The Rocky Road to Translating *Pride and Prejudice* into Portuguese

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In 2021 I was invited to translate *Pride and Prejudice* into Brazilian Portuguese, even though there were already approximately fifteen different translations available in the country. This project, however, had a few requirements setting it apart from the rest: the translation would not have footnotes or a preface by the translator, but it would be paired with an academic book that would cater to those who wanted to learn more about the novel or about Austen. As a diptych, the project would reflect Austen's current dual status: the novel itself could be read for pleasure, presenting Austen as popular author; the accompanying study would present Austen as a canonical author of English literature.

Our typical approach to translation rests on an illusion: that translations must be as close to the original as possible, conveying a sense of equivalence, and that a good translator is an inconspicuous translator (Hermans 18). But those involved in translation studies know that this goal is, in fact, impossible. All translation is mediated intervention. The original work is necessarily recreated when going through a new language that brings with it a new culture. Furthermore, different critical theories also point out that the meaning of a work is not found in the author's intentions or even in the text alone: it is the reader, in fact, who interprets the text and, from both a personal and collective perspective, creates its meaning. Since translators are readers, they will translate a novel, for example, according to their own perceptions and understandings but also according to their own social context. To quote Rosemary

Arrojo, "our translations of any text, literary or not, will be faithful not to the original text, but to what we consider the original text to be, to what we consider it constitutes, [that is,] to our interpretation of the original text that will always be a product of who we are and how we feel and think" (41).

Since the translator's presence is inevitable, then, this essay will analyze some of my choices. Here I'll follow Solange Mittmann's classification of the problems translators usually register in footnotes or Translator's Notes (TNs). If our approach to a translated novel is to willfully ignore that we are reading the translator's and not the author's words, TNs constitute interruptions, or breaks, in this illusion, making the gesture of translation visible (106). For Mittmann, there are two issues that usually lead to this interruption: the lack of words and the excess of meaning. In the first case, the translator cannot find an adequate term or expression in the target language equivalent to the one in the original text. The TN, therefore, is used to explain the term and offer possible comparisons (107). The second case, the excess, happens when the original term has different meanings embedded in it, each expressed in the target language by a different word, forcing the translator to choose (110). In cases of apparent ambiguity or word play, the translator's necessary choice of one word only will inevitably remove that excess, originally open to astute readers, from the translation. The translator might then use a TN to explain the ambiguity, or the excess of meaning, but readers won't have the opportunity to figure it out by themselves.

During my work with *Pride and Prejudice*, I have encountered both cases: the lack of words and the excess of meaning. This essay is an opportunity to present some of them to readers.[1]

LACK OF WORDS

Chaise, *barouche*, *phaeton*, *curricle*, *hackney-coach*, *gig*. In Austen's novels, the specific names of carriages are more than just references to an ordinary part of people's lives in her time. As Sandy Lerner states, Austen's precise use of language conveys "intentional, pointed observations defining social distinction, character, and financial status" (1). In the case of the varieties of vehicles, Lerner argues that "if one re-reads passages that refer to a specific type of carriage, substituting a parallel model of modern automobile, for example, 'Rolls-Royce' instead of 'barouche,' or 'Corniche' instead of 'barouche-landau,' you will start to see the social context; only then is it apparent that Austen is not really writing about vehicles, but is making a specific reference to the speaker's character, social standing and respectability" (1–2). According to Jennifer

Ewing, however, "In a world of democratized ownership of automobiles, modern readers have little to no frame of reference for the economics, customs and social conventions, and operation of horse-drawn vehicles in her novels." The specific names of carriages used by Austen, therefore, are relevant hints that have been mostly lost in time. The question for me, then, was how to prevent their also being lost in translation.

There are a few different terms in Portuguese for carriages, but apparently not for all the vehicles mentioned by Austen. There is, for example, *faetonte* for *phaeton* and *landó* for *barouche-landau*, both very unfamiliar to most people today, but there are not specific words for *curricle*, *gig*, and *chaise*. It soon proved to be a case of lack of words. I decided, then, that I would rely on two terms currently known: *carruagem* for *carriage* in general as well as for larger or fancier vehicles; and *charrete* for gig. *Charrete* can also refer to a simpler vehicle, like Austen's donkey cart; although a donkey cart is different from a gig, the use of *charrete* will adequately distinguish Mr. Collins's vehicle, in which he drives Sir William around, from Darcy's curricle (for which I use *carruagem*), which is seen in Meryton. Also, the image of Mr. Collins and Sir William on a small, cart-like vehicle adds to the comicality of father and son-in-law, with Sir William's misplaced pomposity and Collins's ridiculousness.

To convey how Austen classifies different carriages, I opted to include the number of horses (in Portuguese, *cavalos*). So, Bingley arrives in Hertfordshire in "a chaise and four" (3)—or "uma carruagem puxada por quatro cavalos" (a carriage drawn by four horses).[2] It is the same vehicle used by Lady Catherine when she goes to Meryton: "their attention was suddenly drawn to the window, by the sound of a carriage; and they perceived a chaise and four driving up the lawn" (389) ("sua atenção foi alertada repentinamente para a janela pelo som de uma carruagem, puxada por quatro cavalos, que subia pelo gramado"). Also, when Mrs. Bennet is plotting to send Jane on horseback to Netherfield Park to stay there for the night, she knows that there won't be any carriage available to send her home in case of rain because "'the gentlemen will have Mr. Bingley's chaise to go to Meryton; and the Hursts have no horses to theirs'" (34). From this, we learn that the Hursts do own a carriage, but no horses, so I focused on that fact and translated "os cavalheiros usarão a carruagem do Sr. Bingley para ir para Meryton, e os Hurst não têm cavalos próprios" (the Hursts don't have horses of their own). I translated *chaise* as the general *carruagem*, but I highlighted the difference in fortune between Bingley and his married sister by writing only that she and her husband didn't own their own carriage horses. After all, Mr. Hurst not only "merely look[s] the gentleman" (10), he can't

afford to be one without Mrs. Hurst's twenty thousand pounds: he is "a man of more fashion than fortune" (17).

I encountered a similar translation problem with card games, such as Whist, Commerce, Lottery, Loo, Quadrille, Picquet, Vingt-un, etc. In this case, however, I opted to use their names in English, in italic font. In scenes where I judged the reference to be more general, I opted to say just *jogo de baralho* (card game) or *mesa de baralho* (game table). My first instinct had been to look for equivalent terms, an attempt that soon proved fruitless. Just like carriages replaced by cars, many games played in Austen's novels no longer exist, having evolved to others: Vingt-un, for example, has become blackjack; Commerce is a precursor of poker. Also, it was difficult to determine how similar the games mentioned by Austen were to those played in Portugal or in Brazil in the nineteenth century. The second option, using modern-day games, was tempting at first. According to Devoney Looser, some games also appear in Austen as a support for the construction of her characters, particularly of their personalities. For Looser, for example, the fact that both Bingley and Jane prefer Vingt-un to Commerce is important: "[T]he simpler card game, Vingt-un, . . . has fewer rules and is based on good luck. Neither of them likes Commerce, a more complicated, cut-throat card game of skill." I could, then, have used blackjack and poker in this instance, but modern equivalents for all the other games were hard to find. The decision to keep the original names derived from the fact that I did not have another option to convey subtle characterizations, as I had done with "horses." I kept Austen's specific terms when the game in question was part of characterization. I decided to trust that curious readers could, and hopefully would, simply Google the word, discover the rules of each game, and arrive at their own conclusions. Because Austen did not spell everything out for her readers, I thought I should not underestimate mine.

There is one final translation problem connected to my rationale for dealing with card games that depends on neither a lack of words nor an excess of meaning. When I first read *Pride and Prejudice*, I didn't pay much attention to the word *hermitage*, but subsequent readings made me wonder what it was and, after finally checking a dictionary, wonder why there was a hermitage at the Longbourn estate. Translating *hermitage* shouldn't be difficult because there is a perfect equivalent term in Portuguese, *eremitério*. But, as in English, the word was totally new to me, and I suspected it would be totally new to most Brazilian readers as well. Since a TN was not an option, it was not in my power to explain how hermitages were part of a landscaping fever, much like

building a medieval ruin, to enhance the appeal of one's park—or to point to the pride with which Mrs. Bennet advises Elizabeth to take Lady Catherine there because, even though she knows that Longbourn is not as grand as Rosings, it still has charms to exhibit.

Consulting previous Portuguese translations, I found one where the translator opted to change the term altogether, choosing instead a garden feature that is historically correct and easily recognized by readers today: *caramanchão*, or *bower*. I never complained about the fact that the translation did not follow Austen's exact word—the translator is indeed a traitor by nature. The use of *bower* makes sense if the goal is clarity, because it erases the difficulty readers could find when facing that very strange word, while also, I assume, paying homage to "Catharine, or the Bower" in Austen's juvenilia. For a couple of days, then, I debated between keeping the original term or following this option, maybe choosing a different garden feature—like a gazebo. Or, I asked myself, would a classical temple like the one in the first proposal scene in the 2005 movie be too much for the Bennets' fortune? In the end, I opted for the Portuguese equivalent word *eremitério*.

In other words, faced with three different cases—carriages, card games, and one hermitage—I chose different solutions. With the risk of appearing inconsistent, I carefully considered each and concluded they needed their own solutions. I had considered keeping the original terms in English for the carriages, but I felt their meaning, although discreet, was too important to leave to curious readers to figure out, so I turned, instead, to the number of horses to indicate fortune. I prevented readers from learning new vocabulary, yes, but it was the lesser evil when faced with the risk of erasing Austen's careful association of characters with their vehicles. In contrast, identifying card games by their original names was a gamble—pun intended—with readers' curiosity. If they did not look for a difference between Vingt-un and Commerce, Bingley's and Jane's personalities would nonetheless be made clear from other passages in the novel, so it was not a big risk. Finally, choosing to translate *hermitage* with the equivalent term followed the same reasoning: those readers who didn't know what it was and didn't bother to look it up wouldn't miss an essential aspect of the Bennets' characterization, since it was mentioned so close to the end of the novel. By this point, almost everything that there was to know about them had already been presented. But, for those who did look it up, what a nice, curious detail regarding eighteenth-century landscaping they would discover!

Because excess in meaning is a problem that translators usually find in texts rich with irony and ambiguity, it was obvious that anyone translating Austen would have to deal with it. I encountered one simple example in Mr. Bennet's speech to Kitty, after Lydia's elopement, enforcing a radical change in her routine—no more officers! When she begins crying, Mr. Bennet says, in mock consolation, "'If you are a good girl for the next ten years, I will take you to a review at the end of them'" (331). To begin with, I was sure he meant only that he will review the new rules, like reducing jail time for good behavior. It was not until this project that it dawned on me that Mr. Bennet is wittily referring to a review of the troops: since he has banished officers from Kitty's life from this day on, it makes sense that the reward for her improvement will be a parade of officers. Of course, amusingly, if she really does improve, she will not care for officers anymore. Maybe it was my lack of knowledge of the context that prevented my immediately understanding something that for many might have been obvious, but I cannot believe that the double meaning of the word "review" is incidental here.

During my research on this passage, I discovered a blog post connecting this passage to a letter from Jane Austen to Cassandra, commenting on the marriage of a neighbor, Earle Harwood, and scandalous rumors about the bride before the wedding. In her letter, Austen says, "Earle Harwood has been to Deane lately . . . & his family then told him that they would receive his wife, if she continued to behave well for another Year" (27–28 October 1798). According to Arnie Perlstein, the blogger, it's possible to hear echoes of this story, of a family receiving someone in their house after a scandal, in Mr. Bennet's agreement to receive Lydia and Wickham after their marriage. The time lapse mentioned in the letter—having "to behave well for another Year"—resonates with Mr. Bennet's willingness to review Kitty's punishment after ten years. Perlstein's interpretation encouraged me to believe that the double meaning was more apparent than I had previously thought, and it thereby prompted two different possible translations. There is the literal equivalent of *review*, *revisão*, but there is also the term *inspeção* (or *inspection*), which is sometimes used to refer to the *review of the troops*, as *inspeção das tropas*. Between *revisão* and *inspeção*, I chose the latter. *Inspeção* has a much stronger meaning of closely monitoring something, even policing it. I hoped to convey that Kitty was threatened with being closely watched throughout those promised ten years, highlighting the mock consolation of Mr. Bennet's words.

The example above is a simple case of excess of meaning, and one that did not require more than a few hours of research and consideration. I faced a much more essential dilemma, however, from the simplest word possible: the personal pronoun *you*. In Brazilian Portuguese there are two options to translate *you*, depending on the region: *tu* (in a few parts of Brazil only, although commonly used in Portugal), and *você* (in the larger part of Brazil). Since I was translating Austen into Brazilian Portuguese, the choice seemed evident at first, but it soon became a problem.

When Mr. Darcy finally admits his flaws to Elizabeth and his efforts to change himself, he says, "'Such I was, from eight to eight and twenty; and such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth!'" (410). Darcy's speech is interesting not only because of his confession, which conveys evidence of his inner growth, but also because he uses Elizabeth's first name and thus communicates their reconciliation and the intimacy of the moment. This intimacy is not embedded in the use of the personal pronoun *you*. In the very first sentence that Elizabeth addresses to Mr. Darcy, she uses it: "'Did not you think, Mr. Darcy, that I expressed myself uncommonly well just now, when I was teazing Colonel Forster to give us a ball at Meryton?'" (26). *You*, therefore, does not convey proximity between the speakers, nor any degree of formality or informality in Austen.

The important point here is that the personal pronoun is used differently in Portuguese. Today, in most parts of Brazil, we say *você* when addressing anyone, but in a more formal situation we replace it with *senhor* (sir), *senhora* (ma'am), or *senhorita* (miss). In English you can say "Sir, do you need anything?"; in Brazil you would say, "O senhor precisa de alguma coisa?"—which translates as "Does sir need anything?" replacing the pronoun with the title. In effect, it became clear to me that since Darcy was addressing Elizabeth using her first name for the first time, the degree of formality between them has significantly changed after their mutual declaration. Right before this declaration, when she offers her gratitude for his part in rescuing Lydia, Elizabeth is properly formal. So, to mark the shift in intimacy that occurs between them moments later, I translated Darcy's confession as: "Esse fui eu, dos oito aos vinte e oito, e esse ainda seria eu se não fosse por você, querida, amada Elizabeth!" Darcy refers to Elizabeth using *você* because they not only are engaged to be married but also are entering into their future relationship as equals. I wanted the personal pronoun, used here between them for the first time, to reflect this condition.

This choice, however, created a different problem. What should I do with

the whole novel that came before this scene in which people were addressing each other with *you* regardless of status, familiarity, or formality? If I used the titles *senhor*, *senhora*, and *senhorita*, the overall tone of the story would sound too formal, and the repetition of these words would destroy Austen's economy, one of the aspects that I love most about her style—her lack of verbosity. (Of course, this formality also presented me with the ideal way to translate Mr. Collins: his speeches in Portuguese are full of *sirs*, *ma'ams*, and *misses*.) The solution was to omit the subject of the sentence altogether. It is possible to do that in Portuguese because the conjugation of the verb indicates the grammatical first, second, or third person. If in English you say, *I write*, *You write*, *We write*, the verb is the same in each case (though not with the third person singular *She writes*). In Portuguese, we say, *Eu escrevo*, *Você escreve*, *Nós escrevemos*, and the form (or inflection) of the verb indicates the subject: *I*, *You*, or *We*. Hence, I translated Elizabeth's first interaction with Darcy as: "Não [Ø] pensou, Sr. Darcy, que [Ø] me expressei muito bem agora há pouco, quando estava encorajando o Coronel Forster para dar um baile em Meryton?" The symbol [Ø] marks where the personal pronouns *you* and *I* were omitted. I felt that the use of fewer words, in this way, was more appropriate to Austen's style.

That does not mean that I avoided using *você* throughout the whole novel. Taking it for a sign of familiarity, I reserved it for occasions when I felt the characters had a close connection. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet call their daughters *você*, but the daughters, respecting the authority of a parent, call them *senhor* and *senhora* in return. To mark this difference, Elizabeth calls her uncle and aunt Gardiner *você*, indicating a bond of friendship stronger than their family ties. Jane and Elizabeth address each other as *você*, and Charlotte Lucas as well, but never Caroline Bingley. Lady Catherine, of course, because of her sense of superiority, addresses Elizabeth using *você* precisely because she doesn't respect her, so she uses the familiar pronoun to belittle her. Overall, it was an interesting exercise of assessing each character in relation to all the others, and it made me read the novel at a deeper level.

In truth, before all these questions were excruciatingly contemplated, I had to decide first if I was using *você* or *tu*, the two options in Portuguese for the second-person singular pronoun. As I indicated above, *tu* is not the more common pronoun in Brazil today, so *você* seemed the logical choice. For a while, however, I considered *tu* because it was the more common pronoun in the nineteenth century, being supplanted by *você* only at the beginning of the twentieth century. If I wanted to use the correct language of the period when Austen wrote and published *Pride and Prejudice*, I had to use *tu*. But I didn't.

As I said earlier, the idea that translators are invisible bridges is a comfortable illusion, both for readers and for translators, but I had to accept that readers would have access to my words, not Austen's. So, when deciding which personal pronoun to use, I considered what *Pride and Prejudice* I wanted to create. As I examined Austen's surviving manuscripts and letters, I thought about how she seemed to be so careful with her words, wanting her sentences to flow as naturally as possible. I could, in the name of "faithfulness," use *tu* and other aspects of the Portuguese language that were current in the 1810s in Brazil. But I decided that using the nineteenth-century Portuguese would make the novel sound old-fashioned, archaic, difficult, unnatural—none of the things that Austen is. I decided, therefore, that my version of *Pride and Prejudice* would be as easily read by Brazilian readers as by Austen's fans in English-speaking countries today. That meant, after many anguished weeks, making the decision of adopting a more modernized Portuguese, spoken in the largest part of the country. Whether that was something Austen would have condoned, thankfully I will never know.

FINAL WORDS

As a professor of English in Brazil who aspires to be a Jane Austen scholar, I have always made a point of working with Austen's original texts, occasionally consulting her novels in Portuguese to include translations of excerpts in academic papers. Unfortunately, I was constantly dissatisfied with the translations. Austen's irony and ambiguities always felt lost or watered down. Therefore, when I was invited to translate *Pride and Prejudice*, I felt challenged to do it right. I should have known better. After nine months, three different drafts, and more than two hundred personal notes registering observations, questions, and insecurities, I can safely say that I did not do it right, and it hurt my pride to acknowledge that I had been unconsciously judging my own work and other translations under that same illusion of transparency. Till this project, then, I never knew myself.

NOTES

1. Parts of this essay—with some differences—have been published earlier in the Jane Austen Society of Australia's *Chronicle* (December 2022). I thank the editor, Ruth Williamson, for her kind permission to use them here.

2. This added emphasis via underlining and all subsequent instances are my own, both in English and in Portuguese, to highlight the words discussed.

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