

# Brazilian science going international: analyzing the impact of translation from Portuguese to English

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## Abstract

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This research aims at discussing the effects of translation in the international circulation of academic-scientific production. Translation plays an essential role to ensure that communication is effective among the members of the international scientific community. From a linguistic point of view, however, some elements must be considered, such as: (a) the strict dependence that the scientific-academic genre has with the social context; (b) the absence of precise information in Journals guidelines on how translations must be done; and, (c) the lack of awareness about the target readership of these articles when they are translated. This paper analyzes four excerpts taken from two scientific articles translated from Portuguese to English in Brazilian journals of the field of Language Studies. The analysis focus on the suppression and inclusion of certain terms and their impact in the translated text. Results show that the alterations – being the absence of certain terms or the inclusion of others – have an impact in the authorial gesture, certain times silencing the author's voice, and other times letting the translator voice be heard by the reader.

**Keywords:** Translation, Academic-Scientific Articles, Internationalization, English, Portuguese.

## 1. Introduction

Since 2011, Brazilian scientific community, especially researchers affiliated to academic Institutions of Higher Education, supported by agencies from the Brazilian Federal Government, such as *Conselho de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal e Nível Superior* (CAPES) and *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* (CNPq), have been implementing a set of measures to enlarge the presence of national research in the global scientific community. Actions include a great number of exchange programs for undergraduate students, and the increase of publications disseminating results of researches developed in different public universities all over the country. Thus, what came to be known as the “Internationalization process of scientific production” has the objective to increase the presence of Brazilian research in the global scenario of academic-scientific production. In terms of dissemination of research, attention must be paid at the language used, since the local language, Portuguese, is not well-known outside Lusophone countries, which means that, in order to reach a larger number of readers, articles should either be written in English, currently considered as *lingua franca*, or translated into that language.

As a result, more and more scientific journals in Brazil have been publishing articles in English or, especially in the area of Language Studies, in bilingual versions, that is, the original in Portuguese with its translation into English. While the purpose of such measure is undoubtedly relevant, there are still elements to be considered in terms of the linguistic and discursive impact caused by the translation of those texts, since there seems to be not enough discussion on the effects of translation in the global meaning of the text. Considering, by one side, the fact that a large number of researchers affiliated to national universities do not consider themselves fluent in English as a foreign language<sup>1</sup>, which indicates the low proficiency level among the

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<sup>1</sup> An interview with 50 researchers all of them affiliated to Brazilian public universities was carried out in the year of 2016 with the objective to learn about the proficiency level in foreign languages among national academic-scientific community.

academic-scientific community and, on the other, the absence of discussion on the complexity involving the translation of this genre from one language to another, it is possible to argue that the debate over the linguistic and discursive consequences of academic-scientific translation requires more thorough examination. Therefore, in this paper, we offer an overview of the theme, emphasizing that translation cannot be considered as a neutral process, since it is complex, involving both source and target languages, deeply affected by the cultural, social and historical contexts in which it emerges. Finally, we present the analyses of four excerpts of translations from Portuguese to English taken from two articles published in Brazilian journals of the area of Language Studies in the years of 2014 and 2015. The aspect emphasized is the suppression and/or inclusion of words and expressions during the process of translation, fact seen as a gesture that has implications on the authorial position of the work.

## **2. International circulation of scientific production: the social aspect of translation**

Language can be observed from many different perspectives. When considering the importance of its social context, the notion of “speech genre”, such as proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin (2003), is of great relevance, since it emphasizes the importance of the different fields in which language is used. Thus, the author (2003) defines a genre as a certain type of utterance with relative stability, that can be more or less dynamic. Therefore, from this point of view, language does not signify by itself, but by the way it is used in a speaking community. There are certain constraints that shape and regulate the way language is used in a certain context. For instance, a cooking recipe has characteristics that make it different from a book review: while the first one will have the social role of teaching the steps on how to prepare a meal, the second one has the objective of presenting someone’s opinion about a book. Besides the difference in their social function, both texts are also different in the way language is used; the first is divided into two parts – Ingredients and Instructions – and use verbs in the imperative mood and words that indicate precision in the quantities used and the way procedures should be followed. The second, on the other hand, will present a number of verbs of opinion, adjectives and adverbs to convey the writer’s feelings and perceptions about the book. Speakers are well aware of those rules and can easily recognize a speech genre within their linguistic community.

Thus, cultural, social and historical elements play a significant role defining a genre in a linguistic community. As a text is translated into another language, it should be coherent with the social rules of the target language, so that it can be recognized and accepted as belonging to that genre in the that community of speakers. In other words, translating a text demands more than replacing words from one language to another, it requires from the translator the knowledge of the kinds of utterances typically used in that discursive field.

In the field of science and academic knowledge, however, translation tend to be taken as a neutral, objective and spontaneous process, and, for this reason, cultural, social or historical aspects involving the use of language could be thought as peripheral information. Consequently, as Bennett (2007: 153) explains: “Academic discourse is thus revealed, from the outset, to be a self-referential, self-justificatory practice that determines what may legitimately be considered as knowledge”. One of the consequences of this fact is that texts belonging to the academic-scientific genre can be translated as if they were universal genres, disregarding its particularities in different cultures. Bennett (2007), in a research where she analyzes translations from European Portuguese to English, explains that while the academic discourse in Portuguese has its roots in a neo-romantic and idealist vision, in which emotion is used in language as a resource for expression, the Anglophone academic discourse has a positivist structure, in which experiences are reported in a more objective way.

Also, the author emphasizes that “the way that a particular culture formulates its knowledge is intricately bound up with the very identity of its people, their way of making sense of the world and the value system that holds that worldview in place.” (2007: 154). Hence, translation can cause what Bennet calls “epistemicide” (2007: 154), that is, the destruction of multiples forms of knowledge in order to reproduce the hegemonic dominant position, which is, according to the author, the Anglophone academic discourse.

### 3. Analyses: authorial gestures

In order to analyze the effects of translation in the international circulation of Brazilian academic-scientific production, two articles were selected from two Brazilian Journals: (1) *Acta Scientiarum: Language and culture*, and (2) *Bakhtiniana: Revista de Estudos do Discurso*, both published in bilingual versions – the original in Portuguese and its translation in English. Analyses were carried out in two phases. Firstly, both texts – original and translation – were compared and the distinctive aspects were listed. Later, in the second phase, these differences were considered in terms of the impact they produced in the global meaning of the text and, also, in the authorial gesture, that is, its relation to the position occupied by the author and/or the translator. Then, four excerpts were selected for this paper, focusing on the suppression and inclusion of certain terms.

The criteria used to select the articles were based on the field of study, and also, on the score attributed by the Federal Government department, CAPES, the *qualis periódico*, on their last evaluation<sup>2</sup>. Both of the selected journals publish articles on the Language Studies area, and they are both well evaluated by CAPES, receiving the highest and the second highest score, respectively A1 and A2. To select the articles for analysis, we observed the article metadata information, that is, title, keywords, abstract – and also the references used in the research, with the purpose of selecting papers dedicated to the area of discourse studies. Despite the fact that both selected articles were developed using a discursive theoretical framework, they differed markedly not only in the authors used, but also in the nature of the object under analysis, fact that was relevant for producing more heterogeneous data for this research.

Excerpt 1 and 2 present cases in which the suppression of one or more elements was observed when comparing the original in Portuguese to its translation in English. In the first case, the element missing in the translation is the restrictive particle “só” [only]:

#### Excerpt 1 – Suppression

*Original in Portuguese:* “Diante desses apontamentos, ponderamos que a literatura produzida na América Latina **só** faz sentido quando analisada sob o viés da antropofagia, ritual responsável por desconstruir a ideia de discurso hegemônico”. (Cândido; Silvestre, 2016: 249) (emphasis added)

*Translation in English:* “In fact, literature produced in Latin America is meaningful when analyzed through the anthropophagic aspect which triggers the deconstruction of hegemonic discourse.” (Cândido; Silvestre, 2016: 249)

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<sup>2</sup>*Qualis Periódico* is a concept giving by CAPES every three years to every national Journal affiliated to a Brazilian university. The concept is assigned according to a set of procedures used to evaluate the intellectual production, including: (a) frequency of publication; (b) affiliation of authors; (c) editorial committee; (d) indexation. The concepts vary from the highest, A,1 to the lowest, C, for each Journal and each field of knowledge. Further information on <http://www.capes.gov.br/acesoainformacao/perguntas-frequentes/avaliacao-da-pos-graduacao/7422-qualis>.

In this first excerpt, the authors of the article state that anthropophagy, that is, the well-known movement proposing the production of a genuine national literature, as a result of consuming foreign literature, inaugurated by Mario de Andrade's *Manifesto Antropófago* (1928), is the only way to ensure that Literature in Latin America is meaningful. In the translation, however, the restriction is absent and the importance of Anthropophagy becomes less evident, since it is no longer the only condition to make Latin American literature meaningful, but one way among others.

The second excerpt presents the suppression of the word “*exposição*” [exposition], which means “exposition” and also the suppression of the expression “*por assim dizer*” [so to speak]:

#### Excerpt 2 – Suppression

*Original in Portuguese* “Achei que seria importante começar a **exposição** e discussão da temática tratada como uma definição metafórica do livro *Figuras de retórica*, assumindo, **por assim dizer**, o espírito e o corpo da obra” (Teixeira, 2015: 114). (emphasis added)

*Translation in English:* “I thought it would be important to start out this thematic discussion with a metaphorical definition of the book, which would capture the spirit and the body of the work” (Teixeira, 2015: 114).

The first word suppressed in the translation seems to have the effect of making the text more concise and punctual. It is possible to infer that this translation choice could be regulated by what Bennett (2007) mentions when she explains that Anglophone academic discourse tends to be more precise and straightforward. So, instead of translating both *exposition* and *thematic discussion*, the translator suppressed the first word, translating only the second expression. In the second suppression, on the contrary, the expression “*por assim dizer*” [so to speak] can be interpreted as a subjective position taken by the author. Its function is to modalize the related verb “*assumir*” [assume]. As the work of Authier-Revuz (1990) shows, when the author uses such modalization, it has the effect of a negotiation between author and the reader, in which an uncertainty is left, a gap that must be filled in by the reader. As the translator suppressed that expression, a mark of subjectivity left by the author is obliterated. This fact could be interpreted as a way of making the text more object, coherent with the model of the Anglophone academic discourse.

#### Excerpt 3 – Inclusion

*Original in Portuguese* “No entanto seríamos rasos se apenas afirmássemos que a Antropofagia ao modo proposto por Oswald seria uma forma de libertação total de uma cultura precedente. A proposta é maior: (...)”. (Cândido; Silvestre, 2016: 246).

*Translation in English:* “We would be **extremely** shallow if we merely stated that Anthropophagy in Oswald’s term would be a sort of total freedom from the preceding culture. Oswald’s proposal is **much** deeper (...)”. (Cândido; Silvestre, 2016: 246).

The excerpt 3 shows the inclusion of two adverbs of intensity. The first of them, is added in reference to shallow [*raso*]. The authors of the article use the adjective when talking about the position towards Anthropophagy, which must be understood in a deeper sense to avoid reductionism, that is, to avoid being shallow. The translation includes the adverb “extremely” modifying and emphasizing the meaning of shallow. The second inclusion happens in the sequence, in reference to the word “*maior*”, superlative form of the adjective big, translated as “deeper” and emphasized by the adverb “much”. So, while in Portuguese the authors write “*A proposta é maior*”, the translation presents “Oswald’s proposal is much deeper”. It is interesting to observe that in both cases, the inclusions made are adverbs, which are words that convey a subjective stance. When compared to the two excerpt previously presented, his third example

shows a gesture in a different direction, since its addition of subjective words could be seen as making the text less objective.

#### Excerpt 4 – Inclusion

*Original in Portuguese:* “O lugar dos tropos na argumentação também merece uma longa reflexão do autor. Ele vai demonstrar que as cinco operações da retórica antiga foram divididas em dois grupos, ficando com a invenção e a disposição os elementos destinados a convencer e persuadir, compondo a topologia, que se diferencia então da tropologia, a teoria dos tropos, das figuras, vistas como enfeites, como ‘luxo do discurso’ e, portanto, desnecessárias à argumentação”. (Teixeira, 2015:108).

*Translation in English:* “**Fiorin** also reflects long on tropes of argumentation. He demonstrates that the five canons of classical rhetoric were separated into two groups: topology, composed of **inventio** [invention] and **dispositio** [arrangement] (related to convincibility and persuasion), and tropology, the theory of tropes, of figures, which are regarded as ornament, ‘pompous discourse,’ being, therefore, unnecessary to argumentation”. (Teixeira, 2015:120).

The fourth excerpt is also a case of inclusion in translation. In fact, this excerpt presents a reorganization of the paragraph as it is translated, including information in parentheses, which could be interpreted as a decision made by the translator between elements that are more important and others that are not as important, and therefore are better expressed in parentheses. Also, the inclusion of terms in Latin – *inventio* and *dispositio* – leads to the conclusion that the translator made an effort to make the text sound more formal.

#### 4. Conclusion

After presenting a brief overview of the efforts to enlarge the presence of Brazilian researchers in the international scientific community, by a set of measures known as the “Internationalization process”, we hope to have contributed to the discussion and reflection about the impact that translation has in the authorial position in academic-scientific production. As the analyses of the four excerpts demonstrate, translation is not a neutral process, since it requires adaptations in the articles in order to make them more suitable within the target culture/language in which they emerge. Although it is an important tool that enables the circulation of knowledge besides national borders, it has to be seen as a complex process, involving not only linguistic elements, but also elements of social, cultural and historical natures.

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