The Changing Profession

Thriving on Change: Translation in Brazil

VANESSA LOPES LOURENÇO HANES

The relationship between translation as a profession and as an academic field is counterintuitive: on the one hand, translation is among the most ancient of professional activities, but on the other, scholarly interest in translation on a graduate level and the systematization of undergraduate translator training are quite recent developments (Angelelli and Baer 1–2). This is true especially in Brazil, where, despite translation's status as a profession since the sixteenth century, both the scholarly field of translation studies and systematic translator training have only recently become established as university courses (Silva-Reis and Milton 2–31). The first Brazilian graduate course in translation studies was founded in 2004 at the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (Costa 191). Undergraduate translation programs are currently offered at eleven public universities, but only the most recent actually offers a translation major (192). Eighteen private universities also offer degrees in translation, and these programs are more traditional (that is, focused on professional training), the oldest of which dates from 1969 at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (196). This has led to an inevitable association of translation with an economically viable profession, given that private universities tend to offer technical courses that are safer bets for financial return. The increased significance of translation in recent years has also been attested by national events promoted by universities and translation organizations, in addition to international events, such as the fifth International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies Conference hosted in Minas Gerais in 2015.

The plurality of centers conducting translation research and providing translator training does not seem out of place in Brazil, which is generally considered monolingual (Brazilian Sign Language and the more than 150 remaining indigenous languages "notwithstanding").

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The country's cultural and economic "polysystems" (Even-Zohar 287) have historically depended on international goods that require mediation through translators. However, the welcome surprise is the increasing foregrounding of translation, particularly the elevated status of translated materials and those who produce them. Although literary translation (particularly canonized works) has for decades occupied a central position in Brazilian academia and with booksellers, more specialized subareas are now attracting the attention of both graduate and undergraduate students. PhD theses have been defended on topics as varied as the back-translation of health-care questionnaires (Coulthard 13) and corporate strategies for automotive brochure and manual localization in Brazil (Brunelière 11). Concomitantly, undergraduate translator trainers are paying greater attention to topics such as audiovisual translation and game localization, probably driven by new types of demand (Esqueda and Fernandes 1; Araújo and Alves 305). Initiatives such as university-based translation laboratories (such as the Universidade Federal Fluminense's Laboratório de Estudos da Tradução) or even firms (such as the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro's Escritório Modelo de Tradução) also encourage student involvement in different areas of translation, resulting in a new wave of more knowledgeable specialists within the expanding profession.

However, this widening range of possibilities for both scholarly work and translation professionals does not mean that literary translation has lost its relevance. In fact, literary translation in Brazil is being revisited as a complex issue that demands critical positioning from both scholars and professionals because of the historical conflict embedded in Brazilian Portuguese, which has far-reaching consequences beyond literary translation. Readers unfamiliar with the language may at this point wonder what is so critical about its handling in literary translation. To answer this question, one must consider the larger picture of colonization and power relations that speaks through usage.

Despite Portuguese colonization, the notion that the imperial language was immediately transmitted to and accepted by the entire population is far from the truth: a Tupi-based pidgin called *língua geral* ("general language"), which had been in common use since the early sixteenth century, was only officially replaced by Portuguese in the eighteenth century, a feat accomplished chiefly through force of law, banning indigenous and immigrant languages in educational settings. Brazilian Portuguese was thus born in a setting of resistance and language contact arising from Brazil's deep linguistic roots in different continents. Its population is a melting pot of indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, and immigrants from a variety of Western and Eastern cultures. The result is a derivation of European Portuguese stretched across a framework of unique influences. However, these peculiarities cannot always be seen in the written language, which has continued to be taught and printed in a similar form to European Portuguese. Everyday oral discourse, however, has dropped or reconfigured many grammatical structures (such as pluperfect conjugation and *mesóclises* [direct object pronoun construction]). This has created a tremendous gap between the spoken and written versions of the language, which, according to Mary Kato, makes written Portuguese akin to a foreign language for Brazilian schoolchildren (131).

With such a background in mind, the problematic nature of literary translation into (which?) Portuguese begins to come into focus. Gideon Toury points out that translations tend to be conservative (268), and this has definitely been the case in Brazilian literary translation, where rigid formal grammar has dominated for centuries, even for originally colloquial material. Nevertheless, this paradigm has been shifting in recent years, exemplified by translations of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Since its publication in 1885, this novel has been translated five times in Brazil, and the language used to represent Jim and Huck's dialect has varied considerably: while in the first three translations (including one in 1934 by the renowned Monteiro Lobato) the dialect is sanitized, replaced with high-register Portuguese, two recent translations, by Rosaura Eichenberg in 2011 and by José Roberto O'Shea in 2019, represent it much

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closer to common speech. Eichenberg's translation consistently uses a dialect variety from rural São Paulo state, which, as Marcos Bagno points out, is usually associated with the uneducated (161), whereas O'Shea uses urban variants in an approach that he has explained in detail (O'Shea 37). In fact, O'Shea's translation was nominated for the sixty-second Jabuti Award, the most prestigious national literary award. This indicates that translation is changing how language is perceived in Brazil, showcasing in high literary circles the formerly marginalized and suppressed speech patterns of the masses, whose written representation has been an immense taboo. Thus, translation is legitimizing and canonizing spoken Brazilian Portuguese. The formalization of modernist intellectuals is being supplanted by a (post-)postmodern vérité.

Although *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is emblematic, it is only one instance of a growing host of literary translations—discussed by authors such as Carolina Geaquinto Paganine (282), Cassiano Teixeira de Freitas Fagundes (11), and Fernanda Nunes Menegotto and Rosalia Angelita Neumann Garcia (143)—that are representing language variation with language variation, even if not strictly matching the source text's strategy (that is, not necessarily dialect for dialect per se). Even traditional publishing houses such as Penguin Books have employed this approach in recent translations by their Brazilian imprint, Penguin Companhia. This movement can be observed in other media as well, such as subtitled cinema and television, which are becoming increasingly tolerant of the structures of oral discourse, most likely because of the growth of fan subbing and the methods of streaming platforms—topics to be dealt with in-depth in future research.

Despite these gains, not everything is rosy in this environment of change. In recent years the federal government has hampered new initiatives in translation education, particularly by defunding key institutions, and a conservative chilling effect has influenced language policy. Even so, these negative aspects also work in favor of translation: because of Brazil's far-from-ideal educational levels (particularly in critical literacy), other kinds of translation, like dubbing, are being strengthened. Using data from the country's main cinema sales venue, *Ingresso.com*, Juliana Barbosa points out that more than seventy-three percent of all tickets sold in Brazil in 2021 were for dubbed movies.

Another important aspect on the education front is the revitalization of translation in second language acquisition. Following an international trend since the Second World War, translation passed through a long hibernation in foreign language teaching in Brazil, but national scholars such as Sergio Romanelli (200), Valdecy da Oliveira Pontes and Livya Lea de Oliveira Pereira (338), and Junia Mattos Zaidan and Ana Carolina Justiniano Melotti (314) are now proposing a reconsideration of translation in pedagogical practice. A brief example may help clarify the extent of these new translation practices in teaching: Zaidan and Melotti describe using translation and text production as a potentially emancipatory activity for public high school students, even involving them in selecting the material to be translated, thus resignifying translation as the representation of multiple cultures through text, rather than as the mere transposition of words.

In summary, translation researchers and practitioners in Brazil are experiencing a generally positive moment, with a stable future in view for both. Despite the many challenges that lie ahead, such as the need for legal regimentation of the profession (anyone can currently claim to be a professional translator regardless of formal training or education), new possibilities exist in fields like sign language interpretation, which is growing exponentially in public forums (since it is required support for public schools, the courts, and government meetings) and the private sphere, such as religious services, reflecting the ubiquity of translation as a profession. It seems that translation in Brazil will continue to shift toward everyday usage and away from the ideal language of the colonizer. Thus, translation has a significant, albeit paradoxical, potential to strengthen Brazilian national identity.

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