

Translation as creation

PAULO BEZERRA

THE FINAL product of fiction translation is recreation, but recreation entirely derived from the translator's creativity. Therefore, the translational process is a creative process and, consequently, translation is also creation, for it entails the interaction of two creative elements - the author of the original and its translator. The latter starts from a creation already completed and transforms it into the "secondary" product (with no value judgment!), according to the expression of the Russian essayist P. Topior, i.e., he transforms it into a second work but of equal value, the materialization of which required a degree of creativity different from that used by the first creative element, but by no means less valuable as creativity. Because the translator is always led to rummage the recesses of his language and the richness of its vocabulary, its source of sayings and proverbs, its forms of sign language, in short, its multiple semantic and morphosyntactic resources, in the attempt to solve similar problems imposed on him by the original. He knows that he works with a finished text, to which he needs to give new life, to perform a Charon operation - to borrow a metaphor from Topior -, but in such a way that the characters in the text-boat do not lose memory and the work can satisfactorily cross its Styx, arriving alive at the other side: the translator's target language and culture. To build this crossing the translator has to go through a creative process similar to that experienced by the author of the original, considering, of course, all due differences and specificities. According to Boris Pasternak (1985, p.316), himself a great poet and translator, "In thus daily progressing through the text the translator finds himself reliving the circumstances of the author. Day by day he reproduces his actions and he is drawn into some of his secrets, not in theory, but practically, by experience."

As a dialogue of cultures

Viewed from this angle translation is a dialogue of creative individualities from different cultures, i.e., a genuine dialogue of cultures, in which the translator rummages the guts of the original, listens to the voices that populate it, dives into the sometimes almost inscrutable side of the language, focuses on the life of its characters; in short, soaks in the original to be able to interpret it as a whole and give it a new life; a life, however, marked by the uniqueness of the multiple ways of being of the translator's language and culture, by his creative individuality.

In this regard, Bakhtin offers us a reflection which, while related to a dialogue of cultures in the field of literature, can be extended without any exag-

geration to translation as dialogue and interaction between cultures. Let us look at the passage.

There exists a very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy, idea that in order to better understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one's own, and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture... of course, a certain entry as a living being into a foreign culture, the possibility of seeing through its eyes, is a necessary part of the process of understanding it; but if this were the only aspect of this understanding, it would merely be duplication and would not entail anything new or enriching. *Creative understanding* does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding - in time, in space, in culture ... This dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing; each retains its own unity and open totality but they are mutually enriched. (Bakhtin, 2003, p.365-6)

Here are some actually new issues that we can add to the theory of translation: the act of translating is a penetration in another's culture, but a dialogic penetration in which the "*creative understanding* does not renounce itself," but retains its peculiarities, its individuality as a mark of its own culture, which uses its infinite ways of saying to recreate the spirit of the original, to bring as close as possible to the original ways of being of the other, giving it the specific colors of its national culture. As stated by Nikolai Lyubimov, the great Russian translator of Rabelais, Cervantes, Swift, Flaubert and other classics, quoting Bielski "A corresponding image, as well as a corresponding sentence, are not always in visible correspondence with the words: the inner life of the expression translated must correspond to the inner life of the original."

In my experience as a translator I have many examples which, in my view, correspond to Bakhtin's notion of creative understanding, as well as to Bielski's idea of correspondence mentioned by Lyubimov. I will name a few. In the translation of *Crime and Punishment* (p.524), Raskolnikov talks with his sister Dounia, who is disturbed by his decision to surrender to justice for the death of the old woman and asks him if he wasn't half expiating his crime by facing the suffering. "Crime? What crime? ... That I killed a vile noxious insect, an old pawnbroker woman, of use to no one? Killing her was atonement for forty sins!"^{TN}Literally, the sentence "Killing her was atonement for forty sins!" reads as follows in the Russian original: "*staruchónku protséntitsu, nekomu ne nú-jnuyú, korotuyú ubít' sorok griekhóv prostyát*", i.e., "an old pawnbroker woman, of use to no one, whose death was atonement for forty sins" (p.400). In Portuguese, the phrase "atonement for forty sins" would sound like translation, whereas "has one hundred years of forgiveness" is similar to saying "a thief that steals from a thief has one hundred years of forgiveness."

^{TN} I did not use the verb “steal” because Dounia did not speak of theft, but of crime, and Raskolnikov did not take anything from the old lady: he left what he had taken from the trunk under a rock. What weighed in my translation was the decision was to give the spirit of the original the corresponding spirit in Brazilian Portuguese, guiding myself by Bielinski’s aforementioned statement: “the inner life of the expression translated must correspond to the inner life of the original.”

Let us see another example of translation of the spirit rather than of the letter. In *The Brothers Karamazov* (p.736) Grushenka recounts his visit to Mitya (Dmitri) in prison, and his reaction when she told him she had brought pastries to the Polish, her first lover, who was sick, and says: “But Mitya rose with four stones in hand ...”. ^{TN} The original reads as follows: “*A Mitiato vskotchil s rugátelstvami*”, which literally means “But Mitya stood up in a jump with curses. “The Russian verb *vskotchit*” has the primary meaning of “to jump, to fall on someone” in an aggressive attitude, and in the sentence quoted it is reinforced by the plural noun “curses”. In Brazilian Portuguese, “stand up with four stones in hand” means to stand up with an aggressive attitude or words. The interpretation I gave to Gruchenka’s sentence is semantically consistent with the Russian original, but the form is ours, it is Brazilian. It is therefore the creative interpretation to which Bakhtin refers.

A third and last example

The Russian language has two expletive particles - *déskat’* and *mol* – the use of which introduces a kind of very peculiar free indirect discourse, indicating that the words that follow are someone else’s speech or ideas. When widely used they give the idea of reiteration of a recurring event in the discourse of the narrator or of one or more characters in a narrative, and seek to covertly involve the reader in a kind of dialogue with the narrator. Mr. Golyádkin, protagonist and narrator of *The Double*, uses the particle *déskat’* to exhaustion in order to justify himself sometimes before an interlocutor and others before the reader. Not translating the particle would mean leaving a serious gap in the text; using the repellent “*dir-se-ia*” ^{TN} as seen in some translations would only distort the meaning of the discourse. I chose an expression that is very common in Portuguese - “*sabe como é*” ^{TN} - which does not seem to say anything, but in my view perfectly solves the discursive circumstance of the original. Let us see an example. Desperate with the success of his imaginary double, which occupies on the bureaucratic scale and in social life all the positions which he, Mr. Golyádkin, had dreamed of and for which he was passed by, Mr. Golyádkin visits the supreme boss of the bureaucratic offices at his own home, but is initially questioned, stopped by the doorman and forced to explain himself to the man.

– *Eu, meu amigo, sou aquele... Golyádkin, o funcionário, o conselheiro titular Golyádkin. Pois, sabe como é, vim me explicar...*

– *Aguarde, não pode...*

– *Meu amigo, não posso aguardar; meu assunto é importante, é um assunto urgente...*

– *Sim, mas o senhor vem da parte de quem? Trouxe papéis?*

– *Não, meu amigo, venho por conta própria... Anuncie, meu amigo, assim; “ele disse, sabe como é, veio se explicar”.* (p.206)

[– I, my friend, I am Golyádkin, the titular councilor, Golyádkin. To say... something or other... to explain...

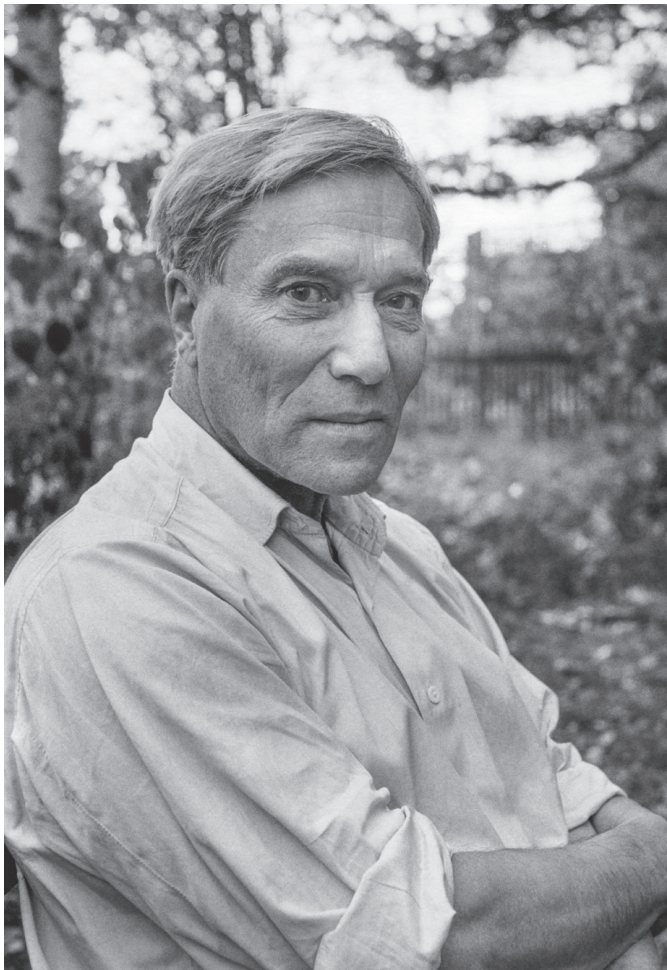
– You must wait. You cannot ...

– My friend, I cannot wait, my business is important, it’s business that admits of no delay ...

– Bur from whom have you come? Have you brought papers?

– No, my friend, I am on my own account. Announce me, my friend, say something or other, explain. (p.206)]

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Boris Pasternak (1890-1960).

We have here two different circumstances in which *déskat'* is used: in the first, Mr. Golyádkin, questioned by the doorman, conveys the idea that he was there for a trivial matter and seeks to gain the understanding of his interlocutor: “*sabe como é, vim me explicar*”^{1TN} suggesting that everybody knocks on the boss’ door for that purpose. In the second, the interlocutor is tasked with announcing Golyádkin’s presence to the boss, and the discursive circumstance makes it very clear that the phrase “*sabe como é*” is double-voiced, it will come from the doorman’s mouth but at the same time is an expression used by Golyádkin himself. Furthermore, by addressing the boss by saying “*sabe como é*”, the doorman will be reiterating the trivial fact that everybody knocks on his door to explain something. Here, what is at stake is the spirit and not the letter of the discourse, which can only be solved by creation. As put by Lyubímov: «literalness weakens the meaning; the spirit of the speech enlivens it.»

In the text mentioned Bakhtin raises another issue that seems essential to me. He says: «In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding - in time, in space, in culture.”

In fact, interpreting a nineteenth century text in the twenty-first century is a challenge quite difficult to be overcome, given that the translator is a man of his time and cannot escape a considerable degree of updating. The translator who translates directly from the original is a mediator between the author and his readers in the language of the translation. Doing so requires being guided by the good old adage: to meet somewhere in the middle. One can neither “over-archaize” the language, at the risk of forcing his readers to constantly refer to the dictionary, nor over-modernize it, at the risk of losing sight of the context of the work. Dostoevsky uses often the expression “*govorit’ skorogovórkoï*”, which means to speak at the speed of lightning. A more accurate translation would be “to speak like a machine gun.” But the machine gun was invented long after Dostoevsky’s death. It would be an over-modernization of the language and a distortion of the context of the work. In this case, the solution rests with a creative interpretation of the work and its context.

Operation with meanings

The first issue to be taken into account by the translator who intends to translate a work of fiction is: the translation of fiction does not operate with signified but rather with meaning, as occurs with literature itself as art. The translation belongs to the field of discourse, it is an operation with language, and this, in turn, “is a representation of meaning” (Meschonnic, 2010, p.57). That being said, one of the greatest and sometimes more harmful dangers for the translation of fiction - the illusion of literalness - is eliminated from the outset.

Translation as art is the product of a particular subjectivity which, even

^{TN} To say... something or other... to explain...

in the translation of the work of others seeks to give life in the target language, making the original an independent work in another language, in another culture, giving it a new historical existence. It is the production of a dissimilarity of the similar, for even though the work is the same, with the original title and original name of its author, it is not a copy of the original, because the translation makes it a work in motion, subject to different interpretations, living on equal foot with works written in the target language and being read in the light of other cultural values, another psychology of reception, as well as of the traditions of the literature of that other language. This new condition – that of work in motion, maintains the unity of the work, which according to Meschonnic (2010 p. XXXI), “is of the order of the continuum of the rhythm and prosody,” enriches the translated work with the values inserted in it by the interpretation of the other who reads it. This is what gives life to a translated work. Here the creative individuality of the translator is of the essence. His creative potentials are mobilized to create the appropriate form for the realm of the senses that bring the work together, neglecting from the outset the illusion of “two plus two equals four,” the simplistic illusion of literalness. What is important to understand is that the translation of literature, whether poetry or prose is, first and foremost, art. Art, as Lyubímov says, is the product of creation, and creation is incompatible with literalness. Therefore, translating a work is not repeating it in another language, but creating a dissimilarity of the similar, in which the work is the same being different and vice versa, recreating the set of values that consolidated the original in the form most suitable for the best aesthetic standard possible of the target language literature, shaped in the discourse used by the translator. In short, translating an original worthy of its aesthetic qualities entails finding the poetic appropriate to maintaining it in the order of the continuum, in the open order of the discourse. The dissimilarity of the similar allows the translated work to maintain its core, semantic and aesthetic values, in a poetic guided by the spirit of the original, thanks to the creative ingenuity of the translator.

The translation of poetry or prose is a form of interliterary reception, of knowledge of peoples. It is also one of the forms of survival of the work in another language, in another culture, and especially in another era, which has its own way of conceiving literature and art and a specific reception of literature as art. Translation is a dialogue of cultures, an interaction of what is “mine” with what belongs to “the other”, a harmonious exchange in which the target language, transformed into discourse by the translator, lends itself to the work of “the other” to turn it into aesthetic reality in a “strange” context, where it becomes a two-faced Janus: first it belongs to the art of the word common to the literary system of the source language, then to the art of the word common to the literary system of the target language. Then the translated work takes on a life of its own, gains autonomy in relation to the system that generated it. It

becomes part of the translation language system and through it also part of the universal literature system. The art of translation enables a work to transcend its space, its time and its culture, to become universal in the language of the other, transcending its space and its time.

Language/languages

When starting the translation of a work, the translator has to be aware that one does not translate idioms, but what a creative individuality - the author - makes of it, that is, one translates language, or rather languages, to the extent that each speaker is a sliver of the socio-cultural universe and his language marks him as part of a particular social segment and expresses his education, cultural level and even mental health or lack thereof. Therefore, in a novel language modalities vary according to the number of speakers and their respective peculiarities, and each of these has his own language pattern. Special mention should be made of the narrator, who is usually someone who uses the classical and universal language standard, which “facilitates” the life of the translator, who masters the refined norm of the language and uses it in his translational craft. But not everything is a bed of roses in the translation of the language of the narrators, as there are narrators who mix one or more language patterns in their discourses. In this sense, there are huge challenges to be faced and I mention two only in the field of novelistic prose so as not to over-extend the subject: Riobaldo, from *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*, who blends classical and popular language patterns in his speech, and many of Dostoevsky’s narrators. In the latter, the fluidity or sinuosity of the language depends on the degree of closeness or distance between the narrator and the speaking character: when the character of the universe becomes blurred, his language is also blurred and that contaminates the discourse of the narrator. There are also nearly extreme cases like that of Mr. Golyádkin, the protagonist and narrator of *The Double*, a character whose central nervous system is compromised and, consequently, whose discourse is also syntactically compromised to the point of being nearly untranslatable. Bakhtin (2003, p.183-4) states that the author does not create his characters based on aesthetic criteria alone; he finds them previously in the real world, with all that characterizes them as personas of that real world and conventionalizes them as literary characters. This alerts the translator to an essential aspect of literary translation, especially in a work with many speakers: each of them has his characterological marker, his language pattern, his own way of speaking, his tone, in short, his diction. Translating the discourse of each speaker according to his diction, his syntax, is the biggest challenge for the translator. Overcoming this challenge means preventing all characters in a novel from speaking the same way. Is it difficult? It is very difficult! Is it possible? Yes, it is, as long as the translator investigates, separately, the speech of each character before starting the translation. This will make him dive deep into all the recesses of the original, feeling the idiom.

Feeling the idiom

Russians often speak of something that pleases me a lot: *tchuvstvo yaziká*, which I translate sometimes as linguistic sensitivity and others as feeling the idiom when it is used in ordinary conversation, or feeling the language when it comes to literature. Feel the idiom or the language of another is feeling the other, establishing some level of empathy (or aversion) with him, to try to capture the nuances of his personality.

When we translate literature we lean on an aesthetic activity, because we are translating the art of the word. Also in this case Bakhtin offers us a reflection that we can apply largely to the translation process as a dialogical interaction with the other. The master says: “The first moment of aesthetic activity is identification: I must experience, i.e., live and know what he experiences, put myself in his place, in a way coincide with him (in the way, in the possible form of this identification)” (ibid, p.23).

Well, I myself experienced this process when I translated *The Double*. To satisfactorily translate the vicissitudes of the narrator-protagonist’s discourse, I needed to identify myself with Mr. Golyádkin, know the meanderings of his discourse, which are a direct reflection of his compromised psyche, feel his gestures as an actor representing gestures of characters, feel his hesitations, his fears and sorrows, his feeling as someone who had been wronged, and even the one moment of affection throughout the narrative. Golyádkin is terribly lonely, his entire life is marked by the total absence of any speck of affection. With all his dreams frustrated, he creates a double to achieve in his imaginary that which he cannot achieve in the harsh crude reality of his daily life. At home, in a dialogue with his double, he experiences the one moment of affection in his life; he suddenly lets go, relaxes and talks on equal terms, friendly and naturally with him. Relaxation causes him to utter the phrase that I reproduce here first literally: “You scoundrel, aren’t you guilty before me?” Now, that is a solemn sentence for the single moment of affection throughout Golyádkin’s life. Because I was deeply immersed in the atmosphere, I had put myself in his shoes, sort of coincided with him, feeling the way he was feeling, I transformed the solemn statement into a sentence loaded with affection: «*Ah, seu patife, tens culpa no meu cartório.*”^{2TN} If I kept the literalness of the solemn sentence, the character would say one thing and I would translate another. As Lyubímov puts it: literalness weakens the meaning; the spirit of the speech enlivens it.

So, feeling the idiom from which you are translating is to fully identify with it, drench in it, experience its music, its rhythm, think with its multiple morphological and syntactic features, capture and experience the affection and also the hostility emanating from the speeches of the characters. In short, penetrate deeply in the source language, incarnate, “depersonalize yourself” tempo-

^{TN} “Oh, you scoundrel, you are guilty on my list.”

rarily in it, dilute yourself in the diction of its speakers and take on their gestures as an actor that performs someone else's words. But for translation to happen I, as the translator, cannot remain in a state of eternal "depersonalization" in the other, because according Bakhtin "projection must be followed by a return to myself", so that I can reincarnate in my discourse in my idiom, in line with its multiple values, in order to render a translation in good Portuguese, with the forms of expression typical of our Brazilian way of speaking and writing.

Psyche and rhythm

Every idiom has a rhythm of its own, but each individual uses it according to his peculiarities. The speech of each individual reflects the rhythm of operation of his psyche, his fluency or disorder is manifested in his syntax, sometimes coherent and harmonious, and others incoherent and discontinuous, depending on the state of mental health or spirit of each speaker. In the case of characters like Mr. Golyádkin, the protagonist of *The Double*, whose central nervous system is compromised and interweaves moments of merely relative tranquility with others of deep disturbance, the discontinuous, confusing and often disjointed rhythm of the syntax of his discourse translates the sense of his psyche, his anguished psyche, causing frequent lapses of this discourse, which on various occasions of the narrative borders on untranslatability. Add to that the fact that the narrative is the representation of a split personality, with all the implications of such a split. I wrote about it (Bezerra, 2011, p.246) in my postface of the edition of *The Double*:

Translating the speech of a character with a split conscience is to translate his language equally split in the speech of his immediate alleged interlocutor, re-split in the speeches of other possible or imaginary interlocutors. The rhythm of that speech is the rhythm of the character's garbled, sinuous and discontinuous thought, which sometimes seems to question, others to exclaim, and others yet to want to say something whose meaning jumbles at the tip of the tongue, and the discourse always leaves a strong feeling of incompleteness, of a gap to be filled and a big question mark for the reader. Dostoevsky organizes this speech in a garbled, sinuous and discontinuous punctuation, like the flow Golyádkin's thought, which may lead the reader accustomed to the standard rules of writing, to the false feeling of impropriety of that punctuation. However, what is at stake is the homology between the being and the way of representing him, as it would be unnatural for a character with a disturbed psyche like Mr. Golyádkin's to speak a fluent and clear language. Therefore, the rhythm of his speech reflects his way of perceiving the world and men, i.e., the meaning he assigns to things because, as says one of the most important translation theorists, "I understand rhythm as the organization of the meaning of the discourse, the organization (of prosody and intonation) of the subjectivity and specificity of a discourse" [Meschonnic, 2011, p.43].

Translating is interpreting, but it is also and above all overcoming interpretation, recreating the rhythm of the work in the target language with a poetic beat that takes account of the multiple meanings and way of being of the original. As says the master of all of us who work with Russian literature in Brazil: “Won’t the rhythm of a translation have much to do with how the translator has assimilated the rhythms of the country of origin of the work and those of the target universe?” (Schneiderman, 2011, p.85).

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ABSTRACT – The essay examines the relationship between translation and re-creation, focusing on the differences and similarities between primary creation, i.e., the construction of a work by its author, and translation as secondary creation, i.e., the new form taken on by the original in the target language, acquiring a new existence and gaining independence. It also analyzes the contribution of Mikhail Bakhtin’s literary theory, as well as the contribution of other great masters to an eventual theory of translation.

KEYWORDS: Translation, Re-creation, Literary theory, Mikhail Bakhtin, Translation theory.

Paulo Bezerra studied and specialized in translation at Lomonosov University in Moscow. He has a PhD in Language and Literature from the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, and a postdoctoral degree in Russian Literature from USP. He has translated more than 50 works from Russian into Portuguese, of which 45 have been published. He was a Professor of Literary Theory at the University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, a professor of Russian Language and Literature at USP, and is a retired professor from the chair of Literary Theory at UFF. He has translated, among others, the following works: by L. S. Vygotsky, *Psicologia da arte e a construção do pensamento e da linguagem* (Martins Fontes); by M. Bakhtin, *Problemas da poética de Dostoiévski* (Forense Universitária), *Estética da criação verbal* (Martins Fontes); by F. Dostoevsky, *Crime e castigo* and *Os irmãos Karamázov* (Ed. 34). @ – bazel@uol.com.br

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