they have in common, however, is that all were trained by the Ministry of Culture's official training course for interpreters and translators of indigenous languages. The second phase of the study aimed to explore this diversity through individual interviews. Thirty-five interviews were conducted in Spanish by the author over Zoom or telephone between April and June 2022, with each interview lasting between 15-75 minutes. A semi-structured interview guide was employed to learn more about the interpreter-translators' decisions to become certified as interpreter-translators, their experiences with interpretation and translation in general, their recommendations for ReNITLI, and their opinions about specialization.

With the verbal consent of participants, written transcripts of their responses were reviewed in greater detail in tandem with researcher notes taken during the interviews, with the goal of observing patterns in the interpreter-translators' perspectives and experiences.

## 2.2 Participants

In this study's sample, participants spoke more than 15 indigenous languages, a significant portion of the 37 that ReNITLI covers and the 48 that exist in Peru today (Oficina de Comunicación e Imagen Institucional, 2020; Chata Bejar, 2021). Figure 1 shows the distribution of these languages.



**Figure 1.** In what language(s) do you offer translation and interpretation services? Participants entered their language(s) in a short-answer format. Number of responses: 141.

Of the 144 survey participants, the great majority speak Quechua, including varieties such as Quechua Chanka, Cusco-Collao, Cajamarca norteño, and Kañaris-Inkawasi, among others. This is consistent with Peru's linguistic composition, as Quechua is the most spoken indigenous language in the country (Ministry of Culture of Peru, 2019). One participant mentioned interpreting and translating between Spanish and two indigenous languages, but the rest reported doing so only in one indigenous language.

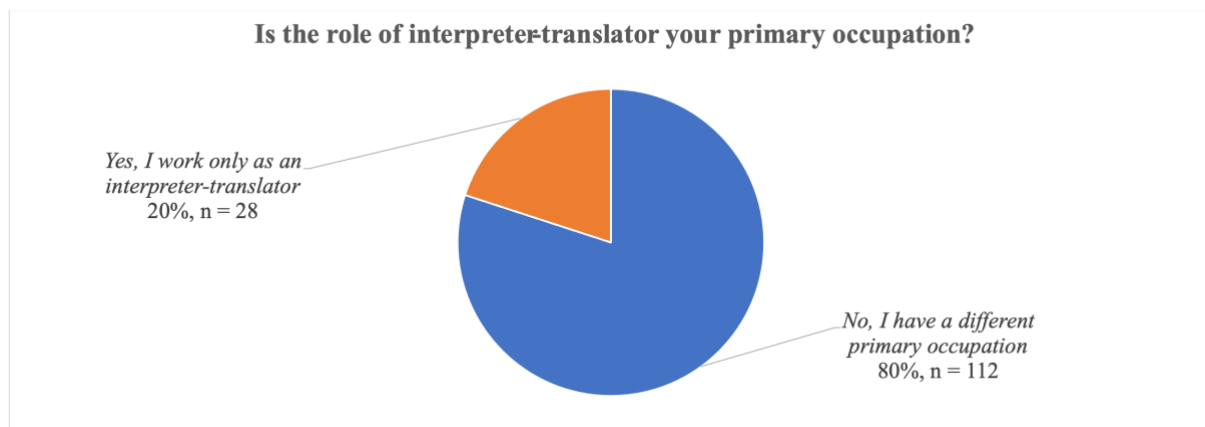
The age range of participants was 23–76 years old (average: 44.6 years). The sample was 60.4% male. Participants were originally from 17 Peruvian states (including the Constitutional Province of Callao) and currently live in 20 states.

## 3. Results and Analysis

### 3.1 Survey results

Although the initial goal of this project was to study interpretation in healthcare specifically, the preliminary survey revealed that a uniform profile of a 'medical interpreter' does not exist. Rather, participants worked with both interpretation and

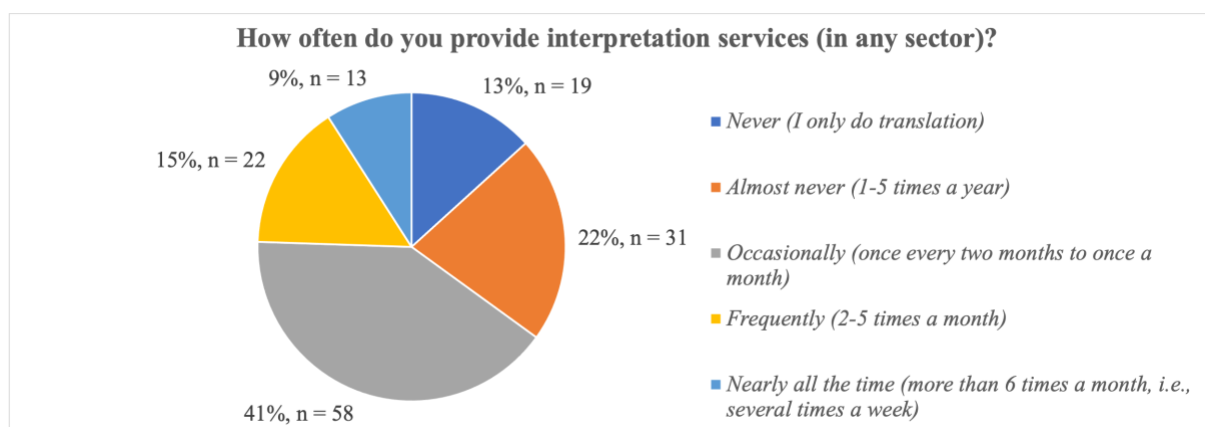
translation in multiple sectors. Additionally, one of the most important findings of this questionnaire was that the vast majority of respondents do not even work exclusively as interpreter-translators, as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Is the role of interpreter-translator your primary occupation?** Participants could select only one response. Number of responses: 140.

Instead, participants had a variety of other primary occupations: teachers, students, lawyers, writers, artists, public servants, independent workers, and more. The range of employment they display indicates that each interpreter-translator brings a distinct set of experiences and perspectives to their work. It also implies that they must find a balance between their responsibilities as interpreter-translators and the other roles they occupy, which suggests they have particular motivations to be in this role.

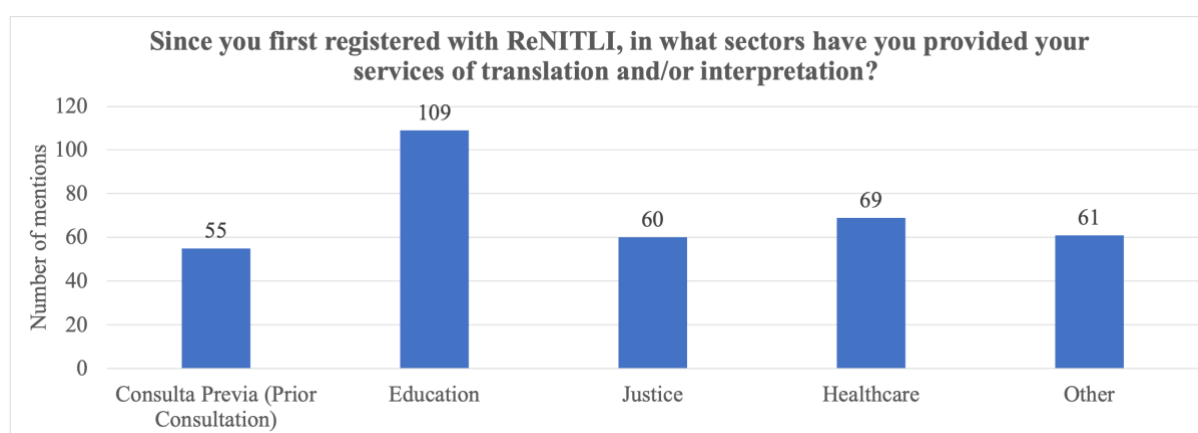
In agreement with the fact that the primary occupation of the interpreter-translators in this sample is not necessarily interpretation and translation, the majority reported interpreting only on an “occasional” basis, which was defined in this case as a frequency of less than once a month (see Figure 3). Less than 10% interpret “nearly all the time,” and there was a notable portion who never interpret, focusing solely on translation of written material.



**Figure 3. How often do you provide interpretation services (in any sector)?** Participants could select only one response. Number of responses: 143.

This finding indicates that although ReNITLI members can opt to be certified both as interpreters *and* translators, there is not an even divide between these two forms of linguistic mediation. Thus, we find that in reality, the makeup of the work is heterogeneous both in type (interpretation versus translation) and frequency.

A related noteworthy result came up in responses to a question about the sector in which participants work most frequently. Of the 144 respondents, only 27—less than a fifth of the total—noted that they work in only one field. The rest reported having worked with multiple sectors, with the most commonly mentioned one being Education, followed by Healthcare, as shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4. Since you first registered with ReNITLI, in what sectors have you provided your services of translation or interpretation?** Participants could select as many answers as necessary, including an option of “Other.” Bars represent the number of times that a given sector was mentioned across all responses. Some noted working with only one sector ( $n = 27$ , 18.8%), but the majority indicated more than one field in their responses.

This finding was interesting and unexpected, given that it contrasts with the previously mentioned notion that it is important to specialize in a particular field of translation and interpretation (Kelly and Zetsche, 2012). Taking into account the fact that ReNITLI members tend not to dedicate themselves exclusively to the work of translation and interpretation, nor do they usually work exclusively with one topic, the main research question was reformulated; instead of exploring only healthcare interpreting, the study pivoted to the more general question of sector specialization in interpretation and translation.

### **3.2 Preparing for each sector**

The 35 interpreter-translators who participated in interviews represented approximately a quarter of those who responded to the survey. Initially, only those participants who mentioned healthcare were going to be recruited through a follow-up email, but because fewer than expected had healthcare experience, a random set of respondents were asked to participate in interviews via email. Their occupations varied, but a notable proportion were teachers and lawyers. All had different levels of experience with translation and

interpretation, but in general, they reported feeling well-prepared by the Ministry of Culture's training course for interpreters and translators of indigenous languages. Despite the training, most also shared the opinion that one of the great challenges they face is the wide variety of terms and concepts they encounter which are unique to each sector; for example, translating a document about mining involves knowledge that is wholly distinct from that required to interpret in a court of law. To make the message understandable, or '*hacer entender*' as the interpreter-translators put it, they freely recognized the importance of understanding the content of each situation.

Nevertheless, they did not suggest that specialization in one sector is the solution to this problem. Rather, their strategy involves a concerted effort by each interpreter-translator to learn and practice the information necessary for each sector for which they are called to interpret or translate. They described several ways to accomplish this, from using Google, to reading books, to consulting colleagues. In each case, the underlying theme was that this additional effort is simply part of the role (quotes translated from the original Spanish by the author):

I understand my career, which is law, and can translate or interpret legal terms, for example. But as an interpreter-translator, when I have to tackle medical terms, economic terms, educational terms, healthcare terms, it's not my language. That's a great challenge for an interpreter-translator, being able to understand [...] and make an effort to approximate the message. (Interviewee 2)

You have to specialize in healthcare, specialize in education, specialize in justice, because if you're just a general interpreter-translator, you practically don't know anything. You can do some general things, but it's not the same as having a specialty. Because a specialty isn't just terms, isn't just lexical items, it isn't just some nouns. It's technical terms and a language of its own. [...] You have to know the basics, at least, to be able to understand what exactly it's about. (Interviewee 9)

A challenge is continuing to get to know more fields, for example, healthcare and other areas. To continue improving knowledge and experiences, to keep helping more people who really need it. (Interviewee 18)

Another interpreter-translator also mentioned that she knowingly accepts translation or interpretation requests in sectors with which she has little familiarity, despite her self-acknowledged lack of experience. In this and the examples above, interpreter-translators reveal that it may be difficult to specialize, but it is even more difficult *not* to, if they want to be able to provide help in any case that arises. The willingness to spend so much time and energy on additional learning thus shows, one on hand, their dedication to the work. On the other hand, in a different interpretation of these findings, it may stem at least partly from the need to be gainfully employed. Though the economic remuneration for their work is not standard and often insubstantial, interpreter-translators are likely motivated to take advantage of any opportunities that do arise, regardless of topic, to be able to support themselves.

### **3.3 Specialization versus exclusivity**

Though most of the interpreter-translators in this sample talked about specializing in the sense that they learn some about each sector, as above, there was a small number who supported the idea of specialization in just one area. In accordance with the idea that distinct terminology and concepts is one of the main challenges, these participants also mentioned that having an existing career in a given sector positively affects their work. In other words, having some kind of specialized training has advantages for interpretation and translation:

In my case, I specialized in Justice. So you have to read books about Justice, get to know the laws, the terms. And, well, you have to specialize, right? Mining, healthcare, culture. You can't be an interpreter for everything. (Interviewee 16)

If the work is in healthcare, I think it's much better if it's a nurse or a doctor. [...] If not, you wouldn't have the same kind of theoretical foundation that a trained professional in that area would. For me it's much better to specialize and be sure of what you're doing, right? (Interviewee 26)

Based on all the work I've done, I think we should specialize [...] because there's so much to know, to study, lots of specialized terminology. [...] If we're not from the field, we can do our research, but there are concepts that maybe we won't be able to understand as completely as if we were a specialist in that area, right? So then we maybe wouldn't produce a translation as rich or as detailed because we're not from that specialty. (Interviewee 35)

In the same way that a certification from the Ministry of Culture lends credibility to interpreter-translators in general, specialized training can give confidence to interpretation sessions and translated documents. In agreement with Kelly and Zetzsche (2012), these participants maintain that specialization—if it comes from a separate career or specialized courses—can improve the quality of individual interpretation sessions and translations.

But once again, though many interpreter-translators mentioned the potential difficulty of dealing with complex terms and concepts, they did not hesitate to comment that restricting oneself to one sector can be limiting:

I think an interpreter should be multifaceted and not specialize in one sector because no one knows when or in what circumstances you'll be called upon for a particular job. (Interviewee 5)

We should want to be trained in a diverse way. There may be calls for justice, politics, and healthcare, or maybe education, different specialties. Why? Because here they can call you and say "There's a case about deforestation, we need a translator," "We have a problem here, a girl has been raped, we need a translator," or "Here there are territory issues, we need a translator." [...] That's why sometimes we have to be prepared to respond to the community's needs. (Interviewee 13)

I'm a lawyer, but I don't just say "No, I'm a lawyer, I only do laws." [...] All of us as interpreter-translators need to be able to do the work in whatever part of the community, according to the languages we speak, to have knowledge of everything, in global terms. [...] You have to know about healthcare, education, basically everything. Why? Because every case that presents itself is different. (Interviewee 14)

In healthcare, I'm there where they need me. In education, when they need me, I'm there too. They ask for a job in the justice system, I'm there. I've never denied a request; actually, I've liked being part of this team because I'm always learning, reflecting, strengthening myself in different areas like healthcare, education, justice, and everything else because I don't think we can close ourselves into just one space. (Interviewee 15)

Personally, I'd like to be familiar with other areas, other sectors. Why? Because the requests come from one or another, and how can I say "I can't help you because I don't know the terminology in this area."? So you have to help for the good of our fellow speakers of indigenous languages, and I need to be prepared and I'm willing to do that. (Interviewee 23)

Each of these observations identifies the need to serve the community as paramount, noting that the added work of knowing each sector is an acceptable byproduct of that goal.

From both sides of this debate, we observe an interesting paradox: that specialization is important, but it can also be limiting. What emerged from further examination of this contradiction was a distinction between *specialization* and *exclusivity*. One must be familiar enough with a given sector to perform an adequate translation or interpretation, but if interpreter-translators are pigeonholed into only one area, they are unable to respond to the demand that currently exists. Grappling with this conflict, this group of interpreter-translators appeared to suggest that the solution is to get to know a few fields in greater detail—in other words, to have specialization without exclusivity. This interpreter-translator explained his ideal situation:

In the short term, I think we should be familiar with all the sectors given that there's demand for it, right? [...] Each interpreter-translator should learn on their own and familiarize themselves a little more to be able to respond to the work of different fields. Now, if we're talking about the long term, yes, I think translators and interpreters should specialize in a particular sector, whether it's healthcare, justice, education, I don't know, or any other sector, right? [...] It's better to focus on one area and get to know it much more deeply, know what it means, what it implies, to work in that sector. (Interviewee 10)

With this suggestion, we can see that it would be ideal to have depth of training in one sector, but the current reality does not permit such limitation. This brings up a question for the future of ReNITLI: how can interpreter-translators be best prepared to provide the strongest services possible while responding to their communities' current, diverse needs?

To answer this question, it is important to keep in mind some of the Registry's greatest strengths. By officially certifying its interpreter-translators, ReNITLI gives an external endorsement to their work, a validation that they themselves explain is extremely useful for proving their credibility. Additionally, it provides them with an internal confidence not only that they have the tools necessary to interpret and translate, but also

that they are doing important work. In many cases, participants had previously done informal translations and/or interpretation, but with the certification, they feel even more prepared to help their communities. The fact that they had participated in this work before also reaffirms that it is not simply an occupation, but rather much more is involved: culture, identity, and protection of indigenous communities. Because of that, when we focus here on indigenous languages, we are only scratching the surface of a much larger issue. Discussions about such topics can help frame any changes that may come to ReNITLI in the future, ensuring it continues to accomplish the overarching goal of recognizing and serving indigenous language speakers.

### **3.4 Other important themes**

In addition to the question of specialization, interpreter-translators brought up several other themes that demonstrate their commitment to serving indigenous communities. First, being people who generally come from the communities that speak these indigenous languages, they have a special relationship with those who receive their linguistic services, perhaps stronger than the relationship that would exist with a foreign, more widely spoken language. According to some members of this sample, their relationship with speakers of their language has changed because now, they feel even more connected to the language and the community. On the other hand, others expressed that no such change had taken place, as it was this existing connection which motivated them to get certified as interpreter-translators in the first place. In both cases, the role of interpreter-translator has a duality to it: the shared language marks them as members of the community, but they are at the same time separated from other speakers by their ability to navigate Spanish-speaking settings with greater ease. Knowing this aspect of the interpreter-translator's role, we can better acknowledge the level of effort required to create a trusting relationship with indigenous language speakers.

Related to the theme of trust, these interpreter-translators spoke of their experiences with interculturality, particularly in healthcare. One voiced the need to tackle this issue carefully, respecting cultural differences and ensuring that conflicting beliefs do not lead to poorer outcomes (e.g., in medical settings). Unlike translation and interpretation of more widely spoken foreign languages, a deep history of discrimination, lack of rights, and other considerations accompany indigenous populations in Peru (Andrade et al., 2018). Interpreter-translators sense this additional connection and many take on the role of advocate as a result, serving as representatives of their communities and languages. Calls for recognition of the importance of translation and interpretation, as well as the need to support rights of indigenous communities, thus came up frequently.

More than dedication to a given job, the choice to interpret and translate also demonstrates a dedication to indigenous communities as a whole. Translation and interpretation are a way to contribute to the larger issue of rights and well-being of these communities, so in this way, even if not voiced explicitly, they take on the role of community advocate as part of the role of interpreter-translator. It is important to note,

however, that such advocacy is a complicated concept. Previous study has shown that in Prior Consultation practices in Peru (*Consulta Previa*, the process of working with indigenous communities when a government or business endeavor will impact them), the fact that interpreter-translators are employed by the State causes some conflict between the parties involved (De Pedro Ricoy et al., 2018). Participants in the present study echoed the same issue, noting that some community members are wary of their association with the government or business enterprises. While interpreter-translators are clearly motivated to assist their communities, they must not alienate the opposing side by fighting too strongly for the indigenous community's interests. Additionally, although it is admirable to care deeply about access and inclusion, holding too strong of a position one way or the other is also at odds with the idea of neutrality in translation and interpretation, which is a complicated facet of the field. It is this struggle for neutrality, a still-unsettled debate in translation and interpretation, which is an added challenge for interpreter-translators. Further work is needed to characterize the careful balance between supporting the communities and transmitting messages impartially.

#### **4. Discussion and conclusions**

##### **4.1 Paradoxes and suggestions**

As a resource that provides official credentials to people who have a passion for serving indigenous communities, ReNITLI is an essential initiative. These conversations with interpreter-translators themselves have given a more detailed view of the current state of the Registry, showing that the profile of an interpreter-translator specialized in only one area does not necessarily exist as in other communities, and also that interpreter-translators themselves see ReNITLI as an extremely important resource.

This study also revealed some interesting paradoxes, the most important being that interpreter-translators should have a certain degree of specialized knowledge, but not limit that knowledge to only one sector. Another fascinating paradox lies in the relationship between the demand and provision of linguistic services. Although participants emphasized the great need for these services, the survey and interviews also showed that the majority do not interpret and translate very frequently. Perhaps the lower volume of requests for services is due to the public's lack of awareness, either about interpretation and translation generally or about the Registry specifically; some said that the institutions they work with (e.g., hospitals, courts, schools, businesses) are familiar with and value their work, while others said the opposite. It could also be related to time limitations based on their personal schedules, as taking on translation and interpretation may take time away from other pastimes and responsibilities. But the urge to underline the importance of their work may stem from a deeper lack of awareness of the needs of indigenous communities. The fact that some feel that their efforts are underappreciated indicates that there is more work to be done to place appropriate value on their work.

In addition to educating people in general about interpreter-translators, participants had some other suggestions about how to accomplish this, as well as how to improve the

Registry. First, many agreed that more specialized training courses would be useful. In addition to the initial basic course, one or two of these courses already exist, but providing further opportunities to expand knowledge in different sectors (as well as providing follow-up instruction over time) would facilitate the aspect of the role that requires preparation for a variety of situations. By learning a bit of everything at the beginning, and then continuing to be involved in classes as several participants suggested, they could spend more energy on each individual situation rather than reviewing a new topic each time a solicitation comes up from an unfamiliar field.

Another suggestion was to have expert interpreter-translators serve as teachers for the Ministry's training course, which is currently taught by people who are not necessarily themselves speakers of an indigenous language. Participants mentioned that they learned a great deal from the course and generally felt prepared, but also that it would have been even more helpful to learn from people who really understand the job from personal experience. With more than 400 certified interpreter-translators to date, students from previous iterations of the course could come back as teachers, providing feedback beyond just general strategies and advice on language-specific challenges. Sharing their experiences would allow new interpretation-translation students to learn from real examples and improve their language skills under the tutelage of fellow speakers.

#### ***4.2 Study limitations and future directions***

This study has presented a clearer panorama of the current work of interpreter-translators certified by the Ministry of Culture. However, we must acknowledge some limitations of this study and recognize that there is much further work to be done. It was not possible to contact all members of ReNITLI, so this sample does not include all languages nor all regions of Peru. With the diversity that was observed among participants, it is important to recognize that individual experiences depend on the language and the person, and conclusions here may not apply equally in all cases of interpretation and translation.

Additionally, as an exploratory study, this survey asked about frequency of interpretation and translation in general terms, using terms like 'occasionally' or 'rarely.' It would be useful to have a detailed database of all the instances of interpretation and translation in which ReNITLI members have participated to be able to describe the current provision of services with more detail. It may benefit the Ministry of Culture and Department of Indigenous Languages to conduct a future study that creates such a database so as to keep up to date with the actual demand for interpreter-translators' work.

Such a database could also shed light on the topic of compensation for interpreter-translators, which came up in some of the interviews. Each job pays differently, and some participants even mentioned cases of working completely for free just to fulfill the need. The unpredictability of payment makes it difficult for interpreter-translators to support themselves only through interpretation and translation. Assessing current trends in payment and then setting standards for how each translation or session of interpretation

should be remunerated may help make the role more secure and retain interpreter-translators in the long term.

While there are areas for improvement, as is true for any initiative in its development, it is essential to underscore the tremendous impact that ReNITLI has had on indigenous languages. With its official training, system of solicitations, and provision of important linguistic supports, ReNITLI can serve as a model for multilingual spaces even outside of Peru. Further projects might focus on differences between languages and regions, or interpreter-translators over time.

### **4.3 Conclusions**

This project has shown that ReNITLI and its members are actively fighting for linguistic accessibility in public spaces in Peru, recognizing and corroborating prior work arguing that indigenous communities deserve the same opportunities as their Spanish-speaking counterparts (Howard et al., 2018). It is important to review initiatives like ReNITLI every so often to ensure that they are serving these communities in the intended way.

But ReNITLI is just one way to guarantee equitable provision of services; in reality, there are other steps that can and should be taken to accompany ReNITLI. The Ministry of Culture's SINEACE program, which certifies bilingual public servants in both Spanish and their indigenous languages, is a good example of another initiative that can make the public sphere more accessible to speakers of these languages (SINEACE, no date). Creating resources in indigenous languages to begin with—assuring that they are not only intelligible but easily accessible—is another way to make sure the communities are not excluded (Flood and Rohloff, 2018). For example, there are already many YouTube videos in indigenous languages, directed to both the communities and those who provide services to them. A few particularly relevant examples are videos that explained the COVID-19 pandemic in Quechua to laypeople (Roca Aguilar, 2020a; FUNPROEIB Andes, 2020; Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 2020) and others that instruct medical professionals on how to care for Quechua speakers (Roca Aguilar, 2020b). Making information available through informal means like social media, radio, and television complements the more formal efforts established by the State.

One further suggestion relates to the wider topic of dealing with cultural barriers while training public sector professionals. In healthcare, for example, trainees are not necessarily taught how to care for indigenous communities (Bendezu-Quispe et al., 2020). In the justice system, too, students do not always learn how best to work with these communities (Kleinert et al., 2019). In both cases, it is important to foster knowledge and cultural competency to be able to better understand the unique problems indigenous communities face and, further, combat the negative consequences associated with these problems (Castro et al., 2015; Badanta et al., 2020).

In an ideal world, all professionals would be multilingual and multicultural, allowing them to assist anyone who comes in. To that end, there are some efforts to teach the most widely spoken indigenous languages to public servants, including doctors in particular

(Shimabuku Azato et al., 2018; Santos-Revilla, 2016). While this would ideally create more comfortable spaces for indigenous language speakers, it would be quite difficult to achieve sufficient proficiency if learning the language from scratch. With the number and diversity of languages that exist in Peru, it would be extremely challenging for individual providers to become familiar with even a minority of these languages. Additionally, although a push to increase providers' linguistic skills may be well-intentioned, shifting the responsibility away from interpreter-translators might affect them negatively.

This study is a dual example of inter-epistemic diversity. First, we demonstrate that translation practices differ in different communities, namely the U.S. and Peru. Second, we recognize the inherent dynamic between Spanish as an imperial and primary language and indigenous communities' languages. In the former case, by presenting the work of ReNITLI, we underline that varying ways of organizing knowledge (in this example, specializing versus not) have different strengths. In the latter, we point out that recognizing bilingual interpreter-translators with an official certification validates their unique knowledge and experience of the world. Such acknowledgments highlight the importance of learning from other epistemic viewpoints, reinforcing the importance of an 'ecology of knowledges' (Santos, 2008, 2016; Bennett, 2024).

With their training and disposition to help, the work of interpreters and translators through ReNITLI will continue to be indispensable in public spaces. The results of this study—in particular, understanding how interpreter-translators distribute their services and how strongly motivated they are to serve their communities—contribute to the effort to improve linguistic services for speakers of indigenous languages in Peru, with important implications for lesser-spoken languages in other regions, as well.

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## APPENDIX

### Preliminary survey for ReNITLI members (Spanish version)

#### Recojo de datos sobre la interpretación y traducción en el sector Salud

Muchas gracias por tomarse el tiempo de llenar esta encuesta. El propósito de estas preguntas es recopilar información acerca de la interpretación y traducción en el sector Salud en el Perú.

Esta encuesta forma parte de un proyecto de investigación realizado en coordinación con el Departamento de Humanidades en la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. El proyecto es apoyado por una beca Fulbright y hecho con el conocimiento de la Dirección de Lenguas Indígenas del Ministerio de Cultura.

Sus respuestas son voluntarias y puede dejar el espacio en blanco si no quiere contestar a una pregunta en particular.

Si usted tiene cualquier consulta o comentario, puede contactar a la investigadora, Julie Wechsler, por correo electrónico: [jrwechl@gmail.com](mailto:jrwechl@gmail.com). Gracias una vez más.

1. Nombre(s)

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2. Apellidos

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3. Correo electrónico

---

4. ¿Cuántos años tiene usted?

---

5. ¿Cuál es su sexo?

*Marca sólo un óvalo.*

Hombre

Mujer

Prefiero no decirlo

Otros: \_\_\_\_\_

6. ¿Dónde nació? (distrito, provincia, departamento)

---

7. ¿Dónde vive usted actualmente? (distrito, provincia, departamento)

\_\_\_\_\_

8. ¿Qué lenguas habla usted? (por favor, escriba una lista separada con comas, como en este ejemplo: castellano, quechua, ashaninka...)

\_\_\_\_\_

9. ¿En qué lenguas ofrece usted servicios de traducción o interpretación? (por ejemplo, quechua-castellano)

\_\_\_\_\_

10. ¿Usted trabaja principalmente como intérprete-traductor o tiene otra ocupación laboral?

*Marca solo un óvalo.*

Sí, solo trabajo como intérprete-traductor

No, tengo otra ocupación laboral

11. Si en la pregunta anterior usted respondió: "No, tengo otra ocupación laboral", por favor, diga cuál es su otra ocupación.

\_\_\_\_\_

12. Desde su ingreso al Registro, ¿en qué sectores ha brindado alguna vez sus servicios de traducción o interpretación? Por favor, marque todas las opciones que apliquen:

*Selecciona todas las opciones que correspondan.*

Consulta Previa

Justicia

Salud

Educación

Otros: \_\_\_\_\_

13. Si en la pregunta anterior usted ha marcado más de un sector, por favor indique con cuál trabaja con mayor frecuencia (marque una sola opción).

*Marca solo un óvalo.*

Consulta Previa

Justicia

Salud

Educación

Otros: \_\_\_\_\_

14. ¿Con qué frecuencia presta sus servicios de interpretación (en cualquier sector)?

*Marca solo un óvalo.*

- Nunca (solo hago traducción)
- Casi nunca (de una a cinco veces al año)
- Ocasionalmente (una vez cada dos meses hasta una vez al mes)
- Frecuentemente (dos a cinco veces al mes)
- Casi todo el tiempo (más de seis veces al mes, es decir, varias veces cada semana)

15. ¿Con qué frecuencia presta sus servicios de interpretación en un caso relacionado con la salud (visitas en hospitales, postas de salud, etcétera)?

*Marca solo un óvalo.*

- Nunca trabajo con casos de salud
- Casi nunca (de una a cinco veces al año)
- Ocasionalmente (una vez cada dos meses hasta una vez al mes)
- Frecuentemente (dos a cinco veces al mes)
- Casi todo el tiempo (más de seis veces al mes, es decir, varias veces cada semana)

16. ¿Dónde presta sus servicios? Por favor, marque todas las opciones que apliquen:

*Selecciona todas las opciones que correspondan.*

- Hospital
- Clínica
- Posta médica
- Otros: \_\_\_\_\_

**¡Muchas gracias por su tiempo!**

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# SELF-TRANSLATION, REWRITING OR SELF-CENSORSHIP? THE AMENDMENT OF A MISOGYNISTIC LYRIC IN TAYLOR SWIFT'S SONG 'BETTER THAN REVENGE'

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**ABSTRACT:** In 2023, American singer-songwriter Taylor Swift released a re-recorded version of her 2010 song 'Better than Revenge,' altering a lyric that originally disparaged a woman because of her sexuality. Through an analysis of the popularisation of feminist discourse in recent years and its direct impact in Swift's feminist stance, the study aims to understand the motivations and effects of the amendment, questioning whether it is an act of (self-) censorship influenced by ideological and perhaps even commercial factors. To this end, the research engages with concepts such as Canli's (2018) intralingual self-translation, Lefevere's (2017[1992]) rewriting, and Pesen's (2019) re-lyricizing. The results open a discussion on the implications of rewriting history, while they also highlight the relevance of translation in music as a mechanism for negotiating identities (Susam-Saraeva, 2018) and for artistic appropriation.

**KEYWORDS:** Taylor Swift; Feminism; Intralingual Self-translation; Rewriting; Censorship

## 1. Introduction

Taylor Swift is one of the most influential artists of the 21<sup>st</sup> century music industry. Beyond her role of singer and performer, she has distinguished herself as a songwriter through her storytelling skills. From her debut in 2006, Swift has released twelve studio albums, writing or cowriting all of her songs. While she has transitioned across multiple musical genres, the self-referential, narrative and literary-influenced qualities of her work have remained consistent, reflecting a capacity for adaptation that "responds to commercial pressures to evolve while retaining a coherent musical identity" (Sloan, 2021, p.1).

When her first six albums were sold without her consent in 2019, she decided to re-record all of them to gain full control and ownership over her work (see Polite, 2025). Although she recently acquired the original masters, she had already re-recorded and released four of these albums, which bear the distinctive subtitle "Taylor's Version". Even if they closely replicate the original productions, one significant lyrical change stands out in 'Better than Revenge,' a track from her third studio album, *Speak Now* (2010). Its re-recorded version was released in July 2023 and remains largely faithful to the original, except for one line that "had received criticism for 'slut shaming'" (King, 2025, p. 123), that is, diminishing a woman's value because of her sexual life.

Although this lyrical change has been briefly addressed in some academic works (see King, 2025; Martínez Martín, 2025; Cray, 2025), it has never been considered from the perspective of Translation Studies. Given the 13-year gap separating both versions, a period that framed the "popularisation of feminism in the media" (Jackson, 2018, p. 33) and Swift's increasing engagement with political discourse, the lyrical change might constitute a distinctive example of ideological rewriting (Lefevere, 2017). To address this issue from Translation Studies would therefore mean to acknowledge the role of translation in the

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way that (pop) music negotiates and reflects sociopolitical changes. The present study therefore aims to investigate the translational process of the amended lyric, why it was produced, and what effects it brings.

Methodologically, the study draws from ‘The outward turn in translation studies’ (Bassnett and Johnston, 2019) which has consolidated new perspectives of what our discipline can study and what translation really can do (Blumczynski, 2023). Following Galvão’s (2025) line of thought that songwriting is a translational practice, and the metaphor of Borges’ (1999[1939]) Pierre Menard (Steiner, 1975; Arrojo, 2004, 2007; Chaudhuri, 2007), I will argue that Taylor’s Versions are translations of the original records determined by a quest for appropriation. Additionally, I will delve into the concepts of ‘intralingual translation’ (Canlı, 2018) and ‘relyricizing’ (Pesen, 2019), this latter being a type of rewriting (Lefevere, 2017), while understanding variability as an inherent aspect of songs (Kirby, 2011; Yagoda, 2011). I will also conduct a content analysis between ‘Better than Revenge’ (BtR) and ‘Better than Revenge (Taylor’s Version)’ (BtRTV), solely focused on the verbal changes, which will be framed within the study of the popularisation of feminist discourse and celebrity feminism (Jackson, 2018, 2021; Chidgey, 2021).

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Translation as appropriation**

Understanding translation beyond the interlingual instance that Jakobson (1959) named ‘proper’ is to acknowledge in its etymology a process of moving, carrying and transferring (Arrojo, 2007; Blumczynski, 2023; Vidal Claramonte, 2025). As Chaudhuri (2007, p. 90) reminds us, “to translate (or to read a translation) is to affirm one’s conviction that something can be ‘carried across’ languages: that a verbal message does not inhere only in the words”. In contrast to the traditional idea of a word-centred operation involving different languages, Bassnett and Johnston’s ‘outward turn’ highlights the need “to expand our ideas about translation beyond the linguistic and to seek a redefinition of what translation actually is” (2019, p. 187). As a matter of fact, translation is “a process necessary to most forms of expression” (Minors, 2013, p. 1) that “can operate across modalities, not just as a static, instrumental interlingual transfer” (Galvão, 2025, p. 164).

Galvão’s (2025) proposal of ‘songwriting as translation’ continues a discussion that challenges conventional notions of translation in its relation to music (Minors, 2013; Apter and Herman, 2016; Susam-Saraeva, 2018; Bennett, 2024; etc.). Songwriting, as the process of “crafting both words and music”, is an “embodied creative practice that resists monolingual paradigms and attests to the plurality of lived experience” (Galvão, 2025, p. 145). In Swift’s career, songwriting has been essential “to create a sense of self in an industry dependent on fracturing her identity into myriad, saleable parts” (Sloan, 2021, p. 13). Consequently, if songwriting is a way of translating experience, and, furthermore, if translation implies reflecting on how meaning travels (Vidal Claramonte, 2022), Swift’s re-recorded songs and their new meanings constitute a relevant issue for scholarly investigation within the field of Translation Studies.

In the volume *Taylor Swift and the philosophy of re-recording: The art of Taylor's versions* edited by Brandon Polite (2025), several chapters discuss the ontology of the re-recorded albums. For Irvin, they may be considered conceptual art because they raise “questions about the nature of art, the artist’s role, and—increasingly—the institutions and power structures in which artists and their works are caught up” (Irvin, 2025, p. 52). It is important to remember that, although currently Swift owns the original records, she embarked on the re-recording project in an attempt to assert ownership of her life’s work. By challenging the inequitable practices within the music industry, Swift aspired to obtain the rights she never had and at the same time set a precedent for artists who want to own their work. The major difference is, therefore, that “conceptual art has often involved appropriation”, while Taylor’s Versions involve “self-appropriation” (Irvin, 2025, pp. 53-54).

Polite (2025b) explores the metaphysical condition of the re-recorded albums questioning if Swift’s process has been an actual reclamation of her work or only a metaphorical one. After applying the view of formalist aesthetic theory and intentionalism, he concluded that re-recording could not “produce genuine instances” of the albums, offering thus a merely metaphorical reclamation (Polite, 2025b, p. 110). This view mirrors the questions “how can one translate a work without making of it a different work? And if different, does it constitute a translation of that work?” (Chaudhuri, 2007, p. 90).

Taking a different approach, King (2025, p. 118) compares the Taylor’s Versions to facsimiles or to Andy Warhol’s *Brillo boxes* (1964): “both could, to the cursory or untrained audience, easily be mistaken for the original”. The difference lies not only in their production, but in the context that surrounds them. Taylor’s Versions perform a legal act as well as a “series of very significant financial acts” (King, 2025, p. 130). Accordingly, “the meaning that we take from these albums as full works will clearly be different” (p. 121).

Regardless of which perspective one adopts, it is clear, nonetheless, that even if there are few outstanding differences, these re-recordings “aren’t perfect duplicates of the original albums” (Polite, 2025a, p. 7). Extending this discussion to the field of Translation Studies raises a central question: can they be identified as translations?

To answer this, my point of departure will be Jorge Luis Borges’ (1999) short story ‘Pierre Menard, author of the *Quixote*,’ where a fictional French author takes on the task of composing a contemporary *Quixote*, but

he did not want to compose *another* *Quixote*, which surely is easy enough—he wanted to compose *the* *Quixote*. [...] his goal was never a mechanical transcription of the original; he had no intention of *copying* it. His admirable ambition was to produce a number of pages which coincided —word for word and line for line— with those of Miguel de Cervantes (Borges, 1999, p. 91; in all Borges’ quotes, the emphasis is from the original).

Menard’s mission has been described as “the most acute, most concentrated commentary anyone has offered on the business of translation” (Steiner, 1975, p. 70). Since Menard’s *Quixote* “gets to exist in a different context, acquiring a life of its own” (Arrojo, 2007, p. 23; my translation), Borges’ story calls into question the notion of ‘original’ by proposing that

“translation, in the same way as reading, is no longer an activity that protects the ‘original’ meanings of an author, but functions instead as a *producer* of meanings” (Arrojo, 2007, p. 24; my translation, her emphasis). Consequently, Menard and his (un)original work offer a theory of translation that shows how “with no outward change of state”, the (translated) text may enter “an indefinitely prolonged and varied extension of its being” (Chaudhuri, 2007, p. 89).

As with Swift’s re-recordings, Menard’s *Quixote* entails a recontextualised iteration and “a profoundly original work, identical with Cervantes’s and yet radically different in purport” (Chaudhuri, 2007, p. 87-88). In light of these considerations, it is worth recalling King’s (2025) comparison of Taylor’s Versions and Warhol’s *Brillo boxes*: they could be mistaken for the originals, but *they are not* the originals. Is that not what a translation is: a new original crafted for its own new target?

Though Menard’s initial method was to “learn Spanish, return to Catholicism, fight against the Moor or Turk, forget the history of Europe from 1602 to 1918—*be* Miguel de Cervantes”, he soon realised that “being, somehow, Cervantes, and arriving thereby at the *Quixote*—that looks to Menard less challenging (and therefore less interesting) than continuing to be Pierre Menard and coming to the *Quixote through the experiences of Pierre Menard*” (Borges, 1999, p. 91). In Swift’s case, she appropriated her past work through her present means and experiences.

Inevitably, Taylor’s Versions are affected by “context and other seemingly slight differences” (King, 2025, p. 120). Contextually speaking, almost everything has changed: her voice, her label, her number of followers, her motivations, the quality of musical production, the range of her influence, her political views... In this line, it is important to consider Swift’s shifts through albums and the meticulous crafting of her persona in each ‘era’ (Lyon, 2019; Sloan, 2021; Polite, 2025a; Cray, 2025; Cantalamessa, 2025), as her “celebrity-text is continuously altered and carefully reconstructed when a new album is released” (Driessen, 2022, p. 93).

Another important factor is *The Eras Tour*, a series of nearly 150 concerts across more than 20 countries from March 2023 to December 2024. In its performances, Swift revisited each of the ten (later eleven) albums she had released up to that point, evoking the distinctive elements of their respective eras, “consciously and explicitly leaning into the same notion of a post-persona persona, deliberately highlighting the ‘eras’ as a series of characters she has played on the way to where she finds herself now” (Cray, 2025, p. 164). The concurrency of the tour and the release of some Taylor’s Versions implies that she “puts her mastery of personas as aesthetic tools on full display while simultaneously—and somewhat defiantly—crafting a ‘no persona’ persona” (p. 165). Consequently, just as Menard’s *Quixote* could only exist through Menard’s, and not Cervantes’, experience, the Taylor’s Versions were created through this post-persona persona, as a translated work across eras.

Swift’s re-recordings constitute an example of how translation can also involve an “institutional, personal, and political significance of self-appropriation” (Cantalamessa,

2025, p. 170). If “translation becomes a means of repositioning the subject in the world and in history” (Apter, 2006, p. 6), Taylor’s Versions, understood as translations, fulfil Swift’s intention of owning her work as they help reposition the legal agency of artists over their creations. In light of these considerations, the re-recorded songs become translations that reassert “the value and importance of her teenage concerns and artistic production from her new position as an influential cultural figure” (Irvin, 2025, p. 55). Within this re-recording project, translation has functioned as “a significant medium of subject re-formation and political change” (Apter, 2006, p. 6) with no transformations at the verbal level. Except for one particular song that does involve linguistic shifts: ‘Better than Revenge (Taylor’s Version)’.

## **2.2 Intralingual self-translation**

The type of transferring addressed in BtRTV leads back to Jakobson’s tripartite division, and, more particularly, to his well-known categorisation of intralingual translation or ‘rewording’: “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language” (1959, p. 233). I have argued that Swift’s re-recordings are acts of translation, within which BtRTV represents a unique example of ‘intra-lingual self-translation’ (Canlı, 2018).

Grutman and Bolderen (2014, p. 323) define self-translation as “the process of transferring one’s own writings into another language, and the product thereof, i.e., the self-translated text”. In self-translation, the same authorial entity unfolds in at least two different systems (Placidi, 2023, p. 123). These are not necessarily linguistic systems, as I will argue drawing on Canlı (2018), who has challenged the assumption that self-translation can only be bilingual, providing a useful framework for examining intralingual self-translations. Through a thorough study of William Faulkner as “intr-auto-translauthor”, that is, “an author who translates his own work into the same language” (2018, p. 59), Canlı expands the notion of intralingual translation “with a focus on the author’s translational actions as the translator of his/her own text” (2018, p. 45).

In some interpretations, self-translation functions like any other form of translation, and the resulting text may not hold a status comparable to the original (Popovič, 1976). However, other scholars suggest that self-translation produces a ‘second original’ (Matelo and Spoturno, 2014) or at least a translated text with “a similar status” to the original (Arrojo, 2004, p. 31). As it has been previously noted, Swift’s re-recorded versions are nearly identical to the earlier ones, with the key difference being her ownership of these ‘new originals’. Standing out among these, BtRTV illustrates the variability and updating necessity that makes part of some songs at an intralingual level (see Kirby, 2011; Yagoda, 2011). It can therefore be understood as a “new original” (Placidi, 2023, p.123) that blurs the borders between Swift’s teenage and adult voices —something usual in self-translation processes.

Matelo and Spoturno (2014) identify three common motives for self-translation: reluctance from authors to be translated by others, a desire to reach a broader audience,

and economic purposes. In Swift's case, the two latter motivations are involved, deeply immersed in a politically charged background. The identitarian and political systems in which the translated version unfolds bring into discussion the consideration of an ideological rewriting presumably influenced by censorship or even self-censorship, concepts that will be now explored.

### **2.3 Rewriting, relyricizing and (self-)censorship**

Since André Lefevere's seminal work *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, the relationship between translation and rewriting has remained a central concern in Translation Studies. As he has stated, "translation is the most recognisable type of rewriting, [...] it is able to project the image of an author and/or a (series of) work(s) in another culture, lifting that author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin" (Lefevere, 2017, p. 7).

One of Lefevere's examples of rewriting is the literary classic *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which was initially conceived as a personal diary, but later underwent some changes in order to be published as a novel. In this process of transformation, the author herself and others included different arrangements aiming at the "'construction' of the image of a writer" (2017, p. 45). This shows another example of intralingual self-translation, where there exist two versions of Anne Frank, person and author, blurred inside the same work:

once Anne Frank took the decision to rewrite for publication what Anne Frank had written, the person Anne Frank split up into a person and an author, and the author began to rewrite in a more literary manner what the person had written (Lefevere, 2017, p. 54)

This double role, one could argue, mirrors the two versions of Swift blurred inside the re-recorded song: the teenager who wrote the original lyrics, and the 33-year-old woman who rewrote its most controversial line.

Derived from Lefevere's framework, Pesen proposes another key concept for this study: 'relyricizing,' which refers to "the rewritten lyrics" as "a subcategory of 'rewriting'" (2019, p. 83). The different kinds of rewriters involved in musical production, namely "song resingers, reperformers, relyricists, [...] are always dependent upon 'patrons'" (Pesen, 2019, p. 84). Patronage is a determinant factor participating in rewriting processes and comprising "the powers (persons, institutions) that can further or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature" (Lefevere, 2017, p. 12)—or music, as in this case. Swift's initial patron was the music label Big Machine Records, which produced the first version of BtR and later sold Swift's work. Over time, Swift evolved into a global cultural phenomenon with a "loyal and very committed fanbase" (Driessen, 2022, p. 93). Consequently, the re-recorded version had a different and more complex patron, which incorporated the fans as a significant financial supporter, bearing as much—if not more—influence as her new label.

In this regard, it is crucial "to focus on the role of song translation in the (re)writing and shaping of history" (Pesen, 2019, p. 82). Ideology emerges here as a central factor, as it:

dictates the basic strategy the translator is going to use and therefore also dictates solutions to problems concerned with both the 'universe of discourse' expressed in the original (objects, concepts, customs belonging to the world that was familiar to the writer of the original) and the language the original itself is expressed in. (Lefevere, 2017, p. 31)

Although a 13-year span may appear relatively brief, the language BtR is originally expressed in has become challenging for the universe of discourse in which its translation was produced. In recent times, the growing awareness of social inequalities has led to a tendency of rejection towards ideologies deemed discriminatory, a paradigm shift that "has re-shaped narratives and adjusted thresholds of tolerance, themselves the result of a cultural politics ineluctably absorbed with identitarian issues, that have become key determinants of the sensitivities of cultural reception" (Xu and Johnston, 2025, p. 2). This pursuit of a 'political correctness' has conditioned different cultural products, as for example the works of British author Roald Dahl, recently revised in order to eliminate racist or misogynistic ideas, which some have considered an act of censorship (see Pope and Fodor, 2025).

Apter and Herman illustrate a particular case of censored rewriting in music: a popular English operetta from 1885, *The Mikado*, which originally included the derogatory term 'nigger'. Subsequent productions and scores in English replaced this term with less pejorative alternatives (see Apter and Herman, 2016), which serves as another example of intralingual translation responding to ideological changes. As the authors explain, "it is often not acceptable for translators to ignore the taboos of their own time and place. Such taboos sometimes required translators to radically change or even destroy an original work" (Apter and Herman, 2016, p. 102).

One last example is the self-censorship undertaken by the pop punk band Paramore. One of their most successful hits, *Misery Business* from the album *Riot!* (2007), was widely criticised because of its slut-shaming line "once a whore you're nothing more". Lead singer Hayley Williams publicly stated her current disagreement with these words, and the band stopped performing it on stage for several years despite its popularity (see Andrew, 2022).

These cases of censorship highlight the role of political and ideological tensions in musical expression. These tensions are "involved in the production, recording, and distribution stages of music, but also in the multitude of political functions music can fulfil at the consumption stage, even when the songs in question originally did not have any political messages" (Susam-Saraeva 2018, p. 360). Paramore's example is particularly relevant since *Misery Business* may have served as inspiration for Swift, who has recognised the influence of this band in the creation of her album *Speak Now* (Swift, 2023a). It therefore serves as a "successful prior censorship" (Merkle, 2018, p. 247).

This discussion has established the concepts and critical lens through which the forthcoming analysis will be conducted. The understanding of Taylor's Versions as acts of translation, the introduction of the notions of intralingual self-translation and relyricizing, and the consideration of (self-)censorship as one ideological engine participating in the

rewriting of history, will be the point of departure to analyse the two versions of BtR in the following sections.

### 3. Analysis of Swift's versions

After releasing her second studio album *Fearless* (2008), the most awarded country album in history, Swift faced scepticism regarding her actual songwriting skills. This shaped the creation of her next album, *Speak Now* (2010): "I decided I would write it entirely on my own. I figured, they couldn't give all the credit to my cowriters if there weren't any" (Swift, 2023b). Both the original album and its re-recorded version list Swift as the only songwriter. Swift's decision parallels McClary's (2002, p. 150) observation about the impact of Madonna's success and image on critical discourse: "in a world in which many people assert that she (along with most other women artists) can't have meant what one sees and hears because she isn't smart enough, claims of intentionality, agency, and authorship become extremely important strategically".

In the prologue to the original album, as part of a CD-leaflet containing the lyrics, Swift equated the songs on this record to 'open letters' intended to convey her most profound emotions, describing BtR as one such letter, addressed "to a girl who stole something of mine" (Swift, 2010). She would later recognise this period (her last teenage years, from 18-20) as "the most emotionally turbulent" of her life (Swift, 2023b). The song's central theme is vengeance, as the title itself suggests, and it narrates the story of a teenage love triangle in which the narrator is left for another girl. Consequently, the narrator seeks to undervalue her romantic rival holding her accountable for everything, and disregards the agency of the male character.

Although the entire song is visceral, there is one particular line in the chorus that encapsulates and reinforces its misogynistic undertones, condemning the sexuality of the rival. Thirteen years later, however, the re-recorded version of *Speak Now* transformed that sole line and made *BtR* the only song to undergo a lyrical modification among the four re-recordings released to date.

**Table 1.** Lyrics of the original and the re-recorded songs.

BtR (2010)	BtRTV (2023)
she's not a saint, she's not what you think, she's an actress she's better known for the things that she does on the mattress.	she's not a saint, she's not what you think, she's an actress he was a moth to the flame, she was holding the matches.

Before the release of the re-recorded version, social media platforms hosted the complaints of fans who believed that the original lyrics "felt witty, wise, and sophisticated when sung by a teenager", but "may now appear naïve and even prejudiced and unfeminist" (Martínez Marín, 2025, p. 145). Consequently, the re-lyricized line aligns with the song's overall theme while eliminating the slut-shaming element. In the prologue to *Speak*

Now (*Taylor’s Version*), Swift (2023b) acknowledges the “unfiltered and potent” essence of the original record, yet makes no explicit mention of BtR or its lyrical change. She has not addressed the matter in any public medium either.

King’s analysis of the change notes distinct features in “the characters portrayed” (2025, p. 123) in each version, especially in the rival, who receives “a more flattering because more agentially assertive position” (2025, p. 123), resulting on Swift’s correction of “a common critique of (quasi-)adultery narratives cast under this gender rubric: that they pit women against each other, ignoring the man’s responsibility” (King, 2025, p. 123). Nevertheless, it is hard to infer any of this from a line that reinforces the man’s passivity, depicting him as a mere ‘moth’ unconsciously driven to matches that might even burn him, while the woman is still portrayed as conscious and responsible. For this reason, I agree with Paul’s remark that “beyond the inconsistent switch from present tense to past tense [...], the lyric doesn’t actually alter the message of the song in any meaningful way” (2023, n.p). In fact, the new line preserves the implicit male-centred narrative of female rivalry, which remains unchanged in other lines of the song like “no amount of vintage dresses gives you dignity” or “stealing other people’s toys on the playground won’t make you many friends”.

It is also worth noting that this is not the first instance in which Swift has altered a controversial lyric. The last time corresponds to her debut album, self-titled *Taylor Swift* (2006). The song ‘Picture to Burn’ originally included a line that was quickly deemed homophobic, which “Swift soon after re-recorded and edited into the otherwise unaltered track” (Cray, 2025, p. 167). Ever since this new version was released, it was included in every copy of the album and every performance, becoming therefore the ‘official version’.

**Table 2.** Lyrics of the original and the official songs.

First published version of ‘Picture to Burn’ (2006)	Re-released version of ‘Picture to Burn’ (ca. 2007/2008)
so go and tell your friends that I’m obsessive and crazy, that’s fine, I’ll tell mine you’re gay.	so go and tell your friends that I’m obsessive and crazy, that’s fine, you won’t mind if say...

This serves as a precedent illustrating what could be either Swift’s own awareness of the potential controversy surrounding her writing, or “a part that she only discovered thanks to some fans or critics (or perhaps her PR team)” (Polite, 2025b, p. 104). Nevertheless, this example differs from the rewriting of BtR “as this was an edit and re-release of a track, rather than a full re-recording, and was likely also done primarily for strategic, commercial reasons (i.e., not alienating gay fans) rather than as an intentional and robust, persona-driven commentary” (Cray, 2025, p. 167). Another key difference is that the issue in ‘Picture to Burn’ is limited to a single line, whereas the entire BtR carries misogynistic undertones. Consequently, one has to wonder what actually changes in the re-recorded song as a whole and what it implies.

#### **4. 'Better than Revenge': Rewriting oneself's past perspective?**

##### **4.1 Feminism as a political and commercial force**

Extratextually, the changes between the original and the translated versions involve the political climate surrounding Swift's persona. By translating her initial works into versions that she can now own, she was inevitably reconnecting with experiences, thoughts and emotions from her youth, and thus "revising her past self through the re-recordings" (Martínez Marín, 2025, p. 147).

While there may be many songs touching on topics she does not identify with anymore as an adult, BtR was the one that most obviously and directly confronted her with a past mindset. One significant change between her 'past self' and her 're-recordings self' was :

the revelation of her political convictions: once such beliefs became integrated into her performance persona, her lyrics and sentiments expressed through them can no longer be convincingly heard as [...] aligning with contemporary (i.e., Trump Era) conservative values (Cray, 2025, p. 157).

Her political stance was made public when she proclaimed herself against Republican candidate Marsha Blackburn in 2018. This is depicted in Swift's documentary *Miss Americana*, where she declared her desire to be "on the right side of history" (Swift, 2020). This documentary highlights "her increasing awareness of the role misogyny and political conservatism play in silencing her voice, diminishing her achievements, and perpetuating homophobia" (Ford and Macrossan, 2024, p. 934).

The feminist beliefs portrayed in the documentary are not an isolated case, as Swift and the general public have been exposed to "the recent embrace of feminism in the mainstream and popular media" (Rottenberg, 2019, p. 40). As social media enable the collective spreading of messages, with pop culture serving as a significant site of online feminist participation (Marwick, 2019), "feminism has become mainstreamed and popularised in ways that no one would have predicted just a decade ago" (Rottenberg, 2019, p. 41).

In this context, celebrity feminist discourse has become a complex issue, as it may sometimes lean more on a commercial strategy than on authentic activism (Jackson, 2021; Tong, 2024). Chidgey (2021, p. 1055) notes an emergent celebrity activism "mediated by practices of individualised consumer capitalism and oriented by explicit social justice frameworks". Accordingly, a related concept is that of 'neoliberal feminism', a variant that "not only disavows the socio-economic and cultural structures shaping our lives but also helps to produce a new feminist subject who is incited to accept full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care" (Rottenberg, 2019, p. 42). "What is clear is that today identifying as a feminist has become a source of social and cultural capital and pride" (Rottenberg, 2019, p. 41) and therefore commercial intentions may be a force shaping public feminist discourse.

With *Miss Americana* and Swift's more politically committed songwriting (see Smialek, 2021; Avdeeff, 2021; Oberst, 2024), some argue that "Swift translates her affects into feminist expressions" (Tong, 2024, p. 1). When highlighting her struggles as a woman inside the music industry, and determining her advocacy for human rights even against the current leading ideology in the United States, "Swift further constructs her persona: inviting audiences to conceive of her as someone who defiantly chooses to prioritise integrity over financial risk" (Cray, 2025, p. 158).

Nevertheless, her feminist stance and alliance to social movements have been said to reflect a neoliberal feminist view, playing an "exploitive and performative" role (Smialek, 2021, p. 99) as part of her public persona (see Avdeeff, 2021; Sloan, 2021; Ford and Macrossan, 2024; Oberst, 2024; Tong, 2024). However, even if Swift's activism follows a neoliberal tendency "in which the notion of activism is sold as part of a celebrity's social brand", it "remains poignant in its performativity" (Sloan, 2021, p. 13).

In this sense, whether commercially-centred or not, Swift's feminist discourse can have a significant impact as part of a globally influential musical genre:

Music and other discourses do not simply reflect a social reality that exists immutably on the outside; rather, social reality itself is constituted within such discursive practices. It is in accordance with the terms provided by [...] music that individuals are socialized (McClary, 2002, p. 21).

Accordingly, this study considers the marketable appeal of feminism capitalised by Swift, as well as her own awareness of her influence, as a significant frame for the re-lyricizing of BtR.

#### **4.2 The rewriting of history**

In such a delicate project of re-recording albums that had been known and played for over a decade, it was imperative to take into account the preferences of final consumers. Although the listeners of pop music and the general society have been part of its reception, Swift's main patron has overall been the fans, who were mobilised "to abandon the much-loved originals and shift to Taylor's Versions", something "essential to the project's success" (Irvin, 2025, p. 59).

In an 'era of feminism' (Flotow, 1997) that has gained prominence over the last decade, Swift uses the "transformation of her persona to 'move' her fans – affectively as well as effectively – to consider what she seems to see as 'the greater good', whether that is Politically (in terms of American politics) or politically (in terms of the politics of the music industry)" (Driessen, 2022, p. 95). The re-recording project, as a political act of artistic reclamation, thus entails the possibility to validate or to reshape certain elements of her past so that they are coherent with her present persona.

Paramore's case, presented in the first chapter, as well as the 'Picture to Burn' re-lyricizing, are cases of "successful prior censorship" (Merkle, 2018, p. 247). These kinds of practices may have set a precedent for Swift and her team during the re-recording

process, resulting in a censorship that might have been partially self-induced and partially encouraged by the expectations of her patron.

Studies have shown how, in the translations into English of Mozart and Da Ponte's *Don Giovanni*, "all versions resort to strategies aimed at drawing on the new receiver's culture. Whatever their own specificities, all versions tend to reduce the strangeness and otherness of the original text" (Degot, 2020, p. 135). Swift's re-lyricizing undergoes a similar process, because some of Swift's newer fans are unfamiliar with her past much as the audience receiving an interlingual translation is unfamiliar with the original. Swift's decision to change the specific lyric her public was most critical about (Paul, 2023; King, 2025), involves considering that "the encounter between new moral or religious ideas and those of the target context may be [...] perceived as threats to the integrity of the receiving culture" (Merkle, 2018, p. 238).

At first sight, eliminating a misogynistic line from a song might seem like an act of feminist rewriting. A feminist translator could assume "the right to change what she cannot approve of" (Flotow, 1997, p. 29). Another feminist translational practice is writing again the stories told by the patriarchy, shifting the women's roles from objects to subjects (Vidal Claramonte, 2022, p. 30). In BtRTV, this only occurs partially. As Bueno and Alonso<sup>1</sup> (2023) note, because Swift's amendment does not shift the meaning of the song, it does not change its original misogynistic theme. Even if omitting the song in the re-recorded album could seem like a solution that meets her present feminist values, the narrative of *Speak Now* "is incomplete without it" (Paul, 2023, n.p) and so is her entire project of re-recording as appropriation.

Rather than a feminist rewriting, it is what Bueno and Alonso (2023) describe as a rewriting of history: a solution that highlights her discomfort toward her previous belief system, embedded in a mechanism of censorship. Resulting from discomfort, this part of her past is neither examined, challenged, nor acknowledged as problematic: it is merely suppressed. This new original can therefore appear as dishonest, "changing the past" and avoiding to recapture "the emotional minefield the originals were created within" (Paul, 2023, n.p). Bueno and Alonso (2023) describe this re-recorded song as a time capsule that metonymically represents the culture of 2010, and Swift's choice is no other thing than erasing and rewriting history in order to avoid a potential confrontation with her past beliefs.

Even if feminism was not such a popular concern back in 2010, "there is a certain unpredictability of when and how songs can have political significance, regardless of whether they were initially intended for political purposes or not" (Susam-Saraeva, 2018, p. 361). The thirteen-year gap prior to BtRTV, infused with the popularisation of feminism in public discourse, endowed the song with political significance and highlighted an opposition with Swift's feminist stance. Because "any text carries the mark of its producer, which is also the mark of the ideological and cultural context in which it is produced"

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<sup>1</sup> Bueno and Alonso's (2023) analyses were shared in a public podcast examining *Speak Now (Taylor's Version)*. Although it is not scholarly criticism, their contributions are meticulous and accurate.

(Flotow, 1997, p. 43), a new version anchored in a past context would not be coherent with the features the present producer wanted to articulate for her fans. As a result, an ideologically motivated rewriting of the song manipulated the original version in order to adapt it to the prevailing ideological current in which it would be reproduced (Lefevere, 2017, pp. 5-6). Since the new lyric still backs the misogynistic narrative situated at the heart of the song, solely rewriting the criticised 'slut-shaming' part may function more as an attempt to efface a problematic past statement rather than critically engaging with it.

## 5. Conclusions

In this article, I have explored the relyricizing of Taylor Swift's re-recorded version of 'Better than Revenge'. As part of her Taylor's Versions, understood as translations that granted her an appropriation of her initial work, the revision of BtR presents an intralingual self-translation, where Swift rewrites a past statement in order to reduce the distance with her current values. Since music "acts as a vehicle where people can negotiate their multiple identities" (Susam-Saraeva, 2018, p. 359), Swift's lyrical change should be seen as an outstanding part of the negotiation of her present identity through a translation-as-appropriation process.

In the reception context of the translated versions, the patronage embodied by the fans also played a significant role, because of their critique of the slut-shaming element via social media (Paul, 2023; King, 2025). Even though Swift is the only author of the change, it cannot be entirely considered self-censorship, having been partially induced by the expectations of her patron.

Regarding past relyricizings in Swift's trajectory, while the amendment of 'Picture to Burn' eliminated all the homophobic elements of the song, removing the problematic line in BtR merely sidesteps criticism of her slut-shaming writing and leaves the song's underlying misogyny unchanged. In her re-recording project, Swift was careful to depict the voyage to her past in a way that matched her present values, probing herself as "a master of self-appropriation, as she cultivates a persona that motivates intense and lucrative loyalty from her fans" (Irvin, 2025, p. 68).

Even if Swift does not make the song feminist, the change does make it less unfeminist, which may suffice to make it commercially acceptable and more congruent with the feminist stance she defends. Because of this, one would still have to question if Swift's choice is an attempt to erase an obsolete past which troubles present discourse. If so, is it a useful approach in her aim of being "on the right side of history" (Swift, 2020)? To stop reproducing slut-shaming narratives is certainly necessary, but it is also counterproductive to pretend they never existed, because no real learning nor progress can come without a clear vision of history. Certainly, Swift's case, among the many others existing in cultural production, does not have a single solution.

What can nevertheless be concluded is that in any of these practices, translation is an essential tool to communicate more social justice-oriented perspectives, but it might be insufficient if it is restricted to rewriting history with no involvement of reflexive

conversations. As human rights face an increasing threat in many places around the globe, the need for critical engagement is more urgent. Since pop music provides a worldwide and accessible platform for introducing subjects for discussion, it is also important to examine its motivations and effects from an academic perspective. Ultimately, this paper demonstrates the relevance of Translation Studies, for artists as well as audiences, to deeper understand the shifts both shaping and shaped by pop music and culture.

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**DOSSIER: IBERO-AMERICAN TRANSFICTION**

## INTRODUCTION

### TRADUCTORES DE PAPEL: CREACIÓN Y TRADUCCIÓN EN OBRAS LITERARIAS PENINSULARES Y LATINOAMERICANAS

FICTIONAL TRANSLATORS: CREATION AND TRANSLATION IN PENINSULAR AND  
LATIN-AMERICAN LITERARY WORKS

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Íntimamente ligadas a fenómenos contemporáneos como la globalización y el postcolonialismo, la búsqueda de la identidad, la crisis de representación o los efectos metaficcionales (Delabastita & Grutman, 2005, p. 28), las llamadas ‘ficciones del traductor’ (Kripper, 2016) han contribuido, especialmente a partir del cambio de milenio, a visibilizar enormemente la figura del traductor, llevando a cuestionar muchos de los prejuicios y estereotipos que siguen girando en torno a la labor traductora (Arrojo, 2018, 2019).<sup>1</sup> Muchas de estas narraciones —conocidas también bajo el término de ‘transfiction’ (Kaindl & Spitzel, 2014; Miletich, 2024)— enfatizan el carácter creativo de la traducción, poniendo en jaque la férrea distinción entre escritura y traducción, ya cuestionada por Borges (1926, 1932), Paz (2012 [1971]), o Campos (cf. Tápia y Nóbrega, 2013). A semejanza de los traductores de carne y hueso, los traductores de papel que protagonizan estas historias de ficción desempeñan su actividad profesional en contextos culturales concretos que determinan su estatus social, así como las concepciones y expectativas respecto al traductor y a la traducción. Así pues, estas miradas ficcionales se erigen como un espacio de reflexión sobre la propia traducción y su relación con la escritura y la literatura, a la vez que se convierten en un valioso instrumento para cuestionar nociones preconcebidas sobre una de las actividades más antiguas del mundo, pues mucho antes de la existencia de intérpretes y traductores profesionales hubo, como recuerda Ricœur (2005, p. 26), viajeros, mercaderes y embajadores que también necesitaban traducirse y traducir al “otro” para poder comunicar en otras lenguas.

Tomando como punto de partida varias obras centradas en la traducción o en la figura del traductor, este dossier, dedicado a diferentes literaturas peninsulares y latinoamericanas contemporáneas, pretende dar voz al traductor como personaje y/o

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<sup>1</sup> Si bien nuestro dossier se centra solo en obras literarias, la proliferación de ficciones relacionadas con la traducción se encuentra presente en otros medios como el cine. Cf. Delabastita & Grutman (2005) y Cronin (2008).

narrador. Los trabajos aquí reunidos abordan algunas de las temáticas recurrentes en la literatura transficcional como, por ejemplo, el proceso creativo inherente a la traducción literaria (Bassnett, 2011; Malmkjær, 2019), la estrecha y compleja relación entre autor y traductor y entre literatura y traducción (Buffagni et al., 2011; Flynn, 2013), las relaciones de poder implícitas en el acto de traducir y que también caracterizan al mundo literario y editorial (Tymoczko & Gentzler, 2002), así como metáforas —viaje, *belles infidèles*, etc.— y prejuicios —traducción como actividad derivativa y femenina— comúnmente vinculados a la traducción (Chamberlain, 1988; Godayol, 2013; Schäffner, 2016). Los ensayos que componen el dossier atienden, a su vez, a los distintos recursos narrativos y poéticos que emplean los autores de carne y hueso para reflejar todas estas cuestiones, sin olvidar que, a veces, la traducción se sigue viendo como una actividad inferior a la literatura ‘original’ y ‘creativa’, lo que relega al traductor a un segundo plano y le convierte en una especie de ciudadano ‘de segunda clase’ (cf. Bassnett, 2011). De ahí que, en ocasiones, estos textos presenten también a personajes que se sienten incómodos con el papel secundario que tradicionalmente se les ha asignado o que muestran cierta rivalidad hacia el autor, llegándole a arrebatarse el ‘espacio’ privilegiado que este ocupa.

Las notas al pie de página son el punto de partida del artículo “Repensar los márgenes desde la ficción. Literatura con notas al pie transficcionales”, que presenta un recorrido teórico sobre los Estudios de Traducción para reflexionar sobre el poder de la ficción y la autoficción como herramienta teórica en *Notas ao Pé da Página* del brasileño Moacyr Scliar y en *El Fill del Corrector / Arre, arre, Corrector*, obra bilingüe (catalán-castellano) de Adrià Pujol y Rubén Martín. El análisis de ambos textos permite ilustrar cómo las notas al pie del traductor se convierten en un dispositivo narrativo y formal que da visibilidad al traductor y subvierte la jerarquía discursiva entre original y traducción. Este recurso invita a reflexionar sobre cuestiones candentes como la relación autor/traductor, la (in)visibilidad del traductor y su creatividad, la traducción como reescritura y la mercantilización de la literatura.

El proceso creativo del traductor es también el foco de análisis del artículo de Isabel Araújo Branco, “A tradução enquanto viagem, trabalho intelectual e performance amorosa: *El Viajero del Siglo*, de Andrés Neuman”. A propósito de la novela del autor hispano-argentino, Isabel Branco aporta interesantes reflexiones sobre el propio concepto de traducción, la traducción como viaje y acto amoroso, el estatuto y papel de las mujeres en la cultura, las condiciones profesionales de quienes traducen o la importancia de la traducción y de los traductores/antologistas en la formación del canon literario.

En “Traducción y creación en *El Vecino de Abajo*, de Mercedes Abad” Fátima Fernandes da Silva se adentra en los entresijos del trabajo del traductor autónomo, las relaciones del traductor con los autores y los editores y la transición de la traducción a la creación literaria. Al analizar obras como *El Naranja* de Carlos Fuentes, *La Vengeance du Traducteur* de Brice Matthieussent, *Un Amor* de Sara Mesa y, sobre todo la novela de la catalana Mercedes Abad, este ensayo aborda cuestiones como las motivaciones para traducir, la invisibilidad de esta actividad, las dificultades laborales y el impulso creativo

implícito en la tarea traductora.

En el artículo “O tradutor, rebaixado funcionário da palavra escrita”, Carina Infante do Carmo analiza *A Noiva do Tradutor* (2015), una novela de João Reis que retoma la tradición de los antihéroes modernistas y la figura del ‘funcionario cansado’ de la literatura portuguesa del siglo XX. En diálogo con otras narrativas como *Sult [Hambre]* de Knut Hamsun o *Livro do Desassossego* de Bernardo Soares (heterónimo de Fernando Pessoa), la autora se sumerge en la configuración del personaje del traductor, la representación del alienado social y mental y la introversión de un sujeto deshumanizado e inestable, que, pese a saberse en la escala del engranaje, construye su identidad a través de la actividad de traducción.

Basándose en un marco teórico interdisciplinar que parte de los Estudios de Traducción y Literarios y se extiende a la Literatura Comparada o los Estudios de Género, las distintas propuestas incluidas en el dossier analizan obras narrativas de autores brasileños, catalanes, hispano-argentinos y portugueses pertenecientes en su mayoría al siglo XXI. Los textos ficcionales estudiados constituyen un corpus variado que permite repensar la compleja relación entre creación literaria y traducción. Para ello, se trazan complejas redes intertextuales, se aborda el papel femenino en el campo intelectual y se reflexiona sobre el papel de la traducción en la configuración del canon literario y de la Literatura-Mundo.

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**REPENSAR LOS MÁRGENES DESDE LA FICCIÓN.  
LITERATURA CON NOTAS AL PIE TRANSFICCIONALES**

RETHINKING THE MARGINS THROUGH FICTION. TRANSFICTIONAL FOOTNOTE LITERATURE

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**ABSTRACT:** This essay presents an analysis of *Notas ao Pé da Página* by Moacyr Scliar and *El Fill del Corrector / Arre, arre, Corrector*, by Adrià Pujol and Rubén Martín, highlighting them as irreverent examples of transfictional literature with footnotes. After a brief introduction to the “fictional turn” in Translation Studies and the growing interest in transfiction, it explores the role of transfictional footnotes as apparently marginal spaces in which fictional translators assume the narrative voice to become protagonists in the story. In contrast to the common perception of the translator’s footnotes as marginal elements, in both texts, the footnotes emerge as narrative and formal devices that give visibility to the figure of the translator and expand their conventional scope of action. It is thus argued that these fictional spaces operate as heterotopias that challenge the discursive order between the original and the translation and between the author and the translator, allowing for reflection on the close relationship between the act of translating and the writing process itself, as well as on the unstable nature of texts.

**KEYWORDS:** Transfiction, Translator’s Visibility, Footnote, Brazilian Literature, Catalan Literature, Translator’s Fictional Footnote, Authorship

**RESUMEN:** Este ensayo presenta un análisis de las obras *Notas ao Pé da Página* de Moacyr Scliar y *El Fill del Corrector / Arre, arre, Corrector*, de Adrià Pujol y Rubén Martín, destacándolas como ejemplos irreverentes de la literatura con notas al pie transficcionales. Tras una breve introducción al “giro ficcional” en los Estudios de Traducción y al creciente interés por la transficción, se explora el papel de las notas transficcionales como espacios aparentemente marginales en los cuales los traductores de papel asumen la voz narrativa para convertirse en protagonistas de la historia. En contraste con la percepción generalizada de las notas al pie del traductor como elementos marginales, en ambos textos, las notas emergen como dispositivos narrativos y formales que dan visibilidad a la figura del traductor y amplían su ámbito de acción convencional. Se argumenta así que estos espacios ficcionales operan como heterotopías que desafían el orden discursivo entre original y traducción y entre autor y traductor, permitiendo reflexionar sobre la estrecha relación entre el acto de traducir y el proceso de escritura, así como sobre el carácter inestable de los textos.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Transficción, Visibilidad Del Traductor, Nota Al Pie, Literatura Brasileña, Literatura Catalana, Autoría.

## **1. INTRODUCCIÓN**

A pesar de que el estudio de la representación ficticia de los traductores y la traducción no era una novedad,<sup>1</sup> el término “transfiction” fue acuñado a principios de la segunda década del siglo XXI gracias a la conferencia internacional “Fictional Translators in Literature and Film” celebrada en la Universidad de Viena en 2011. Este concepto, que hace referencia a

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<sup>1</sup> Véase, por ejemplo, Vieira (1995), Thiem (1995), Delabastita y Grutman (2005), Kurz y Kaindl (2005), Kaindl y Kurz (2008) o Cronin (2009).

la introducción y al creciente empleo en la ficción de fenómenos relacionados con la traducción (Kaindl, 2014, p. 4), ganó mayor popularidad pocos años después con la publicación del volumen derivado de la citada conferencia (cf. Kaindl y Spitzl, 2014) y se ha convertido hoy en un área cada vez más relevante dentro de los Estudios de Traducción. La transficción —o las llamadas ficciones del traductor— se caracteriza por desempeñar “un papel documental en el imaginario sociocultural y en la memoria histórica”, sin menoscabar su atractivo estético en condición de texto literario (Pinto et al., 2022, p. 16, traducción propia). Marta Pacheco Pinto, João Ferreira Duarte y Hélder Lopes insisten en el potencial de la ficción para desvelar aspectos de enorme interés para el estudio de la traducción. En sus propias palabras,

[...] these fictionalized statements or discourses may reveal tendencies not only in social perceptions, thinking and even criticism about translation but also in the representation of translators, as well as commonly accepted views of what translation is or should be, of translators’ status, agency and subjectivities, expected or dominant norms when reading translations or, on the contrary, possibilities for their subversion (Pinto et al. 2022, 1p. 6).

En los últimos años, los Estudios de Traducción han experimentado un verdadero ‘giro ficcional’ (Vieira, 1995), haciendo patente, como ya destacó Rosemary Arrojo (2014, p. 37), el poder de la ficción como herramienta teórica. Varios trabajos recientes ponen de manifiesto este potencial como fuente de riqueza no solo para repensar la manera de entender la traducción, sino también para teorizar sobre ella.<sup>2</sup> Aunque la ficción no deja de ser ficción, la literatura está intrínsecamente ligada a la realidad empírica a la que hace referencia de diversas formas, bien de manera mimética, crítica o utópica (Kaindl, 2023, p. 25).<sup>3</sup> Así pues, la literatura tiene la capacidad de revelar lo que Klaus Kaindl, citando a Rüdiger Bubner, denomina ‘missed reality’. Kaindl señala que no es coincidencia que Arrojo, una de las primeras teóricas de la transficción, haya dedicado gran parte de su trabajo a abordar la cuestión de la (in)visibilidad del traductor,<sup>4</sup> ‘topos’ que también ha suscitado gran atención entre muchos investigadores interesados por el estudio de las ficciones del traductor (véase, por ejemplo, Gaspar, 2014; Miletich, 2018; Clearly, 2021; Pinto, 2022, Kripper, 2023; Gimeno Ugalde, 2023).<sup>5</sup> Sin embargo, el análisis de la

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<sup>2</sup> Sin ánimo de exhaustividad, pueden destacarse los siguientes volúmenes: Kaindl y Spitzl (2004), Arrojo (2018a), Woodsworth (2018), Clearly (2021), Kripper (2023), Spitzer y Oliveira (2023) y Miletich (2024), o el número de la revista *Dedalus* (editado por Pinto et al. 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Esta referencia, sin embargo, no es inmediata, ya que los textos literarios también abordan aquello que permanece invisible a la ciencia empírica (ibid.).

<sup>4</sup> Véase, entre otros, Rosemary Arrojo (1997, 2000, 2004 o 2018a). Esta investigadora ha descrito la invisibilidad del traductor como un legado desafortunado (“unfortunate legacy”, 2018a, pp. 30 y ss.).

<sup>5</sup> La cuestión sobre la invisibilidad del traductor y su posición subordinada respecto al autor ha sido una cuestión ampliamente abordada (y rebatida) en los Estudios de Traducción, especialmente desde que Lawrence Venuti publicó su famoso libro *The Translator’s Invisibility* (1995). No obstante, como ha señalado Kathryn Batchelor (2018, p. 33), hay que tener en cuenta que la escasa visibilidad del traductor en los paratextos no es un fenómeno universal. Batchelor hace referencia al trabajo de Isabelle Bilodeau para destacar que las convenciones editoriales occidentales difieren de otras tradiciones como, por ejemplo, la japonesa, donde los traductores ocupan un lugar mucho más visible.

transficción debe abordarse en continuo diálogo con otros campos relacionados con la traducción, tales como la literatura, el cine, la lingüística o los estudios sobre el multilingüismo (Delabastita, 2019, p. 194), ya que esta conexión es esencial para desplegar plenamente su potencial.

Tomando como referencia el estudio de las notas al pie de página, este artículo abordará la cuestión de la (in)visibilidad del traductor en dos textos transficcionales pertenecientes a la literatura brasileña y a la literatura catalana respectivamente: *Notas ao Pé da Página* (1995), un relato de Moacyr Scliar que, prescindiendo del cuerpo textual, se compone exclusivamente por cinco breves notas al pie, y *El Fill del Corrector / Arre, arre, Corrector* (2018), un libro escrito por Adrià Pujol con traducción de Rubén Martín, publicado en una curiosa edición bilingüe repleta de glosas. En ambas propuestas, las notas al pie de página, espacio textual y simbólico que subraya el papel marginal que tradicionalmente se ha asignado a la traducción, se convierten en dispositivos narrativos y formales que dan visibilidad al traductor y amplían su marco de acción habitual. Como veremos, estos espacios ficcionales funcionan como heterotopías que subvierten la jerarquía discursiva entre original y traducción y permiten reflexionar sobre la estrecha relación entre traducción y escritura.

Tras una breve introducción teórica al papel de las notas al pie del traductor y a su función en el universo de ficción, este ensayo estudiará las obras de Scliar y Pujol/Martín como ejemplos irreverentes de lo que, en la línea sugerida por Kaindl, podría denominarse literatura con notas al pie transficcionales, es decir, textos literarios en los que los traductores de papel construyen su propio espacio narrativo, claramente separado del texto principal, a menudo también en términos tipográficos (Kaindl, 2023, p. 27). Si bien este investigador habla de ‘transfictional footnote novels’, optamos por referirnos a este corpus de modo más general, ya que no todas las transficciones que recurren a la nota al pie como dispositivo narrativo y formal son novelas. De hecho, tanto el relato breve *Notas ao Pé da Página*<sup>6</sup> como *El fill del Corrector / Arre, arre, Corrector*, obra insólita y de difícil clasificación que, de forma paródica, rompe fronteras y moldes genéricos, son buen ejemplo de ello.

## **2. De lo factual a lo ficcional: de las notas al pie del traductor a las notas al pie transficcionales**

Como he destacado en otro lugar, el aparente carácter marginal de las notas al pie de página ha sido objeto de abundantes reflexiones críticas (Gimeno Ugalde, 2023, p. 131). Para Gérard Genette (1997), por ejemplo, las notas al pie son un tipo específico de paratexto cuya función es complementar al texto, lo que les confiere un estatus auxiliar, subordinado al cuerpo principal. Jacques Derrida, por su parte, incidió en la función simbólica de su disposición topográfica:

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<sup>6</sup> Otro conocido ejemplo es el relato *Nota a pie* (1967) de Rodolfo Walsh. Ver Gimeno Ugalde (2023).

In the strict sense, the status of a footnote implies a normalized, legalized, legitimized distribution of the space, a space, a spacing that assigns hierarchical relationships: relationships of authority between the so-called principal text, the footnoted text, which happens to be higher (spatially and symbolically), and the footnoting text, which happens to be lower, situation in what could be called an inferior margin (1991, p. 193).

Si bien es verdad que la naturaleza marginal, tanto espacial como simbólica, de las notas al pie a la que alude Derrida se extiende también a las llamadas notas del traductor, no puede obviarse que estas últimas se ven afectadas por una doble marginalidad, ya que se ubican “en la periferia de una actividad periférica” (Toledano Buendía, 2010, p. 639). De esta manera, la disposición espacial de las notas del traductor al margen del cuerpo textual refleja también el papel secundario que se asigna al traductor a nivel simbólico. Sin embargo, no deja de resultar paradójico que estas sean, al mismo tiempo, la manifestación más evidente de la presencia del traductor, dado que interrumpen la fluidez de la lectura del texto para recordarnos que estamos ante una traducción. Las notas del traductor, cuya finalidad es “anotar y mediatizar el texto sin la cobertura de su habitual invisibilidad” (Toledano Buendía, 2010, p. 639), se convierten así en “huellas”<sup>7</sup> que rompen la “ilusión de transparencia” que emana de la lectura de una traducción como si fuera un original (Venuti, 1995, p. 1 y p. 290). La (in)visibilidad del traductor también está relacionada con el método de traducción. A diferencia de la domesticación, la estrategia de extranjerización aumenta la visibilidad del traductor, quien, en su rol intermediario, encuentra en las notas un recurso legítimo para destacar diferencias culturales y fomentar la diversidad (Arbulu Barturen, 2020, pp. 545-546). En resumen, las notas del traductor pueden interpretarse como una acertada metáfora para describir la posición marginal y ambivalente que suele ocupar el traductor frente al autor, un estatuto que tiende a oscilar entre la invisibilidad que le exige la tradición y la necesidad de ser escuchado y “dialogar” con los lectores (Arrojo, 2018a, p. 38).

Desde el punto de vista funcional, estas notas pueden dividirse entre explicativas y discursivas. Las primeras sirven de complemento al texto y cumplen una función documental o descriptiva, es decir, su objetivo es añadir información para compensar lo que el traductor percibe como una “pérdida” de información para el lector meta que no conoce el original (Toledano Buendía, 2010, pp. 655-658). La segunda función es la de comentario, a través del cual el traductor no solo ofrece información, sino que añade su propia voz, acercando su trabajo y modo de pensar al lector. Esta función discursiva permite crear un espacio donde la auto-referencialidad inherente a la traducción puede elevarse a autorreflexividad o donde el traductor puede hacer explícita su “agenda” (Batchelor, 2019, p. 402). En los casos más extremos, este tipo de notas pueden convertirse en digresiones que, lejos de favorecer la fluidez del discurso del autor, lo interrumpen trayendo a colación reflexiones o temas que no guardan relación con el texto que se traduce (Toledano Buendía, 2010, p. 659).

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<sup>7</sup> En *The Translator's Footprints*, Palopski (2010) introduce esta acertada metáfora para referirse a la visibilidad del traductor en las notas al pie.

Al igual que las notas del traductor convencionales o factuales, las glosas transficcionales pueden servir para explorar la ‘agencia’ del traductor y su papel mediador. No obstante, a diferencia de las primeras, las segundas enriquecen la dimensión ficcional introduciendo una instancia narrativa adicional de carácter ficcional (Kaindl, 2023, p. 27). A pesar de que a primera vista las notas al pie transficcionales podrían considerarse paratextos, conviene precisar que, en realidad, esta es una paratextualidad fingida, dado que su verdadera función es expandir la narrativa literaria (Kaindl, 2023, p. 27). Estas notas, por consiguiente, no cumplen la función secundaria que se les suele otorgar en otros contextos, sino que devienen dispositivos narrativos y formales que aumentan la visibilidad tanto del traductor como del acto de traducir.<sup>8</sup>

Por otro lado, si bien es cierto que las notas al pie factuales, físicamente más limitadas que el texto primario, tienden a ser “mínimas, esqueléticas y sucintas” y tienen la finalidad de “ampliar el texto sin engullirlo” (Benstock 1983, p. 205, traducción propia), las notas transficcionales permiten jugar con la disposición espacial y tipográfica del relato, llegando, por ejemplo, al extremo de adueñarse del texto principal y hacerlo desaparecer, como sucede en el cuento de Rodolfo Walsh, o a prescindir del mismo desde el inicio, como en la propuesta literaria de Sliar. En estas ficciones, anota Kaindl,

[...] the spatial layout of top-bottom, center-margin is an essential aspect. Precisely because ‘[t]he relationship between translation and literature has never been amicable’ (Arrojo, 1996, p. 208), the hierarchical tensions between original and translation, the power struggles between author and translator are made particularly visible through the position for the main text and footnote text (2023, pp. 27-28).

Las notas transficcionales operan como heterotopías que se inscriben en el marco de las relaciones de poder entre original/traducción y entre autor/traductor. La analogía con el concepto foucaultiano permite interpretar este tipo de notas como espacios literarios que muestran características heterotópicas, dado que mediante el diseño espacial “estructuran, cuestionan o subvierten el orden discursivo entre original y traducción” (Kaindl, 2023, p. 28, traducción propia). Rehuyendo convenciones, estos espacios, donde el traductor expresa libremente su voz, se rigen por normas y principios propios que funcionan de modo diferente (o incluso independiente de) a la narrativa principal, mostrando otra perspectiva, cuestionándola o alterándola.

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<sup>8</sup> Kaindl (2023, pp. 28-29) recurre a la noción derridiana de “parergon” (‘marco’), en conexión con las artes visuales, para analizar su interacción con el texto principal u original (‘ergon’, es decir, ‘obra’), argumentando que la función del primero va mucho más allá de la función clásica que se otorga a la nota al pie. Siguiendo a Derrida, quien sostiene que el ‘marco’ no es meramente un accesorio para la ‘obra’, sino que es necesario para justificar su propia existencia como obra de arte, Kaindl defiende que original y traducción son mutuamente interdependientes.

### **3. Hacerse ver y oír: las notas del traductor en *Notas ao Pé da Página* y *El fill de Corrector / Arre, arre Corrector*.**

En *Notas ao Pé da Página*, Moacyr Scliar nos presenta a un traductor literario seguro de sí mismo, cuyo punto de vista, correspondiente a la voz narrativa, sustituye al del autor, un poeta fallecido a quien, como luego se revela, le unía una compleja relación que trascendía lo estrictamente profesional. Este relato consta de cinco breves notas del traductor que conforman el único espacio textual y discursivo de la ficción.<sup>9</sup>

Mientras el traductor adopta una posición autoral,<sup>10</sup> la figura privilegiada del autor de nombre desconocido queda invisibilizada a través de un enigmático espacio en blanco que ocupa el lugar reservado habitualmente al texto principal que, al parecer, correspondería al diario del poeta. Al eliminar el cuerpo central del texto y dejar ese espacio en blanco, el lector se ve obligado a leer las notas, perdiendo así su capacidad de eludirlas.<sup>11</sup> La forma y la disposición del relato, compuesto por cinco páginas en blanco en las que solo aparecen las glosas, desafían la invisibilidad tradicionalmente asociada al traductor y lo sitúan en el centro de atención, si bien siempre dentro del modesto límite que se le confiere, es decir, la nota al pie (Leal, 2023, p. 43).

El diario del autor aparece exclusivamente citado a través de breves referencias en las notas del traductor, quien, tras reproducir entre comillas algunas palabras del poeta, las comenta, aclara e incluso cuestiona.<sup>12</sup> A pesar del papel invisible que se suele otorgar al traductor, este recurso narrativo recuerda al lector que las traducciones son textos mediados por la voz del traductor. Las notas al pie transficcionales se convierten en una suerte de ‘campo de batalla’ en el que el traductor y narrador autodiégetico rinde cuentas con el poeta fallecido, funcionando casi como una parodia de la función discursiva, de comentario, descrita por Toledano Buendía. Por ejemplo, el traductor anónimo pone en duda el aparente alivio del poeta tras ser abandonado por su amante y lo acusa de mentiroso: “Nãõ. Mente. Mais uma vez mente” (1995, p. 374). El traductor ejerce así su poder ‘reescribiendo’ la historia que el autor había narrado en su diario. Descrito por el traductor-narrador como un hombre de difícil relacionamiento y ambición desmesurada, el desespero del poeta contrasta con la seguridad (y aparente reputación) del traductor. El autor, siempre según las notas del traductor, se esmeraba en cultivar una buena relación con este último. Esto lo ilustra el traductor refiriéndose brevemente a un episodio en el

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<sup>9</sup> Aunque no todas aparezcan visibles, siguiendo la lógica del relato, la ficción estaría compuesta por tres discursos: el diario del poeta, que queda oculto al lector, la traducción del diario, también invisible para el lector, y las cinco notas del traductor, dispuestas en las cinco páginas que componen el cuento y único texto visible al lector (véase Oliveira, 2017, p. 80).

<sup>10</sup> Desde la perspectiva de Genette (1997, p. 322), las notas del traductor no serían autoriales, sino allográficas. No obstante, la ficción de Scliar subvierte esta idea al otorgar voz de autoridad al traductor, dándole la única voz narrativa del relato.

<sup>11</sup> Como sostiene Toledano Buendía (2010, p. 647), si bien es cierto que el destinatario de las notas del traductor son los potenciales lectores de la traducción, estos tienen la potestad de no leerlas, puesto que, pese a su visibilidad, los paratextos suelen tener un carácter más bien especializado y no suelen considerarse imprescindibles para acercarse al texto. En el texto de Scliar el lector no tiene esta potestad, ya que las notas son el único texto visible.

<sup>12</sup> “Ele veio nos visitar em setembro” (nota 2); “eu percebia algo” (nota 3); “Sozinho, enfim” (nota 4).

aeropuerto, donde el poeta le recibió con flores y le anunció que estaba a su entera disposición (1995, p. 372).

A través de las notas, el lector descubre que N., antigua secretaria y amante del escritor, le fue infiel con el traductor y que, finalmente, abandonó al poeta para casarse con él. La rivalidad entre autor y traductor se hace evidente en una áspera discusión entre ambos que culmina con la sumisión del poeta implorándole que siga traduciéndole. Tal es el desespero del poeta que no solo elogia sus traducciones, sino que llega a afirmarle que “gosto até de suas notas ao pé da página” (1995, p. 375). El triángulo amoroso entre el autor, N. y el traductor es una ingeniosa (e irónica) recreación ficcional del aforismo de la ‘belle infidèle’, en la cual el personaje de N. actúa como metáfora del texto, tanto del original como de la traducción:

As a metaphor for both the original and the translation, N. can be viewed as a good-humored version of the ‘belle infidèle’, who is not only the author’s down-to-earth Muse, but also represents his writing as a prized possession that, however, cannot remain faithful to him. Even though she is the author’s mistress, she must also “serve” the publisher and later on moves in with the translator whom she finally marries. In other words, the author’s beloved text cannot belong or attend exclusively to him if he wants to get it/her published (Arrojo, 2018b, p. 134).

Al interponerse en la relación amorosa entre el autor y N., el traductor representa, a su vez, a la figura del ‘traduttore-traditore’. Además de contradecir las palabras del poeta, no se puede obviar que la profesionalidad del traductor queda puesta en entredicho por una flagrante falta de ética, demostrada por el mismo hecho de revelar, de forma maliciosa, detalles de la vida íntima del autor. Ya desde la primera nota, el narrador, quien asegura ser ‘traductor e amigo’ del poeta, lo deslegitima y califica de ingrato. El escaso éxito que, según el traductor, tuvo la primera obra del autor se debe “aos esforços da própria N.”, quien “obteve do proprietário da editora (e para isso teve de prestar-lhe certos favores) a relutante concordância para um empreendimento que, do ponto de vista mercadológico, representava uma aventura de desfecho imprevisível” (1995, p. 371). La alusión a los supuestos favores de N. hace patente que el traductor cuestiona el valor de la obra del poeta, a pesar de luego afirmar justamente lo contrario: “nunca duvidei de seu valor literário” (1995, p. 375).

Tanto desde el punto de vista de la disposición espacial como desde una perspectiva funcional, las notas al pie transficcionales se convierten aquí en un lugar “otro”, un contra-espacio donde el traductor de papel “abusa” de la función que se le otorga en la vida real. Las notas transficcionales adquieren cualidades heterotópicas, no solo por el hecho de interpretar y manipular el texto del diario del poeta, sino por constituir la única narrativa visible del cuento. Las notas transficcionales desafían el orden establecido, creando un nuevo espacio donde rigen principios y reglas propios, un espacio en el cual el traductor ostenta una posición hegemónica, tanto en el plano amoroso como en el profesional y discursivo. Sin embargo, estas formas de relacionamiento pueden ser cambiantes, como

ha sugerido Arrojo al señalar la posibilidad de que la relación entre el traductor y N. no sea definitiva (2018b, p. 135). Así pues, N., como metáfora del texto, podría atraer, en el futuro, a otro traductor, del mismo modo que el traductor, por su parte, podría sentirse atraído por un nuevo texto y así sucesivamente. Por otro lado, el espacio en blanco o la ausencia del texto principal podría simbolizar, en clave borgeana, la inexistencia (o falacia) del 'texto definitivo' (Borges, 2012 [1932]). Recordemos que, para Borges, un texto es siempre la transformación de otro y, por tanto, su originalidad no es más que una ilusión. Podría decirse, en este sentido, que el cuento de Scliar no solo cuestiona la jerarquía entre autor y traductor y entre original y traducción, como han señalado otros críticos, sino también la propia noción del texto como algo fijo y estable, favoreciendo una visión del mismo como algo dinámico, mutable y siempre abierto a nuevas escrituras, interpretaciones y traducciones. Pese a atribuir un carácter infiel al traductor (o precisamente por ello), *Notas ao Pé da Página* nos aproxima al pensamiento del escritor y traductor argentino para quien ni la traducción es necesariamente inferior al original ni tampoco existe un 'texto definitivo'.

*El Fill del Corrector / Arre, arre, Corrector* podría describirse, a primera vista, como una edición bilingüe que presenta un texto en catalán en las páginas pares y su traducción al castellano en las impares. Aparentemente, se trata de un ensayo autobiográfico, titulado *El Fill del Corrector*, escrito por Adrià Pujol Cruells, acompañado (en el margen derecho) de su correspondiente traducción al castellano firmada por Rubén Martín Giráldez. Sin embargo, la lectura de las páginas iniciales revela un esquema editorial mucho más complejo, ya que, en realidad, la obra constituye un artefacto narrativo de difícil clasificación que rebasa las fronteras genéricas, a la vez que cuestiona la noción tradicional de autoría y plantea interrogantes sobre el tema de la identidad. Multiplicado por el despliegue de las abundantes notas, el juego literario a cuatro manos que propone esta edición bilingüe impide, como veremos, una lectura convencional de la obra. El ensayo autobiográfico incluye partes noveladas y la traducción castellana altera el original, bien eliminando pasajes ausentes en la versión catalana, bien incluyendo nuevos párrafos de otras obras del autor o inventados por el propio traductor. Y el sinfín de notas al pie de página subvierte el carácter marginal de estas para convertirlas en un espacio de reflexión central sobre la literatura, el mundo cultural y editorial catalanes o las tensiones políticas, culturales y lingüísticas en Cataluña.

Pero, ante todo, las notas se convierten en un 'campo de batalla' entre un autor (Adrià Pujol) y un traductor (Rubén Martín) reales que se ubican en el plano de la autoficción a través de la parodia. Las glosas consiguen acaparar la atención del lector y generan un texto propio que complementa (y a la vez sobrepasa) al original y a la traducción. La complejidad narrativa se intensifica con la intervención explícita de los editores, quienes aparecen en diversas ocasiones: en la nota preliminar que abre el libro, en algunas glosas al pie de página o en la traducción del epílogo, a cargo del profesor Antoni Martí Monterde. Además de traducir al castellano el epílogo, Hurtado y Ortega parodian

su propio papel como editores, añadiendo, a imitación del traductor 'infidel', un párrafo explicativo ausente en el original en catalán:

La verdad es que nuestra nota rinde pleitesía al gran José Manuel Lara, a quien se atribuye ese clarividente juicio acerca del negocio editorial. De hecho, nosotros vamos de homenaje en homenaje, para qué negarlo. Y no hablemos más de sueño, por favor, que traducir este epílogo nos está llevando un buen rato (2018, p. 195).

La aparición de todos estos agentes (corrector, autor, traductor, editor) muestra la naturaleza colaborativa y polifónica de las obras, a pesar de que estas suelen presentarse como si fueran creadas por un único agente o voz, la del autor.

El texto inicial de Adrià Pujol Cruells, escritor catalán nacido en Begur, en el corazón del Empordà/Ampurdán, establece un primer diálogo con su paisano Josep Pla (1897-1981) y con su padre, Jordi Pujol i Cofan (1933-), donde lo literario se funde con lo familiar. A través de la figura paterna, corrector esporádico de Pla durante la década de los 50 y 60 del siglo XX (y, por tanto, figura subsidiaria a la de Pla en calidad de corrector), Adrià Pujol aborda en el texto 'original' su relación intermediada con el célebre autor de *El Quadern Gris*, así como su propia condición y experiencia como escritor periférico en la capital catalana. Las infinitas anécdotas contadas por el padre, ferviente admirador de Josep Pla y definido por su hijo como el "doppelgänger" del célebre autor ampurdanés (2018, p. 24), le permiten reflexionar sobre el legado planiano en el campo literario catalán e ironizar sobre el cinismo del mundo cultural y literario barcelonés. Pese a que la huida de la sombra totémica de Pla le parecía, en sus comienzos literarios, la única condición para convertirse en escritor (2018, p. 84), pronto se da cuenta, como él mismo confiesa, del capital que suponía ser identificado como el hijo del corrector de Pla y de lo inevitable, pero también ventajoso, que resultaba que la crítica relacionara su obra con la de su paisano:

Associar-me amb en Pla: qui m'havia de dir que la lata paterna, l'atzar de l'empordanisme natal i la dialectologia d'ascensor m'havien de fer servei. L'entrevistador, el periodista cultural, necessiten una genealogia, les influències, brillar si detecten un parentiu sobtat amb altres precedents o coetanis. Jo els ho servia amb safata (2018, p. 96).

En paralelo, y aunque topográficamente al margen del texto principal, se establece un segundo diálogo, ahora entre él, como autor del libro, y su traductor, Rubén Martín (también escritor, pero en lengua castellana). A nivel visual, autor y traductor se identifican respectivamente con el ojo abierto y el ojo cerrado, iconos que remiten al lenguaje de los jeroglíficos y que aparecen anunciados ya en la cubierta del libro. En una de las ediciones de la obra, el juego del ojo abierto y cerrado se traspone a la fotografía de la cubierta que funde los rostros de Adrià Pujol (con el ojo abierto) y Rubén Martín (con el ojo cerrado) en una imagen que deviene "trasunto de la fusión gradual de autobiografías que se tejen en el texto, con los dos autores mezclados en la versión en español, enzarzados en el relato de sus diversos accesos a la literatura, al trabajo, al campo literario, a la perplejidad" (Mora 2018, s.p.). Esta fotografía trucada, con el rostro hibridizado de Pujol y Martín, no solo

apunta a la doble autoría de la obra que el lector tiene entre las manos, sino también a Cataluña como territorio bilingüe donde co-existen dos literaturas, representadas precisamente por Pujol y Martín en la vida real: el primero como escritor en lengua catalana y el segundo como autor en lengua castellana.<sup>13</sup>

En la breve “Nota de los editores” que da inicio a este libro de encargo, Hurtado y Ortega defienden la ‘intrépida’ aventura de publicar un texto bilingüe que obliga a una ‘lectura estrábica’ y, anticipando posibles críticas, se mantienen firmes en su decisión: “Oídos sordos a los que proclamen que el teatrillo se arrima al hornillo del bochornillo. Palabras necias a los que condenan la jipsterización de la nota al pie” (2018, p. 7). La paródica referencia de los editores a las notas al pie avanza lo que, en realidad, acaba siendo el núcleo de la obra, ya que el argumento inicial de la “autobiografía” de Adrià Pujol —es decir, la relación Josep Pla/corrector/hijo del corrector— va a pasando a segundo plano a medida que la polémica entre autor y traductor va intensificándose en los márgenes del texto y afectando al propio cuerpo de la obra. Así pues, más allá del intercambio relativo a giros lingüísticos o expresiones idiomáticas, asuntos directamente relacionados con la traducción, las notas al pie de página se convierten en un espacio donde lo lúdico adquiere múltiples formas: juegos intertextuales, largas erudiciones salpicadas de ironía y frecuentes careos entre autor y traductor en los que puntualmente intervienen los editores e incluso una voz desconocida, bajo la enigmática abreviación de “N. del P.”.<sup>14</sup> Las glosas funcionan como una heterotopía, puesto que acaban desplazando el foco de atención del lector, cada vez menos pendiente del “texto original” de Pujol y la traducción de Martín y cada vez más interesado en el delirante intercambio que se establece en el “sótano del libro” (2018, p. 95). En las siguientes páginas se comentarán algunas de las notas al pie que guardan relación con la (in)visibilidad del traductor.

Marcando el tono jocoso que caracterizará buena parte de las glosas que se encuentran en la obra, la primera nota del traductor aparece en la tercera página, bajo la abreviatura común “N. del T.”. Esta primera glosa sirve a Rubén Martín para justificar su decisión de trasladar libremente la expresión catalana ‘llaurar de tort’ por la fórmula ‘labrar con la reja torcida’. Martín comenta que ha descartado la expresión habitual ‘ir por mal camino’ en favor de una alternativa creada *ad hoc* que, a su entender, capta mejor el espíritu coloquial de la expresión catalana. El final de esta extensa digresión alude indirectamente a la noción de la traducción como forma de manipulación, pues el traductor confiesa que está tratando de “hacer pasar por *nonchalante* una sofisticación interesada”

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<sup>13</sup> Adrià Pujol Cruells ha escrito diversas obras, tanto ensayo como ficción. *Picadura de Barcelona* (2014), *Guia sentimental de l’Empordanet* (2016), *La carpeta és blava* (2017), *Els barcelonins* (2018), *La gola* (2019) o *Els llocs on ha dormit Jonàs* (2021), entre otros, son algunos de los títulos publicados por el autor. Además de escritor y antropólogo en lengua catalana, Pujol es conocido por sus traducciones al catalán de autores franceses como George Perec o Claude Lévi-Straus, entre otros. Por su parte, Rubén Martín Giráldez ha escrito *Thomas Pynchon: un escritor sin orificios* (2010), *Menos joven* (2012), *Magistral* (2016) y *Sagrado y Desagrado* (2022). También ha traducido al castellano a escritores extranjeros (Eimear McBride, Angela Carter, Bruce Bégout, Tom Robbins, Jean-Pierre Martinet o Bruce Jay Friedman) y catalanes (Raül Garrigasait y Pujol Cruells).

<sup>14</sup> En el epílogo, Antoni Martí Monterde ironiza al respecto afirmando que tal vez se trate de la personificación de la Paciencia (2018, p. 192).

(2018, p. 16). Pero no será hasta la segunda nota cuando el traductor busque el diálogo de tú a tú con el autor para preguntarle si la traducción de “refrito” (por “llepat”) le parece adecuada (2018, p. 17). A partir de ese momento, Adrià Pujol, intervendrá en las notas al margen (con la forma abreviada “N. del A.”), respondiendo al traductor para aclarar dudas, pero sobre todo para recriminarle las libertades que, para su sorpresa, este se toma con respecto al original. Como demuestran estos dos ejemplos, son varias las notas en las que Pujol exige a Martín que se ciña al texto:

[...] ese fragmento no está en mi original. No sé oiga, si le parece bien hacemos una colecta, un croudfánding, pedimos caridad, lo que sea si sirve para que usted TAMBIÉN escriba un libro (2018, pp. 36-37).

¡Quia, Rubén!: si necesitas escribir tu autoficción particular, rimbombante y astuta, conozco editores que te pueden ayudar. Deja en paz *El fill del corrector*, leñe (2018, p. 90).

A medida que las páginas avanzan, la relación entre autor y traductor se complica, especialmente desde el momento en que el traductor se permite eliminar un largo párrafo de la autoficción donde Adrià Pujol relata detalles biográficos referentes a las duras condiciones de vida por las que atravesó su padre durante la posguerra española. El traductor justifica su osada decisión en una nueva nota al pie: “Este párrafo lo elimino por considerarlo deprimente y poco sustancial. Reanudo la oración con lo que nos interesa, la nutrición literaria del padre” (2018, p. 26). Pujol se opone a la injerencia de Martín, no tanto por el hecho de considerar el pasaje absolutamente imprescindible, sino porque, a su entender, el traductor carece de *auctoritas*. Hurtado y Ortega, los editores, deciden intervenir para aclarar que mantienen el párrafo, “por sustancioso y nutritivo, pero sólo en catalán, por cuestiones de sueño” (2018, p. 29). La nota de los editores (“N. de los E.”) justifica la decisión provisional de dejar el párrafo en catalán en la página derecha, espacio que esta edición bilingüe reserva para la traducción al castellano. Si en el cuento de Scliar solo se mostraba visible un discurso (ver nota 9), aquí se hacen visibles los tres discursos existentes: el de Pujol, el del Martín y el de las notas, que “funcionan como una logomaquia que abre el cuarto texto, o architexto o supertexto, aludido en la aparición de ‘los editores’” (Mora, 2018, s.p.).

La siguiente polémica entre autor y traductor se produce cuando el primero se percata de que el segundo ha incluido en la traducción una frase que no aparece en el original, sino que pertenece a otro de sus libros, *Picadura de Barcelona* (2014). El autor reacciona hostilmente a este pasaje añadido:

Sr. MG, a tenor de nuestra última, pequeña y en cualquier caso insignificante polémica, yo ya pensaba que lo había visto todo. [...] En primer lugar comprenderá mi desconcierto, pues si bien veníamos de discutir sobre un pasaje eliminado del original ahora me encuentro con uno añadido. En segundo lugar, me halaga que lea mis libros y hasta que se permita jugar al noble arte del pastiche, pero no me negará que debería haberme consultado antes. Y en tercer lugar me asombra (en el sentido de que me ennegrece) su osadía, ya que no es

aventurado pensar que obedece a objetivos oscuros. [...] seguiré leyendo su traducción ya con un ánimo distinto, ligeramente beligerante. [...] (2018, p. 30).

A través de este juego intertextual, Martín traspasa lo que Pujol denomina ‘la cuarta pared del traductor’. Por un lado, rompe la simetría entre original y traducción que caracteriza a las ediciones bilingües y, por otro, sobrepasa la delimitación textual entre los dos libros del autor para introducir, a modo de pastiche, un pasaje que, aunque dicho originalmente en boca de Pujol, se refiere también a la propia experiencia de Martín: “Se han atribuido tantas manías y sentencias a Pla que a veces parece el autor de todos los pensamientos mínimamente agudos de los catalanes. O a lo mejor es que sólo hemos leído a Pla” (2018, p. 31). Con esta frase original de Adrià Pujol, que Rubén Martín adopta como propia, este último, como autor catalán en castellano, se asume heredero, de un patrimonio cultural y literario compartido con los escritores en lengua catalana. Pese a tratarse de dos tradiciones literarias distintas, que a menudo se dan la espalda, resulta incuestionable que el territorio catalán se constituye como un único espacio público en el que el sistema literario en catalán y en castellano, en interacción con otras literaturas, desarrollan unas relaciones específicas entre sí (Martí Monterde, 2013, p. 163). El reconocimiento de Pla como referente común en la autoficción, así como la propia existencia de este curioso libro bilingüe —que puede interpretarse como un diálogo entre lenguas literarias— son clara evidencia de este tipo de relaciones particulares.

Replicando a la nota anterior, Rubén Martín alude irónicamente al espacio marginal de las glosas, invitando a Pujol a usarlas para “cambiar el agua a su vaso de ira”, al tiempo que se autoatribuye la responsabilidad de restituir el texto, añadiendo lo que considera que el autor debería haber escrito en el libro (2018, pp. 30-31). Asimismo, reivindicando su posición como autor de la traducción, recuerda a Pujol que ya no es dueño de su texto: “[...] Asuma de una vez por todas que la patria potestad de su texto la perdió hace unos días cuando sus editores pusieron en mis manos sus patas. [...]” (2018, p. 33). Su deseo de reconocimiento y visibilidad se vuelve a hacer patente cuando le pregunta a Pujol dónde aparecerá su nombre cuando se publique la obra: “¿Mi nombre también lo vais a poner en los márgenes o irá en la portadilla?; claro, a lo mejor ni consideraréis que deba salir en la cubierta, tú y tus editores [...]” (2018, p. 169). La pregunta retórica de Martín hace referencia a la escasa visibilidad del traductor en los paratextos, donde su aparición en la cubierta parece casi un imposible.<sup>15</sup> Como ha señalado Cecilia Alvstad (2014), mostrar el nombre del traductor en la portadilla o ubicarlo en un lugar marginal contribuye a mantener, de modo implícito, el llamado ‘pacto de traducción’, es decir, la construcción colectiva que invita al lector a leer una obra traducida como si fuera un original. Sin embargo, la actitud contestataria del traductor, visible tanto en sus ‘intervenciones’ en el

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<sup>15</sup> Es importante notar que la portada real de la obra sí incluye el nombre de Rubén Martín e incluso, como se ha mencionado anteriormente, una de las ediciones muestra una fotografía con el rostro hibridizado de Pujol y Martín.

texto traducido como en las notas al pie, interrumpe repetidamente ese pacto, haciendo consciente al lector de su existencia.

La disputa por la autoridad textual y la cuestión de la (in)fidelidad de la traducción son *leitmotivs* recurrentes en *El Fill del Corrector / Arre, arre, Corrector*. De hecho, la falta de coincidencia del título de la traducción (*Arre, arre, Corrector*) con el del original (*El Fill del Corrector*) no deja de ser una anticipación de las “infidelidades” del traductor. Al darse cuenta de que en la parte derecha del libro han quedado varias páginas en blanco, Pujol reacciona con estupor: “¿Dónde demonios está mi texto? Y esta nota, ¿a qué viene?” (2018, p. 159). En otra ocasión, al percatarse de que Martín ha incorporado un párrafo inventado en el cual aprovecha para hacer publicidad del negocio de dos amigos, Pujol le increpa preguntándole: “¿Qué es toda esta porquería?” (2018, p. 45). El descontento del autor por las infidelidades del traductor se resume de manera magistral con los neologismos que Pujol inventa para referirse a Martín, ya sea a modo de insulto (“traductoroso”) o despectivamente para aludir a este como traductor que aspira a ser autor (“tradactor”) (2018, p. 177 y pp. 128-129). Finalmente, la situación se hace insoportable para el autor, como afirma en la penúltima nota (2018, p. 180).

Si bien las ideas del personaje de Rubén Martín respecto a la traducción aparecen expresadas a lo largo de las diferentes notas al pie, estas se recogen de modo más extenso en el “Prologuito” (sic) que precede al texto donde explicita los criterios que supuestamente han guiado su trabajo. En su habitual tono paródico, declara:

[...] Yo he intentado suavizar los pasajes más turbios y eliminar lo superfluo al tiempo que preservaba las opiniones, lavando la erudición de dispepsia. Es obvio que eso supone modificar el original, puesto que aquello que es agradable en una lengua no siempre lo es en otra. De modo que no me ciño a las palabras y pensamientos del autor al pie de la letra, pero sí a su intención, creo, y los adapto al gusto del lector al que van destinados. Es decir, que no he respetado tanto lo que Pujol Cruells ha escrito como lo que debería haber escrito, y no tanto cómo lo ha escrito como cómo convenía escribirlo por sentido común y elegancia (2018, p. 10).

A pesar de esto, reconoce que su “bella infiel” (2018, p. 9) no puede considerarse una traducción “propiamente dicha, aunque es mejor que una traducción” (2018, p. 10). Según Martín, su labor implica la necesidad de “desentenderse del ideal de equivalencia o de la noción de ‘pérdida’ en la traducción” (2018, pp. 10-11). Si, por una parte, acepta que la traducción “debe conservar siempre algo del original, porque sería empresa demasiado grande apartarse enteramente del carácter del autor”, por la otra, no duda en afirmar que también exige poder descartar “todo lo que pertenece a la disipación” (2018, p. 1). Lo que propone, como él mismo dice, es una traducción de lo que cree que debería haber escrito el autor. Martín parece ganar la batalla librada en las notas al pie, ya que es él quien tiene la última palabra. Así, concluye la traducción añadiendo un párrafo final, ausente en la versión de Pujol, donde explicita sus intenciones: “Yo, de ser el autor (*y espero haber acabado siéndolo*), me preguntaría si no habré mentido tanto como para que no me deje de crecer la lengua después de muerto” (2018, p. 181, énfasis propio).

Desde el punto de vista visual y narrativo, los vaivenes del texto original y del texto traducido, así como las notas al pie autoficcionales que aparecen a lo largo de la obra pueden interpretarse como una parodia de la concepción tradicional del texto como algo definitivo y estable. Al mismo tiempo, las ‘infidelidades’ del traductor nos acercan, si bien a través de la exageración, a la idea de la traducción como acto creativo. A encargo de los editores, Adrià Pujol y Rubén Martín, autor y traductor reales, han dado vida a una obra que traspasa géneros y convenciones y que parodia, mediante el juego autoficcional, la eterna rivalidad no solo entre autor y traductor, sino también entre el catalán y el castellano. En palabras de Antoni Martí Monterde, *El Fill del Corrector / Arre, arre, Corrector* es un complejo artefacto literario que supera, “els estèrils debats sobre la tria de la llengua literària, està redactat com s’ha concebut, tant en català com en castellà, però sense adherir-se a les presumptes tradicions literàries obligatòries de cadascuna d’aquestes llengües” (2018, pp. 199-200).

#### 4. Conclusiones

El análisis de *Notas ao Pé da Página* y *El Fill del Corrector / Arre, arre, Corrector* ha permitido demostrar que ambos textos recurren a las notas al pie como espacio ficcional que da visibilidad a la figura del traductor, brindándole un altavoz discursivo que amplía su marco de actuación, más allá del papel que tradicionalmente se le otorga. Siguiendo a Kaindl, estas notas transficcionales operan como heterotopías que alteran el orden discursivo que, prácticamente desde el Romanticismo, se ha establecido entre original y traducción. Si en *El Fill del Corrector / Arre, arre, Corrector* el traductor se sitúa al mismo nivel que el autor y se dirige a él de tú a tú, polemizando abiertamente con él, tergiversando sus palabras o incluso desafiando su autoridad, en *Notas ao Pé da Página* el traductor se impone al autor, usurpándole el lugar hegemónico, tanto en el terreno amoroso, como profesional y simbólico. En ambos textos, las notas al pie se convierten en un ‘campo de batalla’ desde el cual los traductores de papel reclaman, espacial, discursiva y simbólicamente, un reconocimiento del que los traductores de carne y hueso suelen verse privados. Como hemos visto, más allá de su función lúdica y narrativa, estas notas permiten reflexionar sobre cuestiones complejas como la relación autor/traductor, la (in)visibilidad del traductor, la actividad creativa del traductor, la traducción como forma de (re)escritura, la relación entre original y traducción (y el recurrente tópico de la in/fidelidad), los entresijos del mundo editorial, la mercantilización de la literatura, las pugnas entre lenguas literarias o incluso el carácter colectivo de las obras literarias en el que intervienen diferentes agentes (editor, corrector, traductor, etc.), aunque generalmente estos se presenten como fruto de uno solo, el autor. Como ejemplos de textos literarios con notas transficcionales, las dos obras analizadas permiten repensar los márgenes textuales (y también simbólicos) e ilustran que este tipo de literatura es una fuente de riqueza no solo para la teoría de la traducción, sino también para el estudio de la literatura y su relación con la traducción. Leer estos textos literarios atendiendo a sus márgenes obliga a lector —y, por supuesto, a la crítica— a repensar la relación entre la literatura y la traducción.

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- Gimeno Ugalde, E. - Repensar los márgenes desde la ficción  
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**A TRADUÇÃO ENQUANTO VIAGEM, TRABALHO INTELECTUAL E PERFORMANCE  
AMOROSA: EL VIAJERO DEL SIGLO, DE ANDRÉS NEUMAN**

TRANSLATION AS A JOURNEY, INTELLECTUAL WORK AND LOVING PERFORMANCE:  
*EL VIAJERO DEL SIGLO*, BY ANDRÉS NEUMAN

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**ABSTRACT:** In this article we analyze Andrés Neuman's *El Viajero del Siglo* (2009) in particular the concept of translation, the conception of translation as a journey and as an act of love, the practical translation processes, the working conditions of translators and the social position of women in intellectual work. To do this, we use theoretical conceptions of Thomas O'Beebee, Klaus Kaindl and Karlheinz Spitzl, Rosemary Arrojo, Itamar Even-Zohar, José Lambert, Paul Ricœur and other critics. We also used the Portuguese edition, *O Viajante do Século* (2010), translated by Vasco Gato, in order to better understand the literary and translation options and the novel.

**KEYWORDS:** Transfiction, Transmimesis, Translation, Translators, Andrés Neuman

**RESUMO:** Neste artigo analisamos *El Viajero del Siglo* (2009), de Andrés Neuman, em particular o conceito de tradução que aí encontramos, a concepção da tradução como viagem e como acto de amor, os processos práticos tradutórios, as condições de trabalho dos tradutores e a posição social das mulheres em trabalhos intelectuais. Para isso recorreremos às concepções teóricas de Thomas O'Beebee, Klaus Kaindl e Karlheinz Spitzl, Rosemary Arrojo, Itamar Even-Zohar, José Lambert, Paul Ricœur e outros críticos. Utilizamos também a edição portuguesa, *O Viajante do Século* (2010), traduzida por Vasco Gato, de forma a aprofundar opções literárias e de tradução e assim melhor compreender o romance.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Transficção, Transmimese, Tradução, Tradutores, Andrés Neuman

## **1. Introdução**

A folha de uma planta, de um arbusto ou de uma árvore é quase sempre vista do lado de cima, aquele que se dá ao sol, que o acompanha, o mais visível para quem passa e quem fica. É o que a planta dá a ver, ficando o lado reverso numa posição mais discreta, virada para dentro, para o tronco e para as outras folhas, como que ensimesmada, como que na retaguarda de quem dá a cara, como que ocultando o que se está a construir, reflectindo. Pega-se numa folha caída no chão ou retirada de um tronco e o polegar percorre a superfície razoavelmente lisa do lado frontal, sentindo, ainda assim, delicados sulcos horizontais e o mais profundo sulco central que estrutura a folha. Os outros quatro dedos vão sentindo o que não se vê, o reverso mais montanhoso, mais saliente, mais forte, mais definido, mais esquelético. Quando o tacto vence a visão, vira-se a folha e descobre-se naquele pedacinho um mundo mais complexo, mais interessante, mais elaborado, mais visível, ainda que menos estético. Ou aparentemente menos estético, porque, quando visto a contraluz, as nervuras e cores revelam o esplendor de intrincadas e belas

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intersecções. Só não é visível a circulação da seiva. É a estrutura à vista, o avesso do bordado mais perfeito, uma espécie de *making of* de si próprio, da folha.

Miguel de Cervantes introduziu a metáfora do ‘avesso do bordado’ para fazer referência à tradução. Nesse sentido, o bordado é, pois, o texto traduzido terminado. Mas o que temos quando vemos os dois lados em simultâneo? O que compreendemos apalpando e observando a folha da árvore na sua globalidade? Um processo de preparação, construção e manutenção (o lado de trás) e o seu resultado (o lado da frente). Mas, se num bordado o trabalho é dado por terminado, numa folha isso nunca acontece, num desenvolvimento contínuo até à sua queda ou à retirada forçada por um elemento estranho. A tradução pode alguma vez ser dada por terminada? Quando é entregue pelo tradutor para divulgação ou publicação, sim. Ou, pelo menos, é vista como tal, como um trabalho acabado, mesmo que o tradutor não esteja totalmente satisfeito com o resultado. Daí muitas vezes não voltar a ler o texto depois de impresso com receio de encontrar erros ou soluções menos conseguidas. Trata-se do “fantasma da tradução perfeita” de que falava Paul Ricœur, que “culmina no receio de que a tradução, porque tradução, venha a ser apenas uma má tradução, de certa forma, por definição” (Ricœur, 2005, p. 13). Daí também encontrarmos edições revistas, existindo uma oportunidade de edição. Nesse caso, o trabalho é contínuo, mesmo parecendo que tenha sido dado por terminado. Mas, se a tradução é a parte da frente da folha, o que é a folha na sua globalidade? Mantendo o paralelo com a tradução, uma resposta possível é a seguinte: a tradução visível e simultaneamente o processo de construção do texto. Como é possível aceder a ambos ao mesmo tempo? Através de um relato de um tradutor sobre o seu trabalho ou, em alternativa, através da ficcionalização em que tradutor e tradução são apresentados lado a lado no mesmo texto.

Quanto à primeira, sabemos que os livros de memórias de tradutores têm-se vindo paulatinamente a impor em vários países. Em relação à segunda, a teoria da literatura classifica esses textos no âmbito da categoria ‘transmimese’ ou ‘transficção’. A primeira, na definição de Thomas O’Beebee (2012), corresponde ao uso na ficção de actos de tradução, como os processos de trabalho e a representação de cenários multilinguísticos, ao passo que o conceito de ‘transficção’, proposto por Klaus Kaindl e Karlheinz Spitzl (2014), refere-se à crescente introdução de personagens de tradutores e de questões relativas a esta área em textos ficcionais. Rosemary Arrojo destaca que estas narrativas ajudam a introduzir questões pertinentes no estudo da tradução, proporcionando diversas perspectivas e camadas sobre os temas, nomeadamente “the decisive role played by those emotional, psychological elements that are part and parcel of the translator’s practice, and which are also subtly behind idealised assumptions about original writing and its alleged “superiority”, elements that are extremely difficult to be tackled or even approached within the limits of conventional scholarship” (Arrojo, 2018, p. 548). No presente *dossier* estão em foco várias destas narrativas. Neste artigo, concentramo-nos em *El Viajero del Siglo* (2009), de Andrés Neuman, recorrendo ainda à edição portuguesa, *O Viajante do Século* (2010), traduzido por Vasco Gato. O romance tem como protagonista Hans, um

tradutor que, embora faça da viagem o seu modo de vida privilegiado, se estabelece temporariamente em Wandernburgo, uma cidade alemã imaginária. A própria urbe se desloca no espaço, sem uma estabilidade física absoluta, numa espécie de viagem contínua. Aí, Hans conhece e envolve-se com Sophie, jovem intelectual submetida ao domínio patriarcal e às convenções sociais. Ambos acabam por desenvolver uma relação amorosa e simultaneamente uma parceria em projectos de tradução e na criação de uma antologia de poesia europeia para uma editora de renome em pleno século XIX. A partir da narrativa, abordaremos o conceito de tradução, relacionando-o com temas como a tradução enquanto viagem e enquanto acto de amor, o processo criativo prático do acto de traduzir, o estatuto e as condições profissionais do tradutor e a posição das mulheres na cultura.

## 2. Viagens no mundo e nos textos

Passamos muitas páginas do romance até descobrirmos que um dos protagonistas, Hans, é tradutor. Duas particularidades o distinguem: é, de facto, tradutor profissional (não tendo outra actividade ou fonte de rendimento) e também viajante (um anacrónico ‘nómada digital’, que pode trabalhar onde quiser desde que faça chegar o seu trabalho a quem o contratou). A faceta de viajante é a primeira com que contactamos. Hans chega a Wandernburgo vindo de Berlim e propõe-se prosseguir rapidamente o percurso para Dessau. Contudo, este viajante empedernido (e que sempre assim é apresentado no texto), deixa de o ser quando chega à cidade, primeiro sem motivo aparente, depois devido à relação de amor e trabalho com Sophie, a segunda protagonista. O trabalho (a tradução) e a actividade (as viagens) de Hans misturam-se, pois, especialmente no início da narrativa. Em Wandernburgo apenas se sabe que é um forasteiro e que pretende seguir a sua viagem, não sendo colocada a possibilidade de aí se fixar. A curiosidade sobre o que Hans faz por parte de quem o vai conhecendo é evidente, mas ele opta por não responder com clareza.

A primeira referência ao trabalho como tradutor – associado, aliás, às viagens – surge apenas no segundo terço na primeira parte do romance: “Cada vez que le preguntaban por su trabajo, Hans contestaba: Viajar, viajar y traducir. Algunos entendían que era intérprete, otros que era diplomático, otros que estaba de vacaciones Todos, sin embargo, respondían educadamente: Oh, comprendo” (Neuman, 2019, p. 64). Cada um interpreta a resposta de forma diferente, mas nenhum como sendo tradutor, talvez por desvalorizarem esse trabalho e não o associarem àquela pessoa e à imagem que dela tinham ou talvez ainda por não conhecerem essa profissão. Mais à frente, Hans explica um pouco essa dupla condição de viajante e tradutor. “Regresar es imposible. Por eso prefiero los lugares nuevos. [...] no puedo vivir de otra manera. Creo que si sabes adónde vas y qué harás, lo más probable es que termines sin saber quién eres. Trabajo traduciendo, eso puede hacerse en cualquier sitio. Trato de no hacer planes y que la suerte decida” (Neuman, 2019, p. 119). Também Gerald de Nerval – ainda desconhecido do público geral contemporâneo das personagens, mas muito apreciado por Hans – viaja e traduz. Inclusive, Goethe reconhece que a tradução de Fausto para francês feita por Nerval “es mejor que la original”

(Neuman, 2019, p. 334). Um colega de Hans, portanto. Para a personagem, viajar é sempre um acto criador que impulsa em si a pulsão de fazer e imaginar, projectando nos outros viajantes pequenas ficções sobre quem são ou como reagiriam a um comentário seu. Hans faz imediatamente uma analogia com a literatura: “Es igual que con los libros, los ves apilados en una librería y te gustaría abrirlos todos, saber al menos cómo suenan. Piensas que podrías estar perdiéndote algo importante, lo ves y te intrigan, te tientan, te hablan de lo pequeña que es tu vida y lo inmensa que podría ser” (Neuman, 2019, p. 120). As viagens servem também para o indivíduo se encontrar, perceber qual o seu lugar através do contacto com o outro (“para saber dónde quiere estar uno necessita ir a lugares distintos, conocer cosas, gentes, palabras nuevas”, Neuman, 2019, p. 121). Também Alejo Carpentier dizia, em “De lo real maravilloso americano”, que se sentia mais latino-americano sempre que viajava para fora do subcontinente, percebendo melhor o que lhe era próprio e o que lhe era alheio: “Vuelve el latinoamericano a lo suyo y empieza a entender muchas cosas” (Carpentier, 1976, p. 96). Hans, mais à frente, em conversa com Sophie, recorda as horas que passava na hemeroteca da faculdade: “Era mucho mejor que ir a clase, era como viajar, te perdías y encontrabas maravillas por casualidad” (Neuman, 2019, pp. 179-180). Depois, em conversa com os amigos, Hans fala sobre as particularidades de viajar de comboio: “[...] y como llegan lejos hay pasajeros de lugares distintos [...], es como estar en varios países al mismo tiempo, ¿entiendes?, como si los países se movieran” (Neuman, 2019, p. 285). A viagem, portanto, como a leitura, é a possibilidade de simultaneamente estar em dois lugares e viver várias experiências. Mas o comboio também surge como uma biblioteca que disponibiliza todos os livros que permitem ao leitor viajar. A viagem, que leva a tantos conhecimentos e que funciona como explicação de muitos aspectos de Hans. Por exemplo, quando Álvaro lhe pergunta como aprendeu tantas línguas, ele responde, mais uma vez de forma dúbia: “Digamos que viajando” (Neuman, 2019, p. 361). Muito antes já havia dito: “Todo lo que sé lo he aprendido viajando, o sea mezclándome con extraños” (Neuman 2019, p. 98). Mesmo anteriormente, num diálogo com o tocador do realejo, o conhecimento é associado à viagem: “[...] ¡tú pareces detective! (parecido, dijo Hans, viajero) [...]” (Neuman, 2019, p. 50).

Qual o sentido de ‘tradução’ em *El Viajero del Siglo*? Ao longo da obra, a palavra ‘traduzir’ surge enquanto sinónimo lato de ‘interpretar’ e ‘compreender’, além da designação do acto de passar um texto de uma língua para outra. Vejamos alguns exemplos:

Hans miró a Sophie, Sophie le dijo cosas con los ojos, Hans quizá las tradujo (Neuman, 2019, p. 179).

Este tipo, pensó Álvaro, es un caso patológico: vive de traducir y necesita que lo traduzcan (Neuman, 2019, p. 225).

Hans, que llevaba traduciendo cada gesto de Rudi desde que se habían saludado, se preocupó todavía más con esa orden [...] (Neuman, 2019, pp. 267-268).

[...] introducirse en las emociones diarias, ordenarlas y traducirlas al lenguaje corriente [...] (Neuman, 2019, pp. 307-308).

Esta concepção de tradução enquanto compreensão vai ao encontro da teorização de August Wilhelm Schlegel e Friedrich Schlegel, contemporâneos das personagens. Como resume Susan Bassnett, o primeiro defendia que “all acts of speaking and writing are acts of translation because the nature of communication is to decode and interpret messages received” (Bassnett, 2002, p. 71), ao passo que o segundo encarava a tradução como “a category of thought rather than as an activity connected only with language or literature” (Bassnett, 2002, p. 71). Schleiermacher refere também um sentido semelhante, indicando que traduzimos “quando procuramos definir melhor [um] sentimento e ele se transforma em objecto do nosso pensamento”, acrescentando que “até os nossos próprios discursos somos por vezes obrigados a traduzir” (Schleiermacher, 2003, p. 61).

Esta forma mais metafórica de “tradução” leva-nos às consequências da tradução aprofundadas no romance: o aumento do conhecimento, a fuga à censura e o intercâmbio literário. A propósito de uma possível livre circulação comercial, Sophie manifesta a sua preocupação com a possível imposição da literatura dos países mais poderosos aos restantes, possivelmente num eco das preocupações expressas por Immanuel Kant em *A Paz Perpétua* (1795) sobre a necessidade constituir uma Federação de Estados, em que os vários membros não se impusessem entre si, mesmo que uns tivessem mais poder ou mais população que os outros. Itamar Even-Zohar, em “Polysystem theory” (1979), propõe a teoria das interferências, que estuda as condições que levam à interferência de uma literatura noutra e que resultam na transferência de propriedades de um polissistema para outro. As propriedades periféricas podem entrar no centro se a capacidade do repertório do centro desempenha determinadas funções. Os repertórios dominantes e os repertórios alternativos podem entrar em competição e, como reconhece Even-Zohar, é frequente um repertório que se torna dominante excluir os restantes ou tornando-os ineficazes. É isso que Sophie teme, conhecendo as dinâmicas dos sistemas literários. Em “Literatura, traducción y (des)colonización” (1999), José Lambert apresenta quinze regras básicas de importação e exportação em que ecoam as preocupações empíricas de Sophie. Destacamos duas: por um lado, quanto mais um sistema importe de uma sociedade vizinha mais aprofunda a sua posição de dependência; por outro, quando mais unidireccional for a relação de importação/exportação mais dependente se torna do seu ‘big brother’. Sophie reflecte, pois, sobre as relações hierárquicas entre literaturas nacionais, questão estudada por Even-Zohar, autor que reconhece que a hierarquização se estabelece desde o início das relações mas, em alguns momentos históricos, os modelos estabelecidos deixam de ser aceites por todos, em particular os mais novos. Pode mesmo verificar que “no se acepta ninguno de los elementos del propio repertorio” (Even-Zohar, 1999b, p. 227), indica Even-Zohar, uma conclusão que certamente agradaria a Sophie. Hans defende que os países mais pequenos são mais abertos e curiosos, logo mais sábios. A propósito de Goethe e da sua *Weltliteratur*, afirma que a literatura alemã será construída a partir do

cruzamento com outras: “sumandóla, comparándola, mezclándola con las demás” (Neuman, 2019, p. 303). A tradução leva ao diálogo e à literatura universal:

[...] la naturaleza se comporta como un organismo animado, ansioso. Es un ciclo infinito e infinitamente subordinado, o sea, los organismos individuales son remansos que interrumpen la corriente general para intensificarla. [...] El pensamiento también es una fuerza que avanza nutriéndose de todo, integrando lo adverso. Es el principio del cometa y la estela, que parecen dos realidades distintas cuando sólo son una consecuencia del otro (Neuman, 2019, pp. 353-354).

Noutra ocasião, conversando na tertúlia, Hans defende que “aunque la traducción fuera un diálogo imposible, sería el imposible más necesario de la cultura” (Neuman, 2019, p. 318). Renunciar a este diálogo seria cair no perigo do nacionalismo, do fechamento e da hierarquização de culturas, assegura. O senhor Levin destaca a importância do público-alvo e do contexto em que se produz uma tradução – e as comunidades vão mudando ao longo do tempo, logo “cada época necesita traducir de nuevo su biblioteca” (Neuman, 2019, p. 319). Paul Ricœur salienta precisamente a “retradução incessante das grandes obras”, acrescentando que é na retradução que melhor se nota a “insatisfação suscitada pelas traduções existentes” (Ricœur, 2005, p. 16). Na base destas considerações está a ideia de que o tradutor resulta da sua própria época, aplicando uma visão de mundo e o vocabulário que lhe é mais próximo. O que pensavam sobre a tradução os contemporâneos das personagens do livro? Friedrich Schleiermacher, por exemplo, considera que existem apenas dois caminhos possíveis para o tradutor: ou “deixa o mais possível o escritor em repouso e move o leitor em direção a ele; ou deixa o leitor o mais possível em repouso e move o escritor em direção a ele” (Schleiermacher, 2003, p. 61). A primeira opção – a mais elogiada por Schleiermacher – implica que o tradutor procure substituir “o entendimento da língua original que falta ao leitor” (Schleiermacher, 2003, p. 63) ao ponto de parecer que, “se o autor tivesse aprendido alemão tão bem [...], não teria traduzido a sua obra [...] diferentemente do que o tradutor realmente fez” (p. 63). Por seu lado, Francis William Newman considera que o tradutor deve fazer com que a tradução pareça o mais estrangeira possível. As traduções de William Morris são “deliberately, consciously archaic, full of such peculiarities of language that they are difficult to read and often obscure” (Bassnett, 2002, p. 73), segundo Susan Bassnett. Morris pretende destacar a condição de estrangeiro do texto original.

Referimos já a fuga à censura, presente no romance, com a tradução de autores proibidos e Hans e Sophie a recorrer a manobras inteligentes: os autores dos livros de libertinos franceses foram apresentados com os nomes de nascimento (e não os pseudónimos, com que figuram nas listas oficiais) e mantido o anonimato com que outra obra foi originalmente publicada. Trata-se de uma proposta de Hans à editora Brockhaus. Como estudámos noutra ocasião (ver Branco, 2024), é comum os tradutores que mantêm uma relação de alguma proximidade com os editores terem uma atitude activa e apresentarem propostas de edições. É-nos útil recorrer a Bernard Lahire e ao seu conceito

de ‘jogo literário’, que designa um campo secundário e corresponde a um “universo fracamente remunerado e muito pouco profissionalizado, mas que é, no entanto, muito exigente no tempo que consome” (Lahire, 2009, p. 2), em que facilmente podemos integrar tradutores, editores, revisores linguísticos, paginadores e gráficos, além de escritores. Na narrativa de Neuman, a editora acaba por pedir uma retradução para evitar conflitos com o sistema censório, conduzindo à autocensura. Even-Zohar reflecte sobre a relação do tradutor com o repertório quando verifica que uma descrição está proibida no seu repertório. Nessa circunstância, o tradutor “either deletes it completely or manipulates its components in accordance with the models available in his own culture” (Even-Zohar, 1980, p. 68), sendo comum a substituição de relemas, as destruições parciais ou as amplificações. Quando as opções alternativas são bloqueadas, os repertórios recusados são substituídos por repertórios adjacentes ou acessíveis de outras formas. Sophie e Hans discutem sobre a melhor solução – não ceder ou adaptar-se e reescrever –, sem acabar por chegar a consenso. Even-Zohar reconhece a importância das instituições (como a censura e a editora de *El Viajero del Siglo*) na dinâmica dos polissistemas, regulando as normas, sancionando-as ou recusando-as, pagando ou reprimindo produtores e agentes, determinando modelos e produtos e funcionando como intermediárias entre as forças sociais e os repertórios de cultura de forma paralela ao mercado. Ao contrário deste, pode tomar decisões aplicáveis durante um período de tempo superior. As instituições podem apoiar os produtores na criação de repertórios (como Hans e Sophie no seu papel de antologiadore) e não se apresentam de forma homogénea. Regulam a produção e o consumo, embora dependam da correlação de forças do conjunto de factores.

Talvez o mais interessante na conversa entre as duas personagens seja o desabafo sobre a necessidade de quem vive da tradução de ter recursos financeiros para sobreviver e, portanto, de trabalhar e ser pago por esse trabalho. Por outras palavras, a necessidade (mesmo se sem vontade) de se adaptar ao mundo concreto de que falava Levin e, se for preciso, alterar o seu trabalho em função do sistema de poder em que se insere. Voltaremos a esta questão, mas, para já, retomamos Even-Zohar quando afirma que, para substituir um repertório, não é necessária a mudança de repertório dentro de um grupo social, mas alterar as posições dentro da sociedade. José Lambert reflecte também sobre a relação da tradução com o poder político, explicando que, em função do poder político, as importações culturais podem ser proibidas selectivamente (censura) ou sistematicamente (total proteccionismo). Todas as sociedades têm uma importação selectiva: a censura começa como autocensura.

Se, no romance, traduzir se aproxima do acto de viajar, também é verdade que a tradução é apresentada como algo semelhante ao amor. Tudo começa com a associação dos gestos à leitura quando Sophie percorre com os dedos uma chávena, “acariciando con las yemas el relieve de la porcelana como quien descifra un texto en braille” (Neuman, 2019, p. 96). Iniciada já uma relação amorosa entre Hans e Sophie, a sensualidade física é associada à leitura e à escrita em diversos momentos, mostrando como as palavras estão

arreigadas nas mentes e imaginários de ambos ao ponto de, mais do que uma espécie de tatuagem invisível, termos como que uma extensão natural dos seus corpos e gestos: mais do que acariciar, as mãos de Sophie “leían” (Neuman, 2019, p. 276) e uma das suas coxas tem uma mancha “alargada como un trazo de lápiz” (p. 278). Não se trata da vontade mórbida e doentia da apropriação do outro através da caligrafia e do corpo, como encontramos no filme *The Pillow Book* (1996), de Peter Greenway, que, aliás, conta também com um tradutor como personagem central. Pelo contrário, no romance de Neuman temos comunhão, igualdade, partilha, apoio e colaboração mútua. Amor, afinal. Os corpos de Sophie e Hans mantêm-se “[e]ntrelazados igual que un garabato” (Neuman, 2019, p. 278). Durante as tardes na estalagem “pasaban de los libros al catre y del catre a los libros, buscándose en las palabras y leyéndose los cuerpos” (Neuman, 2019, p. 301), num prazenteiro equilíbrio entre trabalho e sexo, com Hans a “desfrutar de esa ansiedad que lo llevaba desde una lengua extraña hasta el cuerpo de su compañera” (Neuman, 2019, p. 304) e Sophia a equilibrar “la tensión entre el rigor del trabajo y la distracción del deseo”, ambos acostumando-se “a desearse mientras traducían” (Neuman, 2019, p. 304) e comprovando que “todas esas palabras que buscaban eran otra manera de encontrarse, de acortar la distancia entre sus bocas” (p. 304). Desse jogo, “solían aflorar las mejores ideas comunes” (Neuman, 2019, p. 304). O próprio Álvaro, amigo de ambos, se apercebe disso, dessa simbiose das duas personagens trespassadas pelo amor e pelo labor tradutório: “Extraño pasatiempo, pensaba, y extraña manera de quererse” (Neuman, 2019, p. 363).

Este entrelaçamento de palavras e sentimentos estende-se também à comunicação escrita, isto é, às cartas que Sophie e Hans vão trocando. Por exemplo, ela, numa dessas missivas, envia-lhe o seu “beso más políglota y cantarín” (Neuman, 2019, p. 368) Mesmo encontrando-se com frequência, escrevem-se intensamente todos os dias, o que nos pode levar a pensar se a comunicação entre as personagens se tornará mais profunda através da escrita do que da oralidade. No final da obra, impedidos de se encontrarem, redobram o envio de correspondência. “También hacían el amor por escrito” (Neuman, 2019, p. 508), comenta o narrador, aparentemente distraído do que já havia relatado ao longo do romance.

Dizia Hans a Sophie a propósito de uma passagem de *Lucinde*, de Schlegel, que é admirável uma concepção do amor, “no como huída sino como llegada al mundo, como forma de conocerlo” (Neuman, 2019, p. 376). Portanto, de mãos dadas, entrando no universo e aprofundando a sua compreensão – como na e através da tradução. Traduz-se como se ama, mostram as personagens:

Cuanto más trabajaban juntos más se daban cuenta de lo parecido que eran el amor y la traducción, entender a una persona y trasladar un texto, volver a decir un poema en una lengua distinta y ponerle palabras a lo que sentía el otro. Ambas misiones se presentaban tan felices como incompletas: siempre quedaban dudas, palabras por cambiar, matices incomprensidos. Ellos también eran conscientes de la imposibilidad de lograr la transparencia como amantes y como traductores. Diferencias culturales, políticas,

biográficas, sexuales actuaban como filtro. Cuanto más intentaban mediar en ellas mayores se volvían los peligros, los obstáculos, las malinterpretaciones. Pero al mismo tiempo los puentes entre las lenguas, entre ellos mismos, se volvían más anchos (Neuman, 2019, p. 301).

O narrador explica que Sophie tinha sensações semelhantes quando fazia amor e quando traduzia, passando das certezas sobre o que queria às intuições e depois a uma “lucidez insólita” (Neuman, 2019, p. 302), encontrando então o que tinha procurado: “un sentido final, la sensación precisa, las palabras exactas” (p. 302). Através da escolha dos vocábulos, a própria narrativa agudiza este cruzamento entre tradução e amor, como se de uma amálgama se tratasse.

A longa citação que há pouco introduzimos mostra como, para as personagens, as duas actividades se apresentavam felizes e incompletas. Paul Ricœur, a propósito de tradução, fala também de um “ganho sem perda” (Ricœur, 2005, p. 19), de que “se deve fazer o luto até à aceitação da diferença insuperável do próprio e do estrangeiro” (p. 19), num luto da tradução absoluta que conduz ao “prazer da tradução” (Ricœur, 2005, p. 20). Existe, pois, uma sensação semelhante no amor e na tradução, que leva à vontade constante de recomeçar ou retomar o acto. Afinal, podemos dizer que amar é relacionar dois seres e pô-los em comunicação absoluta. Como na tradução. Numa das sessões da tertúlia, Hans, reflectindo sobre as opiniões do professor Mietter sobre a suposta impossibilidade de traduzir poesia, conclui que tudo aquilo poderia ser aplicado às relações amorosas: “alguién que descreía de las posibilidades de la traducción era, en pocas palabras, alguien escéptico con el amor” (Neuman, 2019, p. 316). Ou seja, se Mietter não acredita na transferência de ideias e palavras para outra língua, não poderá viver a comunicação que o amor implica.

Em certo momento, Hans sussurra a Sophie que ela é a sua sorte. Sophie desenvolve aquela ideia e diz-lhe que não vê o seu amor feliz como uma sorte, mas como “un atrevimiento, *nuestro* atrevimiento” (Neuman, 2019, p. 390), visto resultar de vontades e escolhas de ambos: “Todo esto es voluntario, mágicamente voluntario [...]” (p. 390). Comentemos nós: é um atrevimiento e um acto voluntário como numa boa tradução, porque aí não se trata apenas da ‘sorte’ de encontrar a palavra mais adequada, mas do ‘atrevimiento’ de voar e assim alcançar a tradução o mais perfeita possível. Sophie fala nas opções de quem faz: Hans ficou em Wandernburgo, ela não o ignorou. São opções de acção, como na tradução, quando escolhemos uma solução e não outra.

### **3. Métodos e condições de trabalho**

Como traduzem Hans e Sophie, companheiros também de trabalho? É uma situação nova para ambos, já que ele trabalhava sozinho até então e ela nunca tinha traduzido. Lisa, a filha dos estalajadeiros, observa Hans a trabalhar no quarto: um homem sentado à mesa, concentrado, olhando o que está apoiado no atril e escrevendo depressa, durante horas: “Parecía otro cuando leía, le cambiaba la cara, se lo veía lejano pero contento, como la gente cuando canta” (Neuman, 2019, p. 253). Um Hans projectado noutra mundo, que faz

com que Lisa deseje aprender a ler. Na verdade, a primeira tradução que encontramos em *El Viajero del Siglo* é feita por Álvaro, espanhol a viver na Alemanha. Hans pergunta-lhe como traduziria para espanhol *Gemütlichkeit* e ele avança com várias hipóteses pensando em voz alta até chegar à palavra galega ‘morriña’, explicando que esta é conhecida por todos os espanhóis. Portanto, uma tradução aparentemente não conseguida ou mesmo impossível é afinal alcançada e compreendida, num percurso improvisado que surpreendentemente termina numa terceira língua, mostrando desde o início do romance que a comunicação cultural se faz através das palavras e da tradução, culminando por vezes em soluções que podem não ser perfeitas mas que são criativas e, acima de tudo, efectivas. Este ‘pensar em voz alta’ de Álvaro é, de certa forma, retomado como método de trabalho por Sophie e Hans quando começam a traduzir juntos, na medida em que a reflexão se faz a partir da reacção do outro, discutindo o sentido dos poemas ao traduzi-los. Pretende-se, pois, interpretar o texto para o compreender a fundo e depois traduzi-lo convenientemente.

Hans e Sophie também anotam sugestões de alteração de palavras. Depois voltam a interpretar o poema na primeira versão traduzida e verificam se esta respeita o sentido do poema original. Mark Polizzotti, em *Simpatía por el Traidor*, identifica certas inquietações comuns aos tradutores, como a vontade de continuar a rever os textos mesmo que estejam já publicados ou a recomendação de ler o original completo antes de o começar a traduzir. Uma das suas estratégias é a seguinte:

[...] empezar con las palabras que el autor me ha dado y luego, una vez lo he bosquejado en inglés, imaginar la escena. [...] No se trata de modificar el texto de origen, sino de ver qué evoca. Y luego, en lugar de sentirme esclavizado por una definición de diccionario –que podría no expresar lo que yo o el original necesitamos que enuncie– tratar de recrear la misma imagen mental con las herramientas lingüísticas a mi disposición. (Polizzotti, 2020, p. 114).

Noutra ocasião, Hans propõe que cada um traduza dois poetas e que depois se corrijam mutuamente. Sophie sugere uma leitura em voz alta de cada rascunho para “ver cómo sonaba” (Neuman, 2019, p. 334). Trata-se, pois, do reconhecimento da importância da sonoridade do poema que é evidente, em primeiro lugar, para o leitor – quem lê, quem entra no poema, quem o compreende, quem o traduz para si mesmo, ainda que sem o passar de uma língua a outra. Tradutores são em primeiro lugar leitores e intérpretes. Para traduzir poesia espanhola recorrem a Álvaro, além de dicionários e uma gramática. Comentam os textos, discutem o seu sentido e fazem um primeiro esboço de tradução. Mais difícil é traduzir do russo, mas ainda assim fazem-no, com a liberdade tradutória e metodológica da época, porque nada impede a pulsão de transferência linguística de Hans, uma força criadora que dificilmente desacelera. Através de duas ‘línguas-ponte’ e um dicionário, acede ao russo praticamente desconhecido. Depois lêem traduções dos poemas para inglês e francês. A seguir, “consultaron palabra por palabra en el diccionario y anotaron las diferentes acepciones junto a los cuadrantes” (Neuman, 2019, p. 409).

Falávamos há pouco de atrevimento e aqui temos mais um exemplo disso. A referida pulsão tradutória de Hans é travada apenas pelo desgosto provocado pela morte do tocador de realejo. Então, “tenía la impresión de que trabajaba peor” (Neuman, 2019, p. 507) e “no se divertía” (p. 507) a traduzir. Tradução e amor afectados pelo desgosto da morte de um amigo, amor também embora em termos diferentes do abordado anteriormente.

Numa das sessões da tertúlia, o professor Mieter fala sobre o que considera ser a ilegitimidade da tradução de poesia e Hans comenta que a fidelidade é um paradoxo, porque “en el mismo instante en que aparece en escena otro texto la fidelidad es inalcanzable, el poema ya es distinto, se ha convertido en outro” (Neuman, 2019, p. 316). Assim, a fidelidade (no sentido de ‘identidade’, de ‘ser o mesmo’) é impossível de concretizar. Não se trata de uma deslealdade. Para traduzir bem, o tradutor deve reescrever o original, isto é, “devolver al lector un *auténtico* poema en su propia lengua” (Neuman, 2019, p. 316). Tal só é possível devido a um equilíbrio entre a compreensão do sentido do original e o exercício da liberdade do tradutor. O romance acentua o afastamento da ideia de ‘traição’ ou ‘substituição’ do original, propondo antes uma perspectiva da tradução como um contributo, “un empujón a un texto que ya estaba en movimiento” (Neuman, 2019, p. 319), algo que “exagera los mecanismos de la lectura” (p. 319). Na linha, portanto, do método de trabalho de Sophie e Hans, em que a compreensão do texto ocupa um lugar primordial, como se traduzir fosse um contínuo acto de interpretação, de forma passiva e depois de forma activa, isto é, primeiro através do entendimento e depois da recriação com palavras de outra língua.

*El Viajero del Siglo* encerra outras descrições de trabalho, de diferentes actividades, nomeadamente dos operários agrícolas, dos operários fabris e de criados. É um retrato, na sua maioria, da brutalidade das muitas horas de trabalho diário, da falta de condições no emprego e em casa, de salários baixos e da ausência de perspectivas de futuro, mas também da organização sindical e das suas reivindicações. As condições de trabalho dos tradutores também estão presentes no romance, num contexto em que existe já um verdadeiro mercado do livro. O senhor Levin e o professor Mieter dão conta disso quando conversam sobre o aumento do número de leitores e as suas consequências: “[...] tampoco olvidemos que para tener buenas librerías, buenas traducciones, reediciones de los clásicos, esas cosas, hace falta que existan todos esos lectores a los que les gusta comprar libros. ¡Mercado, puro mercado!, sentenció el profesor, no me venga usted ahora con las virtudes del mercado” (Neuman, 2019, p. 173). Este irónico comentário final poderia ter sido feito também por um tradutor. As principais marcas desta profissão serão a liberdade na gestão do horário e a instabilidade laboral, como a situação de Hans reflecte: “[...] la verdad es que me estoy quedando sin fondos [...]. esperaba algún golpe de suerte, yo qué sé. Hasta ahora siempre había hecho lo mismo: trabajaba, reunía un dinero y viajaba por ahí hasta que se me acababa, y entonces vuelta a empezar” (Neuman, 2019, p. 238). Hans espera ansiosamente um possível pedido de uma editora de Leipzig e, sem saber se o receberá, questiona-se se terá dinheiro suficiente para pagar o quarto na estalagem na

semana seguinte. A carta de Brockhaus finalmente chega, com novos trabalhos, o que permite a Hans respirar de alívio. Além de traduzir, faz revisões, escreve paratextos e selecciona poemas. Mais tarde, a revista *European Review* pede-lhe um ensaio sobre poesia alemã. “Pagaban bien y, cosa rara, la mitad por adelantado. Hans había aceptado de inmediato” (Neuman, 2019, p. 403). São condições excepcionais tanto pelo valor do pagamento, como pelo adiantamento, esbatendo temporariamente a instabilidade da profissão. Essa condição é marcante na forma distante de Sophie e Hans verem o pedido da editora de alteração da tradução dos libertinos franceses. Ela não admite mudanças, aproximando-se das tradutoras feministas dos séculos XX e XXI que, como explica Teresa Moure em *Linguística escreve-se com A*, enquanto “mediadoras numa actividade linguística” (Moure, 2022, p. 94), se negam a “participar na difusão de conteúdos ideológicos com os quais não concordam” (p. 94). Por seu lado, Hans é menos susceptível, pensando no tempo já despendido e no dinheiro do pagamento que não pode perder. Perante a irredutibilidade de Sophie, desabafa: “Cómo se nota que no te ganas la vida traduciendo” (Neuman, 2019, p. 431). Esta instabilidade mantém-se nos nossos dias. Os relatórios *Survey on working conditions* (2020) e *The legal situation of European literary translators in 9 maps and a conclusion* (2022) de European Council of Literary Translators’ Associations (CEATL) revelam que, em dois terços dos países analisados, normalmente não é dado qualquer adiantamento do pagamento na assinatura do contrato; em metade dos países, a taxa inicial geralmente não é paga integralmente 60 dias após a entrega; em 16 países, os tradutores não recebem royalties, mesmo no caso de um best-seller; em metade dos países, os tradutores não recebem qualquer remuneração extra para utilizações secundárias (e-book, audiolivro, serviços de streaming, etc.). Embora a Convenção de Berna reconheça os tradutores literários como autores e os direitos morais sobre o seu trabalho, os documentos da CEATL mostram que “in most European countries, the legal framework of the translation contract is relatively weak, we lack collective bargaining (to negotiate standard contracts, remuneration, transparency), and the current situation of literary translators is a far cry from the principles put forward in the DSM directive, especially when it comes to remuneration and transparency” (CEATL, 2022, p. 11). É possível ficcionalizar também este cenário. Rosemary Arrojo, em *Fictional Translators*, aborda a ficção enquanto teoria e simultaneamente “a persuasive form of activism” (Arrojo, 2018, p. 35). A propósito do conto “Nota al pie”, de Rodolfo Walsh, Arrojo mostra como a narrativa ilustra a situação socioeconómica da classe dos tradutores no século xx, a forma como depende da entidade empregadora e como é desvalorizada pelo público em geral e por quem com ela trabalha directamente. Outro aspecto sublinhado é o isolamento dos tradutores freelancers, sem colegas de trabalho com quem falar sobre soluções de tradução mas igualmente sobre problemas de carácter de organização sindical, agudizando a sua situação de invisibilidade. “And it is precisely because translation is still largely misunderstood and underestimated as an innocuous replacement of words that it can generally (and unapologetically) be used to serve interests that are not necessarily the translator’s or even the original author’s” (Arrojo, 2018, p. 44), acrescenta Arrojo.

Em *El Viajero del Siglo* encontramos, pois, referências às condições de várias actividades profissionais. Existe uma hierarquia de importância e dificuldades? No confronto com quem não trabalha e vive de rendimentos, identifica-se nos trabalhadores uma consciência de classe? A cozinheira Petra parece tê-la, sim. Ela mostra indiferença em relação a intrigas e inveja entre colegas, dizendo: “esta no es mi familia, es mi trabajo” (Neuman, 2019, p. 329). E acrescenta que haveria justiça se a sua filha “no tuviera que vivir pelando patatas” (p. 329). Por seu lado, Elsa, a dama de companhia de Sophie, comenta noutra situação: “aprendí que los criados vivimos de los restos de los amos, crecemos con lo que ellos tiran” (Neuman, 2019, p. 338). Elsa comenta que faz o mesmo que ‘eles’, isto é, aproveitar o mais possível a sua posição. Acrescenta que não é amiga de Sophie, mantendo uma cordial relação de trabalho. Há, pois, um ‘nós’ e um ‘outro’, quem trabalha e quem emprega e paga o salário, estando esta relação financeira presente na mente de quem trabalha, mas que não impede que Lisa perceba que, enquanto humanos, são iguais. Com ciúmes de Hans, a jovem pensa que Sophie é como ela própria, “sin esos vestidos que le compraba su padre y esos peinados que le hacían sus sirvientas” (Neuman, 2019, p. 509), ou seja, sem estatuto social e sem dinheiro. De facto, no fim do romance, a condição de ambas aproximar-se-á um pouco, visto que Lisa consegue concretizar o sonho de aprender a ler e Sophie sai de casa e irá trabalhar, aparentemente tornando-se independente do pai.

#### 4. Mulheres e sociedade

Como sabem tanto Hans e Sophie? Porque lêem. Hans aprende também muito com as traduções que realiza profissionalmente. É um saber acumulado e inteligentemente manejado que o põe ao nível de Mietter, iminente professor universitário jubilado, durante as profundas discussões na tertúlia. Sophie ocupa intencionalmente uma posição mais discreta nesses diálogos, não só por não ser conveniente a anfitriã entrar em disputas, mas acima de tudo por ser mulher. Tal condiciona-a a expressar os seus raciocínios e opiniões, apesar de serem fundamentados e reflectidos. Isto leva-nos a uma outra questão presente no texto: a condição da mulher, em particular da mulher intelectual e tradutora. Vejamos como a importância da conquista de direitos para as mulheres iguais aos dos homens está presente em *El Viajero del Siglo*, em particular através de Sophie. Logo numa das primeiras conversas com Hans, critica a Revolução Francesa por excluir as mulheres da vida pública: “[...] si esa revolución íntima se hiciera como es debido, su consecuencia natural sería un cambio de las funciones públicas, ya me comprende, que las mujeres pudiéramos aspirar al parlamento además de al bordado [...]” (Neuman, 2019, pp. 80-81). Na tertúlia, embora sem poder mostrar abertamente as suas opiniões feministas, Sophie aproveita algumas oportunidades para passar os seus pontos de vista, como quando falam sobre Schopenhauer:

De hecho no hace mucho me atreví a leer su libro y parecía algo inseguro con las mujeres... insistía en que nos aplicáramos a las labores domésticas o a la jardinería, pero que jamás se nos ocurriera instruirnos en literatura y mucho menos en política. Y eso es, caballeros, paradójico, porque para llevar a buen término esa propuesta, quiero decir, para que la

doctrina de Schopenhauer no caiga en saco roto, hubiera sido más práctico recomendarnos a todas las mujeres el estudio atento de las obras filosóficas, y muy en particular las suyas. Desde mi carencia de teoría, me embarga la impresión de que a los mayores filósofos de nuestro tiempo los persigue una contradicción: todos aspiran a fundar un pensamiento distinto, pero todos piensan lo mismo de las mujeres (Neuman, 2019, p. 104).

De facto, mais do que uma questão de direitos, trata-se do papel que tradicionalmente as mulheres desempenham na sociedade, a imagem que têm delas e elas têm de si mesmas e o impacto desta situação nas suas vidas. Até a esclarecida e convicta Sophie é afectada. Insurrecta na sua vida íntima, é perturbada por possíveis projecções negativas de terceiros sobre o facto de ser mulher e sobre o seu trabalho de tradução. A insegurança que sente é evidente, apesar dos seus conhecimentos e da confiança de Hans nas suas capacidades intelectuais: “también tengo el temor de que en la editorial a mí te juzgen por ser *una* traductora, [...] ¿cómo sabré que me toman en serio?” (Neuman, 2019, p. 295). A citação deveria ser mais longa, porque o desabafo de Sophie revela outras questões, como o chamado ‘síndrome da impostora’ (duvidando das suas capacidades e receando a opinião do editor) e a incerteza em relação à compreensão de Hans destes receios. Afinal, Hans é um homem e não passou por situações de discriminação (claras ou subtis) que socialmente estão reservadas ao sexo feminino, em particular no que toca à sua capacidade intelectual, sempre minorizada. Aliás, Sophie, mais tarde, conversando com Hans sobre o seu casamento com Rudi, irrita-se quando o amante diz que deve ousar mais no momento de pensar sobre se deseja ou não a boda. A resposta surge com revolta face a quem não compreende como o papel tradicional das mulheres a limita profundamente nem as consequências na vida de quem vá contra as normas: “¿Y tú qué? gritó Sophie, ¿eres muy libre o muy cobarde? ¿a quién le das lecciones? Sé mujer un momento, solamente un momento, y verás qué distinta te parece la valentía, estúpido” (Neuman, 2019, p. 467). Assim, ela lida simultaneamente com as suas inseguranças pessoais e com as inseguranças provocadas por possíveis perspectivas machistas e paternalistas sobre si e o seu trabalho. A narrativa situa-se algures no século XIX, sendo as personagens, portanto, contemporâneas, por exemplo, de Choderlos de Laclos, que em *De l'éducation des femmes* (1783), reflectia sobre a situação feminina: “Onde existe escravatura, não pode haver educação: em todas as sociedades as mulheres são escravas [...]; o próprio da educação é desenvolver as faculdades, o próprio da escravatura é abafá-las [...]” (Laclos, 2002, p. 37). Mary Wollstonecraft, em 1792, defendia a igualdade entre os sexos no seu *A vindication of the rights of woman* e alertava para os contextos em que as mulheres são criadas e que as aprisionam a práticas e expectativas machistas:

Hacedelas libres y pronto se volverán sabias y virtuosas, a la vez que los hombres lo serán más. Pues la mejora debe ser mutua, o la injusticia a la que una mitad de la raza humana está obligada a someterse se volverá contra sus opresores. La virtud de los hombres será carcomida por el insecto que él mantiene bajo si pie. (Wollstonecraft, 2020, p. 139)

O próprio direito à alfabetização das mulheres não é aceite pela sociedade, em especial no que diz respeito às classes baixas. Tal é reflectido nas personagens do romance *Elsa e Lisa*: a primeira aprendeu a ler sozinha e está, também sozinha, a aprender inglês, com a maior discrição possível, de forma a não ser atacada; a segunda, impedida pela família de frequentar a escola, aprende a ler às escondidas com a ajuda de Hans. A sindicalista feminista Clara Zetkin, na passagem do século XIX para o século XX, sublinhava que a questão da educação “desempenha um papel determinante na vida dos milhões de proletários” (Zetkin, 2007, p. 159), em particular das mulheres, considerando que a educação recebida nas escolas primárias não lhes deu mais conhecimentos para se libertar “nem uma personalidade mais rica e mais desenvolvida” (p. 159). Zetkin defendia escolas públicas, gratuitas, mistas e obrigatórias para todas as crianças, com material escolar e refeições incluídas. Reivindicações que Lisa, Elsa e Sophie certamente apoiariam.

Na própria interpretação dos poemas que traduz, Sophie imprime a sua visão feminista. É o caso do soneto “Escrito está en mi alma vuestro gesto”, de Garcilaso de la Vega, em que Sophie rejeita a ‘mulher objecto’ e a ‘mulher passiva’ desejada pelo sujeito poético: “[...] los [poemas] de Garcilaso, maravillosos, delicados, pero siempre con esa espantosa idea de fondo: te amo si te callas, eres perfecta porque apenas te conozco, ni falta que me hace [...]” (Neuman, 2019, p. 362). Como comenta o historiador de arte Miguel Ángel Cajigal Vera, neste campo as mulheres “ejercen por lo general como musas, modelos y amantes” (Cajigal Vera, 2021, p. 56), um retrato que pode ser estendido à literatura e que tem neste poema um exemplo. Helena Sotoca desenvolve a reflexão sobre a dualidade sujeito e objecto: “El hombre –sujeto– hace arte. La mujer –objeto– es arte. [...] tras este elogio [...] se esconde una manzana envenenada. Si la mordemos, aceptamos sin miramientos un lugar pasivo en el sistema. Un espacio en el que las mujeres no podemos hacer ni decir. Solo podemos ser para su consumo” (Sotoca, 2022, p. 38). Uma opinião que Sophie certamente também partilharia, com a sua aguda perspicácia e sentido crítico, pensando em todos os momentos nas consequências para as mulheres da imagem que delas se constrói, mesmo aquelas aparentemente benéficas. É o que acontece na tertúlia quando comenta sobre as personagens femininas de livros escritos por homens: “Los cronistas y los lectores aman a las heroínas pero las aman muertas. Y las pobres van de aquí para allá con la obligación de inmolarse. ¿No podríamos tener heroínas un poco más felices?” (Neuman, 2019, p. 172).

No fim do romance, Sophie parte sozinha com “dos maletas llenas de ropa, papeles y dudas” (Neuman, 2019, p. 531), certamente começando a cumprir o seu destino de tradutora reconhecida e independente, pouco depois de pôr fim ao seu noivado com Rudi e de Hans a recomendar a editores conhecidos. Se fosse uma figura real e não ficcional, enriqueceria a lista de vinte e seis tradutoras nascidas até 1870 preparada por Teresa Moure no citado *Linguística escribe-se com A*, que inclui, por exemplo, Filipa de Lencastre, a Infanta Dona Catarina, Leonor de Noronha, a Malinche, Isabel Rebeca Correia, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Faustina Sáez de Melgar, Emilia Pardo Bazán e Julia Asensi. Teresa Moure escreve sobre a “feminização profissional” (Moure, 2022, p. 78) da tradução,

recordando que na Idade Média e no Renascimento a tradução era “uma das escassas habilidades aceites para aquelas que, por questão de classe e de formação, pudessem enfrentar os textos” (p. 78). Para Moure, os nomes desta lista “são indicativos de que as mulheres cultivaram sempre o campo da tradução e denunciam que os masculinos genéricos com que se oculta a sua presença deveriam ser substituídos por formas mais inclusivas, que permitissem divulgar a sua actividade” (Moure, 2022, p. 78).

## 5. Práticas de tradução e jogos com o leitor

Hans e Sophie traduzem para alemão poemas de diversas línguas, nomeadamente do português. Recuperemos a imagem da folha de árvore do início do nosso artigo e cruzemos num mesmo momento a tradução e a ficção sobre a tradução, acrescentando ainda a tradução da tradução. Esta poderia ser apenas a transcrição do original, mas o tradutor da edição portuguesa, Vasco Gato,<sup>1</sup> opta por não o fazer. Nesta edição, um poema do poeta português Bocage que tinha sido editado em espanhol no original de *El Viajero del Siglo* é retraduzido para português a partir dessa versão. Em nota-de-rodapé é apresentado o poema original, explicitando o que foi feito, embora sem que se explique a razão. Assim, temos duas versões em português do mesmo poema: a original (escrita por Bocage) e a tradução realizada a partir da tradução espanhola. Faria sentido, de facto, incluir apenas o original? Como Sophie comenta as opções de tradução – “[...] me parece mejor vientos que céfiros” (Neuman, 2019, p. 387), por exemplo – não seria possível incluir apenas o poema de Bocage, apesar de se tratar da língua para a qual o romance está a ser traduzido. É como que um reflexo de um reflexo, um ‘*mise en abyme*’ literário. Na tradução do segundo poema de Bocage, ela nota: “Este, sonrió Sophie, te ha quedado perfecto” (Neuman, 2019, p. 388). Mas será assim tão perfeita a tradução feita por Hans? Vejamos algumas palavras do poema original, da tradução em espanhol e da sua versão em português feita a partir da tradução para espanhol:

Poema de Bocage (em português)	Tradução para espanhol	Versão em português a partir da tradução em espanhol
Razão	razón	razão
Amor	amor	amor
acusas	atacas	atacas
apreciar	demorarme	demorar-me
frágil vítima	la víctima	a vítima
injusta e vária	cambiante	cambiante
noutros laços	en brazos de otros	nos braços de outros
fuja de Marília bela	aparte de mi bella	aparte da minha bela
maldigue	acuse	acuse
carpir	morder	morder

<sup>1</sup> Contactámos o tradutor de forma a compreender melhor o processo de tradução e as suas escolhas, bem como a sua percepção sobre as traduções de português para espanhol presentes no romance. Não foi ainda possível obter uma resposta.

Além do desaparecimento da maiúscula em ‘Razão’ e ‘Amor’ e, portanto, do afastamento da conceptualização de ambos, verificamos na tradução para espanhol (e portanto na versão em português feita a partir da versão em espanhol) a alteração do sentido de palavras (como ‘carpir’, o acto de lamentar através do choro; ou ‘laços’ enquanto relações) e a retirada de adjetivos (como ‘frágil’ e ‘injusta’) e do nome ‘Marília’, uma das ‘amadas’ que surgem com frequência na obra de Bocage. Não existiam palavras em espanhol com um equivalente mais adequado em termos de significado e de frequência de utilização? Estas escolhas poderão ser intencionais para o jogo com o leitor, que pode também traduzir e pensar sobre a tradução feita por Hans, a sua própria tradução e o trabalho tradutório em geral. Por outras palavras, pensar sobre as possibilidades de interpretação e de tradução e todas as portas que se abrem a partir desse exercício de e/ou traduzir e/ou analisar uma tradução de outra pessoa, neste caso realizada por Hans. E eventualmente não concordar com a tradução e com o comentário de Sophie... Porque, como dizia Ricœur, com a linguagem podemos “não só dizer a mesma coisa *de forma diferente*, mas dizer uma *coisa diferente* do que é” (Ricœur, 2005, p. 51).

Mais à frente as personagens voltam a comentar esta segunda tradução. Ou será o mesmo momento com a mesma observação de Sophie, mas percebido por Lisa, ao entrar no quarto? De facto, parece ser a mesma. Afinal, se estava ‘perfeito’, porquê repetir a revisão e porquê repetir a apreciação com as mesmas palavras? Contudo, simultaneamente parece ser outra ocasião, porque na primeira Lisa não traz uma limonada. Então, é ou não? Não é possível ter uma resposta clara, o que contribui para aumentar o jogo com o leitor, em particular à volta desta passagem e desta tradução, como se se insistisse nesta provocação que é a apreciação de Sophie sobre uma suposta perfeição, como a lembrar o leitor que deve apreciar por si próprio se é ou não perfeito. Esta segunda visão do momento acrescenta algo? Sim, a perspectiva de Lisa em relação ao comentário de Sophie: “[...] alcanzó a oír la respuesta de esa engreída estúpida que venía casi todas las tardes: ‘Este te ha quedado perfecto’. No era gran cosa para decirle a un hombre como Hans” (Neuman, 2019, p. 393). Na linha de obras como *The Alexandria Quartet* (1962), de Lawrence Durrell, temos uma multiplicidade de perspectivas sobre o mesmo objecto ou acontecimento, tal como se passa no acto de traduzir em muitas ocasiões do romance, uma compreensão mais aprofundada ou um complemento para essa compreensão. Como diz Sophie, a realidade “es muchas cosas al mismo tiempo” (Neuman, 2019, p. 404).

Outro aspecto interessante do trabalho de Hans e Sophie é a preparação e tradução de uma antologia geral de poesia, um projecto que incluiria o máximo de países possível. Um projecto utópico, portanto. Hans fala numa livre circulação internacional e comercial de livros sem passar por alfândegas, enquanto Sophie refere a importância de os países mais poderosos não tentarem impor a sua literatura aos outros. O citado Mark Polizzotti faz também uma defesa da tradução como defensora da diferença, contra a homogeneidade, fazendo uma reflexão associada aos nossos dias:

Dado que una frontera también puede ser vista como defensora de la diferencia, lo que más me preocupa y desconcierta es la penetración de la homogeneidad. La otra cara de la libre circulación, así como del contacto potencialmente infinito (lo que paradójicamente incluye el tipo de contacto que posibilita la traducción), es que también puede conducir a la erosión de la diversidad. Me preocupa la aparición de un mundo donde la traducción ya no sea realmente necesaria, no porque todos podamos hablar la misma lengua, sino porque las distintas lenguas del mundo ya no expresen las diferencias psicológicas y culturales que las hacían especiales e interesantes. Antes caractericé la traducción como un puente que une culturas y una medida de la distancia entre ellas. ¿Pero qué sucede cuando dicha distancia torna en insignificante? ¿Qué sucede cuando puedes ir a cualquier parte del mundo y encontrar el mismo McDonald's, el mismo Starbucks, el mismo H&M, la misma Apple Store, y -lo peor de todo- una misma perspectiva básica, sin importar si estás en París, Praga o Parsippany? ¿En semejantes condiciones, qué sentido tendría viajar ya físicamente, ya en las páginas de una novela extranjera? (Polizzotti, 2020, p. 139).

No quadro da teoria dos polissistemas, Itamar Even-Zohar reflecte sobre os processos de canonização de textos e autores, ou seja, a centralidade ou centralização do seu estatuto num determinado sistema e indica que a literatura canonizada é coagida pelos padrões culturais que regulam o comportamento das elites inovadoras. É o caso de Sophie e Hans em *El Viajero del Siglo* e da sua tentativa de incluírem o máximo possível de autores relevantes, independentemente da sua origem geográfica e linguística, e procurando evitar uma hierarquização de culturas. Trata-se, pois, de uma acção consciente e inovadora. Como diz Even-Zohar, a argumentação e reestruturação de um repertório através da introdução de novos elementos são expressões de um sistema inovador e resultam em produtos menos previsíveis, como seria esta antologia preparada pelas nossas personagens. Even-Zohar (1999b, p. 224) refere que as obras traduzidas relacionam-se pelo menos de duas formas: pela maneira como os textos de origem são seleccionados pela literatura receptora; e pelo modo como são adoptadas normas, hábitos e critérios, fruto das suas relações com outros co-sistemas locais. Os critérios de selecção das obras traduzidas são determinados pelo polissistema local, visto os textos serem escolhidos em função da sua compatibilidade com as novas tendências e o papel supostamente inovador que poderão assumir dentro da leitura receptora. Procurando aplicar esta concepção ao trabalho de Hans e Sophie, reconhecemos a tentativa de evitar a comum hierarquização de línguas e culturas e a preocupação com a visibilização e reconhecimento de determinados autores (mulheres, escritores de fora do centro da Europa, etc.). Javier Calvo, em *El Fantasma en el Libro* (2016), indica que a História da tradução pode ser lida como um conto: “La traducción empezó siendo un oficio de príncipes y de sabios, que la usaron a menudo para cambiar la Historia. Después estuvo en manos de los poetas y fue una modalidad de creación literaria que dio forma al canon del Occidente” (Calvo, 2016, p. 21). Hans e Sophie poderiam ter contribuído para esse cânone.

Sophie insiste em incluir poetas de língua espanhola na antologia, sugerindo a mexicana Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, freira feminista do México colonial, autora que contribuiria de forma original para o volume e que interessaria a jovens leitores, dando voz ao pensamento e sentimento de uma mulher: “En vez del enésimo Caballero cortés

alabando a su amada, una de esas chicas ausentes que no abren la boca en todo el poema, aquí es ella la que habla” (Neuman, 2019, p. 361). A antologia será o projecto mais especial partilhado por ambos. Quando Sophie, pressionada pelo pai e pelo noivo, decide espaçar mais os encontros com Hans, comenta que o que mais a incomoda é “dejar inacabada la antologia europea” (Neuman, 2019, p. 443). Ele anima-a: “Algún día la terminaremos” (p. 443). Na verdade, tal não acontece. Projecto duplamente utópico, portanto: por um lado, por implicar um gigantesco conhecimento de diferentes literaturas e um enorme volume de trabalho na busca de poetas e poemas de línguas dispersas por um extenso território, com o domínio de vários idiomas e a utilização de muito tempo nesse projecto; por outro, por não ser concretizado por esses parceiros na tradução e no amor. No derradeiro encontro de ambos, nas ruas de Wandernburgo, Hans conta que pediu a demissão à editora. Sophie pergunta de imediato pela antologia, desiludida face à improbabilidade da sua edição, mais do que a sua não participação nela.

Incluir Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz na antologia seria também contribuir para a formação de um cânone alternativo, um cânone ligeiramente menos androcêntrico. Porque, como conclui noutra ocasião Sophie, a propósito de Dorothea Schlegel e a impossibilidade de concluir a redacção de um romance, essa “es la historia de la literatura” (Neuman, 2019, p. 377). Ou seja, a história da ausência de condições para a criação de obras por mulheres e, caso sejam concretizadas, uma enorme tendência para a sua invisibilização e silenciamento. Trata-se, pois, de uma questão estrutural, não de situações e casos isolados. Joanna Russ, no seu *How to suppress women’s writing* (1983), contextualiza de forma genérica este fenómeno:

In a nominally egalitarian society the ideal situation (socially speaking) is one in which members of the “wrong” group have the freedom to engage in literature (or equally significant activities) and yet do not do so, thus proving that they can't. But alas, give them the least real freedom and they will do it. The trick thus becomes to make the freedom as nominal a freedom as possible and then – since some of the so-and-so’s will do it anyway – develop various strategies for ignoring, condemning, or belittling the artistic works that result. If properly done, these strategies result in a social situation in which the “wrong” people are (supposedly) free to commit literature, art, or whatever, but very few do, and those who do (it seems) do it badly, so we can all go home to lunch. (Russ, 2005, p. 4)

Como afirma Linda Nochlin em *Why have there been no great women artists?*, “the art is not a free, autonomous activity of a super-endowed individual, ‘influenced’ by previous artist, and, more vaguely and superficially, by ‘social forces’” (Nochlin, 1988, p. 158). Antes ocorre numa “social situation, are integral elements of this social structure, and are mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions” (Nochlin, 1988, p. 158).

## 6. Conclusão

Retomemos a imagem inicial da folha da árvore: a parte da frente, virada para o sol, corresponde ao texto do romance e a parte de trás, mais discreta e ainda mais elaborada,

à tradução, tendo nós introduzido uma perspectiva tridimensional com a tradução da tradução. Para Hans, a tradução é “un encuentro entre dos voluntades literarias” (Neuman, 2019, p. 317). Neste romance, nesta folha de árvore, são, na verdade, três as vontades literárias: a do autor, a das personagens-tradutoras e a dos tradutores para outras línguas, como para português. Se, como defende Rosemary Arrojo, a ficção é não apenas “a privileged form of theory, but, also, [...] a persuasive form of activism” (Arrojo, 2018, p. 35), a narrativa de Neuman (e as suas traduções para outras línguas) é a aplicação prática da ‘transmimese’ ou ‘transficção’, na medida em que dá conta ficcionalmente do processo tradutório e da representação multilinguística da realidade e dos textos e contribui para o tratamento literário da tradução e dos seus actores. Even-Zohar escreveu sobre os produtos produzidos pela literatura como campo de acção, nomeadamente os textos e os escritores. Acrescentaríamos também os tradutores. Diz o teórico que estes se comportam de acordo com modelos estabelecidos, mas também podem “llegar a ser los principales productores de un nuevo repertorio ‘literario’, y además del repertorio cultural general” (Even-Zohar, 1999a, p. 45), como seria o do processo de tradução ficcionalizado. O produto sociosemiótico mais importante da literatura está “en el nivel de las imágenes, modos, interpretaciones de la realidad y opciones de acción” (Even-Zohar, 1999a, p. 46), acrescenta. Portanto, podemos incluir a visibilização dos tradutores, do seu trabalho e das suas condições de trabalho, nomeadamente para quebrar o isolamento entre si e, quem sabe, aumentar o seu nível de organização e reivindicação.

Em relação a este último aspecto, podemos reflectir sobre as recentes polémicas a propósito de quem estaria ou não habilitado a traduzir a obra de Amanda Gorman, lida na tomada de posse de Joe Biden como presidente dos Estados Unidos. Embora se levante questões relevantes e normalmente sem palco mediático – desde logo, a tradução e o trabalho dos tradutores, bem como a marginalização de pessoas racializadas –, confunde-se discriminação com base no fenótipo com condições e acesso à educação (em particular ao ensino superior) e ao trabalho intelectual de determinados grupos, que em geral correspondem às classes sociais baixas (com pouca formação, horários de trabalho extensos e desregulados, salários baixos e precariedade laboral, numa herança geracional que se vai repetindo) em que se encontra grande parte das pessoas racializadas. Ou seja, confunde-se um essencialismo (determinada característica física inata, género ou orientação sexual) e a forma discriminatória como a sociedade o encara com as condições sociais objectivas (educação formal, conhecimento aprofundado da língua materna e de línguas estrangeiras e inclusive modelos ou referências pessoais em profissões intelectuais) que dão acesso a um trabalho concreto. Joana Simões Piedade, pensando o panorama português, considera que ‘quem deve/pode traduzir ou dobrar’ são:

todos aqueles apetrechados, com talento, formação e competência para tal devem (poder) fazê-lo. A questão fundamental é de outra ordem e deve orientar-nos para as relações de poder e de exploração que importa realmente desafiar. [...] As exclusões em razão da etnia são óbvias e agridem o quotidiano de afrodescendentes, ciganos e migrantes nas escolas, no emprego, na habitação (Piedade, 2021, n.p).

Uma das consequências da forma como a questão foi inicialmente colocada é contribuir para a continuidade dessas discriminações, pois negar a capacidade de traduzir um texto a alguém que não tem uma característica biográfica em comum com o autor implica também afirmar que quem não o possui não tem também a capacidade de compreender o texto, encerrando-o assim num círculo acessível apenas ao grupo restrito de quem tem a ‘chave’ e afastando à partida todos os restantes. Tal é precisamente o contrário do que pretende quem escreve um texto para ser lido por outros (exceptuando quem o faz para um grupo de ‘iniciados’, como no ocultismo) e é também o contrário da própria concepção de tradução, isto é, da criação de uma ponte que leva um texto a quem não tem condições linguísticas de o ler, tornando acessível o outro, o diferente de si. Um ‘diferente’ que o pode ser apenas linguisticamente, partilhando afinal muitos outros aspectos. Se se afirmar que somente o indivíduo ‘igual’ compreende o texto, fecha-se a porta à possibilidade de passar uma mensagem a alguém que não partilhe determinadas características (sendo necessário determinar que características concretas seriam essas no caso de cada texto) e conseqüentemente à própria tradução. E, como vimos ao longo do nosso artigo, o primeiro passo da tradução é a compreensão do texto. A escritora portuguesa Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida dizia, a propósito desta polémica, que a:

ideia de que autores negros não devem ser traduzidos por brancos implica uma posição recíproca inaceitável: a de que, como mulher negra, não me é reconhecida a capacidade (mais ainda, o direito) de traduzir, por exemplo, Rousseau ou Flaubert. [...] Imaginar que só uma mulher negra pode traduzir o que escrevo sugere que só uma mulher negra poderá compreender essa tradução e, portanto, que só posso ser entendida por leitoras negras. (Lucas, 2021, n.p)

O humorista Ricardo Araújo Pereira, numa crónica profundamente sarcástica, propunha-se criar anúncios a ser publicados por editoras, como “tradutor queniano branco zanolho para traduzir a lírica de Camões para suaíli” (Pereira, 2021, n.p) ou “tradutor alcoólico para traduzir obras de Edgar Allen Poe, Hemingway, Faulkner e Bukowski. A editora concede prazos generosos para concluir as traduções” (Pereira, 2021, n.p). “Mas o melhor mesmo talvez seja, à cautela, não traduzir nada. Como se fazia com a Bíblia, antigamente. No sagrado não se toca” (Pereira, 2021, n.p), concluía ironicamente.

Para Paul Ricœur, uma ‘universalidade’ adquirida através da tradução desejaria “suprimir a memória do estrangeiro e talvez o amor pela língua de cada um” (Ricœur, 2005, p. 19), uma ‘universalidade’ que nos transformaria em “estrangeiros de nós mesmos, em apátridas da linguagem, exilados que teriam renunciado à procura do asilo de uma língua de chegada. Em suma, nómadas errantes” (Ricœur, 2005, p. 20). Como Hans, portanto. Concluamos com uma passagem de *El Viajero del Siglo* profundamente visual e musical e que, de certa forma, corporiza estas considerações. Estando o tocador de realejo no seu leito de morte, conversa com Hans sobre as formas de denominar o seu instrumento em diferentes idiomas: *Leierkasyen* e *Drehorgel* (alemão), *organetto di Barberia* (italiano),

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*orgue de Barbarie* (francês), *straatorgel* (neerlandês), *lirekasse* (dinamarquês), *positiv* (sueco), *fatorgan* (norueguês), *katarynka* (polaco) e *barrel organ*, *fair organ*, *street organ* e *hurdy-gurdy* (inglês). Pensativo, o moribundo sorri: “Son muy bonitos, gracias, ya estoy mucho mejor” (Neuman, 2019, p. 501). A tradução surge, então, como alívio para quem não toca há muito tempo e sente saudades. A tradução como recriação, como multiplicação, como substituição do som do próprio realejo. Fechemos com uma passagem da curta “Nota sobre as traduções” de Vasco Gato, na versão portuguesa do romance: “Todas as línguas são uma ponte. Todos os poemas também” (Neuman, 2010, p. 523).

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## TRADUCCIÓN Y CREACIÓN EN *EL VECINO DE ABAJO*, DE MERCEDES ABAD

TRANSLATION AND CREATION IN *EL VECINO DE ABAJO*, BY MERCEDES ABAD

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**ABSTRACT:** This article analyses the representation of the translator as a fictional character in *El Vecino de Abajo* (2008), by the Catalan writer Mercedes Abad, focusing on the tensions between translation and creative authorship. Drawing on research on translators in fiction and on the concept of transfiction, the study examines how the novel stages the translator's loss of professional agency and her subsequent transition towards authorship. Using a qualitative textual analysis informed by Translation Studies and literary theory, the article explores the symbolic association between translation, constraint and survival, and between creative writing, empowerment and self-affirmation. The protagonist's abandonment of translation coincides with a reconfiguration of power relations between translator, author and editor, ultimately reinforcing a hierarchical opposition between translation and original creation. *El Vecino de Abajo* contributes to contemporary fictional imaginaries of translation by foregrounding the translator's desire for authorship and by dramatizing translation as a subordinate and transitory practice.

**KEYWORDS:** Author; Literature from Catalonia; Mercedes Abad; Translator; Transfiction

**RESUMEN:** Representación de la traductora como personaje de ficción en *El Vecino de Abajo* (2008), de la escritora catalana Mercedes Abad, mediante tensiones entre traducción y autoría creativa. Partiendo de investigaciones sobre traductores en la ficción y del concepto de transficción, se examina cómo la novela escenifica la pérdida como traductora y su posterior tránsito hacia la autoría. Mediante un análisis textual cualitativo informado por los Estudios de Traducción y la teoría literaria, se explora la asociación simbólica entre traducción, restricción y supervivencia, como entre escritura creativa, empoderamiento y autoafirmación. El abandono de la traducción por parte de la protagonista coincide con una reconfiguración de las relaciones de poder entre traductor, autor y editor, reforzando una oposición jerárquica entre traducción y creación original. Esta novela contribuye a los imaginarios ficcionales contemporáneos de la traducción destacando el deseo de autoría de la traductora y dramatizando la traducción como práctica subordinada y transitoria.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Autor; Literatura de Cataluña; Mercedes Abad; Traductor; Transficción

*Translation has tended to be regarded as the poor relation, as an activity involving little talent and creativity, as something that could be carried out by trained hacks and financially rewarded accordingly (Bassnett, 1993, p. 138).*

**Para Begonya y Ofélia**

### 1. Introducción

En los libros de nuestra infancia, el traductor era un nombre que aparecía mencionado y a veces abreviado con la sigla NT, diciéndonos, en las novelas de Enid Blyton, cómo eran los bizcochos que comían los cinco, qué significaba un 'pence' en las aventuras de los siete secretos, que en el colegio de las mellizas la 'miss' era la maestra... Se trataba de una

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entidad invisible (Venuti, 1994) tan secreta como las aventuras que leíamos, una especie de voz amiga que nos ayudaba a comprender universos desconocidos, repletos de nombres en cursiva que hacían más evidente el hecho de que eran extranjeros. Este discurso informativo, que puntuaba nuestro viaje como si de un guía turístico se tratara, solía aparecer al final de la página, en letras cuyo tamaño indicaba que lo que revelaban era también secreto. Sin embargo, el traductor no está siempre en una posición ancilar, muchas veces forma parte del universo de la ficción, apareciendo como personaje o como narrador.

En la introducción a *Transfiction: Research into the Realities of Translation Fiction*, Klaus Kaindl (2014) recuerda que, si bien la figura del traductor como personaje de ficción se remonta a obras del pasado, tales como la poesía épica alemana desde el siglo XII, textos conectados a la Expansión Ultramarina, en diversas lenguas, o el teatro de Shakespeare, es en el siglo XX cuando esta presencia gana fuerza tanto en la literatura como en el cine, ya desde la época muda. La cita del epígrafe, extraída de un ensayo donde Susan Bassnett reflexiona acerca de la evolución de la literatura comparada a los estudios de traducción, describe un estadio que toma forma a partir del siglo XVII y que perdura hasta los años 70 del siglo XX. En este momento, la teoría de los polisistemas (Even-Zohar, 1979), permite pensar la traducción de manera innovadora y plantear así cuestiones diferentes, como “What image do translators have of their work and how has that image been expressed figuratively?” (Bassnett, 1993, p. 142). Las obras ficcionales abren un nuevo espacio para dar respuesta a esta pregunta, por lo que a lo largo de los últimos años se ha reflexionado acerca del hecho de que cada vez haya más traductores e intérpretes como personajes de ficción, tanto en la literatura como en otras artes. Rosemary Arrojo afirma, siguiendo a Nitsa Ben-Ari, que la evolución más evidente tuvo lugar en la década de 70 del siglo pasado y con mayor expresión a partir de los años 90 (Arrojo, 2018, p. 539).

El creciente número de personajes traductores e intérpretes constituye un fenómeno que puede ser entendido en el marco de la globalización, de un mundo poscolonial caracterizado por el intenso desplazamiento en contextos tan diversos como la guerra, el turismo o la emigración. Dirk Delabastita considera que el éxito de los textos que convierten en ficción el movimiento y el encuentro de las personas con lenguas y culturas diversas se debe al hecho de que estas reflejan el modo de vida actual:

[...] translation has become a master metaphor epitomizing our present condition in a globalized and centreless context, evoking the human search for a sense of self and belonging in a puzzling world full of change and difference. (Delabastita, 2020 [1998], p. 192)

Klaus Kaindl defiende que esta presencia no se agota en la ficción: “Going beyond the fictional, we might also include (auto)biographies and memoirs of translators and interpreters or documentaries about translation and interpreting” (2014, p. 4). Este autor enumera diversos acercamientos de la literatura y del cine contemporáneos que se ocupan de la cuestión de la identidad en el ámbito de la traducción, y sostiene que la razón por la

cual los traductores e intérpretes son utilizados para tratar conflictos existenciales y contradicciones resulta de las características que tradicionalmente les son atribuidas:

They are invisible and ubiquitous, subordinate and powerful, faithful and dubious, oppressed and uncontrollable, and they can enable or prevent communication — in other words, they are changeable, oscillating beings that are hard to grasp because they are constantly in motion and have so many layers to them. (Kaindl, 2014, p. 9)

Porque estos personajes circulan en un mundo caracterizado por el cambio constante, por la flexibilidad/precariedad, por la ausencia de puntos de referencia que estructuraban la sociedad y a los individuos en el tiempo anterior a la modernidad líquida de la que habla Zygmunt Baumann (2000). El arte responde a la vida: “Contemporary literature is interested in questions of identity, in characters whose fragmented identities are a reflection of a fragmented modern world, in which displacement is a widespread phenomenon” (Strümper-Krobb, 2003, p. 117).

Este artículo analiza *El Vecino de Abajo* (2008), de Mercedes Abad, mediante un análisis textual cualitativo apoyado en los Estudios de Traducción y en el concepto de transficción, con el fin de examinar la representación de la traductora como personaje y los valores simbólicos asociados a la traducción y a la escritura creativa.

## **2. Traductores en algunos textos literarios**

Antes de analizar la novela que constituye el objeto de estudio de este artículo, haremos un breve repaso por otros textos significativos para el asunto que nos ocupa. Los textos seleccionados no pretenden constituir un panorama exhaustivo de la figura del traductor en la ficción, sino ilustrar diferentes configuraciones narrativas del traductor como personaje: el traductor como agente de poder histórico (*El Naranja*), el traductor como figura subalterna que reclama visibilidad (*La Vengeance du Traducteur*), y el traductor como profesional frustrado cuya práctica entra en conflicto con el deseo de autoría (*Un Amor*). Estos ejemplos permiten situar *El Vecino de Abajo* dentro de una constelación de ficciones que problematizan la relación entre traducción, poder y creación literaria.

*El Naranja* (1993), del autor mexicano Carlos Fuentes, habla del tiempo en que por vez primera la idea de globalidad gana fuerza, mediante las navegaciones y el descubrimiento de otros continentes. Escrita en 1992, pasados 500 años de la llegada de los europeos al continente americano, esta obra se compone por cinco relatos: “El factor común entre éstos es la aparición del naranja. Se utiliza como símbolo de la cultura transterrada al ser un árbol que ha recorrido el mundo y se ha integrado a múltiples culturas” (Alemán, 2017). Me detengo aquí en el primer de estos relatos, “Las dos orillas”, que sitúa la traducción en el centro de la acción, problematizando el papel que se otorga a la lengua y al lenguaje. Su narrador, que habla después de muerto, es Jerónimo de Aguilar, uno de los hombres que acompañan a Hernán Cortés, responsable de la caída del imperio azteca. Cuando se conocen, Jerónimo de Aguilar ya domina la lengua maya, por el hecho de haber estado viviendo como prisionero en México durante ocho años a causa de

un naufragio, y a partir de este momento le acompaña como traductor. Cuando Guatemuz, sobrino de Moctezuma, es capturado y llevado a la presencia de Cortés, Jerónimo de Aguilar, narrador del relato, tiene la función de intérprete:

Este indio joven y valiente, el último emperador de los aztecas, empezó a llorar pero Cortés le contestó que por haber sido tan valiente que viniera en paz a la ciudad caída y que mandase en México y en sus provincias como antes lo solía hacer.

Yo sé todo esto porque fui el traductor en la entrevista [...]. Traduje a mi antojo. No le comuniqué al príncipe vencido lo que Cortés realmente le dijo, sino que puse en boca de nuestro jefe una amenaza: —Serás mi prisionero, hoy mismo te torturaré, quemándote los pies igual que a tus compañeros, hasta que confieses dónde está el resto del tesoro de tu tío Moctezuma [...].

Añadí, inventando por mi cuenta y burlándome de Cortés: —No podrás caminar nunca más, pero me acompañarás en mis futuras conquistas, baldado y lloroso, como símbolo de la continuidad y fuente de legitimidad para mi empresa, cuyas banderas, bien altas, son oro y fama, poder y religión.

Traduje, traicioné, inventé. (Fuentes, 1993, p. 18)

En el texto de Carlos Fuentes, Jerónimo de Aguilar se sirve del estatuto de traductor para subvertirlo: falsea las palabras originales a fin de subrayar las verdaderas motivaciones de la conquista de México —el deseo de riqueza y la vanidad, compatibles con dos pecados capitales (la soberbia y la avaricia)—, lo que tácitamente cuestiona la dimensión religiosa de la empresa que forma parte de la justificación oficial. De hecho, el narrador repite el discurso oficial, pero lo cuestiona, es decir, lo invalida: “¿No hicimos más que darle su destino mejor al oro de los aztecas, arrancarlo de un estéril oficio para difundirlo, distribuirlo, otorgarle un propósito económico en vez de ornamental o sagrado, ponerlo a circular, fundirlo para difundirlo? (Fuentes, 1993, p. 42). La traducción que hace del discurso de Cortés busca distorsionar el original, pero lo que hace es adelantarse a la realidad, puesto que lo que Jerónimo de Aguilar dice al rey azteca, mintiendo, es lo que efectivamente ocurrirá:

[...] como así sucedió en efecto, convirtiéndose mis falsas palabras en realidad, ¿no tuve razón en traducir al revés al capitán y decirle, con mis mentiras, la verdad al azteca? ¿O fueron mis palabras, acaso, un mero trueque y no fui yo sino el intermediario (el traductor) y el resorte de una fatalidad que transformó el engaño en verdad? (Fuentes, 1993, p. 19)

Las palabras de Jerónimo de Aguilar se hacen premonitorias, como si hubieran creado la realidad, hecho que otorga al traductor un poder insospechado. Por eso la muerte crudelísima del rey azteca se debe a la afabulación de Jerónimo de Aguilar, para siempre, hasta después de muerto, asombrado por la culpa (subrayada por estar referida al inicio de párrafo):

El joven emperador fue el rey de burlas, arrastrado sin pies por la carroza del vencedor, coronado de nopales y al cabo colgado de cabeza, desde las ramas de una ceiba sagrada, como un animal cazado. Sucedió exactamente lo que yo, mentirosamente, inventé.

Por todo ello no duermo en paz. (Fuentes, 1993, pp. 19-20)

La responsabilidad, sin embargo, es (también) de una mujer, La Malinche, indígena a quien bautizaron para que pudiera ser, además de esclava de Hernán Cortés, su concubina; a partir de entonces es conocida como doña Marina. Esta figura histórica, tradicionalmente recordada por el papel que desempeñó en la conquista de México, se sirve del conocimiento de varias lenguas y de su posición para, además de traducir, mover influencias en el sentido de aproximar a los españoles a los pueblos indígenas, facilitando las aspiraciones de los primeros. Por este motivo, la narrativa histórica la ha recordado, durante muchos años, como traidora. Así, por ejemplo, el *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* de la Real Academia Española define ‘malinchismo’ como la “[A]ctitud de quien muestra apego a lo extranjero con menosprecio de lo propio”.<sup>1</sup> Originaria de Veracruz, Fuentes la introduce en la narrativa en el momento en que llega la “[...] noticia de un levantamiento de mexicanos en Veracruz contra la guarnición dejada allí por Cortés” (Fuentes, 1993, p. 24). En este episodio, doña Marina no traduce, sino que aconseja al rey azteca a que se rinda: “[...] esto se lo dijo la mujer al emperador por su propia iniciativa, no traduciendo a Cortés, sino hablando con fluidez la lengua mexicana” (Fuentes, 1993, p. 26). Mientras Jerónimo de Aguilar distorsiona el discurso original, y de esta manera lo traiciona, doña Marina ni siquiera finge traducir, y de esta manera también traiciona su función, además de traicionar a su pueblo, ayudando a los españoles. Se trata de traductores traicioneros al texto y a las personas, lo que por un lado los sitúa en el linaje del ‘*traduttore, traditore*’ y por otro lado les confiere un estatuto infiel que también caracteriza a muchos traductores ficticiales.

En los últimos años, aparecieron obras que ponen en jaque el espacio tradicionalmente reservado al traductor, reclamando más visibilidad para esta voz. El 2009, Brice Matthieussent publicó *La Vengeance du Traducteur*, título que desvela el proyecto de la narrativa. El traductor, que también asume la narración, empieza dando la bienvenida al lector desde el lugar que ocupa, el pie de página, un espacio inferior —“[...] sous cette fine barre noire” —, con mal aspecto —“[...] antre” —, más pequeño que el del narrador —“[...] pas aussi spacieux que chez mon voisin d’au-dessus” (Matthieussent, 2009, p. 13). Relegado desde siempre a la invisibilidad, en ausencia de una voz propia, le es exigido que sea una sombra sin cuerpo, que se mantenga subyugado y fiel al discurso que le cabe traducir:

J’évolue incognito, désincarné, fantôme obéissant et fidèle [...].

Ce n’est pas une vie, c’est à peine exister. Mes notes ? Des apparitions [...] fugaces [...] : les serviles explications de l’exégète transi par la foi. (Matthieussent, 2009, p. 14)

Su pregunta replica la del lector —cuya voz aparece mediatizada—, acostumbrado a ver al traductor en las notas, que no se cuestiona sobre si ese papel le hace justicia. La barra que separa el espacio del autor del que ocupa el traductor es el símbolo de

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<sup>1</sup> Disponible en: <https://dle.rae.es/malinchismo?m=form> (Consultado: 25 marzo 2022).

aprisionamiento de este último, y eso le lleva a desear responder con fuerza física a este obstáculo. Él, que no es más que una sombra, gana cuerpo para luchar por la extensión de su espacio vital:

[...] l'envie me vient de faire monter la barre en poussant du dos et des fesses. J'aimerais me relever, d'abord m'agenouiller, puis gagner la station verticale, rehausser cette maudite ligne d'horizon qui au bas de la page me confine dans la marge inférieure. (Matthieussent, 2009, p. 15)

La evolución que desea simular al ser humano, en el sentido de la verticalidad, que conlleva la adquisición de una voz para comunicar, en este caso con el lector. Dos páginas después, se apodera de la barra, al introducirla en la nota, es decir, el texto de la nota que escribe deja de ocupar el espacio al pie de la página: ahora es la nota a su nota la que lo ocupa. Su texto, que suele seguir un asterisco — “Chaque fois que j'apparais c'est après ce petit signe typographique en forme d'étoile, l'humble astérisque” (Matthieussent, 2009, p. 15) —, sigue ahora dos asteriscos, prueba de la conquista territorial del traductor, quien logra así subir un jalón que lo deja más cerca de la posición de autor.

En una novela reciente de Sara Mesa, *Un Amor*, la protagonista, Natalia, ha dejado un trabajo que no le gustaba, del cual la traducción era tan solo una parte: “Traducciones comerciales, correspondencia con clientes extranjeros, cosas así” (Mesa, 2021, p. 42). Al inicio de la acción intenta hacer su primera traducción literaria, tarea que coincide con un cambio de vida y que considera una evolución positiva: “La traducción comercial es puro trámite y esto..., bueno, lo que ella hace apunta a la esencia, hacia el meollo mismo del lenguaje” (Mesa, 2021, p. 44). Pese a ello, avanza poco, primero por estar adaptándose a su nueva casa —“Por las tardes se sienta a traducir una o dos horas. Nunca logra la concentración suficiente” (Mesa, 2021, p. 19)— y después por añorar a un hombre —“Con él fuera, tan cerca, le resulta imposible concentrarse. Tarda muchísimo en traducir cualquier frase, incluso las más simples. [...] Insiste, dando vueltas y vueltas en torno al mismo párrafo” (p. 83)—. La reflexión sobre el acto de traducir contradice el entusiasmo que se adivinaba por la traducción literaria, puesto que siente que el texto de partida le es impuesto y que traducir es estar constantemente en busca de la palabra justa, en una lucha de la que se adivina perdedora:

Le imponen las palabras que otra persona escribió antes que ella, palabras escogidas con cuidado [...]. Si quiere hacerlo bien [...], debe tener consideración con cada una de esas elecciones. Pero pensarlo así es llegar a la extenuación y la parálisis. [...] Cada palabra se convierte en enemiga y traducir es lo más parecido a batirse en duelo con una versión previa, y mejor, de su texto. Avanza con tanta lentitud que se desespera. ¿Es el calor, la soledad, la falta de confianza, el miedo? ¿O es, simplemente [...] su ineptitud, su torpeza? (Mesa, 2021, p. 27).

No sorprende demasiado que la protagonista acabe dejando este proyecto para dedicarse a cuidar de un matrimonio mayor: “Incapaz por completo de traducir, las horas

muerzas se convierten en pasto para la suspicacia. Con el fin de esquivarlas, se ofrece a echarle una mano al viejo Joaquín en el cuidado de su mujer y de la casa” (Mesa, 2021, p. 114), aunque al final tenga la intención de terminar “[...] la traducción de las piezas de teatro” (p. 183). Pese que a lo largo de la novela la cuestión de la traducción se menciona varias veces, esta ocupa un lugar tangencial en la trama. Sin embargo, Natalia se identifica con una galería de personajes traductores que problematizan su trabajo y que tienen una moral cuestionable: el hecho de haber robado en el pasado — “[...] sin necesidad, por un impulso. Nunca llegó a entender el motivo que la llevó a hacerlo” (Mesa, 2021, p. 43)— y de acostarse con un hombre (al menos aparentemente) para que este le haga una reparación doméstica — “Puedo arreglarte el tejado a cambio de que me dejes entrar en ti un rato” (p. 67)— la sitúan en una cierta amoralidad.

### **3. La traductora de *El Vecino de Abajo***

Al igual que las obras antes mencionadas, *El Vecino de Abajo* (2008), de la catalana Mercedes Abad, invita al lector a acercarse a la intimidad del personaje traductor, del cual no suele conocer más que el nombre: cómo trabaja, cómo es su vida cotidiana, lo que piensa, lo que siente. El libro propone una reflexión sobre la labor del traductor, su relación con el autor y el editor, y sobre lo que puede suponer el deslice de la posición de traductor para la de autor.

Esta novela está escrita en primera persona por la protagonista, una traductora que vive en un piso con su gata, Babilonia, nombre que remite al universo de la traducción, puesto que deriva de Babel, la ciudad plurilingüe, pero también al ruido, al desorden, al desentendimiento. El *incipit* — “Las obras comenzaron a traición un lunes a las ocho en punto de la mañana. No hubo preludios ni oberturas, nada que hiciera presagiar lo que se avecinaba” (Abad, 2008, p. 7)— introduce el motor de la narrativa de forma tan abrupta como el inicio de las propias obras. El ruido y el polvo hacen que aquel espacio sea difícil de habitar, lo que lleva a la protagonista a reaccionar y a emprender un recorrido que se revelará transformador. Veremos como *El Vecino de Abajo* convoca algunas cuestiones pensadas en el marco de la traductología.

En sintonía con el flujo contemporáneo, la narradora es desalojada de su casa, donde también trabaja, y se ve obligada a ‘exiliarse’. Acepta la oferta de Sergi, veterinario de su gata, para refugiarse en una casa aislada que pertenece a los padres del chico. No obstante, acostumbrada a la ciudad, en aquel entorno se siente aprisionada, observada, y durante una noche en que bebe demasiado rompe su ordenador, en el que tenía la traducción que estaba haciendo. Decide entonces regresar a casa, determinada a ocupar el espacio que es suyo por derecho, pero le espera la casa ocupada por Sergi: está allí no (solamente) por haber ido a dar de comer a Babilonia, sino (también) para estar con otra mujer. Sintiendo usurpada, expulsa al chico e intenta volver a trabajar para terminar, en un ordenador prestado, la traducción del autor que estaba traduciendo y que entre tanto ha ganado el premio Nobel. Al bajar la escalera de su casa para dirigirse a la biblioteca, donde busca tranquilidad, es asaltada por un hombre que está escondido en el rellano del piso en obras

y que la obliga a darle no solamente el dinero que lleva encima, sino también el valor máximo que el cajero automático permite sacar. Sintiendo desamparada por el hecho de que nadie — ni las fuerzas del orden, ni los transeúntes — la haya protegido, sea del caos provocado por las obras, sea del asaltante, se convence de que la fuente de todos sus males es *El Vecino de Abajo*, Miquel Aubet, a quien confiere el estatuto de enemigo. En la biblioteca no consigue concentrarse en la traducción, que le aburre más por estar siendo hecha por segunda vez, y el tiempo que podría dedicar al trabajo comienza a utilizarlo para odiar al vecino. Poco a poco, el odio y el deseo de venganza la invaden, por lo que empieza una guerra contra él con el objetivo de destruirlo. Esto a pesar de reconocer que el hombre — a quien llamará “rata de alcantarilla” (Abad, 2008, p. 78)— no le resulta desagradable:

Si al menos hubiera tenido la decencia de ser feo, cojo, viejo, si le hubiera ofrecido al mundo la imagen de un pobre diablo o me hubiera parecido remotamente triste, no me habría encendido tanto la sangre. Pero era joven, fuerte, había montado un restaurante que se había puesto rápidamente de moda y debía de reportarle considerables beneficios, llevaba ropa moderna y cara y sonreía. Sobre todo, sonreía [...]. (Abad, 2008, p. 75)

En *Construir al Enemigo*, Umberto Eco recuerda que la diferencia es la principal característica que define al enemigo: “Los enemigos son distintos de nosotros y siguen costumbres que no son las nuestras” (Eco, 2021, p. 8). Pero también señala que esta diferencia suele ser creada:

[...] se construyen como enemigos no tanto a los que son diferentes y que nos amenazan directamente [...], sino a aquellos que alguien tiene interés en representar como amenazadores aunque no nos amenacen directamente, de modo que lo que ponga de relieve su diversidad no sea su carácter de amenaza, sino que sea su diversidad misma la que se convierta en señal de amenaza (Eco, 2021, p. 8).

En el caso de esta novela, la protagonista se siente efectivamente amenazada, puesto que las obras en casa de su vecino, aunque involuntariamente, acaban con su tranquilidad y hacen peligrar su salud. Pero admite que el hombre no corresponde *per se* a esa figura, puesto que evoca la ausencia de fealdad, una característica atribuida a los enemigos a lo largo de la historia y estudiada en el ensayo de Eco:

El enemigo debe ser feo porque se identifica lo bello con lo bueno (*kalokagathia*), y una de las características fundamentales de la belleza ha sido siempre lo que la Edad Media denominará *integritas* (es decir, tener todo lo que se requiere para ser un representante medio de una especie, por lo cual, entre los humanos, serán feos los que carecen de un miembro, de un ojo, tienen una estatura inferior a la media o un color ‘deshumano’). (Eco, 2021, p. 9)

Así, lo instituye como enemigo recurriendo a los rasgos que lo hacen diferente de ella: la situación financiera, que adivina estable (al contrario de la suya), y el hecho de estar feliz y sonreír, gesto que señala como lo que más le incomoda de él. La importancia que le

atribuye se refleja en el hecho de que la sonrisa de su vecino aparece de nuevo en dos momentos clave de la narración: el primero marca el inicio de la bajada al infierno de la narradora, que veremos en seguida, y el segundo en el *excipit*, que se comentará más adelante.

El gusto de la protagonista por el orden —que hace que la situación provocada por las obras sea más intolerable aún— la lleva, como era su costumbre, a coger del suelo una bolsa abandonada para tirarla a la basura. Al ver que contiene botellas de tinta roja en spray, se le ocurre la idea de hacer un grafiti insultando al vecino de abajo para que la situación se haga pública. Consciente de que se trata de un acto importante, se viste como si fuera a una fiesta. La intervención de dos policías le impide escribir las últimas letras de la palabra que así queda incompleta —“AUBET, HIJOPUTA, REY DE LOS CABRONES, TE VOY A BORRAR LA SONRISA HACIENDO QUE TE TRAGUES LOS COJ” (Abad, 2008, pp. 95-96)—, pero la violencia con que responde, un puntapié con el puntero de la bota, hace que sea detenida y posteriormente llevada al juzgado. Convencida de que está siendo tratada injustamente, puesto que nadie la defiende de los ataques que va sufriendo, todos directa o indirectamente causados por el vecino de abajo, recusa contestar y queda detenida dos semanas durante las cuales tiene tiempo para seguir odiando a Miquel Aubet, con una “[...] rabia no exenta de voluptuosidad” (Abad, 2008, p. 115).

Al salir de la cárcel, en lugar de aceptar asilo en otra casa, opta por resistir y, con la ayuda de tranquilizantes, ocupa el espacio que, por el ruido y por el exceso de polvo, ni durante la noche deja de serle hostil. En simultáneo, con la ayuda de personas que se le alían, emprende un plan creativo y meticuloso para vengarse de su enemigo. Hay que subrayar el hecho de que la venganza le proporciona disfrute físico y de que tiene un comportamiento que puede ser considerado del orden de la ausencia de moral, lo que retoma un estereotipo que a veces se atribuye al acto de traducir. Rosemary Arrojo defiende que el texto de llegada como traición al texto de partida se refleja en el perfil más o menos promiscuo de los personajes traductores: “the translator as an amoral traitor unable to fully commit to texts and sexual partners” (2018, p. 546). Posteriormente, la protagonista tiene la idea de crear, en sociedad con su vecina actriz, una agencia de venganzas a medida denominada Vengatrix. Poco tiempo después deben cerrarla a causa de una denuncia y abren una versión más discreta, que funciona exclusivamente en línea. Respecto a su vecino, coordina una red de espionaje destinada a su anihilación. Cansado de sufrir tantas desgracias, que cree tratarse de casualidades, Miquel Aubet pone el piso en venta, sin llegar a concluir las obras.

Los traductores e intérpretes que viven en las obras de ficción suelen estar en esta profesión no por gusto —“[...] translation is often pursued only as a second or third professional choice” (Arrojo, 2018, p. 544)—, sino por necesidad financiera o psicológica: algunos albergan el sueño de convertirse en autores, ocupando un lugar que consideran más elevado en el podio de las actividades literarias —“given the frequent lack of social recognition of the translator’s work, how to resist frustration and the temptation to usurp the original author’s role” (Delabastita, 2020, p. 192)—; otros traducen porque desistieron

de perseguir ese sueño; pero hay también quienes pasan de autores a traductores para tener una vida anónima y tranquila. Si hasta la llegada del Romanticismo el autor no se beneficiaba de ningún privilegio por la originalidad de su obra, a partir de los años 60 del siglo XX la frontera entre autor y traductor se difumina, abriendo espacio a la complejización de estas dos entidades:

[...] the growing prominence of postmodernism and post-structuralism led to moves away from the reification of solitary genius [...], the distinctions and hierarchy between author and translator likewise shift and become indeterminate. (Wakabayashi, 2011, p. 87)

En el artículo citado, la autora analiza un corpus de treinta y dos obras de ficción, distinguiendo varios tipos de relaciones entre autor y traductor, entre ellas el traductor como “writer *manqué*” (Wakabayashi, 2011, pp. 90-91) y la traducción como “refuge from writing” (pp. 91-92). En la novela de Mercedes Abad, la protagonista traduce por necesidad económica, y deja de hacerlo en cuanto se da cuenta de su imaginación y de su capacidad para ser autora. De no haberla descubierto, seguiría siendo uno de los referidos escritores *manqués*. La cuestión laboral es enfocada mediante el arrepentimiento de la narradora por no haber osado aceptar la propuesta de una amiga para fundar una editorial: por miedo a perder un trabajo regular, había recusado entrar en la aventura de la edición, terminando por distanciarse de su amiga —a quien se refiere como “ex gran amiga” (Abad, 2008, p. 62)—, y ahora ve que el negocio prospera y que, en lugar de ser una de las propietarias, trabaja para esa misma editorial, pero como traductora. Como el autor del libro que estaba traduciendo recibe el Premio Nobel, tiene la esperanza de que las ventas le proporcionarán la mejor remuneración de su vida, no dejando de notar con ironía que “[...] el porcentaje que reciben los traductores sobre las ventas no es como para disparar cohetes” (Abad, 2008, p. 87).<sup>2</sup>

La mala relación del traductor con el autor aparece representada en el encuentro inesperado entre un autor y la protagonista, poco después de haber esta salido de la prisión. Al preguntarle cómo está, ella contesta así:

— Cabreada [...]. Y tú también deberías estar cabreado en vez de sonreír estúpidamente. Hace por lo menos cinco años que no ganas ningún premio y los críticos alaban de forma tan unánime como cansina tus últimas obras, que ya nadie compra. Incluso tu más feroz enemigo ha dejado de escribir aquellas furiosas diatribas contra ti. Estás acabado [...] (Abad, 2008, p. 208).

Cuando se extiende el rumor de que está escribiendo un libro, su amiga se interesa por publicarlo, y le hace un adelanto:

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<sup>2</sup> El rol del mercado en las transicciones ha sido abordado por D. Kripper: “En ellas hay descripciones detalladas sobre el trabajo del traductor: qué traducen, cómo lo hacen, cuándo y por cuánto, y se suele profundizar en descripciones laborales, como la cantidad de palabras traducidas por hora, la cantidad de horas trabajadas por día, o la cantidad de traducciones necesarias para poder subsistir; son las marcas de una labor que no es de ninguna manera independiente del mercado en el que se inserta y por donde circula” (Kripper, 2017, p. 177).

Le había mentido al darle a entender que el libro existía, pero ¿qué me impedía escribirlo? La idea de que un libro naciera precisamente de un rumor infundado me parecía una broma colosal (Abad, 2008, p. 219).

Empieza entonces a materializar el libro que todos pensaban que estaba escribiendo, pasando de esta manera de traductora a escritora. Así es como empieza a problematizar el trabajo del editor —que al dar consejos para mejorar la obra del autor estaría de alguna manera expresando su deseo de escribir también un texto original—, dándose cuenta de la envidia que Clara (la editora) siente por no conseguir escribir un texto original:

[...] a mi ex gran amiga no le hacía ni puñetera gracia el hecho de que me convirtiera en autora, de lo que deduje que quizá ella también acariciaba en secreto el sueño de escribir. Puede incluso que ya lo hubiera intentado y hubiera fracasado en el empeño (Abad, 2008, p. 219).

A medida que escribe, la protagonista descubre su enorme creatividad, se descubre autora, experimenta la necesidad y la urgencia de escribir:

Tuve que entrar en la primera librería que encontré para comprar urgentemente una libreta y más o menos cada trescientos metros me veía obligada a detenerme y a garabatear notas con furiosa y atropellada energía, sentada en un banco si tenía la suerte de pasar junto a alguno, de pie las más de las veces (Abad, 2008, p. 258).

La frontera entre el antes y el después de ser escritora es marcada por la compra de un ordenador: “Me gustaba la idea de escribir la novela en un aparato completamente nuevo donde jamás había hecho traducciones ni ninguna otra de las cosas con las que antes me ganaba la vida” (Abad, 2008, p. 257). Se trata de una refundación de sí misma, de un renacer. Por eso, mientras se encuentra inmersa en el proceso de escritura deja de oír el ruido de las obras —“Durante los tres días que había pasado consagrada a la creación literaria no había vuelto a oír ningún ruido en el piso de abajo” (Abad, 2008, p. 257)— y de interesarse por los relatos de la vida cotidiana del vecino, que cada día recibe de sus espías —“[...] suspendí la orden de vigilar a Aubet para poder dedicarme a la novela sin las interrupciones que suponían los relatos de mis colaboradores” (Abad, 2008, p. 264). La escritura tiene aquí una función salvadora. Por eso, la venganza contra el vecino de abajo da lugar al reconocimiento, porque sin él nunca hubiera cambiado de profesión. A medida que siente más seguridad en sí misma como escritora, la protagonista deja de sentir placer en la destrucción del que veía como enemigo. Es por esa razón que en el *excipit* aparece ayudando al vecino, sonriendo, y él agradeciéndole y sonriéndole a ella también, en una escena que recupera de manera especular el momento en que lo ve por primera y se siente incomodada por su sonrisa.

#### 4. Conclusión

Quizás se pueda establecer una relación, por un lado, entre escritura creativa original e inspiración/afirmación/poder (razón por la cual el ruido de las obras deja de incomodar a la protagonista) y, por otro, entre traducción y supervivencia/obligación/revuelta/falta de poder. Así, la novela de Mercedes Abad plantea un viaje de autodescubrimiento en el cual la traducción es entendida de manera subsidiaria y casi como una molestia –síntoma de un mal que atormenta al personaje–, disimulando el deseo íntimo del traductor en afirmarse como autor: “Era libre de cambiar y, desde luego, no pensaba desaprovechar semejante oportunidad” (Abad, 2008, p. 257), “Escribir es lo único que puedo hacer ahora. No tengo otra opción” (p. 263).

En lugar de pensar la traducción, esta novela se ocupa de la traductora como personaje de ficción, protagonista de una transformación que le otorga poder y que la sitúa en un lugar distanciado del segundo plano del traductor que escribía las NT mencionadas al principio de este artículo. Se trata de un gesto contemplado por Denise Kripper:

Analizar el rol del traductor como personaje de ficción [...] permite ver las circunstancias de poder y manipulación que se batían a fuerza en el momento mismo de la escena de traducción. Atendemos entonces a un cambio en apariencia menor, pero en realidad fundamental de perspectiva: de la traducción, se pasa a hablar del traductor (Kripper, 2017, pp. 175-176).

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## O TRADUTOR, REBAIXADO FUNCIONÁRIO DA PALAVRA ESCRITA

### THE TRANSLATOR, A DEMOTED FUNCTIONARY OF THE WRITTEN WORD

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**ABSTRACT:** The novel by João Reis *A Noiva do Tradutor* (2015) narrates in a disorderly flow in the head of an unnamed translator, in a city without explicit reference, somewhere in the interwar period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He presents himself between the precarious and subaltern situation of his writing work and the mocking anger with which he observes the inhabitants and social webs of the city where he lives. It is in this condition that such a character leads us to possible parallels with well-known characters of literary modernity – Bartleby, Wakefield, Raskolnikov, the protagonist of *Hunger*, by Knut Hamsun, Gregor Samsa – but also to the legacy of several ‘tired functionaries’ of twentieth-century Portuguese literature, such as Pessoa's semi-heteronym in *The Book of Disquiet* (1982).

**KEYWORDS:** Fictional Translator, Modernist Antihero, Tired Employee (Theme), Narrator's Reliability

**RESUMO:** A novela de João Reis *A Noiva do Tradutor* (2015) faz a narração em fluxo desordenado na cabeça de um tradutor sem nome, numa cidade sem referência explícita, algures no período entreguerras do século XX. Apresenta-se ele entre a situação precária e subalterna do seu trabalho de escrita e a cólera escarninha com que observa os habitantes e as teias sociais da cidade onde vive. É nesta condição que tal personagem nos leva a paralelos possíveis com personagens bem conhecidas da modernidade literária – Bartleby, Wakefield, Raskolnikov, o protagonista da *Fome*, de Knut Hamsun, Gregor Samsa –, mas também à herança de vários ‘funcionários cansados’ da literatura portuguesa de novecentos, como o semi-heterónimo pessoano do *Livro do Desassossego* (1982).

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Tradutor Ficcional, Anti-Herói Modernista, Funcionário Cansado (Tema), Fiabilidade Do Narrador

#### **1. Ficcionalizações do tradutor na literatura portuguesa contemporânea**

É muito desafiante que, na contemporaneidade, as ficções que dão evidência à personagem do tradutor se tenham tornado num espaço de indagação teórica dos Estudos de Tradução e da Literatura, nomeadamente na sua dimensão comunicativa. Os artigos reunidos em volume por Klaus Kaindl e Karlheinz Spitzl (2014), assim como os estudos de Rosemary Arrojo (2018) e Denise Kripper (2023) são bastante elucidativos acerca dessa tendência ficcional nos nossos dias.

A tradução ficcionada passou a ser um dispositivo literário em que a figura marginalizada do tradutor permite questionar a soberania da figura autoral, chegando a subverter o espaço exíguo da nota-de-rodapé a que a sua expressão explícita

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convencionalmente se reduz.<sup>1</sup> Assim se questiona a desconfiança histórica sobre os tradutores, cristalizada no adágio *traduttore, traditore*, e, por essa via, as relações de poder inerentes às ideias de autoria e fidelidade, assim como às hierarquias sociais e culturais que determinam a produção e circulação das traduções.

Mais recentemente, a tradução, determinada no seu exercício pela fluidez cultural e espacial, pela precariedade laboral e desvalorização social, ganhou o estatuto de grande metáfora da contemporaneidade. Facilmente ela se associa, como o fez Kaindl (2014, p. 2), à experiência descentrada da modernidade a que Zygmunt Bauman (2006) chamou líquida, marcada pela mudança acelerada, por relações sociais, económicas e de produção fugazes e superficiais. Não por acaso se têm elaborado ficcionalmente a transacção económica que liga tradução e mercado e também a coexistência multilingue, no seio de um mesmo grupo social ou de um mesmo território, e os impactos de fluxos migratórios inerentes a uma globalização em regra predadora da vida social e da natureza.

A evidência contemporânea da figura e da actividade de quem traduz converge, então, com um entendimento do literário como fenómeno comunicativo, na medida em que o tradutor interfere, por força, na recepção do texto junto do público da língua de chegada.<sup>2</sup> Justamente por isso faz sentido reconhecermos afinidades entre a valorização ficcional do tradutor e princípios norteadores da Literatura-Mundo. Não é forçado assinalar essa sintonia com esta que é uma das linhas avançadas da Literatura Comparada: lembremos que ela se interessa pelas apropriações e diálogos literários, para lá das fronteiras nacionais e da ideia simplista de influência, pelas circunstâncias de recepção das obras literárias e dos bens culturais, sabendo que é assimétrica a posição de autores e textos e desigual o peso de línguas e culturas num sistema de circulação transnacional (cf. Jobim, 2017).

Se tivermos em conta a pesquisa que Maria Antónia Hörster tem dedicado à presença do tradutor na poesia, na ficção e no diário portugueses dos séculos XX e XXI, chegamos à conclusão de que, no contexto da literatura portuguesa, não há cabimento para falarmos de um *fictional turn* que tenha por centro a figura do tradutor. Num ensaio de 2011 Hörster confirma que são escassos os exemplos portugueses e que neles é constante a representação realista das condições precárias em que o tradutor exerce a sua função, reduzido a expediente de sobrevivência — como no romance *As Monstruosidades Vulgares* (1960), de José Régio —, ou de contextos especiais em que a tradução tem relevância. Assim sucede na sala de aula de uma língua estrangeira, recriada por Cristóvão

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<sup>1</sup> Lembramos, a título de exemplo, os contos do brasileiro Moacyr Scliar (*Notas ao Pé da Página, Contos Reunidos*, 1995) ou do argentino Rodolfo Walsh (*Nota al pie, Un Kilo de Oro*, 1967), estudados por Arrojo (2018) e Kripper (2023), respectivamente.

<sup>2</sup> Não por acaso, José Saramago, também ele relevante tradutor nas décadas de 1950-1980, sublinhou, nos seus *Cadernos de Lanzarote - Diário V*, a relação entre o escritor e o tradutor como “um diálogo entre duas entidades individuais que hão-de completar-se, [e] sobretudo um encontro entre duas culturas colectivas que devem reconhecer-se” (1998, p. 53). É por ter uma compreensão destas duas figuras no quadro do circuito comunicativo da literatura que Saramago defende que “os escritores fazem as literaturas nacionais e os tradutores [,] a literatura universal” (José Saramago cited in Gómez Aguilera, 2010, p. 198).

Aguiar, no conto “Uma chamada na aula de Inglês”, recolhido na colectânea *A Descoberta e Outras Histórias* (1992).

Na fita do tempo seguida por Maria António Hörster, o marco ficcional pioneiro situa-se no romance de Maria da Graça Azambuja, *Bárbara Casanova* (1954). Aí, os constrangimentos do trabalho da jovem protagonista, em luta pela sobrevivência, não impedem que a tradução literária seja para ela um “acto verdadeiramente libertador e [...] instrumento de encontro com o mais fundo de si mesmo, habitualmente reservado à escrita dita original” (Hörster, 2011, p. 649). Deve-se esse conceito positivo da tradução ao encontro com a beleza potenciado pelos textos vertidos pela personagem, ao contrário do que sucede em *As Monstruosidades Vulgares*, em que estão em causa textos romanescos menores. Ao mesmo tempo, a obra de Maria da Graça Azambuja sinaliza ficcionalmente alguns traços positivos na evolução sócio-cultural daquele tempo português: o caminho, mesmo que comedido, de emancipação feminina e a relativa expansão do mercado editorial português, registada desde o período da II Guerra Mundial, não obstante os constrangimentos materiais e políticos impostos pela ditadura salazarista.<sup>3</sup>

Em “Tradutores e tradução na literatura portuguesa dos séculos XX e XXI”, de forma bastante sucinta, Maria António Hörster salienta, já no séc. XXI, *Boa Noite, Senhor Soares* (2008), de Mário Cláudio. No seu entender, a curiosidade da novela vem do facto de ela se vincular a um modelo literário anterior, o *Livro do Desassossego*, e a várias personagens suas, em especial Bernardo Soares. O livro parte, aliás, de um fragmento daquela espécie de diário pessoano que relata a despedida de António, o aprendiz de caixeiro do armazém de tecidos onde trabalha Soares, recriado como “tradutor comercial que é, para além disso, um grande poeta, ou melhor, [...] um grande poeta que era, para além disso, um tradutor comercial” (Hörster, 2011, p. 655). Será aquela personagem subalterna, outrora jovem, que assume a narração retrospectiva: é sob o seu olhar deslumbrado que chegamos à Baixa lisboeta dos anos 1920-1930 e ao tradutor que devia transpor expressões antiquadas ou converter medidas de comprimento, exigidas pela correspondência com firmas inglesas. Revelava-se, deste modo, ao narrador um Senhor Soares estranho, circunspecto, retraído, mas também delicado e humano, tendo-o descoberto na privacidade da sua casa e a exercer funções que implicavam, no fundo, uma posição marginal na hierarquia do escritório do patrão Vasques, na Rua dos Douradores.

É assim que Mário Cláudio nos conduz numa irresistível aproximação ao semi-heterónimo pessoano e, por interposta personagem, a Fernando Pessoa, também ele tradutor de profissão que, assegurando desse modo o sustento, podia “descolar e seguir em viagem mental para outras criações” (Hörster, 2011, p. 656). Quer isto dizer que, em

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<sup>3</sup> Note-se que para essa expansão editorial contribuem dois factores. De um lado, o livro de bolso, em particular, da colecção *Os Livros das Três Abelhas*, fundada em 1949, por Victor Palla e José Cardoso Pires para a editorial Gleba e, depois, para as Publicações Europa-América, com inegável projecção nas décadas de 1950 e 1960. Do outro, as antologias e colecções de autores estrangeiros contemporâneos (não raro, de narrativa breve e/ou autobiográfica) em que, desde inícios da década de 1940, se destacaram editoras como a Portugália ou a Livraria Tavares Martins e personalidades como Fernanda de Castro, João Gaspar Simões, Cabral do Nascimento ou Manuela Porto, no papel de tradutores ou prefaciadores.

*Boa Noite, Senhor Soares*, não interessam tanto a tradução (comercial, neste caso) e os requisitos inerentes à transposição linguístico-cultural, mas sim a reinvenção da atmosfera social e emocional do protagonista e enunciador do *Livro do Desassossego*, que exerce uma actividade baça e rotineira, em contraste radical com a potência transfiguradora da poesia, cultivada nas horas vagas.

## **2. O caso de *A Noiva do Tradutor* de João Reis**

A vida dissonante e rebaixada, própria dos heróis modernistas, encontramos-la igualmente reinventada num romance mais recente, não assinalado nos estudos de Maria António Hörster: *A Noiva do Tradutor*, de João Reis. Publicado em 2015 pela Companhia das Ilhas, uma pequena editora sediada no arquipélago dos Açores, este romance de estreia do seu autor, tradutor freelancer de línguas nórdicas e inglês para português, ganhou alguma projecção em Portugal, ao ser reeditado, em 3ª. ed., pela Elsinore (uma das chancelas da Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial), em 2019, ano em que é traduzido pelo próprio João Reis para uma edição nos EUA, a que se segue a edição brasileira, no ano seguinte. Em 2021, o livro foi também publicado na Geórgia e na Sérvia.

*A Noiva do Tradutor* faz a narração em fluxo desordenado na cabeça de um tradutor sem nome, algures no período entre guerras do século XX e numa cidade sem referência explícita (que pode bem ser Lisboa), onde chove sem cessar. O protagonista apresenta-se entre o complexo de inferioridade com que vê o seu trabalho de escrita e a cólera escarninha com que observa os habitantes e as teias sociais da cidade e do universo cultural por onde transita. A enunciação narrativa transcreve a torrencialidade relativa do seu pensamento, na primeira pessoa, em frases longas, vertiginosas, corais em certas passagens. Com elas presentifica derivas no espaço e no pensamento, ao mesmo tempo que introverte toda a representação da realidade circundante. Reproduzimos um excerto do capítulo II em que o narrador se encontra num mísero e soturno quarto alugado, onde trabalha horas a fio:

[...] trabalho à luz da vela, no inverno, esforço os olhos no meu quatinho bafiento e escuro, não há respeito pelo trabalho de um homem, não, traduzir não é trabalho de pessoa séria, afinal, porque é que me pagam para escrever uns gatafunhos, verter na nossa nobre língua cartas comerciais, faturas, obras literárias do maior calibre, deixe-se disso, homem, pegue numa enxada, faça-se doutor das artes médicas, já não precisaria de dormir neste quarto infeto, alugado pela senhora Lucrecia, viúva que parasita os pobres inquilinos, falando-se no diabo, lá vem ela a descer as escadas, a megera parece um elefante, um rinoceronte [...] (Reis, 2019, p. 19)

Vive, portanto, um quotidiano marginal e precário, feito de privações, de frio e do sacrifício de traduzir para a sua língua textos que na maioria acha medíocres, em horários desregulados, com prazos absurdos e honorários parcos e pagos a desoras. Atormenta-o a repugnância que sente por mulheres e homens com quem tem de conviver e que desenha com o traço grosso e ressentido do grotesco. Transita numa paisagem urbana (por ordem, no eléctrico, na pensão, no banco, na cartomante, nos editores, no café, no cais) onde

sobressaem as figuras humanas. Avalia-as como observador hipersensível, desconectado e implacável, enquanto, a todo o custo, tenta dissimular a discrepância que vive entre os seus actos e os seus pensamentos.

Tem de sujeitar-se à lógica perversa do mundo editorial, feito de idiotas bem-sucedidos, compadrios e promiscuidades com a crítica literária e onde imperam editores que, na sua caricatura, nada deixam a desejar a figuras fáusticas.<sup>4</sup> Em todo o caso, se este *eu* se autodeprecia, “não passo de um mero tradutor na escuridão” (Reis, 2019, p. 38), e se se sente vítima do desprezo social pela função que desempenha, vendo-se no fundo da escala da engrenagem, ao lado do tipógrafo e da mulher da limpeza, se, em suma, se mostra “afundado em papéis” (Reis, 2019, p. 25), é neles e na tarefa ingrata de traduzir que encontra o único traço definidor da sua identidade. Atormentado inclusive pelas palavras com que trabalha e de cujo significado continuamente se esquece, o próprio o admite: “[...] as possibilidades eram tantas na minha juventude, poderia ser tudo, acabei no nada, sim, sou tradutor, sou aquilo que faço e não sou ninguém, sou um nome numa folha de papel [...]” (Reis, 2019, p. 94).

Trata-se, sem dúvida, de um misantropo, adoentado e hipocondríaco, obcecado pela partida, num navio para destino incógnito, da noiva que idealiza. À imagem de Helena de Tróia, ela é um ideal de beleza e perfeição e o seu afastamento leva ao falhanço do protagonista. A evocação da partida da noiva é, por isso, um dos *leitmotive* do romance, chamado para título e constante até ao epílogo em que assomam a loucura e/ou o provável suicídio do tradutor, quando procura juntar-se à noiva e se prepara, no cais, para “nadar e percorrer todo o azul profundo do mar” (Reis, 2019, p. 120).

A este propósito, Marta Pacheco Pinto aventa a hipótese de um desenlace redentor em que a água é o destino final do protagonista, até então atingido pela inabilidade emocional face à perda amorosa, à estrutura económica que enquadra a sua actividade e à estreiteza mental que o rodeia: “the baptismal waters [...] would endow the baptized individual with an identity” (Pinto, 2022, p. 250). Ao não referir explicitamente que a novela em estudo coloca o problema da fiabilidade do narrador, esta leitura de base comparatista e assente numa *close reading* é, nosso ver, demasiado assertiva quanto à possibilidade de um desfecho positivo da novela de João Reis. Vejamos porquê.

Na óptica da ensaísta, o corpus estudado (em que constam também um conto e um romance de duas autoras japonesas, Yoko Tawada e Yoko Ogawa, já estudados por Rosemary Arrojo (2018) tem em comum um epílogo semelhante para as personagens tradutoras, todas elas anónimas e excluídas na e da sociedade. Ao lançarem-se à água, encontram, no fim do relato, a resolução do conflito entre arte e ética e um escape à sua “inability to cope with the responsibility of translation and/or the in/visibility it entails” (Pinto, 2022, p. 266), na sociedade e na história. Nessa linha, o tradutor de João Reis

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<sup>4</sup> Sem fazer uma conexão biografista entre os planos textual e do autor empírico, é interessante assinalar que, numa entrevista à Agência Lusa, em 2022, o romancista João Reis tenha expressado uma posição muito crítica sobre o universo literário português, acusando-o de nepotismo, favorecimento dos ‘mesmos de sempre’ e falta de reconhecimento do seu trabalho junto dos pares.

acabaria a rejeitar a condição de ser neutral, que lhe é eticamente exigida pelo exercício da sua profissão: “the non-explicit drowning appeases the translator’s restlessness and puts an end to his hectic life and sorrow as both a failed man and a failed translator” (Pinto, 2022, p. 266). Ora, para todos os efeitos, ao longo da trama, a tensão narrativa vai sendo manejada de modo a revelar um crescendo de alienação de que o protagonista-narrador sofre, perseguido por visões e odores e cada vez mais convencido de que está a enlouquecer. E, sendo assim, o lance derradeiro é suficientemente indefinido, em aberto e eufemístico, para não descartar a hipótese trágica do suicídio e para poder asseverar com clareza a redenção da personagem.

### 3. Comunicações com a linhagem modernista do funcionário cansado

Como se lê na recensão da edição brasileira de *A Noiva do Tradutor*, na *Folha de S. Paulo*, a “literatura moderna está cheia de personagens como esta vagando sem nome, arrogante e humilhado rebaixado funcionário da palavra escrita sujeito ao poder dos outros” (Erber, 2021, s.p). Laura Erber concretiza esta apreciação, quando se refere ao diálogo hipertextual do romance em presença com a tradição literária moderna. Fala, inclusive, de uma relação “intensa” e “vertiginosa” (2021, s.p) da obra com o escritor norueguês Knut Hamsun,<sup>5</sup> a ponto de poder ser uma sua versão contemporânea e daí resultar “um livro antiquadamente moderno ou modernamente antigo” (Erber, 2021, s.p).

Faz muito sentido seguir esta pista de leitura e desde logo, como defende aquela crítica brasileira, ter por referência *Fome* (1890), o primeiro livro de Hamsun, que viria a ganhar o Nobel da Literatura trinta anos depois, em 1920. O seu protagonista não tem nome, casa ou trabalho, e vai para a cidade, aparentemente, para se tornar escritor. Quase chega a enlouquecer (ou enlouquece, não se sabe ao certo): deambula perdido nas ruas de Kristiania (hoje Oslo), enregelado de frio, tolhido pela fome e pela apoquentação constante de ter de pagar a renda do quarto e garantir a refeição seguinte. Desenhado sob a forma crua de monólogo interior que revela as variações de humor e momentos de delírio da personagem, *Fome* não abre espaço para a denúncia social. Parece haver até intenção de o protagonista-aspirante às letras se expor aos limites da sua resistência. Procura, em contrapartida, dar relevo à “distorsion et [...] la fragmentation de la cohérence de la ville dans la linéarité du récit, permettant de dessiner analogiquement dans le discours narratif les détours de l’errance urbaine” (Galand, 2007).

É nessa compreensão alargada da tradição moderna/ista (de que *Fome* é um meridiano) que faz sentido pensar o romance de João Reis: a configuração da sua personagem de tradutor, as formas de introversão de um real desumano e instável, a fiabilidade do narrador e a figuração do (mental e socialmente) alienado, cindido entre a aparência cumpridora da rotina apagada e triturante e o devaneio onírico, a regressão a um estádio como que primitivo e a busca de ser outro.

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<sup>5</sup> De notar que João Reis já traduziu Knut Hamsun. A saber: *Mistérios*, em 2013, *Os Frutos da Terra*, em 2016, e *Sob a Estrela do Outono* (2023), todos para a editora Cavalo de Ferro (Lisboa).

Cabe aqui ver o tipo do homem comum e urbano, do empregado de escritório, executor de tarefas estereotipadas, maquinais e rotineiras, identificável desde o século XIX, entre os funcionários públicos de Gogol (*Contos de Petersburgo*, 1842), Dostoievski (*Memórias do Subterrâneo*, 1864), ou Melville (*Bartleby, o Escriturário*, 1854) e que o marco modernista fez proliferar; pensemos, antes de mais, em Kafka e a sua *Metamorfose* (1915). A deriva sem regresso do tradutor de *A Noiva do Tradutor* leva-nos à herança de escrivãos, guarda-livros, revisores e tradutores, vários deles também presentes na literatura portuguesa de novecentos, que vão de Bernardo Soares, no *Livro do Desassossego* (1982), até ao revisor em *História do Cerco de Lisboa* (1989), de José Saramago. Pelo meio salientam-se o alienado escriturário de *Páscoa Feliz* (1932), de José Rodrigues Miguéis, ou o funcionário cansado que dá título a um poema de António Ramos Rosa, incluído em *Viagem Através de uma Nebulosa* (1960) – aí se formula excelentes variações de uma figura obscura e mediana que, à noite, liberta os sonhos reprimidos e a arte da escrita.<sup>6</sup>

Não esqueçamos que João Reis se escusa a pensar-se no quadro da tradição literária portuguesa. Assim se explica a esse propósito:

Sou português e, como tal, serei sempre um escritor português. Mas, embora não renegue a tradição literária portuguesa, nem me afirme superior a ela, não me revejo em termos de influências nessa mesma tradição. Nem em estilo, nem em temas. Sou um escritor europeu, acima de tudo. Revejo-me no *continuum* da tradição literária europeia, tanto moderna como pós-moderna (Reis, 2021, s.p).

Verdade seja dita, o tema do funcionário cansado ganha em ser considerado no plano trans-nacional da modernidade literária ocidental, com notória incidência no período modernista. A vulgaridade humana é central para a ficção desse período literário, em detrimento relativo da composição heróica dos românticos. Na avaliação que faz ao romantismo europeu, Lilian Furst (1979, p. 53) precisou justamente que esta última se situava na posição intermédia entre o comprometimento do herói tradicional (com o *ethos* do dever) e o anti-heroísmo das figuras modernistas. Claro que o estágio romântico compreendia já a tensão interior e a disrupção do sujeito com a sociedade, o valor supremo do *ethos* do sentimento e do belo, assim como uma aguda auto-consciência de si. A diferença da fase modernista situa-se, entretanto, no relevo conferido ao anti-heroísmo, diverso do da tradição picaresca, por implicar a corrosão auto-irónica, a vulgaridade monótona, com que se fragiliza ainda mais o perfil das personagens medianas na relação consigo mesmas e com o mundo.

Não admira, por isso, que as palavras do protagonista de *A Noiva do Tradutor* não andem longe da descompensação entre a auto-imagem engrandecida pela referência mitológica de Sísifo e a condenação ao destino medíocre de um injustiçado:

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<sup>6</sup> Sobre a linhagem do funcionário cansado na poesia portuguesa novecentista, cf. Rocha, 2008.

[...] sou perturbado por tanta estupidez, coisas inúteis, é de bradar aos céus, um suplício, nasci na época errada ou poderia ter sido uma figura da mitologia grega, um deus caído em desgraça, o salvador da humanidade condenado a sofrer eternamente diante do absurdo, uma gigantesca pedra que empurro, carrego às costas, tudo em mim quer explodir, estremeço de frio, a água escorreu-me pelo pescoço, o chapéu no elétrico, sabe-se lá onde estará agora, terei de o averiguar (Reis, 2019, p. 21).

Para o tradutor, a sua profissão é ela própria um sinal depreciativo: “[...] sou um mero tradutor, não o defensor da justiça humana, não sou o seu campeão, puxam-me para baixo e nado no lodo” (Reis, 2019, p. 109). Nem tão-pouco é compensada pelo escape da reflexão filosófica ou pelo fulgor da criação poética, à imagem do que sucede no *Livro do Desassossego*.

No caso do diário ficcional pessoano, declara-se a sonhada heroicidade romântica oposta à mesquinhez do escritório onde trabalha o seu anti-herói e da cidade por onde deambula, melancólico e abúlico. Declara-se, sem rodeios, a perda da referência romântica do homem fatal que “existe nos sonhos próprios de todos os homens vulgares” (Pessoa, 1998, p. 87) para, logo a seguir, vir a confirmar o seguinte: “não consigo visionar-me nesses papéis de píncaro senão com uma gargalhada do outro eu que tenho sempre próximo como uma rua da Baixa” (p. 87). A escrita é, nesse sentido, um refúgio incorpóreo que o submerge e lhe desvia da atenção de cenários humanos ou atmosféricos da cidade. Resta-lhe ser o passante anónimo e indistinto que cumpre deveres funcionais e só vive a sério no íntimo e pela escrita, alheado dos outros. Em contraste, para o tradutor de *A Noiva do Tradutor* não há o refúgio da invenção artística, indissociável também do protagonista de *Fome*. A sua posição socialmente desclassificada passa inclusive pela relação ressentida com as esferas eruditas da sociedade, diluídas no meio de um mar de analfabetos: “uns são intelectuais demais, os outros, analfabetos, não há meio-termo, asfixio aqui” (Reis, 2019, p. 58).

#### 4. Conclusão

A afinidade modernista de *A Noiva do Tradutor* conduz-me, de novo, à sua justa qualificação como “livro antiquadamente moderno ou modernamente antigo” (Erber, 2021, s.p). Não será rigoroso vê-lo como fruto epigonal, mas, antes, como algo parecido com um pastiche deliberado, no desenho da personagem e na enunciação narrativa. Aliás, a consistência do romance advém em grande medida do facto de a sua composição implicar a leitura de outros textos com os quais estabelece uma ligação hipertextual: não apenas, como vimos, com um texto em particular, mas com o filão romanescos, uma tradição genológica intensamente revolucionada no período modernista. Importa não esquecer que

[...] modernism stands most prominently as the largest debt, at once providing a rich archive to navigate and also clearly underscoring the reflexive sense of textuality linking modernism with contemporary fiction. Whether through explicit or implicit rejection, self-conscious

reclamation, or complex and ambivalent negotiation, modernism is the most significant prior period to which contemporary fiction relates itself (Trimm, 2018, s.p).

No fundo, em tempos que parecem moderar a evidência do chamado pós-modernismo, é face a uma renovada valorização do modernismo (quer como objecto de pesquisa e ensaio quer como objecto de recriação estilística, em exercícios de escrita criativa) que se intensifica uma espécie de mano-a-mano anacrónico de tempos romanescos. Com ele se reelabora parte da contemporaneidade literária e dentro dela, seguramente, um livro como *A Noiva do Tradutor* e o seu protagonista.

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## INTERVIEW

## JOÃO GUIMARÃES, DIRETOR MUSICAL E TRADUTOR DE CANÇÕES

Daniel Galvão\*  
FCH-UCP/ NOVA FCSH

João Guimarães<sup>1</sup> é ator, encenador, cantor e diretor musical de dobragens. Licenciado em Teatro Musical pela Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts (Londres) e em Psicologia pela Universidade do Porto, encontra-se atualmente a finalizar o Mestrado em Teatro, na especialização em Encenação, pela Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema (ESTC). Conta com um percurso de vinte anos no teatro musical, integrando o elenco de produções emblemáticas como *Jesus Cristo Superstar*, *Grease* e *Fame*. Como encenador, assume a direção artística da produtora AM LIVE, responsável por diversas produções de grande escala. No âmbito da indústria da dobragem, colabora regularmente com os estúdios SDI Media (Matinha) e Somnorte, acumulando as funções de dobrador e diretor musical, cargo no qual assume frequentemente a tradução de canções. Exerce ainda atividade docente como coordenador de curso na Academia de Música de Vilar do Paraíso.

**João, o seu percurso artístico evidencia uma relação intrínseca com o teatro musical e a encenação. De que forma se deu a sua entrada no universo da dobragem e em que medida é que a experiência de palco influencia a sua abordagem à direção musical no contexto da dobragem?**

O meu primeiro contacto com o universo da dobragem ocorreu em 2002, na Somnorte, quando gravei o genérico da série *Oliver e Benji*, um trabalho que, apesar de anónimo, alcançou um sucesso inesperado e foi transmitido em diversos canais. Contudo, a minha afirmação profissional enquanto diretor musical consolidou-se posteriormente, no estúdio Cinemática em 2009. O convite para integrar essa equipa baseou-se no reconhecimento de um perfil multidisciplinar específico: a conjugação do domínio sólido da língua inglesa, fruto de três anos de residência em Londres, com a formação técnica em música e em teatro musical. Foram estas três valências simultâneas que ditaram a minha entrada na direção.

Relativamente à influência que a experiência como ator e encenador exerce sobre a direção musical, creio que esta reside essencialmente na perspetiva com que abordo a direção de atores. A maioria dos profissionais que dirijo em contexto de dobragem não possui formação específica em canto. Frequentemente, as dificuldades que apresentam não se devem à falta de sensibilidade auditiva ou de potencial vocal, mas sim à ausência de técnica.

A minha abordagem consiste, portanto, em colocar-me no lugar do ator, auxiliando-o a interpretar o texto como se de um diálogo falado se tratasse, desconstruindo a barreira

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do canto. Recorro a estratégias como a segmentação das frases em pequenas ideias ou o uso de imagens mentais e representações gráficas simples da melodia. Ao focar a direção na intenção dramática e na compreensão do texto, um *métier* que o ator domina, consigo que este se liberte da pressão técnica da entoação, permitindo uma interpretação musical mais fluida e natural.

**Portugal é, historicamente, um país com uma forte tradição de legendagem, reservando a dobragem quase exclusivamente para o conteúdo infantojuvenil. Considerando que este género é frequentemente pontuado por momentos musicais, como caracteriza o panorama atual da dobragem portuguesa? Sente que esta especificidade de ‘nicho’ impõe uma responsabilidade acrescida na qualidade da tradução de canções, dado que é a porta de entrada de novos públicos para o consumo de produtos audiovisuais?**

A premissa de que a especificidade deste ‘nicho’ acarreta uma responsabilidade acrescida é indubitável. O facto de a dobragem em Portugal ser quantitativamente inferior à de outros mercados confere ao conteúdo infantojuvenil um peso determinante na formação da literacia audiovisual do público. Tratando-se de uma audiência particularmente fidelizada, a qualidade da tradução torna-se o principal veículo de receção e apreciação do produto. Neste contexto, a precisão métrica assume, na minha ótica, um carácter preponderante. Historicamente, nomeadamente no início da minha atividade de direção em 2009, era comum o recurso a guiões de referência provenientes do Brasil ou de Espanha. Contudo, estas traduções apresentavam frequentemente inconsistências silábicas que comprometiam a fluidez musical. Considero, portanto, o rigor métrico uma questão basilar, pois é este que assegura o respeito pela integridade da melodia, pela intenção original do compositor e pelo ritmo intrínseco que a canção impõe à letra. Paralelamente, a dimensão estilística exige igual minúcia. A experiência com estreias mundiais, desprovidas de referências prévias noutras línguas, reforçou a necessidade de uma análise cuidada do registo vocal, seja ele *Pop*, *Soul* ou de cariz mais lírico.<sup>2</sup> Consequentemente, a seleção de intérpretes que mimetizem a sonoridade e o estilo original é crucial, uma vez que a identidade musical constitui, em última análise, a marca identitária da própria obra audiovisual.

**Para efeitos de clareza terminológica e processual, poderia delinear as funções específicas de um diretor musical de dobragens?**

A delimitação destas responsabilidades depende, invariavelmente, das especificidades de cada produção. No entanto, tomemos como referência o modelo mais frequente, no qual o ator responsável pela dobragem da personagem assume também a interpretação

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<sup>2</sup> Neste contexto, o termo ‘lírico’ refere-se à técnica vocal de matriz erudita ou clássica (associada ao *bel canto* e à ópera). Distingue-se da emissão vocal *pop* ou de teatro musical contemporâneo (*belting*) por exigir uma imitação de voz mais ‘redonda’, com maior projeção acústica e uso predominante de *legato* e *vibrato*. No universo da animação, este registo é frequentemente associado ao estilo das Princesas Disney (*Branca de Neve*, *Cinderela*) ou a personagens de cariz operático.

musical — uma premissa muitas vezes definida pelo cliente. O processo inicia-se com a análise dos materiais originais recebidos, que podem variar desde um episódio piloto até simples referências de áudio ou guiões visuais. Nesta fase, considero fundamental compreender o contexto e a dramaturgia da personagem na trama, pois tal influenciará determinantemente a abordagem à tradução. O método de trabalho desdobra-se na audição repetida do original e numa tradução literal para apreensão da mensagem, seguindo-se o rigoroso trabalho de encaixe métrico, verso a verso, respeitando as sílabas, o ritmo e a melodia impostos pelo compositor.

Após a aprovação das letras pelo cliente, segue-se a direção em estúdio, frequentemente realizada sem grande antecedência temporal. Nesta etapa, tira-se partido do facto de o ator já conhecer o registo da personagem, instruindo-o a manter na interpretação musical as mesmas características da voz falada, sejam elas sotaques, ceceios ou outras especificidades vocais. É imperativo notar que a tonalidade da canção é imutável; portanto, qualquer adaptação necessária recai sobre a modulação vocal do ator e nunca sobre o tom da música. Existem, contudo, variantes a este modelo, como o recurso ao *match voice* quando o ator não possui aptidão para o canto, exigindo a contratação de um intérprete que mimetize a voz falada. Finalmente, no caso de canções que pontuam a ação sem serem interpretadas pelas personagens, cabe-me propor cantores que se aproximem da versão original, submetendo essa seleção à escolha final do cliente.

**Na praxis da indústria em Portugal, observa-se frequentemente que a tradução das canções é delegada aos diretores musicais, ou que estes se veem obrigados a retraduzir substancialmente as versões entregues pelos tradutores de diálogo. Na sua ótica, quais são as carências estruturais ou técnicas que tornam a tradução ‘convencional’ ineficaz no contexto musical?**

A ineficácia da tradução ‘convencional’ neste contexto não deve ser interpretada como uma crítica pessoal aos tradutores, mas sim como a constatação de uma realidade técnica: a frequente ausência de conhecimentos musicais específicos. Esta lacuna traduz-se, primariamente, na incapacidade de ajustar o número de sílabas métricas à frase musical, mas, mais profundamente, na incompreensão de que a execução cantada impõe exigências orgânicas distintas da articulação falada. Existem vocábulos que, conquanto naturais no discurso corrente, carecem de fluidez melódica ou revelam-se de árdua execução quando cantados. A língua portuguesa, por exemplo, caracteriza-se por uma elevada incidência de vogais fechadas, nomeadamente os sons [ə] e [e], cuja projeção se torna particularmente complexa em registos agudos ou notas sustentadas. O tradutor, ao não considerar que a palavra cantada obedece a uma lógica física e acústica diferente da palavra dita, tende a realizar escolhas lexicais que, embora semanticamente adequadas, são musicalmente ineficazes. Consequentemente, embora a esmagadora maioria dos materiais chegue às minhas mãos com uma versão preliminar do texto, existe uma convenção tácita na indústria de que esse material não é definitivo. O estúdio parte do

princípio de que a minha função implica, invariavelmente, a revisão ou tradução integral da letra, de modo a garantir que a métrica, a fonética e a rima servem a execução musical.

**Na sequência do que acaba de expor, considera que os tradutores têm consciência de que as traduções de canções que realizam acabam por se revelar, sendo cru na terminologia, funcionalmente inúteis?**

A perceção dessa realidade é, na minha experiência, maioritariamente inexistente, fruto de uma falha de comunicação intrínseca à indústria. Não havendo contacto direto entre a direção musical e os tradutores (que operam frequentemente em regime *freelance*, isolados e muitas vezes sem acesso aos registos áudio das canções) não existe um retorno crítico sobre o trabalho entregue. Assim, subscrevo a utilização do termo 'inútil'. Longe de constituir uma agressão, trata-se de uma descrição factual e direta da eficácia do produto final, visto que estamos perante material que é, na prática, descartável. A necessidade de reformulação é de tal ordem sistémica que a tentativa de aproveitamento parcial se torna inviável. Ao detetar falhas na métrica, na rima ou na própria execução vocal das palavras, a correção de um único verso desencadeia um efeito em cadeia que obriga à reestruturação integral da estrofe ou da canção. Insistir na manutenção de excertos de uma tradução inadequada comprometeria a coesão da obra, resultando numa versão híbrida que nem respeita o original nem atinge a qualidade exigida na língua de chegada. Portanto, a tradução integral impõe-se como a única solução técnica viável.

**De uma perspetiva funcional, qual diria que é o propósito final da tradução de canções neste contexto específico? Diferenciando-a de outras modalidades de tradução, qual é a função operativa primordial que o texto tem obrigatoriamente de cumprir para ser considerado válido ou bem-sucedido em estúdio?**

A questão central reside, efetivamente, na exequibilidade vocal da canção, salvaguardando sempre a integridade da versão original. De nada serve dispor de uma letra esteticamente apurada ou literariamente irrepreensível se, na prática, a sua execução se revelar inviável por não se adequar à música. Ilustrando com as restrições técnicas que enfrentamos: se a partitura exige uma nota sustentada numa vogal aberta como [a] e a tradução impõe uma vogal fechada como [e], ou se se tenta forçar o encaixe de três sílabas num espaço métrico originalmente concebido para apenas uma, o resultado é funcionalmente nulo. Em última análise, o objetivo operativo da tradução de uma canção é garantir que esta cumpra a sua dupla função primordial, ou seja, ser passível de interpretação musical na língua de chegada e assegurar a plena inteligibilidade da mensagem por parte do público.

**A tradução de canções para dobragem é uma operação multifacetada, onde o tradutor deve gerir simultaneamente o conteúdo semântico, a acentuação tónica, o ritmo, a**

**sincronização labial, o texto visual e a ‘cantabilidade’<sup>3</sup> da tradução. Na sua experiência, quando estes elementos entram em conflito, qual deve ser a hierarquia de prioridades? O que é que se sacrifica primeiro em prol do funcionamento e adequação da canção em português europeu?**

Na gestão destas variáveis, estabeleço uma hierarquia de sacrifício muito clara. O elemento primordialmente prescindível é o sincronismo labial estrito, ou a componente visual. Embora a coincidência entre a abertura vocálica da imagem e o fonema cantado seja o ideal estético, essa é invariavelmente a primeira cedência que realizo. A prioridade recai sobre a manutenção do número de sílabas e a integridade da mensagem, em detrimento de uma correspondência perfeita entre o movimento labial original e a articulação portuguesa.

Em contrapartida, a acentuação tónica constitui, na minha ótica, um último reduto inviolável. A distorção da prosódia natural da língua é algo que considero tecnicamente inadmissível. A título de exemplo crítico e análise técnica, considero problemática a tradução do tema icónico *Let It Go*, do filme *Frozen*. Na versão portuguesa, o verso “comigo só há solidão” impõe a acentuação musical na sílaba átona, resultando numa execução fonética próxima de ‘so-LI-dão’. A gravidade deste desvio é exacerbada pela própria natureza do termo escolhido que é uma palavra com uma carga identitária fortíssima na nossa língua, conferida justamente pela presença do ditongo nasal [ẽw]. Este tipo de desvio constitui uma violação grave da estrutura da língua, especialmente considerando que existiriam múltiplas alternativas lexicais para preencher aquele espaço métrico sem ferir a prosódia. A minha tolerância para com a acentuação de sílabas átonas é nula; prefiro manipular ligeiramente o contexto semântico a permitir tal atropelo linguístico.

Existe, contudo, uma exceção estrutural a esta primazia da métrica: a imposição de glossários ou texto visual. Quando a tradução está vinculada a terminologias pré-aprovadas pelo cliente, isto é, palavras-chave que definem o universo da série, sejam nomes de personagens, locais ou lemas, a métrica é forçosamente sacrificada. Ilustro esta realidade com uma série recente da Disney que dirigi, cujo conceito central assentava na frase *The Rescue Pets Rescue Pets*. A obrigatoriedade de traduzir o monossílabo inglês *pets* pelo trissílabo português ‘animais’ gerou um conflito métrico imediato. Após um processo de articulação entre a direção musical, a tradução e o cliente, e dada a impossibilidade de alterar o lema da série, a solução implicou sacrificar a limpeza rítmica para acomodar o excesso de sílabas imposto pelo termo ‘animais’.

Em suma, a cantabilidade não é uma variável abstrata, mas sim o resultado direto da simbiose entre o rigor métrico e o respeito absoluto pela sílaba tónica. São estes os dois pilares que, para mim, determinam a fluidez e a naturalidade da entoação final.

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<sup>3</sup> O termo traduz o conceito de *singabilit'*, central na teorização dos *Song translation studies* (Low, 2017; Franzon, 2008). Não obstante a ausência de um consenso terminológico absoluto na literatura, o conceito é utilizado no presente contexto para designar a propriedade funcional de um texto, nomeadamente a sua aptidão fonética, rítmica e prosódica para ser articulado e executado em conformidade com uma estrutura musical preexistente.

**Existe uma noção prevalecente na indústria, quase um mito profissional, de que a tradução de canções exige um tipo de criatividade inata, inacessível a tradutores que operam estritamente no domínio textual. Concorda com esta visão, ou considera que a barreira reside, antes, na falta de literacia sobre a prática em si e sobre as especificidades e constrangimentos que lhe são inerentes?**

A resposta a essa dualidade reside, a meu ver, na confluência de ambos os fatores. Retomando a questão da iliteracia técnica abordada anteriormente, é inegável que existe uma lacuna estrutural na formação dos tradutores. O desconhecimento da linguagem musical — desde a incapacidade de descodificar uma partitura até à incompreensão de conceitos como tessitura, extensão vocal ou as cambiantes tímbricas entre registos masculinos e femininos — constitui uma barreira objetiva. Sem o domínio destas ferramentas, a perceção da melodia e das suas exigências rítmicas fica irremediavelmente comprometida.

Contudo, seria redutor limitar a questão à mera competência técnica. Existe, de facto, uma dimensão intangível, uma componente de ‘arte’ ou intuição criativa que transcende a aplicação mecânica de regras. Sem incorrer em autoelogio, reconheço que, em determinados momentos, a solução tradutória emerge com uma fluidez e uma adequação estética que dificilmente consigo justificar por via estritamente racional. Talvez se trate de um instinto ‘cristalizado’ pela experiência, mas que se distingue claramente do recurso a estratégias facilitistas, como a rima verbal sistemática em terminações ‘-ar’, ‘-er’, ou ‘-ir’. Embora funcionais, essas opções empobrecem a obra, pois negligenciam a riqueza que a diversidade vocálica confere à coloração melódica. Portanto, o sucesso da tradução de canções resulta não só da superação das carências técnicas do tradutor, mas também do mérito intrínseco e da sensibilidade artística que o diretor musical imprime ao texto.

**Depreende-se da sua argumentação que o perfil do tradutor de canções implica, necessariamente, a condição de executante — seja músico, cantor ou ator? Ou admite que a especialização técnica e académica, desvinculada da prática performática, seja suficiente para dotar o tradutor das ferramentas necessárias para superar estes constrangimentos? Esta dúvida, curiosamente, ecoa debates transversais a outras áreas da tradução especializada.**

Considero a especialização viável. Admitindo que existe uma predisposição natural — cuja métrica de ‘sensibilidade auditiva mínima’ é difícil de quantificar —, creio que um tradutor com formação de base pode, mediante um programa pedagógico estruturado e adequado, adquirir as competências necessárias. É perfeitamente possível instruir um não-músico na rigorosa contagem de sílabas métricas, na perceção da altura das notas, no domínio da rima e, crucialmente, na noção de cantabilidade, ou seja, no discernimento sobre a aptidão fonética das palavras para serem proferidas melodicamente.

O paralelismo com outras áreas é legítimo. Tal como existem tradutores especializados em medicina ou engenharia mecânica, que dominam a terminologia e os processos sem serem médicos ou engenheiros, a tradução de canções deve ser encarada como uma especialização técnica passível de ensino. Contudo, e falando a título pessoal, torna-se difícil dissociar a qualidade do resultado da minha própria vivência. O facto de possuir formação em técnica vocal e experiência como ator-cantor constitui, inegavelmente, uma mais-valia diferenciadora. Embora a teoria seja acessível, a compreensão orgânica da voz e das suas limitações físicas oferece uma vantagem operativa que a formação académica, por si só, poderá ter dificuldade em replicar plenamente.

**Dando continuidade a esse raciocínio, coloquemos então a hipótese de um cenário de profissionalização ideal. Se os tradutores adquirissem, via formação especializada, a competência técnica para entregar um texto ‘cantável’, o seu trabalho deixaria de ser, recuperando a classificação anterior, ‘funcionalmente inútil’. Não considera que essa validação do texto a montante resultaria numa otimização estrutural do vosso trabalho? Ao retirar ao diretor musical o ónus da tradução, não lhe permitiria libertar o foco para se dedicar exclusivamente à direção vocal e o apuro interpretativo da performance?**

Há aqui uma dimensão pessoal e metodológica que condiciona a minha resposta. No meu caso específico, a tradução e a direção não são processos estanques, mas sim fases interdependentes. Gosto de traduzir porque é nesse momento que adiro o domínio, a segurança e a confiança sobre a canção. É ao traduzir que dissecos o contexto, compreendo a personagem e antecipo as dificuldades técnicas que os atores irão enfrentar, o que acaba por fundamentar a minha direção. Portanto, eu dificilmente abdicaria dessa etapa, pois a minha direção nasce do conhecimento profundo que adiro ao traduzir o texto.

Não obstante, analisando a indústria numa perspetiva mais abrangente, concordo que essa capacitação técnica dos tradutores seria extremamente benéfica. Se os tradutores estivessem munidos destas ferramentas, entregando textos funcionalmente aptos, isso representaria uma mais-valia. Ao libertar os diretores musicais da tarefa de corrigir ou traduzir as canções na íntegra, reduzindo drasticamente o tempo despendido nessa fase, permitir-se-ia que estes focassem toda a sua energia na preparação da direção vocal com muito mais cuidado. Nesse sentido, a autonomia técnica do tradutor resultaria, inequivocamente, numa otimização processual.

**Considerando que a formação especializada nesta prática é ainda residual nos currículos académicos, que conselhos práticos daria a quem deseja especializar-se nesta vertente da tradução de canções na dobragem de filmes e séries? Na ausência de um ensino formal, que outras competências ou valências deve um tradutor exercitar autonomamente para dominar as especificidades deste contexto audiovisual?**

Sugiro uma abordagem autodidata assente em três eixos fundamentais. O primeiro é o estudo analítico do repertório histórico. É imperativo conhecer o cânone das grandes

produções, nomeadamente os temas icónicos da Disney traduzidos em Portugal a partir de 1994.<sup>4</sup> Não defendo apenas uma audição passiva, mas sim uma análise crítica para identificar os ‘erros de princípio’, as falhas técnicas e as soluções que foram adotadas ao longo das décadas.

O segundo eixo prende-se com a literacia musical contemporânea. A indústria audiovisual acompanha as tendências da cultura *pop* global. O tradutor deve possuir uma cultura musical vasta que abarque géneros como o *Pop*, *Rock*, *R&B*, *Soul*, *Indie* e até o *Jazz*. Atualmente, assistimos a fenómenos disruptivos como a ‘invasão’ do *K-Pop*, que trouxe uma nova postura vocal e estética que influencia diretamente a linguagem das séries. Ignorar estas tendências é arriscar produzir um texto anacrónico.

O terceiro eixo é a atualização sociolinguística. É crucial dominar o léxico e o imaginário do público infantojuvenil atual. A forma como as crianças e os jovens comunicam evolui rapidamente e as séries refletem essa dinâmica. O tradutor tem de estar sintonizado com essa realidade para garantir a credibilidade da canção.

Por fim, no que toca às competências técnicas que debatemos, estou convicto de que se existisse uma formação especializada, focada nestes tópicos, que fosse incisiva e verdadeiramente *straight to the point*, os tradutores sairiam dela com uma consciência proativa e aptos a entregar um trabalho fundamentalmente útil e de qualidade.

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<sup>4</sup> O ano de 1994 assinala um marco histórico na indústria audiovisual nacional com a estreia de *O Rei Leão*, a primeira longa-metragem de animação da Disney dobrada integralmente em português europeu. Este projeto inaugurou a localização de conteúdos Disney especificamente para Portugal, rompendo com a prática vigente até então, em que o público infantojuvenil consumia estas produções através das versões dobradas em português do Brasil.

## BOOK REVIEWS

## TRANSLATION AND COMMUNITY

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**Translation and community**, Mustapha Taibi, New York: Routledge, 2024, 214 pp., £35.99, ISBN: 978-1-032-42426-2 (Paperback).<sup>1</sup>

Community translation plays a crucial role in bridging communication gaps between public services and multilingual communities, ensuring language accessibility for marginalized groups. In this context, Mustapha Taibi's book provides a structured and comprehensive introduction to the subject, exploring fundamental questions about community translation, from the translator's role to the challenges of ensuring language accessibility. As well as offering guidelines to novice community translators, the book traces the evolution of community translation as both a professional practice and a social service, emphasizing its role in public communication. It also provides further readings, reflective questions, and case studies to enhance understanding for students and practitioners.

Chapter 1, 'What is special about community translation?', examines the distinct characteristics of community translation as a professional activity and social service. The chapter highlights the social role of community translators in ensuring equitable access to translation services to all groups in society. The concept of translation agency is a key focus, highlighting how translators play an active role in enhancing the effectiveness of public communication (pp. 10–11). Taibi reviews the terminology and key issues in community translation, including quality assurance, language accessibility, and methods of information dissemination. The chapter also discusses factors that influence the quality of community translation, such as translator involvement, social policies, and collaboration with stakeholders. Taibi offers insights into community translation and language policy, emphasizing the need to address ethical dilemmas and practical challenges to enhance accessibility and inclusivity in multilingual societies.

Chapter 2, 'Your role as a community translator', examines the multifaceted role of community translators, highlighting their responsibilities as cultural mediators, social agents and facilitators of communication (pp. 28–33). This chapter underscores the need to balance accuracy, impartiality and a deep understanding of the social and cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://www.routledge.com/Translation-and-Community/Taibi/p/book/9781032424262?srsItd> (Accessed: 15 March 2025).

context of the audience. Taibi effectively bridges theory and practice by incorporating ethical codes and real-world case studies.

Chapter 3, 'Text types, translation brief and translation strategies', presents the functional approach to translation, emphasizing the Skopos theory (Reiss & Vermeer, 2014) alongside the concepts of text type, translation brief, and translation strategy (p. 43). The chapter underscores the importance of aligning community translation with the communication goals and needs of the target audience rather than merely pursuing linguistic equivalence. Consequently, it calls for a more in-depth analysis of the practical challenges in applying functional theory, particularly within institutional settings that continue to prioritize literal translation.

Chapter 4, 'Translating public messaging', discusses the translation of public messages as part of a communication strategy, particularly in social and health awareness campaigns (pp. 62–64). This chapter outlines how community translators need to balance message accuracy and language accessibility for diverse audiences. By highlighting the concepts of audience design and user personas, this chapter strengthens its functional approach, making it highly applicable to the context of community translation.

Chapter 5, 'Translating regulatory texts', discusses the translation of institutional documents that regulate public rights and services for citizens. Taibi highlights the complexity of translating such texts, as they must strike a balance between terminological accuracy and readability for a wide audience. The concept of "government by translation" is introduced to illustrate how translation becomes a tool for managing public policy in multilingual societies (p. 86). The chapter offers an in-depth analysis of the institutional standards that shape translation practices, including consistency of terminology and levels of language formality. Taibi positions the translator's role at the intersection of institutional authority and audience needs, highlighting the ethical challenges inherent in maintaining both fidelity and accessibility in community translation.

Chapter 6, 'Translating culturally sensitive texts', discusses the challenges of translating texts containing sensitive cultural issues, such as gender issues, domestic violence, and religious references (pp. 108–114). The chapter highlights the role of the translator as a cultural mediator who not only conveys meaning across languages but also adapts the text to ensure cultural relevance to the target audience without sacrificing accuracy. Taibi grounds her analysis in theories of cultural relevance and mediation, and incorporating translation strategies such as cultural substitution and the use of euphemisms.

Chapter 7, 'Translating for different dissemination media', examines translation across various distribution channels, emphasizing differences in translation strategies between written texts, audiovisual content, and digital media. The analysis is supported by relevant research, especially in the context of public health communication such as COVID-19 campaigns (p. 121). The chapter's strength lies in its comprehensive and practical multimodal approach, but the discussion of technical challenges in subtitling and dubbing

would benefit from a deeper analysis, particularly regarding spatial and temporal constraints.

Chapter 8, 'Translating personal official documents', discusses the translation of documents such as birth certificates, driving licenses, and diplomas, within the framework of language services for migrant communities. The chapter outlines the main challenges in translating official documents, including accuracy standards, document integrity, and variations in legal and administrative systems across countries. A functional approach to translation, as proposed by Prieto Ramos, is considered essential for maintaining a balance between fidelity to the source text and the needs of the end user (p. 140).

Chapter 9, 'Locating and using resources', focuses on the critical use of various translation tools, including dictionaries, glossaries, encyclopedias, parallel texts, and emerging technologies such as machine translation and artificial intelligence (pp. 155–169). The chapter emphasizes that effective community translation requires not only access to these resources but also the ability to assess their reliability and contextual applicability. While the content is comprehensive and pedagogically relevant, the discussion remains largely normative, overlooking the practical limitations faced by translators in under-resourced settings. Although the chapter provides an extensive examination of AI tools, its perspective tends to be overly optimistic and lacks a deeper critique of their potential impact on translation ethics and quality (pp. 162–167). Like a puzzle missing key pieces, the chapter would be more complete with sharper, context-sensitive perspectives, particularly on the role and implications of technology tools in various translation settings.

Chapter 10, 'Revising your and another translator's work', discusses translation revision as a critical process in ensuring quality, particularly in the context of community translation (pp. 172–187). The chapter emphasizes that revision—whether self-revision, other-revision, or post-editing—is not merely an error-detection task but a nuanced process involving accuracy, clarity, cultural appropriateness, and user accessibility. It highlights that revision should be adapted to the communicative purpose and context of the translation, especially when serving diverse communities. While the chapter thoroughly outlines key revision parameters—drawing from frameworks such as National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) and The Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators-the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (AUSIT-FECCA)—it tends to generalize the competence of revisers, assuming that skilled translators are naturally effective revisers, a claim challenged by some empirical studies (Gonzalez et al., 2023). Much like an intricate negotiation, revision tasks involve complex interpersonal dynamics, yet a deeper examination of ethical considerations and power imbalances between translators and revisers in institutional settings would provide a more comprehensive perspective.

Chapter 11, 'Teamwork and community engagement', conceptualizes community translation as a socially embedded practice that requires more than linguistic and textual competence; it emphasizes the need for interpersonal, attitudinal, and strategic skills to function effectively within professional teams and sociocultural communities (pp. 188–

201). The chapter challenges the traditional perception of translators as solitary workers by reframing them as collaborative agents who must engage with colleagues, clients, and communities. While the discussion offers a comprehensive overview of teamwork dynamics—including role distribution, conflict resolution, and quality assurance—it occasionally idealizes collaboration, overlooking institutional hierarchies and potential power imbalances in multilingual team settings. Moreover, the chapter promotes community engagement through situated and work-integrated learning, illustrating best practices from service-learning programs in Spain and the U.S. A more critical analysis of issues such as gatekeeping in community access, cultural representation, and volunteer exploitation would strengthen the discussion.

This book serves as a fundamental resource for translators, academics and policymakers seeking to understand the role of community translation in promoting language accessibility and social inclusion. In addition, it provides in-depth insights into community translation, illustrating its complexity across various dimensions. Reading this book is akin to constructing a bridge, where each chapter connects theoretical foundations with practical applications, forming a comprehensive understanding of translation as a social service. Through a structured progression of topics, readers can engage with key themes such as the role of community translators, ethical considerations, and the impact of translation on multilingual societies.

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## DECOLONISATION WITHOUT CONSENSUS: THE PRAXIS OF GLOBAL SOUTH TRANSLATION

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**Translation and decolonisation: Interdisciplinary approaches**, Chambers, C., & Demir, I. (eds.), Routledge, 2024, 244 pp., 37,59€ (paperback), ISBN: 978-1-032-38271-5

The word ‘decolonisation’ is often contentious and rarely straightforward. The word ‘translation’ is perhaps not inherently challenging, yet it often occurs in political contexts. However compelling both terms may be for Global South students like me in Anglophone contexts, it is very easy to lose sight of their simultaneous overlapping themes and the potential pushback they receive. To a greater or lesser extent, both words advocate for making marginalised voices visible. History has shown this. *Translation and decolonisation* offers a timely interdisciplinary conversation between often-differing terms around their praxis, and will be of interest for scholars in areas such as Postcolonial Studies, Translation Theory, Contemporary Literary Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, Linguistics, History, and Migration Studies.

Although the collection foregrounds perspectives from the Global South, Latin American voices are noticeably underrepresented, particularly Indigenous voices. Without them, the debate around land, its ownership, dispossession, and potential restitution is left unexplored, despite its centrality to many decolonial movements. This example illustrates, as the editors acknowledge, that the term decolonisation has become overused and inflated (Chambers and Demir, 2024, p. 2). The chapters differently address their concerns about the possibility of achieving decolonisation, which adds a political awareness of both the term and the limits of each editor’s disciplines – in other words, the collection anticipates scepticism. One example the book offers is that decolonisation can work as a theory in relation to sociology and linguistics. In addition, the contested term can also serve as a means to achieving solidarity, as seen in the case of Pakistani magazine *Āwāz* or the Zapatistas Movement. Alternatively, it may operate as an underpinning ethos or value, particularly in contemporary novels that grapple with neo-colonial narratives and refugee or migrant contexts. Besides giving voice to emerging scholars, the book opens with a reprint of an essay by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and closes with a reprint of one by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, signalling the persistent influence of these authors on the postcolonial field to date. It thus continues to pursue a praxis on decolonisation through translation, which is essential for marginal voices to avoid being ventriloquised, and to avoid reducing decolonisation to an echo of social justice, critical methodologies, or settler perspectives (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012, p. 107; Tuck and Wayne Yang, 2021, p. 63). In doing so, the editors

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address the longstanding neglect of South-to-South conversations in both fields and attempt to prioritise them instead.

The essays deal with a range of linguistic contexts, which suggests that English is not the sole entry point or medium for unveiling other locations, as the editors call it (Chambers and Demir, 2024, p. 8). Yet, it remains a monolingual book for those who are at least acquainted with postcolonial practices, and whose entry point is persistently Anglocentric. Starting with Spivak, the collection introduces the problem of the role of the translator in Global South contexts through the historical and geographical representation of Bengali, intertwined with Spivak's own name and authoritative voice. In the second chapter, Kathryn Bachelor deepens the divisions between the postcolonial and the decolonial, building on Walter Mignolo's concept of decoloniality. The chapter could have been further enriched by Indigenous views, especially in the light of Indigenous scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's claim that "Walter Mignolo and company have built a small empire within an empire" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012, p. 98). If Indigeneity is a category for a heterogeneous group that has persistently been denied ongoing existence, epistemological autonomy, and land ownership, its absence in this collection is striking.

The main challenge of the collection is summarised in Paul F. Bandia's chapter, which problematises the extent to which intersectionality moves away from anglonormativity to enhance challenging linguonormativity (Bandia, 2024, p. 58). He does so by focusing on EDI (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion), an umbrella term where decolonisation is insufficiently tackled by institutional values. A feminist lens in the collection is offered by Tejaswini Niranjana's chapter, which unveils the classroom imbalances through a gender perspective. Niranjana compellingly draws our attention to the potential engagement between decolonisation and multivocal pedagogical practices in India. Abdelmajid Hannoum's chapter, 'On translation ideology', maps the asymmetries of structural language theories, though it may rely too heavily on philosophies of language to further shape (or not) the anti- or de-colonial goals of a text, obscuring the possibilities of shaping decolonisation in practical terms.

Claire Chambers' and Gargi Binju's articulation of literary analysis enhances the nuanced interdisciplinary impact of the collection. They focus on novels by R.F. Kuang and Ayesha Manazir Siddiqi, and on M.G. Vassanji's work, respectively. Underscoring a world of in-betweenness in these novels, both chapters consistently challenge the potential of fiction to reveal the heterogenous nature of belonging and language learning in Asian-African, Asian-American and Asian-English contexts. Sara de Jong's chapter grounds the reader in political translation, this time in the US-led NATO war in Afghanistan. She interrogates the consequences of translating and interpreting underrepresented voices, so that a seemingly simple multilingual exchange operates vis-à-vis power relations.

In Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez's chapter, we read a compelling critique of the Eurocentric framework underpinning the definition of human rights, which is a refreshing view to understand today's conflicts where the West is a key actor. These reflections, for example, evoke the ongoing raids by ICE in the USA, and the urgent need to dismantle

colonial notions underlying anti-immigration policies. The next chapter organically moves on towards activism, where in a more personal tone, Maureen Freely illustrates the often-unspoken boundaries between local history and translation. Translating is rarely a neutral task, and so she draws on the value behind the exhausting endeavour of making voices accessible and available. Freely suggests that translation can also be a tool to resist colonisation (Freely, 2024, p. 203), comprehensively highlighting the role of entities such as *English PEN* or journals like *Asymptote* through her own personal and intimate ‘constant turmoil’ (Freely, 2024, p. 205).

Haider Shahbaz effectively draws our attention to a case study that, unlike solidarities of the Bandung Era or the Tricontinental times in the 1960s, focuses on the Pakistani magazine *Āwāz*, founded in the 1970s by the progressive feminist and Urdu writer Fahmida Riaz. A South-to-South collaborative tension can be found in the next chapter, where Peiyu Yang illustrates Arab-China solidarity, critically addressing a romanticised version of China. Her more local approach to Palestine-China solidarity through Ghassan Kanafani’s work is refreshing, especially as she pays attention to the use of the female body to resist the Zionist occupation and its counterpart in China. This chapter demonstrates that decolonisation remains relevant to demystify South-to-South collaboration as a monolithic strategy.

The greatest contribution of this collection is that, instead of focusing on the widely explored contributions of magazines such as *Lotus* or *Tricontinental* to solidarity, decolonisation, and translation, the authors further underscore the role of South Asian, Palestinian, and Chinese translations instead. It is therefore fitting that the collection ends with a chapter by recently deceased author Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o, which focuses on African languages, their publishers and the academic world, mirroring the pervading colonial structures that permeate the rest of the contexts in the collection. Wa Thiong’o thus reiterates an enduring challenge: to do more for our languages and in our languages (Wa Thiong’o, 2024, p. 223).

Beneath the surface of heavily theoretical ideals around decolonisation, *Decolonisation and Translation* makes the depth of the Global South visible, as Freely puts it, without expecting consensus (Freely, 2024, p. 205). It addresses the complexities of Global South cultural translations, while making the debate heterogeneous and politically grounded. The collection is ambitious, yet accessible for readers who are neither translators nor literary scholars, as translation moves vertically through the uneven languages and horizontally through (de)colonial hierarchies. Decolonisation and translation interact, overlap, intersect, and differ in many places: in hostile political environments, in the comfort of a literary analysis, within the precarity of teaching spaces, and during the draining task of feminist and migrant activism. This is only a sample of wider endeavours that can finally be uncovered in *Decolonisation and Translation*.

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## TRANSLATING SENSUOUSLY: EXPLORING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES THROUGH THE LENS OF TRANSLATION

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**Translating Indigenous knowledges: Toward a sensuous translation**, M<sup>a</sup> Carmen África Vidal Claramonte, London and New York: Routledge, 2024, 222 pp., €43.99 (paperback) ISBN 9781032866987, €35.19 (ebook) ISBN 9781003528630.

The field of Translation Studies is currently witnessing a growing interdisciplinary and epistemological openness. This shift is encouraging many researchers to reflect more deeply on how the core concept of our discipline can be applied beyond the interlinguistic—and even beyond the linguistic—realm. Such is the case with África Vidal Claramonte’s book, *Translating Indigenous Knowledges: Toward a Sensuous Translation*, which explores the notion of ‘sensuous translation’ as a framework for engaging with indigenous worldviews. Through this work, Vidal Claramonte challenges traditional Western epistemologies and examines how translation can illuminate new ways of knowing, particularly within indigenous contexts. The result is a rigorously argued, interdisciplinary monograph that will undoubtedly be of interest not only to translation scholars but also to researchers in anthropology and sensory studies.<sup>1</sup>

In the introduction, Vidal Claramonte outlines the overall trajectory of her monograph, which unfolds across four chapters. The author situates her study within a broad range of theoretical frameworks that have been instrumental in shaping the aforementioned EPISTRAN project, such as Piotr Blumczynski’s (2023) and Douglas Robinson’s (2017) ‘translationality’, Michael Cronin’s (2017) ‘eco-translation’, and Kobus Marais’s (2019) ‘(bio)semiotic translation’. Her focus, she explains, is on indigenous knowledges, cosmovisions, and worldviews, as well as on forms of translation that extend beyond the strictly linguistic. In doing so, she seeks to move past reductionist dichotomies such as the body/mind divide, emphasizing instead the central role of the body, objects, experiences, senses, and emotions, elements that become the principal agents in the translations she examines.

Translation, in Vidal Claramonte’s approach, is never static or definitive; it is rhizomatic in the sense of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980 [1987]), and recalls the medieval notion of *translatio* as movement. She conceives translation as a weaving of “knots, threads, colors, and bodies in movement” (p. 3), as ‘shamanic translation’,

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<sup>1</sup> Notably, the reviewed book appears on the website <https://www.sensorystudies.org/books-of-note/>, which features works of interest in the field.

‘translation as equivocation’, and ‘total translation’. These modes are explored in depth across the book’s chapters, each illuminated through carefully selected case studies.

The opening chapter, titled ‘A knowledge of many knowledges’, immerses readers in the world of shamanic translations, practices that are creative, fluid, and perpetually in motion. Long marginalized by what has been termed ‘epistemicide’ (Bennett, 2007, 2023, 2024; Santos, 2014, 2016; Price, 2023), these translations are particularly compelling because they allow us to apprehend the world—or rather, worlds—beyond binary oppositions, the so-called ‘one-world world’ (Law, 2015), and Eurocentric globalization.

Within this context, Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2002) notion of *conocimiento*—“a theory of knowledge from intuition” (p. 27)—becomes especially significant. Translation, in her view, operates through the body, emotions, and senses, directly challenging rational, scientific Western conceptions of knowledge. Vidal Claramonte underscores how, for Anzaldúa, connecting with nature positions translation as an experiential, embodied practice. Building on this perspective, she turns to Carlos Castaneda’s (1968 [1985]) *The Teachings of Don Juan* and to the shamanic narratives of Davi Kopenawa (Kopenawa and Albert, 2013), guiding readers into the world of shamans and their epistemic translations of the universe, in which “feeling is the most complete way of accessing knowledge” (p. 38). Through these examples, Vidal Claramonte highlights the centrality of the senses and affirms the relevance of the sensory turn and sensory studies (see Howes, 2022) for contemporary translation theory.

The second chapter, ‘Expanding translation’, opens with the idea that the sensuous knowledges introduced in the first chapter cannot be translated through traditional Western methods. Translation, the author argues, must go beyond words, beyond the search for equivalence and mere reproduction; it should be conceived as difference, as equivocation, and as a form of communication that can extend between human and non-human beings. Such approaches are essential for conveying knowledges grounded in sensory experience.

As the author explains, in the context of indigenous knowledges, a range of anthropological theories can further enrich our transdisciplinary understanding of translation. Among these are Anne Taylor’s (2015) concept of ‘shamanic translation’ between humans and nature; Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s (2004) idea of ‘translation as equivocation’, which challenges univocality and equivalence; Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s (2014, 2016) notion of ‘intercultural translation’, framed as a “way of avoiding the epistemicide of non-Western knowledge” (p. 88); and Jerome Rothenberg’s (1962 [1981]) ‘total translation’, which involves performing ethnopoetry beyond language, engaging all the senses.

Building on the theoretical discussions and examples presented in the previous chapters, the third chapter, titled ‘Translating through the senses: Cecilia Vicuña’, turns its focus exclusively onto the Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña. Through her works, deeply influenced by indigenous practices, Vicuña demonstrates the central role of the senses and the body in translation processes. Her artworks themselves function as translations,

transforming ideas and stories from one materiality into another. Among these, *quipus*—threads or cords—stand out as tangible translations of narratives, allowing viewers to engage directly with indigenous knowledges and Andean cosmovisions. Vidal Claramonte carefully shows how Vicuña’s art embodies tactile modes of translating ‘reality’, fostering connections with the ancestral and the natural, and enabling communication beyond language.

In the final chapter, ‘Toward a sensuous translation’, the author once again underscores the extensive work of translating indigenous knowledges highlighted throughout the book, emphasizing that knowledge is acquired through the senses, the body, and in connection with the natural world. Within this perspective, translation emerges as a “sensuous journey between worlds inhabited by humans, non-humans, and extrahumans” (p. 168). To capture this dimension, Vidal Claramonte coins the concept of ‘sensuous translation’: a mode of translation enacted through the senses, through the sensory expressions of experience, always dynamic and operating on multiple levels. This form of translation, inherently creative and unique to each person, offers a means of engaging with knowledge beyond the universalizing and colonial frameworks that seek to dominate and homogenize.

Overall, as in Vidal Claramonte’s other recent monographs—*Translation and Contemporary Art: Transdisciplinary Encounters* (2022) and *Translation and Objects: Rewriting Migrancy and Displacement through the Materiality of Art* (2025)—this book offers a wealth of material for reflection. In line with the expanding interdisciplinary scope of Translation Studies, it invites a deeper appreciation of translation’s relevance across diverse academic fields, thereby enhancing our understanding of the concept itself. In *Translating Indigenous Knowledges*, Vidal Claramonte opens a profoundly emotional world by presenting the work of various indigenous sensuous translators, united by a common aim: to free translation from binary thinking and to reveal the beauty and richness of translating not merely *difference*, but *through difference*, translating with the senses.

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