DISCOURSE AND TRANSLATION STUDIES: A CASE STUDY OF GENRE INTERTEXTUALITY[1]

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(…) *with a written language it is always possible to reconstruct a dictionary and a grammar, isolate sentences, transcribe them or paraphrase them in another language, whereas I am trying to read in the succession of things presented to me every day the world's intentions toward me, and I grope my way, knowing that there can exist no dictionary that will translate into words the burden of obscure allusions that lurks in these things.* Calvino,1981:61

Translation Studies and Genre

This paper draws on the notions of genre and on the field of critical discourse analysis to build a model for the evaluation of translations, which proved to be useful in translators' training classes. It aims at answering the following research questions: are there any changes as regards generic structuring when a textual genre is translated? If so, what governs such changes?

In order to be able to answer these questions a review of the present literature on genre is necessary. Some developments of the notion in the field of critical discourse analysis together with the idea of intertextuality amongst genres are also crucial for the

analysis, which is intended at the macro level of culture. The corpus analysed consists of texts translated from the *New York Times* on-line archives into a local Brazilian newspaper. The textual genre chosen will be named for the purposes of this paper "scientific news report published in the section on health matters" in the *New York Times.*

Genre: a network of lines that intertwine

Swales (1990) has developed an extensive study on genre in which he pursues the concept critically in diverse areas such as folklore, literature, linguistics and rhetoric. He rounds up his discussion with the following working definition of genre:

> A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognised by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style (Swales, 1990: 58).

Working in the area of research on reading in ESL, Wallace (1992) expresses a similar viewpoint. She emphasises that genres are social events not only in terms of the social roles and purposes of those who create them as speakers or writers but because the communicative function of the resulting spoken or written text is recognisable to a particular community of listeners or readers.

I would like to single out two points made by Swales, one in his working definition and the other elsewhere in his text, which are relevant in a research model for genre-based studies of translation. The notion that the communicative aims shared and recognised by

members of a discourse community shape the schematic structure of discourse as well as dictate choices of content and style and the idea that today's existence of transnational discourse communities is likely to lead to universalist tendencies in genres might back up a comparison of languages at the discoursal level which could otherwise be difficult.

Bakhtin (1986) had previously arrived at a similar conclusion on his definition of speech genres: language is realised through individual utterances but each sphere in which language is used builds its own genre, i.e., relatively stable types of these utterances (Bakhtin, 1986: 60). For him, the three aspects that integrate an utterance - thematic content, style, and compositional structure - are equally linked to the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication. According to Bakhtin, to be able to understand more fully the changes that are likely to occur in one of the compositional aspects of utterances, "(…) one must develop a special history of speech genres (…) that reflects more directly, clearly, and flexibly all the changes taking place in social life (1986: 65)". Bakhtin had also recognised the intertextuality amongst genres when he pointed out the heterogeneity of speech genres and defined primary and secondary genres:

> Secondary (complex) speech genres - novels, dramas, all kinds of scientific research, major genres of commentary, and so forth - arise in more complex and comparatively highly developed and organised cultural communication (primarily written) that is artistic, scientific, sociopolitical, and so on. During the process of their formation, they absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communion. These primary genres are altered and assume a special character when they enter into complex ones. They lose their immediate relation to actual reality and to the real utterances of others (1986: 61-62).

The example he gives to illustrate the matter is the occurrence of letters or everyday dialogues in novels. In addition to that, the author points out the need to reveal and define the nature of the utterance through analysis of both primary and secondary genres.

Taking the concept a bit further critical discourse analysts' approaches to genre intend to frame it within the context of social practices. Kress and Threadgold (1988) sketch a theory of genre in the broad framework of social semiotics, a field of knowledge defined by them as "(…) crucially concerned with explicit accounts of language as text, of context, and of detailed linguistic analysis within a socially based theory of language (1988: 215)".

According to the authors, to describe a genre involves an account not only of its internal dynamics but also of the "(…) generically constrained ways in which it unfolds materially in space and time (1988: 218)". Through analysis of four different generically constructed texts they also discuss the multigeneric character of texts realised through intertextual resources such as discourses, narratives, cryptotypes[2] and dialogism.

Another interesting point that they add to their critical approach to genre has to do with the stability of the social situation-types in which language is encountered in the forms of the texts produced in those situations, an element already pointed out by the other theorists mentioned before. What they add to the feature of stability stems from the fact that they also consider social and linguistic interactions as the sites of power difference. Thus the degree of fluidity possible in the interaction and therefore in the genre is directly related to the degree of power at issue in that particular interaction: "Where power is strong, genres will be strictly policed and relatively rigid. Where power is less, generic form is liable to greater flux, fluidity" (1988: 238).

This point is even clearer in Kress (1989: 450) where the author sees generic forms, and therefore genres, as the product of systems or patterns of power-relations which have a certain stability and persistence in a particular society. In short, genres could thus be

taken as codings of relations of power, which as such make par-
ticular positions of power available to participants in the genre.

Fairclough (1992: 195) takes the notion of intertextuality a step
further, drawing on the concept as it is dynamically and dialectally
conceived by Bakhtin. Not only are texts dependent upon society
and history; they may also transform these social and historical
resources made available within the order of discourses for their
realisation, claims Fairclough. In this sense texts may re-accentuate
genres, genres may be mixed in texts, and a genre might even
colonise or appropriate another.

Finally, in the field of Translation Studies, Mason (1992),
drawing upon the categories of genre, discourse and text as proposed
by Hatim and Mason (1992), is able to show how ideology intervenes
in the translation process. Mason (ibid.: 25) takes into account the
many levels of processing that the translated text undergoes to point
out that "the meaning potential of items within the language system
(…) is exploited by a variety of users, each within their own context
and for their own purposes". Thus when there are different world-
views and discursive histories divergent discourses and texts are
created. The process of text interpretation may then be affected by
the ideological shifts realised through lexical choices, cohesive
relations, syntactic organisation, text structure and text types.

Mason (ibid.) bases his model for description of translated texts
and training of translators on the categories of *genre*, *text* and
discourse. The concept of *genre* has been fully commented on above.
Text and *discourse* are taken in narrower senses than the usual,
broader sense which they have for the purposes of text linguistics
and discourse analysis. *Text* "(…) refers to a unit of structure which
is deployed in the service of an overall rhetorical purpose – e.g. to
expound or argue", and *discourse* refers to "systematically
organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings
and values of an institution" (ibid.: 25)[3] . The notion that language
users have their own discursive history, i.e., a previous different
experience of discourse which finds expression in their perception

and use of discoursal features is closely bound up with the notion of ideology, another crucial concept of Mason's model. *Ideology* is taken as "(…) the set of beliefs and values which inform an individual's or institution's view of the world and assist their interpretation of events, facts, etc." (ibid.: 25).

The aim of the present paper stems mainly from the work of this Translation Studies theorist. According to Mason (1992: 34), the discussion of translators' techniques and strategies can be greatly enriched if training programs take into account the important dimensions of genre, discourse and textual developments in text production and reception. The expanded notion of genre as codings of relations of power with the implications of power positioning for the participants in translation as a unique interactive event, as well as the notion of intertextuality as stated by Fairclough (1992) are categories to be added to a model undoubtedly useful both for descriptive and pedagogical purposes.

Genre: a network of lines that intersect

Pagano (1998) has devoted herself to the study of transformations occurring in genres when transposed from their original medium. She worked with changes which scientific articles published in special periodicals undergo when they are turned into articles published in general interest magazines for a general audience. In rewritings of such a nature, she concludes, narrative plays an important role: "from simple causal and chronological organisation (…) to the making up of characters and a plot (…) the narrative mode contributes to an integrating view of scientific findings (1998: 70)". Amongst the aspects that indicate the appropriation of narration in the rewriting of the genre analysed, she emphasises the introduction of direct and indirect speech and a strong cohesive element between ideas being debated.

All the features described by Pagano (1998) and others are present in the texts belonging to the genre "scientific news report published in the health/science section" of the *New York Times* on line, indicating a likely strategy of rewriting a scientific theme for a non-specialist audience. Most of these features, however, are not captured when translated into Portuguese for a local Brazilian newspaper, contradicting what Mason (1992) envisages as the task of the translator:

> The translator, as both the receiver and producer of text, has the double duty of perceiving the meaning potential of particular choices within the cultural and linguistic community of the source text and relaying that same potential, by suitable linguistic means, to a target readership (1992: 23).

What interests us in our analysis is to unravel the systematic ideological shifts which affected the translator's process of both perceiving the meaning potential of particular choices made within the macro context of the source text and relaying that potential adequately to a Brazilian readership. We shall start with the very first paragraph from the text "Smoking may harm hearing" which presents itself from the beginning as an example of what Hatim and Mason (1992) call "hybridity" of texts:

> **1) Add** hearing loss to the list of maladies cigarette smoking may cause in middle-aged and elderly Americans. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin Medical School found that smokers were nearly 1.7 times as likely to suffer hearing loss than nonsmokers.

Although the theme should be here one of the many maladies caused by cigarette smoking, the writer, before narrating the scientific facts related to this finding, uses a convention dominant in another genre, i.e., the instructional type, giving the reader an

instruction as if in a recipe as his starting point. The idea might have been to draw the reader's attention to the fact that as a rule he/she could *definitively* add hearing loss to the many associated effects of smoking and to make him/her curious enough so as to read the rest of the news. The translated text, on the other hand, looks more like a traditional scientific text in which the theme being investigated should be first mentioned in a conventional expository type text. Besides, the strong command represented by the imperative in ST is passivised and modalised, which should perhaps be more acceptable to the readership of the scientific article *per se*:

> **1.1)   A perda da audição** pode ser acrescentada à lista de doenças que o fumo pode causar em americanos de meia idade e idosos. Pesquisadores da Escola de Medicina (…)

Another example of hybridity of genres can be found in the text "Shoes that walked the earth 8,000 years ago". It is a report on findings in the field of archaeology based on shoes, which were excavated by archaeologists. It has a strong narrative component, which could be interpreted as fictional. One of the features that can be taken as fictional is the personification of the shoes in the story: through the verbal choices made by the writer we can identify the shoes as **+ humans** as well as **+ actors** in the processes described:

> **2) Shoes** that **walked** the earth 8,000 years ago.
> **3)** Though these materials are perishable, **the shoes survived** because of the dry and constant conditions in the cave (…)

The passivization found in the translated text might indicate a double trend to normalisation[4] of the genre, i.e., conforming it to the patterns accepted by a scientific community and to the non acceptance of the fictional element by this same audience. Thus the shoes are reduced to their condition of **–human** and **+ affected** in the processes described:

> 2.1) **Encontrados sapatos** de 8 mil anos.
> 3.1) Apesar desses materiais serem perecíveis, **os sapatos se**
> **conservaram** por causa das condições climáticas dentro da
> caverna (…)

Another element that could be taken as fictional in this text is the marked Theme in 4). It helps build the context of a narrated story in which the fronting of the circumstantial adjunct plus the insertion of the attributive adjective *ancient* seem to take the reader into the ancient world of the shoes:

> **4) [**From an **ancient** garbage dump in the cave**]**, archaeolo-
> gists have retrieved a number of discarded shoes that range in
> the age from 800 to 8,000 years old.

The translated text disrupts the context of fictional narration not only when it rewrites the sentence with an unmarked Theme (thus simplifying[5] it) but also when it omits the adjective:

> 4.1) Arqueólogos recuperaram vários sapatos em escavações
> **[**no local que seria o Æ depósito de lixo da caverna**]**, e sua
> idade varia de 800 a 8 mil anos.

One important element in narratives, be them natural conversation or fictional texts, is the presence of characters that are able to carry out actions. In scientific reports for a community of specialists, on the contrary, the emphasis is less on characters than on findings or the chronological order in time in which these have taken place. However, when these reports are rewritten in a general interest magazine or newspaper for a community of lay people it is crucial to have the voices from the field heard by the general audience. Therefore this genre appropriates the feature of

dialogism characteristic of everyday dialogues or of secondary genres such as the novel or the play. The example in 5) comes from the text "Scientists study ice to learn about global climate" and the one in 6) from the text "Prayer can lower blood pressure":

> **5) The scientists** also were able to measure ice thickness and study how the polynyas are formed.
> 6) And **researchers** found earlier this year that adults who attended church at least once a week were less likely to have high levels of interleukin-6 (…)

The translated text sets the emphasis on the findings, making the option for an impersonalised sentence in 5.1) and for a passive in 6.1) with the goal of the action highlighted, once again in a movement towards normalisation:

> 5.1) Também **foi possível medir** a espessura do gelo e estudar como as polynyas são formadas.
> 6.1) E, no início deste ano, **descobriu-se** que os adultos que iam à igreja pelo menos uma vez por semana tinham menos probabilidade de apresentar níveis altos de interleucina-6 (…)

When using direct or indirect speech, rewriters of source texts tend to use speech act verbs classified by Wierzbicka (1987) under *the tell1 group*. According to the author: "*Tell* is one of the most basic speech act verbs (…) [which] seems to include only two components: saying something and wanting to cause someone to know something (1987: 287)". There are a number of examples with the verb *say*[6], either introducing indirect speech or as a post-script to direct speech, of which 7) comes from the text "Prayer can lower blood pressure" and 8) from "Scientists study ice to learn about global climate":

> 7) Study authors **say** the findings could be limited to the area studied, an overwhelmingly Protestant area of North Carolina. 8) If you look at it from a satellite, you're never quite sure what you're looking at," **says** Bernhard Lettau of the National Science Foundation.

The translated texts are likely to substitute *affirm* for *say*[7]. In her semantic analysis of speech acts verbs, Wierzbicka (1987) puts *affirm* under *the assert group*, even though she also points at a slight semantic difference between the two verbs *affirm* and *assert* (which is not of any interest to this study). The author states "(…) *affirm* is associated with 'defending' or 'showing allegiance to'(…) (1987: 322)". What matters to us is the subtle difference in the meaning of verbal processes when "scientific articles for a general audience" are translated into Portuguese: characters in scientific events cannot just "say something to cause somebody else to know it" but they are to "defend or show allegiance to" something perhaps in order to be believed:

> 7.1) Os autores do estudo **afirmam** que as conclusões poderiam se limitar à região onde se realizou, uma área do Estado North Carolina cuja população é, em sua grande maioria, protestante. 8.1) "Ao observar as imagens de satélite você nunca sabe realmente o que está vendo", **afirma** Bernhard Lettau da National Science Foundation.

One last feature to be examined here is cohesion. When rewriting the scientific event for a community of lay people writers seem to be quite concerned with establishing a firm and clear connection between the new ideas which are likely to be first introduced to that particular audience. The examples 9) and 10) from the text "Report casts doubt on brain sizes of early hominids" present a strong case of lexical cohesion, in which the main scientific fact being depicted in a paragraph is retrieved right at the beginning of the next paragraph:

9) Though researchers are trained to resist such biases, conscious and unconscious, a new measurement of an early hominid skull suggests that, for whatever reason, **the brain sizes of many human ancestors** were overestimated.
Reducing **the brain size of many early hominids**, experts said, (…)
10) (…) Dr Glenn Conroy, an anthropologist at the Washington University School of Medicine in St Louis, reports in Friday's issue of Science that he has measured **the skull capacity of a 2.8-million-year-old hominid** with a CAT scanner (…)
The hominid's brain capacity, Conroy found, (…)

Once again the translated text disrupts the cohesion trying to conform the text to patterns where the priority is given to the voice of an authority in the field which should be heard first:

9.1) Apesar de os pesquisadores serem treinados para resistir a estes preconceitos, conscientes ou inconscientes, uma nova medição de um crânio de hominídeo sugere que, por um motivo ou outro, **o tamanho dos cérebros de muitos ancestrais do homem** foi superestimado.
Segundo especialistas, reduzir o tamanho do cérebro de muitos dos primeiros hominídeos (…)
10.1) (…) O Dr. Glenn Conroy, antropólogo da Escola de Medicina da Washington University em St Louis, relata no último número da revista Science que mediu **a capacidade do crânio de um hominídeo de 2,8 milhões de anos** com um CAT scanner (…)
Conroy descobriu que a capacidade craniana do hominídeo (…)

Thus some of the features suggested by Pagano (1998) as transformations occurring in a genre as a consequence of its transposition from one medium into the other (and thus from a readership into another) are mainly disregarded in translation. We shall try to hint at some possible explanations for that in our conclusion.

Translation Studies and Critical Discourse Analysis

So far I have been describing what happens to generic structuring of texts when they are translated into Portuguese. This study step has an important role in translation pedagogy as well: the translators' awareness regarding genre should be raised at the beginning of a training course.

We could have rounded up our description of simplifications and normalisations above by interpreting them as the translator's unawareness of the macro level of textual analysis, which involves generic features and intertextuality. But this would not be enough in a critical approach to genre. We should also go a step further trying to understand translation in the order of discourses of Brazilian social practices. We could thus ask ourselves a couple of questions: why do Brazilian translations seem to move towards conservatism of generic features proper to a genre version directed to a specialist readership whenever there is appropriation of features of primary genres? or whenever there is appropriation of the fictional character of literature in the source genre rewritten for a lay readership? Could it be that only specialised readers would read the newspaper section in which these texts were published?

I would like to suggest that even though there has been substantial progress concerning debates on the identity of translation as a communicative event *per se*, changes occurring in the translations analysed here might be taken as ideological shifts intervening in a social practice which holds less power in a context where transfor- mations are possibly not allowed. Therefore if power is on the side of genres written for specialised audiences (such as the scientific article) translators would better retrieve features from those genres even though these features do not even integrate the texts they are translating. That is, translation as a social practice with less power than writing would not be allowed to appropriate features which might undermine the credibility of the news being conveyed. Going back to the quotation with which I opened this paper, I would agree

with Calvino in that translators should read in words "the burden of obscure allusions that lurks" in them or they should grope their way to find what dictionaries can never tell.

Notes

1. A version of this paper was presented at the Conference *Research Models in Translation Studies*, at UMIST, England, on April 2000. My participation in the conference was sponsored by FAPEMIG.

2. Cryptotypes are defined as patterns of meaning which seem to be realising profoundly important social and cultural positions (1989: 234).

3. The concept of text is drawn from Hatim & Mason (1990) and the concept of discourse from Kress (1985).

4. For a full definition of normalisation see Baker (1996).

5. Baker (1996) has also described the process of simplification as "(…) making things easier for the reader (but not necessarily more explicit) (…) (1996: 182)".

6. Although not mentioned by Wierzbicka in her *Tell1 group*, I suggest the verb *say* could be included there following its definition of use in *Collins CoBuild*: "You use **say** for direct speech when you give the actual words that someone uses (1993: 1288)."

7. This could be perhaps investigated in the future as a feature of translated texts in Brazilian Portuguese. In a quick look at a translated quotation in an academic paper an example of this transformation was found: "*There were an alarming number of miscarriages and abnormalities with the technique,*" **says** *Roger Gosden (…)* translated as "*Com esta técnica, houve um número alarmante de interrupções da gravidez e anormalidades,*" **afirma** *Roger Gosden (…)*, in Pagano (1998: 66-67).

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