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Article abstract

This article outlines the theoretical foundations and the design of a research project concerning a psycholinguistically oriented investigation of translations from German into Portuguese. Within an empirical framework it aims to analyse data collected among Portuguese and Brazilian translators using the thinking-aloud technique. Building on it, it cross-examines the issue in its linguistic and cultural aspects, throwing light on and contributing to the development of the methodology of translation teaching as a whole and, more specifically, in relation to the linguistic pair German/Portuguese.

VEIO-ME UM 'CLICK' NA CABEÇA[1]: THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND THE DESIGN OF A PSYCHOLINGUISTICALLY ORIENTED, EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION ON GERMAN-PORTUGUESE TRANSLATION PROCESSES

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Résumé

Cet article résume les fondations et le design *d'un projet d'investigation psycholinguistique dans le domaine de la traduction de l'allemand au portugais. D'une façon empirique, on essaie d'analyser les données obtenues auprès des traducteurs portugais et brésiliens en utilisant la technique* «penser à haute voix». *À partir des données recueillies, on examine les aspects linguistiques et culturels et on élabore des conclusions qui apportent une contribution au développement de la didactique et de la méthodologie pour l'enseignement de la traduction en général et, plus particulièrement, pour la paire de langue allemand/portugais.*

Abstract

This article outlines the theoretical foundations and the design of a research project concerning a psycholinguistically oriented investigation of translations from German into Portuguese. Within an empirical framework it aims to analyse data collected among Portuguese and Brazilian translators using the thinking-aloud technique. Building on it, it cross-examines the issue in its linguistic and cultural aspects, throwing light on and contributing to the development of the methodology of translation teaching as a whole and, more specifically, in relation to the linguistic pair German/Portuguese.

INTRODUCTION

In the course of the last decades the approach of academic works on translation theory has shifted from a somewhat limited focus on qualitative analyses of both source and target texts to works carried out within a much broader field of investigation, aiming not only at a thorough evaluation of the product but also at a better and more comprehensive understanding of the process itself.

These several areas of research have produced works drawing, for example, on a linguistic perspective (*cf.* Catford 1965; Nida 1969; Albrecht 1973), on a text-analytical perspective (*cf.* Thiel 1981; Nord 1988), on a text-oriented or functional perspective (*cf.* House 1977; Reiß and Vermeer 1984), on a cultural-oriented perspective (*cf.* Snell-Hornby 1988), on a didactic perspective (*cf.* Königs 1987) or on a psycholinguistic perspective (*cf.* Königs 1987; Krings 1986; Séguinot 1989; Lörscher 1991; Tirkkonen-Condit 1991; Bell 1991).

It may also be argued that research on translation carried out in the sixties (*cf.* Vinay and Darbelnet 1960; Catford 1965; Nida 1969), as well as in the seventies and

eighties (*cf.* Reiß 1971, 1974, 1976, 1980; Koller 1979, Wilss 1977, 1981, 1984, 1988; Newmark 1981, 1988; Nord 1988 and Königs 1979, 1982/84, 1986a, 1986b, 1987, 1987a, 1987b, 1988, 1989) have contributed and functioned as stepping stones for the present stage of psycholinguistically oriented researches on translation.

This article uses the contributions made by the above-mentioned authors to develop an empirical project of a psycholinguistic investigation of translation processes involved in rendering two source texts in German into two corresponding target texts in Portuguese and it will serve as the basis for a PhD Dissertation in Applied Linguistics (*Sprachlehrforschung*) at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany[2].

The material presented below partially covers the theoretical foundations used as a framework for my research as well as the methodological and logistic backgrounds involved in it. Finally, in the concluding section, an attempt has been made to outline preliminary remarks with the aim of providing new relevant contributions to the didactics of translation in general, but more specifically to the linguistic pair German/Portuguese.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

A Conceptual Model

The starting point of my research model are the concepts of Adhoc-Block and Rest-Block developed by Königs (1987). How these two concepts differ from one another in the course of a translation process can be better understood in the light of the pragmatic concept of Relevance developed by Grice (*cf.* Levinson 1983). Relevance was further discussed by Sperber and Wilson (1986). The so-called Code Model and Inferential Model were further examined, analysed and criticised by them, aiming at the presentation of a new framework in which the two models were rearranged and merged into a new single overview.

Similar to this view, a line of research on translation theory was then established. The analysis of encoding and decoding steps built the foundations of a text-analytical view of translation (*cf.* among others, Nord 1988). However, as the corresponding process was examined a little closer, it became clear that apart from the encoding and decoding of source and target texts, and its internal and external counterparts, there were several other factors playing a very important role towards the completion of the process.

Building on Königs' (1979: 9) definition of a translation, I assume that in the course of the process both Code and Inference, in close association with Relevance, play a very important role. The Inferential Model works as a fundamental component in the analyses of cognitive processes which take place in the so-called Rest-Block.

One may say that these concepts and models can and should be integrated within the scope of a psycholinguistically oriented analysis of the translation process. Therefore, the theoretical foundations used as a framework for the present empirical research project can be traced back to a combination which uses the quite often quoted diagram of a Code Model (*cf.* Shannon and Weaver 1949; *cf.* Sperber and Wilson 1986: 4) as its foundation for a psycholinguistic line of research and draws on the models presented by Königs (1987b: 165) and Bell (1991: 59) to establish the framework used in the analyses of data collected in Portugal and Brazil.

I have also drawn on Königs' distinctions of theories of first, second and third degrees, and have chosen his classification of theories of first degree (*cf.* Königs 1990: 111) to set the foundations of an inductive, primordially descriptive approach, empirically based, which searches for explanations of why a given product has been achieved. They are opposed by deductive, primordially prescriptive theories, which do not offer the necessary framework for the didactic, learner-oriented approach intended here.

The first considerations towards the problems analysed in my research can be shown by the following examples:

(1) *Wie lang soll es sein?*
(How long should it be?)

This question was asked with reference to the length of a letter. According to what I am trying to show, one might say that it was first encoded in German and then decoded in Portuguese by a native speaker of the latter. The resulting translation was quite inadequate in terms of acceptability. The following mental representation seems to have arisen in my informant's mind:

(1a) *Wie lange* **soll** es **sein**?*

Although all five words were mentally encoded and decoded as part of a question, and respectively translated from German into Portuguese, there was a clear misunderstanding as far as the message was concerned. *Wie lang* was understood as a temporal concept. A possible interference of the English form "How long" on the cognitive processes of my informant, a native speaker of Brazilian Portuguese, who had learnt English before learning German. Somehow the informant realised that his translation did not make sense. After thinking about it for some thirty seconds, it occurred to him that his doubts could be resolved by opposing *Wie lang* to *Wie lange*, both translated as "How long" in English but, interestingly, as *qual o comprimento* and *quanto tempo* in Portuguese — much more similar to the oppositon available in German. It may be hypothesized that in order to make sense, my informant had to access elements of the Rest-Block. It allowed him to integrate the elements into a meaningful unit and, thus, enabled him to make sense of what had been asked.

This example is quite similar to another one mentioned by Königs (1987b: 171) for the solution of a translation problem from Spanish into German for the Spanish word *cura* in the phrase *cura de primavera*. To Königs' informant *cura* meant *el cura* (the priest) and the sentence did not make sense. It had not occurred to him that his problem could easily be solved with a change of the masculine for the feminine definite article — *el cura* (the priest) and *la cura* (the cure). He tried repeatedly to grasp the meaning of the sentence and this only became clear to him when, later on in the text, he came across the Spanish verb *curar* (to heal), which provided him with the necessary key to access semantic knowledge stored within his Rest-Block.

As previously defined, Relevance played here a major role in the solution of both problems. The opposition between *Wie lang* and *Wie lange*, *el cura* and *la cura* was solved using information stored in the Rest-Block of the respective informants associated with the contextual relevance of their mental search.

However, a further analysis shows that problems related to the use of definite articles in Portuguese have much deeper roots. This can be shown in the following examples:

(2) *Die Heizung ist an.*
(The heating is on.)

As may be seen in instances of code-switching, speakers of Brazilian Portuguese play with the translation of the German sentence[3] by keeping the German noun *Heizung* (heating) in its original, untranslated form, in the place of the corresponding equivalent in Portuguese *aquecimento*. The result of this humorous play with languages and words reveals itself in the production of the following alternatives, which may be relevant for the purpose of my research project:

(3) *A Heizung está ligada.*
(The heating is on.)
(4) *O Heizung está ligado.*
(The heating is on.)

Similar examples were found among speakers of European Portuguese playing with German and Portuguese in the following sentences:

(5) *Die Bahn kommt gleich.*
(The tram will come soon.)
(6) *A Bahn já vem.*
(The tram will come soon.)
(7) *O Bahn já vem.*
(The tram will come soon.)

In sentences (3) and (6) my informants decided to translate the German definite article into Portuguese, preserving the underlying gender determination in German instead of using the respective Portuguese masculine gender for *o aquecimento* and *o comboio* respectively. These were the options produced in utterances (4) and (7) which reveal an underlying option favouring the Portuguese gender.

At the time of writing, my considerations on the subject point to a strong influence of the level of command in both native and foreign languages. The better the command of German as a foreign language, the higher the likelihood of utterances similar to (3) and (6). The greater the relevance of the Portuguese context, the higher the chances of (4) and (7)-like formations. With reference to such encoding and decoding steps, it also seems appropriate to recall Königs' (1987b) remark that in such cases the didactics of translation should take into consideration not only the negative, agrammatical aspects of a translation but also its positive, more grammatically accepted ones. The discussion about the merger of the so-called Code Model and Inferential Model will lead us to the following questions:

— On what level do these processes take place: lexical, syntactic or textual?
— How does lack of translation competence into a certain foreign language differ from lack of communicative competence in that same given language?

The Formulation of a Hypothesis of the Translation Process

In order to assemble relevant data to examine the above-mentioned questions more closely, I have developed a research project aimed at cross-examining translation processes in German/Portuguese translations performed by a group of 12 native speakers of Brazilian Portuguese and the same number of informants, who are native speakers of the European variant of the same language.

To support the issue on a cultural level, it seems appropriate to refer the reader to Beckers' (1989) concept of Prior Text. It is to be understood as part of the cultural background which enables a given group of speakers to encode and decode linguistic subtleties within a commom cultural context. In view of this concept I have approached the issue bearing three further questions in mind:

— How can one analyse translation processes with reference to the concept of Prior Text?
— Which differences are there in translation processes from German into Portuguese among informants of two distinct cultural groups, *i.e.* among Brazilians and Portuguese?
— How can one assess, establish and analyse such differences?

These thoughts and considerations have led me to the point which I now consider to be the preliminary hypothesis for the carrying out of this research project:

> Within the field of translation theory it has already been examined and explained quite extensively that one can translate "better" if one is aware of and able to decode and to infer at parallel levels. Königs (1987a) states that analyses of cognitive processes necessarily lead to an improvement in the quality of both the didactics and methodology within the field of translation theory. Building on this statement, my research project aims at an analysis of cognitive processes in two distinct cultural groups which share the same normalised language and, drawing on such results, it hopes to contribute to and open up new perspectives for the development of translation theory, more specifically for the linguistic pair German/Portuguese.

Using the following methodology, a research project has been carried out in Portugal and Brazil. Its conceptual background, technical specifications and preliminary steps are described in the next section.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to collect the necessary data, contacts were established with Portuguese and Brazilian Universities as early as June 1992, in preparation of the necessary logistic background for my fieldwork.

After some contacts in Portugal, the *Universidade do Porto* agreed to provide me with the necessary informants and facilities.

In Brazil such contacts were made with both the *Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais* and the *Goethe Institut* of Belo Horizonte.

The methodology chosen for the data collection was the technique called "thinking aloud." Although objections have been raised concerning its validity in some respects (*cf.* Tirkonnen-Condit 1989), it seems to me that it is still the best existing technique to collect data which allows for psycholinguistically oriented analyses of the translation process.

The equipment used was a cassette recorder OLYMPUS S909, with a recording speed of 1.2cm/s and a recording range of no longer than 1 metre radius, and with a highly sensitive microphone, which is set in motion by a very low voice (VCVA — variable control voice actuator). The SONY XB60 microcassettes used in the recording sessions were expanded to a recording capacity of 120 minutes each due to the slower recording speed available with the OLYMPUS S909 recorder.

Two texts of approximately 180 words each were chosen as the material to be translated. They had been published by the "Amt für Verkehrs- und Wirtschaftsförderung, Sport- und Bäderamt der Stadt Bochum"[4] in a promotional leaflet entitled *Wasserfreude für Wasserfreunde* and include, besides lexical and morpho-syntactic subtleties, functional and culture-oriented characteristics, which would provide interesting material for my investigation.

Besides making the decisions concerning equipment and text typology, I have also designed two types of questionnaire to be filled out after the translation work has been carried out by the informants on each text. I have taken into consideration remarks and suggestions made by Heindrichs *et al.* (1980) and Reisener (1978) but, at the same time, I have tried to move away from assessments of a qualitative nature and looked for information leading to characteristics of the process itself.

With equipment, text and complementary material ready I set myself the task of finding the 24 informants needed for my research. Bearing in mind the diversity in foreign and native language proficiency, experience in the field of translation, knowledge of the German, Brazilian and Portuguese societies, etc., I divided the groups according to the following characteristics:

— The profile of the 24 informants was first established in view of two major sub-groups: The Portuguese group (GP) and the Brazilian group (GB) had twelve informants each, each informant having the respective European and Brazilian variants of Portuguese as his/her native language.
— Each sub-group was then initially divided into four other groups of three members each, determined according to the following specifications:
  a) Professional translators;
  b) Informants who have a very good command of German, but who do not use it as a working language, although they may occasionally use it professionally within their respective fields (*i.e.* engineers, architects, psychologists, etc.);
  c) Students of German as a foreign language — language, literature and, preferably, translation — who have completed their degree recently;
  d) Students of German as a foreign language — language, literature and, preferably, translation — who are in their last two terms of studies.

The structure of the groups and sub-groups can be outlined as follows:

GROUP P				GROUP B			
GP1	GP2	GP3	GP4	GB1	GB2	GB3	GB4
(T1)	(T2)						

Each informant, classified according to his/her respective sub-group, was expected to translate the two German texts, previously selected, into Portuguese and try to "think aloud" about them in the course of translation. The recordings were done on an individual basis and were followed by the completion of a questionnaire and by a short interview, aimed at clarifying possible doubts observed during the recording sessions. Both contributions of a given informant were collected within a period of 48 hours. Thus, I could observe and compare the translation strategies used in both recording sessions, the former being still relatively present in the short-term memory of my informants to allow for associations and recursive comparisons.

FIELDWORK

At the time of writing (July 1993) fieldwork has already been completed in Portugal and has just started in Brazil.

The collection of data in Portugal took place in the northern city of Porto, between the second week of April 1993 and the end of May 1993. I collected a total of 43 hours of recording from 12 Portuguese informants, who corresponded to the profiles detailed above. The facilities used were part of the Phonetics Laboratory of the Linguistics Centre of the *Universidade do Porto*, which provided an adequate environment for the recordings. All 12 informants worked under the same conditions, using the same room, equipment and reference material: a German/Portuguese and Portuguese/German dictionary published by Langenscheidts; a Wahrig monolingual German dictionary; a Polyglot Travel Guide about the Ruhr-Valley; a detailed city map of Bochum and environs (Falkplan) in scale 1:20.000 and an Infoplan for Bochum in scale 1:7.500. Apart from the material provided, there was supplementary material brought along by the informants themselves. These included unabridged editions of German/Portuguese bilingual dictionaries (Porto Editora), Portuguese monolingual dictionaries (Aurélio) and German monolingual dictionaries (Duden, Wahrig). The recording sessions took from a minimum of 75 minutes to a maximum of 150 minutes, with an average of 100 minutes per session, and were always undertaken within a maximum interval of 48 hours between both recordings.

For the purpose of a still incipient view of the works being carried out, I would like to quote a German sentence which is part of my corpus of analysis.

(8) *"Bochum liegt zwar nicht am Meer, aber Badenixen und Wassermänner mangelt es kaum an Gelegenheiten."* (Bochum does not quite lie on the seaside but mermaids and water sprites have no lack of opportunities.)

Sentences from (8a) to (8e) are some of the possible alternatives collected from the Portuguese informants for the approach and solution of translation problems from German into Portuguese in sentence (8). Please note that the transcriptions and their English counterparts are quite literal and are not intended as an exercise in translation itself.

(8a) *"Badenixen, ver..., Nixen, Nix. Tá aqui como Wassermann. Portanto, Badenixen und Wassermänner. Portanto aqui é quase como a repetição de Wassergeit ou Wasserratte. Portanto, deixo espaço já. Pode ser que surja algo."* (Badenixen, see..., Nixen, Nix. It is here as Wassermann. Therefore, Badenixen und Wassermänner. Therefore, here it is almost like the repetition of Wassergeit or Wasserratte. Therefore, I'll leave a blank now. Perhaps something will occur to me.)

(8b) *"Eh, Badenixen. Xeu ver..., Agora só faltam as Badenixen e os Wassermänner. Que coisa mais chata! Eu vou ver no dicionário. Mas não me lembro como se diz isso em português. Estúpido! Aqui não tem! Ora bem, podia por: "todas as sereias e tritões ou todos os filhos de Tritão. As sereias e os sereios? Não pode! Neptunos não dá. As sereias e os filhos de Tritão. Já está!"* (Eh, Badenixen. Lemme see... Now there are only the Badenixen and the Wassermänner left. What a boring thing! I'll look it up in the dictionary. But I don't remember how to say this in Portuguese. Stupid! There isn't any! Look, I could write: "all mermaids and tritons or all sons of Triton. The mermaids and the merlads*? You can't! Neptunes is impossible. The mermaids and the sons of Triton. That's it!)

(8c) *"Badenixen? Vamos ver se tem aqui... Badenixen? Cá tinha Nixen e era o espírito das águas. Vamos ver... Não tem! Não sei... O que que eu faço?"* (Badenixen? Let's see if it is here... Badenixen? There was Nixen and it was the water-spirit. Let's see.. There isn't! I don't know... What do I do?)

(8d) *"Badenixen eu não sei o que é. Vou ver... Ninfa, pois! Pessoas que gostam muito da água? Para os apreciadores da água? Mas retira muito a riqueza dessas palavras. Vou por neptunos."* (I don't know what Badenixen is. I'll look it up... Ninf, that's it! People who are fond of water? For water-lovers? But it removes a lot of the riches of these words. I'll write down neptunes.)

(8e) *"Badenixen und Wassermänner... Digamos os amantes da água. Vou fugir um bocadinho do que está aqui. No sentido do masculino e feminino e vou optar por, por todo e qualquer amante da água. Pronto!"* (Badenixen und Wassermänner... Let's say the water-lovers. I'll run away just a little bit from what there is here. In the sense of the masculine and the feminine and I'll opt for, for every and which water-lover. That's it!)

It is interesting to observe how differently each of the informants approached the issue. Apart from morpho-syntactic problems, which varied extensively from one to the other, they all had great difficulties in rendering the German nouns *Badenixen* and *Wassermänner* into Portuguese.

Their level of difficulty ranged from not even being able to find the noun *Badenixen* in the dictionaries, not relating it to *Nixe* alone, easily found in reference books (*cf.*(8c)), to reflections on Greek mythology (*cf.*(8b)) and how to translate it within a Portuguese context.

There were cases of reflections on the use of masculine and feminine forms in German and a decision to translate them gender-neutrally into Portuguese (*cf.*(8e)).

In (8b) *neptunos* was seen as an impossible alternative in direct opposition to (8d) which definitely preferred *neptunos* as a way of preserving and reporting semantic characteristics embedded in (8).

In (8a) my informant decided to put the problem aside in the hope that an intuitive solution would come to her later. This was exactly the opposite strategy used in (8b) where the informant arrived at a satisfactory solution for the same problem through extensive handling of reference books, relying on her own thoughts and analogies. In (8c) someone gave up the search for a solution quite early, showing lack of persistence and interest. The solution found in (8d) reveals dissatisfaction with a possible semantic generalization and the option for a more creative solution. The opposite strategy is selected in (8e) with the decision to use gender neutral forms in Portuguese for masculine and feminine forms in German.

The preliminary analyses above are just intended to throw light on how intricate the problem is. There is an obvious need to contrast and discuss it with reference to the level of proficiency in German of each one of the informants. It is also important to take into consideration the strategies used recursively in the same body of translation by each one of them and cross-examine it in relation to the totality of the data collected in my corpus. The samples provided above are only meant as illustrative examples for the analysis to be carried out after fieldwork was completed in Brazil by August 1993.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: TRANSLATION AS PROCESS AND AS A CRAFT

It may sound a bit odd when I define, within the scope of an empirical work, the translation process as a form of craft. This might be more suited as the topic of a philosophical approach. However, I take for granted that the capacity and ability to translate can only be achieved with effort, patience and determination. Something that requires on the part of the translator-to-be the struggle and the dedication of the apprentice to achieve a desired and worthy goal. These words are supported by Bell's (1991: 267) statement, when he suggests that the craft of translation requires of translators "that they become more aware of how they do translating and become more skilled at explaining and sharing the experience."

From a psycholinguistically oriented and a didactic perspective it means that research on translation should concentrate on the process without neglecting the product itself. This is the view defended here. For the linguistic pair German/Portuguese these are still preliminary steps. I have already stated elsewhere (*cf.* Alves, in press) that this gap must be filled. The first analyses carried out in the data already collected in Portugal reveal an enormous amount of interesting and relevant material, particularly when it begins to be cross-examined with reference to its Brazilian counterpart.

I shall end this article with a quotation from Sutherland (1966, *cf.* Garman 1991: xv) which somehow foresees unfolding possibilities for research on translation:

> The task of psycholinguistics is not to confirm Chomsky's account of linguistic competence by undertaking experiments [...]. The task of psycholinguistics is to my mind very much more difficult and interesting. It is, by doing experiments, to find out what are the mechanisms that underlie linguistic competence.

The steps undertaken here are much more humble in nature. However, they are small steps towards a much more comprehensive goal. By throwing light on a very particular area of research, they aim to contribute to the didactics and methodology of translation teaching as a whole and to provide empirical evidence to be used in theoretical works of a broader scope.

Finally, I would like to remind the reader of the title of this article. Its translation into English (*cf.* note 1) reveals how difficult, how fugitive and how subtle the task of a tranlator can be. From the exhilarating and rewarding feeling of satisfaction over an adequate solution to the frustration and disappointment of failure, he/she must constantly face an inner struggle for which there does not seem to be any clear-cut solution but only the determination to "parse" ahead, not to give in, but to pursue and persevere in his/her quest towards the mastery of the craft.

The material already collected and its preliminary analyses have given me the necessary encouragement to carry on. It is my hope to see it bear fruit and thus enable me to give my contribution to the development of a field which is both full of promise and in dire need of further research.

Notes

1. The translation of the Portuguese sentence *VEIO-ME UM 'CLICK' NA CABEÇA E DEPOIS FOI-SE NA MESMA VELOCIDADE EM QUE VEIO* partially quoted in the title of this article reads in English "A CLICK CAME TO MY HEAD AND THEN IT WENT AWAY AT THE SAME SPEED IT HAD COME [to me]." It was uttered by a Portuguese informant on data collected during fieldwork in Portugal and it was related to the solution of a translation problem. The informant said she had found an adequate solution — intuitively and rather spontaneously — which also escaped her conscious grasp before she became fully aware of it. This utterance confirms the reasons for the need for further research on translation and outlines the starting point of my present research; *i.e.* analyses of mental awareness embedded in a cultural context.
2. For a further comprehensive bibliography on translation, not necessarily quoted in this article, but used as a reference source for my PhD Dissertation, the reader is referred to the bibliographic section at the end of this article.
3. I have opted to preserve the orthographic conventions used for nouns in German, keeping the initial letter of the German noun in capitals, even when embedded into the half-translated sentence in Portuguese.
4. I'd like to thank the Tourist Office of the City of Bochum for official approval concerning the rights for use and later publication of the article "*Wasserfreude für Wasserfreunde*," granted in correspondence dated 09.02.1993.

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