

TRANSLATIONAL IMPLICATIONS: HISTORY AND MULTILINGUALISM IN *HENRY V*

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1. The historical component

William Shakespeare used as subjects for some of his plays episodes of the political history of England which occurred, mainly, in the periods traditionally designed as the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) and the Wars of the Two Roses (1455-85). The former was characterized by great oscillations between military success and failure and was caused by the desire of some English kings who wanted to occupy the French throne, but it was equally desired by the common English people themselves, who already had a developing sense of nationalism, but, in addition, considered the French wars good opportunities to reduce the hardships of their daily living through the products of plundering and ransom usually associated with such wars. The initially surprisingly successful English invasions of France and the resounding victories in the battles of Crécy (1346), Poitiers (1356) and Azincourt (1415) filled the collective English soul with pride and survived in the memory of the people throughout the centuries. When Shakespeare used such historical matters in his plays, he did not but

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give voice to that national pride and offer his countrymen the flavour of glorious past times. The Wars of the Two Roses, on the contrary, also survived in the people's memory, but as tragic episodes of a civil war in which two families—the House of York (symbolized by the white rose) and the House of Lancaster (symbolized by the red rose)—involved themselves in bloody fights for the English throne. Curiously enough, it was precisely with three historical plays about the War of the Roses that Shakespeare inaugurated in 1590 his career as a dramatist, with the first of three parts of *Henry VI*, and with another historical play, *Henry VIII*, that he closed his dramatic production in 1612. In the time between these two dates he wrote another six “histories”, which means how much the Stratford man cherished English historical themes.

It was in this context that *Henry V* was written in 1599. The central character of this historical play is King Henry V (1387-1422), who commanded the English political fortune from 1413 to 1422 and by invoking some reasons of arguable succession rights decided to revive what his grandfather Edward III had failed to materialize in the first part of the Hundred Years' War. Shakespeare could not have chosen a better figure to embody that English pride of superiority in relation to their historical rivals on the other side of the Channel. Historically considered ‘the first modern general’ (cf. Travelyan: 187), Henry V began a triumphal expedition into France in 1415 and with his hungry, poorly equipped (except for the revolutionary long bow) army inflicted terror among the well-organized French until by the Treaty of Troyes, in 1420, he was recognized heir to the French crown. However he did not enjoy this victorious situation for long as he died in 1422 leaving his two crowns to his infant son who would rule as king of England as Henry VI (1421-1471), but who in 1453 had already lost everything that his father had conquered in France with the exception of Calais.

These are, in very general lines, the historical elements that Shakespeare had at his disposal and used for the play I am dealing with here and which he seasoned with his uncommon creativity and artistic power. It may be opportune to underline that an artist such as

Shakespeare was not supposed to be strictly subject to fidelity to historical facts, as everybody recognizes that he was entitled to the amount of liberty generally acknowledged to artistic creation. In spite of that, the historical facts are there and cannot, under any circumstances, be grossly disrespected.

In this light it is easier to understand how Shakespeare made the central character of this play a hero of gigantic dimensions, clearly beyond the size King Henry is attributed by history, moreover when readers remember how the same Henry had been depicted in the two parts of *Henry IV*, as an undisciplined young man whose best friends were rogues. The resulting *Henry V* is one of the longest of Shakespeare's plays, which does not mean one of his most successful ones in terms of popularity, as it has been rarely and very irregularly staged, almost exclusively in Britain and, exceptionally, in other English-speaking countries.

2. Multilingualism in *Henry V*

A substantial part of the plot of this play happens in France, and a number of its characters are French. These two factors alone would justify that the French language appeared in some of the dialogues when communication occurs between French people or between French and British speakers. But it does not appear so natural that a whole scene (Act 3, scene 5) is in French, moreover in a play addressed to the English public whose overwhelming majority in Shakespeare's time did not understand this language and fewer readers and spectators were able to speak it. The scene in case is a dialogue between Katherine, the daughter of the French monarchs, and her old maid Alice, "an old Gentlewoman" and begins as follows:

KATHE. Alice, tu as eR té en Angleterre, & tu bien parles le Language.

ALICE. *Um peu Madame.*

KATHE. *Je te prie m'enRigniez, il faut que ie apprend a parler:
comment appelle vous le main en Anglois.*¹

The princess is aware that Henry V wants to marry her and for this reason she wants to learn some English. Some Shakespeareans have considered the introduction of this scene in the play as being an act of great courage on Shakespeare's part as he perfectly knew that only a small part of his audience would understand what was said on the stage or what could be read on the printed page. As I will try to demonstrate below, Act 3 scene 5 poses the translator serious matter for reflection about what kind of translational attitude he may/must adopt. Besides this scene there are numerous other passages in the play where French is also used but in the form of very short sentences or even isolated words, with the exception of a funny dialogue in Act 4, scene 4, of mixed English and French, involving Pistol, who speaks only English, his French prisoner, who speaks only French, and a Boy who serves as an interpreter for the other two. These cases, however, do not represent any sort of difficulty in terms of translation.

The comic element originating in other characters' incapacity to understand and speak their interlocutors' language happens again in Act 5, scene 2, when Henry and Katherine are left alone. Here again the difficulty originates more in the ambiguities Shakespeare intentionally introduces into the speeches of either interlocutor than in the presence of French. But here again the translator is forced to manipulate or ignore some words of the original text to avoid explicit references to the English language for reasons that will be presented here.

Though French is the most used foreign language in the play, there are others, but used in an incomparably smaller scale, as is the case of Latin, in most cases used by the pretentious Pistol—one of the low social status characters who took part in the war motivated by the prospect of material gains—, a circumstance which in itself makes it clear that, by doing so, Shakespeare expected to create comic situations, as always happens when he resorts to French in this play. Linguistic variety in *Henry V*, however, is not limited to French and

Latin. Ton Hoenselaars considers that this play is “arguably one of the most babylonian texts in the English language” (xiv), and Delabastita calls it “a great feast of languages”, borrowing these words from Moth’s speech in Act 5, scene 1 of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*². Another good contribution to the justification for these attributes is the way three other characters in the play (Fluellen, MacMorris and Jamy) speak English. They are all soldiers in Henry’s army and speak English, but the English they speak is strongly marked by interference from their own mother tongues. Fluellen is Welsh, Mac Morris is Irish and Jamy is a Scot. Although Fluellen is the one who most frequently appears and speaks in the play, the other two appear in Act 3 scene 3, and each of them speaks four times, their English being characterised by deviations from standard English caused by phonological transfers from their native dialects.

The three captains are undoubtedly important in the play’s economy. On the one hand, their presence beside the English king is clearly intended to document the desired unity of the British Isles around the crown and to show that the king’s ambitions were shared by all of the Britons. As is now known such a sign of British unity had still to be promoted not only in the fifteenth century, but in Shakespeare’s time as well because that unity was not entirely guaranteed at either time. From what has just been pointed out it is only reasonable to conclude that more than expressing historical truth Shakespeare wanted to give voice to the English people’s wishes. On the other hand the presence of the three captains in the play introduce a comic component into a plot whose succession of events is predominantly characterised by violence, cruelty, hunger, and suffering as is typical of war.

3. Translational implications

One of the very few practical rules of translation universally accepted by practising translators is the one that concerns the so-called third languages which appear in a given text besides the source and

the target languages. In the translation of *Henry V* into Portuguese, all the passages written by Shakespeare in languages other than English must be considered third languages. And the rule stipulates that such passages should be left untouched. If we abide by the rule—as I did almost integrally in my published translation of *Henry V*—what appears in French and Latin should continue in French and Latin. I have just said, however, that I followed the rule *almost* integrally, and this requires some explanation.

A central question in translation, especially in the translation of drama, is that the target language becomes the language of the characters. In the light of this principle, Portuguese conventionally becomes Henry V's language, as it becomes the language of other characters such as Fluellen, Pistol, Canterbury, and the Eastcheap taverner. All this poses the translator a series of problems of very complex nature, and the latter are particularly felt in a historical play with characters who, in reality, lived at a certain time and place. Considering Portuguese as Henry V's language is a clear example of anastrophe, but this must be assumed by the translator in the conventional light of translation of fictional texts, moreover dramatic texts.

Another amply debated aspect in translation theory is the so-called equivalent effects. By this term translation theorists try to convey that the target text must provoke in its readers the same type of reactions as the source text does in its original audience. This theory is, at least partly, a very arguable one, as it is part of common sense that the reactions of different readers to the same text may be very different, varying from person to person, and therefore there is no unique effect of a text on its readers. Thus there is no typical unanimous effect that the translator should take into consideration when s/he is doing her/his work. And, of course, the same variety of reactions can be caused by the target text among its readers.

There are, however, certain elements that the translator may (must) assume as facts that he must (should) take into account. In the case of *Henry V*, a fact that cannot be ignored about the presence of foreign languages is Shakespeare's intention to provoke laughter in his readers

and spectators. Now taking this fact into account represents a difficult challenge to the translator and obliges her/him to face a number of difficulties the common reader is not aware of. In this light, if Fluellen's linguistic deviations in relation to standard English make the English-speaking reader smile or laugh, the minimum to which the Portuguese translator should aspire is that her/his work have a similar effect on its readers. The task is far from easy, but nevertheless it represents a goal of the translation.

4. What solutions are there to be found?

My translation of *Henry V*, published by the Oporto publisher Campo das Letras in 2004, was born within a project designed by the Instituto de Estudos Ingleses of the Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto whose aim is a new complete translation of Shakespeare's plays. An originality of the project, if it is any originality at all, is the rule according to which as soon as a given translator has completed the translation of an act of the play s/he is expected to distribute a copy of her/his proposed work to the other nine members of the team who are expected to read it and attend a general meeting to propose any changes that they consider as advantageous for the final version. The final decision is always made by the translator who will sign the published translation, but the time-consuming discussions that we have had around translational issues have proved extremely interesting and enriching. In this, way the final product is, in varying degrees depending on the nature of the play and the capacity of the translator, the result of cooperative work. The greatest disadvantage in this practice, as can be easily perceived, is the time spent at our long meetings. In spite of this, eleven plays have already been published and some more are forthcoming.

4.1 The parts in French

I completely agree with those who propose that the passages in a third language should be integrally maintained, but in the case of *Henry*

V this rule cannot be one hundred percent followed. Let us go back to the beginning of the dialogue that introduces the foreign-language lesson taught by Alice to Katherine. The latter begins with the following statement:

Alice, tu as eR té en Angleterre, & tu bien parles le Language.

This reference to England is perfectly adjusted to the historical context of the play. However, it poses the translator some difficulty as s/he, according to the normal practice in translation work, and as I stated above, considers that the native language of the characters in the target text is Portuguese. And the question turns even more complex with Katherine's next speech when she says:

Je te prie m'enseigniez, il faut que ie apprend a parler: comment appelle vous le main en Anglois?

From this point to the end of the scene the princess asks Alice to teach her the English words that correspond to the French ones that successively come to her mind. At first sight there is nothing in all this that might represent serious difficulty to the translator, but when the latter realizes that Shakespeare used this lesson to make his audience (including his readers) laugh, then the thing takes a very different colour. Both the teacher and the learner in this foreign-language lesson make mistakes when they say the English words, with the princess accentuating the deviations present in her teacher's supplied models. For example Alice says *finres* for *fingers*, *nick* for *neck* and other small things like these, and the English reader/spectator certainly smiles on hearing such corruptions. But if the English words were left, and assuming that the play is being translated into Portuguese for those who cannot understand it in English, then all the comic effects of the English lesson would be totally lost. This was exactly what Henrique Braga, the author of the only other Portuguese published translation of *Henry V*³ before mine did: all he did was transcribe the original text.⁴

The transfer of the comic effects into the target text can only be achieved if the language taught is Portuguese instead of English, and the errors be made in relation to the Portuguese language.

Leonardo Da Vinci is said to have once declared about originals and imitations of works of art that nobody drinks from the water jar if he can go to the fountain. Because I was aware that, at least in principle, the readers of what I was translating would read my translation because they could not read *Henry V* in English, and that for their very same incapacity would not understand the comedy present in the lesson if the target words were English, I decided to transform the lesson of English into a lesson of Portuguese. As a result of my option the linguistic deviations were made in Portuguese by both Alice and Katherine. On assuming this position I was perfectly conscious of the historical and geographical implications involved, but at the same time I was aware that I could find in the text some attenuation for my "sin". For example, one knows that Katherine wants to learn the invading king's language because she also knows that he will seek her hand, but there is nothing in the text telling us that that is the reason. One knows it from logic and history. And it was against logic and history that I decided to change the English lesson into a lesson of Portuguese.

My decision, however, implied that I made slight changes in the original text, even at the level of French. For instance, Katherine's first words

*Alice, tu as eR té en Angleterre, & tu bien parles le
Language*

were slightly changed into

*Alice, tu as esté a l'étranger, & tu bien parles les
langues;*

and, immediately after this I suppressed Katherine's reference to the English language in

*...comment appelle vous le main **en Anglois** .*

There was similar intervention in other speeches of this scene with references to English and England:

Original	Changes made
<i>Kathe.I'ay gaygnie diux mots d'Anglois viRtement...</i>	<i>J'ai gagné deux mots vitelement...</i>
<i>Alice. C'est bien dict, Madame, il est fort bon Anglois.</i>	<i>C'est bien dit, Madame; vous parlez très bien.</i>
<i>Alice. Ouy. Sauf voRtre honneur en verite vous pronouncies les mots auRI droit, que les Natifs d'Angleterre.</i>	<i>Oui. Sauf votre honneur, en vérité, vous prononcez les mots aussi droit que les natifs.</i>

It is my belief that the changes just presented do not substantially affect the essence of the Shakespeareran text, which is not the case of my choice of Portuguese words instead of the English ones to correspond to the French terms that the princess presented. To reproduce the comedy of the original I adulterated the pronunciation of some of the Portuguese words given by Alice as equivalents to the French terms. This is neither the occasion nor the place to present the list of the solutions I found, but I dare say that to a certain extent some of the fun created by Shakespeare in English can be found in my Portuguese version of this scene.

4.2 The other British accents

As stated above, three of Henry's soldiers come from different geographical/linguistic areas of the British Isles: Fluellen, from Wales, MacMorris, from Ireland, and Jamy, from Scotland. Each one of them speaks English influenced in varying degrees by the accent typical of his native area. Fluellen is the one who most frequently intervenes in the play, to the point of becoming the main comical character of the play. Besides some phonological deviations, the Welshman's English

is also characterised by some syntactic errors. Here is an example of how he speaks when he addresses himself to the king:

FLUELLEN. I, so please your Maiesty. The Duke of Exeter ha's very gallantly maintain'd the **P**ridge: the French **is** gone off, looke you; and there **is** gallant and most **p**rave passages; marry, th' **ath**versary **was haue** possession of the **p**ridge; but he is enforced to retyre, and the Duke of Exeter is Master of the **P**ridge: I can tell your Maiesty, the duke is a **p**rave man. (Act 3, scene 6)

In this, as well as in other speeches of this same character, there are not many deviations from standard English: **p**ridge instead of **b**ridge, **p**rave instead of **b**rave, **ath**versary instead of **ad**versary; there **is** (instead of there **are**)... **p**rave passages. In other passages we come across examples of adulteration more or less of the same nature: **p**orn instead of **b**orn, **f**alarous instead of **v**alorous, **p**rains instead of **b**rain, etc.), but the percentage of wrong words in Fluellen's discourse is relatively low. This fact will be considered below as a motive for reflection.

The amount of language produced by the Irishman or by the Scot is relatively smaller than Fluellen's: they both appear in Act 3, scene 3, and each of them speaks three times. Again it is through speech that Shakespeare distinguishes them from other characters in the play. Let us have a look at one example of each.

MACMORRIS. By **Chrish** Law **tish** ill done: the worke **ish giue** ouer, the Trompet **sound** the Retreat. By my Hand I swear, and my fathers Soule, the Worke **ish** ill done; it **ish giue** ouer: I would haue blow**ed** vp the Towne, so **Chrish** saue me law, in an houre. Oh **tish** ill done, **tish** ill done: by my Hand **tish** ill done.

The most visible mark of MacMorris' English is, at the phonological level, the transformation of the sounds /s/ and /z/ into /R/ and some errors in the syntax of verbs.

As for Jamy the density of deviations is incomparably higher, as can be seen in the following example:

JAMY. By the Mes, ere these eyes of mine take themselves to slomber, ayle de gud seruice, or Ile ligge i'th' grund for it; ay, or goe to death: and Ile pay 't as valorously as I may, that sal I suerly do, that is the breff and the long: mary, I wad full fain heard some question tween you tway.

In this and the remaining speeches by the Scot nearly every word contains some deviating mark from English to such a point that it makes it impossible to emphasize every occurrence unless one is prepared to bold very nearly 100% of the text.

What kind of problems do the three accents represent for the translation?

First of all it must be reminded that Shakespeare resorted to this kind of language to produce a laughing effect; then it is necessary to underline that the English language, that is to say, the one in which the play was originally written, serves as the basis to all this. And, as I said above, from a translational perspective, the new language of the play is Portuguese. Accordingly, if the translator wants to produce in his readers a similar effect to that caused by the English text in the English-speaking audiences, s/he has to deal with Portuguese as Shakespeare did with English. The obvious solution to meet this purpose was finding regional Portuguese accents and assigning them to the three captains of the king's army. And finding regional accents in Portugal is the easiest of things in spite of the small geographical dimension of the country: you only have to travel less than one hundred miles and you come across new forms of Portuguese that may differ from others in pronunciation, vocabulary and intonation. Errors in syntax are common and numerous in popular usage. That is why Portuguese comedians

resort to such regional accents in their performances on the radio, on television and on the stage. Thus the task of finding linguistic varieties of Portuguese for the three soldiers was easy, even without any need to leave the geographical frontiers of continental Portugal.

I decided to make Fluellen speak with the Oporto accent, MacMorris with that of the Beira Alta and Jamy would speak Alentejano, the typical accent spoken in the Alentejo. In spite of all the complex implications of my decision, as will be discussed further down, a simple look at Henrique Braga's translation and the speeches produced by the three captains would be more than enough to demonstrate that some sort of attitude as mine had to be taken. As a matter of fact Braga put flawless standard Portuguese in their mouths, and all the fun of the original is lost. For those who can read Portuguese, here are three short examples from Braga's translation to prove what I have just stated:

FLUELLEN. *Sim, se apraz a Vossa Majestade. O Duque de Exeter defendeu valentemente a ponte. O Francês foi repellido, sabe? e agora temos boas e bravas façanhas. O inimigo queria apoderar-se da ponte, mas viu-se obrigado a retirar, e o Duque de Exeter está senhor da ponte. Posso afirmar a Vossa Majestade que o duque é homem de coragem.* (p.84)

MACMORRIS. *Por cristo, é malfeito. O trabalho está acabado; a trombeta toca a retirar. Por esta mão o juro, e pela alma de meu pai. O trabalho está abandonado. Eu teria feito ir a cidade pelos ares, Cristo me salve, numa hora! Oh! é malfeito, é malfeito! por esta mão, é malfeito!* (p. 65)

JAMY. *Pela missa, antes que estes olhos se entreguem ao sono, farei um bom serviço, ou estarei enterrado; isto é, ou morrerrei; e quero combater tão valorosamente como puder, o que por certo farei, tão brevemente como longamente. Terei gosto de ouvir uma questão entre vós dois.* (p. 66)

And now my own translation of the same passages:

FLUELLEN. *Estibe, cum licença de Bossa Majestade. O Duque de Exeter aguentou a puonte cum brabura. Os Franceses foram-se imbora e, reparai, houberam passagens de coragem e Brabura. Pela Birgem Maria, o adbersário estaba de posse da puonte, mas foi obrigado a retirar, e o Duque de Exeter é duono da puonte. Posso asseberar a Bossa Majestade que o duque é um brabo.* (p. 94)

MACMORRIS. *Pelo amor de Cristo, ixo correu mal. O xervixo acabou, a trombeta tocou a retirar. Juro por minha fé e pela alma de meu pai, que o xervixo foi mal feito. Foi xuspenxo. Se foxe eu, mandava a xidade pelos ares, axim Cristo me xalve, numa hora. Oh, ixo foi mal feito, mal feito. Por minha fé, ixo foi mal feito.*(p. 81)

JAMY. *Pela santa missa, antes de estes meus olhos se darem ao sono hê-de fazeri bom serviço, ou então ficarê estendido no chã por causa disso. Estou devendo uma morte a Deus e hê-de pagá-la com tanta coragem quanta puderi, isso vou fazeri com certeza, e é isso que importa. Caramba, estava-me parecendo em estari ouvindo qualqueri questão entre vós dois.* (p. 82)⁵

All I did was introduce some phonetic changes and a few syntactic errors. In doing so it is my conviction that I was not very far from Shakespeare's conception, and that in the hands of able actors these texts would work acceptably well on the stage. But there are some aspects in my solution that deserve careful reflection. One of them has to do with the relative percentage of deviations in the original and in my translation to the standard languages. For instance, in Fluellen's speech presented above there is a total of 66 words, six of which present phonological deviations from correct English: *pridge* (three

occurrences), *prave* (two occurrences) and *athversary* (one). These figures indicate that the deviation rate is about 9%. Besides the phonological errors there is one in syntax when Fluellen says ... *and **there is** gallant and most prave passages* instead of **there are**. In my translation there are 64 words, 17 of them being incorrect according to standard rules, and this is equivalent to 26,5%, a much higher deviation rate than in the original.

I am not able to say that if Shakespeare desired to lend more authenticity to the Welshman's speech he could have introduced any more deviations in relation to the standard language or if what he did already corresponded to the English really spoken by a typical Welsh speaker of his epoch. But as far as Portuguese is concerned it is my understanding that after having chosen the Oporto accent for Fluellen I had to put in his mouth a version of this accent as close as possible to what an Oporto man in the street would say today and not reduce deviations to one or two occurrences of the most typical Oporto marks such as the substitution of **b** for **v** or **om** for **ão**. As for the speech of the other two characters something similar was done, although percent differences in comparison with the original do not always correspond. In Jamy's case, for instance, the distortion rate is higher in English than in my translation.

Another even more serious problematic aspect is anapopism. To find a character in an *historical* play who takes part in a military campaign in France in the course of the second part of the Hundred Years' War whose name is Fluellen and who speaks Portuguese with an Oporto accent is an impudent violation of historical facts. I was quite aware of all this when I decided to do what I did in fact. However, Shakespeare is a singular name in world literature, and literature does not always respect historical truth, as to a certain extent happens in *Henry V*. Of course my infringement of historical truth was not a matter of imitating Shakespeare, but it was in some degree legitimated by his own attitudes, and mainly by my intention to transfer into my Portuguese translation the comic effects present in some of his scenes.

Obviously there were other possible options to be taken in order to camouflage at least part of the anachronism visible in my translation: I could, for instance, give the characters Portuguese names, but such an attitude would still violate historical truth, as there is no news that there were Portuguese soldiers in Henry V's army. And as I said above, Henrique Braga's solution of using flawless standard Portuguese for the speeches of Fluellen, MacMorris and Jamy is not a good one. That is why I did what I did, and after having analysed the questions from several perspectives and discussed them with my colleagues, I do not think that it will ever be possible to translate *Henry V* without having in the end an anguishing feeling of frustration mainly because of the implications of the multilingual character of this play.

Notes

1. In this citation I follow the text of the First Folio of 1623, although in my translation of the play I adopted versions in modern French frequently used in critical editions nowadays.
2. "They have been at a great feast of languages, and stolen the scraps".
3. I have only considered the translations done in Portugal; those published in Brazil have not been considered here.
4. As a matter of fact his transcription does not fully coincide with the text published in the best known English editions, including the first folio. In this scene he substituted *conde* for *coudre*, although the translation provided for this word by Alice is the "correct" one, *De elbow*. On the other hand, in the following passage the translator did not pay the necessary attention to the original.

CATARINA
Non, je réciterai à vous promptement: de hand, de fingers, de nails...
 ALICE
De nails, madame.
 Alice's *nails* is a correction of *mails* that the princess used in her repetition of the words she supposed had already been learned so far. In Braga's text the reader does not understand why the correction or what correction was made.

5. I have bolded the phonological deviations and underlined the syntactic errors or regional particularities.
6. The oldest edition I was able to find was dated 1955.

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