

## Translating Poems of Recollection and other Movements by Conceição Evaristo

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### **Resumo:**

*O presente trabalho apresenta contribuições com base em teoria pertinente aos Estudos de Tradução Intercultural, apartir de trabalho dos Autores ao traduzir obra de poemas de Conceição Evaristo. Mostra casos concretos e retoma o foco do Simpósio proposto pelos Autores, se concentrando na discussão da identidade negra das Américas, com particular referência a hibridismo, discurso e performance.*

**Palavras-chave:** tradução intercultural, hibridismo, identidade negra, Américas.

### **1 Introduction**

Translating *Poems of Recollection and other Movements* by Conceição Evaristo represented a rich intercultural, academic and human experience, considering the way two scholars – a Brazilian and an American one – mediated the text, until the moment when we would consider that we had got to an ideal, or the most ideal possible – choice.

This way, this short talk aims at showing a brief summary of recent paths taken by Translation Studies, taken in consideration in terms of their intimate relationship with the field of Literary Studies and specific points related to the translation of African Diaspora Writers.

Our aim is not to argue or question, as some might, if Translation Studies have been moving in such a radical different direction from Linguistic Studies that, therefore, they have acquired a new identity, or else, if this has to do with a new trend. In fact we are interested in the methodological perspective of dealing with regions and cultures, not as closed entities or polarities, but by looking at processes of transfer, exchange, and interaction in the sense of entangled or shared histories and cultures, as in the case of the African Diaspora. In fact, during the course of the work both Professor Tillis and I have been doing when translating Afro-Brazilian writer Conceicao Evaristo's poems into English, we've been trying to rethink key concepts and premises that link and divide African Diasporic concepts in different parts of the world.

In an attempt to respond to the growing interest within and beyond the academic field of Translation Studies in the role played by translators in redressing the injustices of an increasingly polarized and conflictive society, we focus on the translation of African-diasporic literary texts as a means of exchanging and representing meanings across and within cultures. Contemporary

globalization has made translation extremely relevant in the public sphere of post-modernity. Translation as boundary-crossing and as a place of mutual convergence represents the most crucial aspect of translingual identities of our era. It is both transcription into another language and inscription into another culture. However, does it simply translate meanings or does it generate new meanings?

## **2 Text**

The time when translation was seen as a merely interlingual activity of canonical written texts is gone. Today the horizon is much wider and translation is seen essentially as an intercultural activity. In the contemporary world, transcultural representation of different natures is recurrent. In the agenda of the contemporaneity, globalization of communication, multiculturalism, tradition and cultural transmission generate constant ideological debates, originated in politics. In such a scenario, the role of translation is seen as essential for the spreading of cultural diversity in contemporary world. Roads taken (and not taken!) in the past are essentials for the linking of these to the new, cross-fertilized languages that constitute and energize the field in the future, while recognizing the complexity of language politics in a world at once more monolingual and more multilingual.

It is not difficult to understand the problems a translator dealing with items such as gender and ethnicity necessarily faces. In the bare field of translations of literary Afro-American texts into Portuguese and of Afro-Brazilian texts into English, efforts start to be made in order to fill in the gap. When working with Afro-American and Afro-Brazilian texts we must take issues of power, gender and geopolitics into consideration if we are to discuss transformation and re-enunciation in some of such texts.

In such an international environment of diasporic and transcultural connections, discourses of authenticity and heterogeneity are constantly thrown one against the other. Narrowing the focus on our point of debate in this Conference, we may affirm that the understanding of how blackness translates into different contexts and geographical spaces – only recently started to attract scholarly attention, as primary topic of research to be systematically analyzed by researchers devoted to Translation Studies.

This way, one of our main aims is to find answers to questions such as “Which are the implications of translating poetry, fiction, contemporary African-American literature from English, with its specific manners of questioning identity, to Brazilian Portuguese (or vice-versa)?, or “Which are the political and cultural contexts which define the selection, translation and reception

of translated African–American works into Portuguese?”, or “Which are the assumptions about Afro-descendent Literature in Brazil and in the United States?” The understanding that such questions are much wider and deeper than they may seem, leads us to new questions as well as to an interesting mapping related to Translation Studies, to the Afro–descendents, as well as to an incipient understanding of how identities are constructed in different geographical spaces.

In a recently released book (August, 2010) by Lauro Maia Amorim: *Translation, Blackness, and The (In)Visible*, the author gets to something of extreme relevance to any researcher eager to understand how blackness translates into different contexts and geographical spaces. During his work, routine assumptions come to surface: generally silent, but absolutely divergent points that clearly show the difference in American and Brazilian imaginaries concerning the Afro–descendents. In fact, he brings to surface intriguing problems related to the relation between Literature and blackness across different cultures. Specific conflicts, such as the “myth of racial democracy” in Brazil, varied implications and consequent potentialities give rise to the appearance of challenging aesthetic questions to the researcher’s work. In his final analysis, Amorim shows how racially loaded are many Brazilian expressions and, moreover, how diverse the construction of blackness is in Brazil and in the United States.

In another book also published this year (August 2010), *Zora Neale Hurston And Their Eyes Were Watching God: The Construction of an African-American Female Identity and the Translation Turn in Brazilian Portuguese*, Rodrigo Alva and myself explore the translation to Brazilian Portuguese of *Their eyes were watching God*, the great novel written in 1937 by celebrated African-American Author Zora Neale Hurston. In the book, we work on an experimental criteria chart to analyze details of the translation of Hurston’s novel, entitled *Seus Olhos viam Deus* and work on specific points that worried us, as a consequence of a hasty translation under the pressure of publishers.

And which were some of the points found in Hurston’s translation that worried us so much? As widely known by those who have read her work, the author of the original text, Zora Neale Hurston, had as one of her literary characteristics, with a very clear strategic objective, the struggle to transcribe the dialogues in her works as clear representations of the African–American oral tradition. In other words, the dialogues in the novel were aimed to be graphically represented exactly the way the characters spoke.

This way, a relevant point in our discussion was how satisfactory had such transposition of orality, that is so representative of the referred ethnic population in English, been characterized in Brazilian Portuguese. That was a major question since such linguistic aspect follows a completely different trend in Brazil: in fact, the point is that the language spoken by both black and white

people in Brazil suffers slight variations according to Brazilian regions and states. Therefore, the idea was to understand which elements and concepts had been taken into consideration so that decisions could be made over how to reproduce the original dialogues, the choices the translator had made and what he had considered to be important so as to represent such orality in the target language as a clear transposition of the equivalent original text.

To our dismay, we found out that the linguistic selection / choice had followed exactly one of the points already mentioned: what goes on in the translator's, country's imagination. And we explain: official data, brought about by a survey led by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in 2006, show that in comparison with whites, the people who declared to be black or brown had fewer years of schooling, their average income was half of the whites, unemployment rates among them were greater. This just puts into numbers a situation which is broadly admitted around the country – the one that blacks are poor and lack education. Following such imaginary, the translator's choice when transposing the aforementioned dialogues was to write them in "incorrect" Brazilian Portuguese, this way breaking the spine of such a referential novel as *Their Eyes Were Watching God...*

In the line of choices/selections, it is also interesting to think about how omissions, introductions, and informal footnotes may affect the comprehension in the target language. Are these elements tools that help the translation reader to get closer to the original experience? Or are they a palliative that the translator found as a solution for an obstacle he/she faced during the translation process? It is not possible to deny that the use of these artifices is a well-established practice when we speak of translations. There are translators who prefer to insert a brief explanation in the sentence or paragraph, instead of using footnotes; and there are those who prefer the footnotes in order to be more close to the original text. In one way or another, what this shows is the active participation of the translator in the process of bringing the reader of the target language closer to the experience the original readers went through.

Contemporary researchers view translation not as a mere faithful reproduction of an original text, but as a process that inevitably involves deliberate acts of selection, construction and – omission. And we would reinforce **OMISSION**, because whatever **IS NOT** translated in a specific context always reveals as much as whatever **IS** translated. That is, silences and gaps in translated texts – in the same way as non translation (or, also called, zero translation) of complete texts – represent fundamental and revealing aspects of the translation politics in specific cultural contexts.

For this reason, translation processes are inextricably linked to cultural domination issues, to assertiveness and to resistance – or, to sum up, to **POWER** issues. The examples throughout History of translators who, in true acts of resistance, could manage to get around governments,

churches, publishing houses and other instances of power, and used translation to introduce new ideas and ways of expression are many.

This way, when compiling contributions of the cultural trend and other theoretical questions, we come to methodological issues which are of importance if we wish to advance research around the theme, as for example:

- Which power relations interfere in the choice of texts to be translated?
- How do different cultures build the image of writers, texts and cultures as departing from translations?
- Which is the role played by translation in the processes of colonial and post-colonial construction of identity?
- What do we understand by translation?
- In which ways does it shape literary production and cultural transposition?
- By which means does official cultural memory contribute to translation formatting?

All questions lead to definition of

- the image of the Other through translation;
- cultural hegemony and globalization;
- translation and the loss and / or emergency of literary canons;

In his book entitled, *Translation and Identity in the Americas – New Directions in Translation Theory*, researcher Edwin Gentzler, tackles the extremely relevant issue related to the role developed by TRANSLATION in the very design and formatting of the Americas. He shows that the Americas are an extremely fertile land – and yet not explored – for Translation Studies. Taking into consideration the current movements that have been making visible and working for the rescue of the multilinguistic history of the Americas and have been bringing to public sight the hard reality, hidden for so long, of the conflicting history of linguistic suppression all over the continent, Gentzler shows that translation is one of the primary means of cultural construction in a variety of post-colonial environments, Gentzler defends the idea that in the Americas it is much less something that occurs in between separated and distinct cultures, but mostly something capable of being decisive in the establishment of those cultures. Working with a variety of texts and constantly referring to minority and oppressed groups, the book reinforces, through examples, the cultural roles that translation policies may develop in a prejudicial process, pointing out as one of its consequences social exclusion, the loss of identity and psychological trauma. In his conclusion, re-

states his firm conviction that History of Translation in the Americas is actually the history of identity formation – something deeply rooted in its millions of inhabitants' psyche.

- What is the role of translation in reporting conflicts in spaces of linguistic and cultural differences?
- How does intercultural translation occur between metropolis and diasporas, or in between diasporas?
- How are literary translations established – do they challenge and face the cultural difference or just reinforce it, and , if so, how?
- Which are some of the political and ideological dimensions of translation?
- In a post 9/11 world, how has translation been made between the West and the East?

### **3 Conclusion**

Concluding, we hope to have contributed to the awareness about conclusions of current researches and others recently concluded, in Translation Studies and Compared Literature areas. Theories that have been practically presented to you in Professor Tillis's work when translating Blas Jimenez into English.

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