



THE GOTHAM TRANSLATOR

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Banana Peels to Trip up the Translator _____

By Paulo Rónai (Adapted from a lecture delivered at the Dept. of Letters, Federal University of Paraná)

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Prosper Mérimée, the great French storyteller, author of *Carmen* and *Colomba*, among other classic works, was also a translator of exceptional merit. He was the first to bring the Russian authors to the French reading public, and thus responsible for the dissemination of their works throughout the West. A witty and ironic man, he had adopted as motto for his private life the Greek adage "Remember to be suspicious". We can ask to borrow this saying as the translator's slogan, since the most important quality required for his trade is a perpetual suspicion.

And this is because as a professional he spends his life treading steep paths, set about on either side with precipices and paved with banana peels. This article will be dedicated to the identification of some of the latter. In reality, their number is legion, for, as we will see, there is no word, no matter how simple, which may not be harboring, in particular circumstances, some ambiguity, and thus be transformed into a dangerous trap.

Don't expect a theory of translation with definitions and fixed rules from me. Even if they could be formulated, they would teach us little about the actual process of translation. If you ask me what red is, I would be able to give the exact measure in microns of the wavelength which produces this color, and even so you would not see it; but if I should say to you that it is the color of blood and of fire, or were simply to show you a poppy, your curiosity would be satisfied.

Naturally, if a blind man were to ask the question there would be no way to satisfy him. I consider blind in the area of translation the person who is indifferent to the subtleties of his own language, who does not normally seek the best manner of expressing himself, and who speaks and writes in a slapdash way; he naturally would never become a translator, even if his life depended on it.

I am a literary translator. But the phenomena we are looking at are of interest to all sorts of translators, since we all work with the same raw material, language — a mysterious, impalpable reality which surrounds us on all sides.



Taking it as a given that the translator should know his own language profoundly, a solid knowledge of the language which he is translating is another indispensable requirement. And this

must be a grammatical and lexical knowledge, and as complete as possible.

As far as grammar is concerned, the aspiring translator will have all the irregular forms of the conjugation and all the unusual inflections of the declensions, the more so as they are not always listed alphabetically in dictionaries. He will be able to distinguish archaic from modern forms, slang from everyday forms, spoken from written forms. He will have an especially acute awareness of phenomena that do not exist in his own language.

If he is to translate from French, he ought to know thoroughly the tricks of the pronominal adverbs *en* and *y*; if from Italian, the difficult handling of the unstressed pronouns combined with the verb, as in *scrivermela*, *facendogli*, *fateglielo*; if from German, the distinction between verbs with a separable prefix, such as *wiedersehen*, *zusammenkommen*, from those without, such as *übersetzen*, *beschreiben*. All this seems as if it hardly needs saying, but there are so many (continued on next page)

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heedless people who venture into translating without being deeply steeped in the grammatical rules of the target language that we judged this preliminary warning necessary.



As far as the lexicon is concerned, the first and principal source of confusion is in great part the fact that words possess various meanings. If they had simply one unique, well-determined meaning — as, for example, pin, aspirin, and centimeter, translation would be something that is relatively easy. But the majority of the vocabulary used in everyday language has various meanings, listed and often numbered in dictionaries, and which can be quite far removed from each other.

This phenomenon is called polysemy, and it can be found in every language. But, you will say to me, if the phenomenon is common to all languages, there is no reason for alarm. However, only in very rare cases do two corresponding words in two languages have the same senses, as for example French *punaise* and Portuguese *percevejo*, which both indicate a certain insect and a certain type of nail.

But the French noun *prix*, which corresponds to the English "price", also has the sense of "prize"; or another noun, *rapport*, can signify both report and rapport. We need context in order to be able to understand them and translate them. Only after we read the complete phrase *le prix Nobel* do we know that it is a prize, and not until we have heard mention of the *rapport Kinsey* do we understand that one is thinking of a report.

Sometimes the context is much larger than a unique phrase or a simple expression. The translator who had to translate a French novel titled *Adresses* would have to read at least a few pages of the volume in order to know if it was called "Addresses" or "Abilities".

This last example shows that even words with the same origin in two languages can branch out in different directions. French *maître* (and English "master") have the principal senses of Portuguese *mestre*, but they have in addition the sense of "master" in the context of "master-slave" or "master-servant", a sense which is lacking in Portuguese.

So we can draw the conclusion that the meaning of a word is not contained only in the word itself, but comes from the words which surround it. An excellent proof of this is in the two German phrases *Er dient* and *Sie dient*, where the first is understood to mean "He is doing his military service" and the second "She works as a maid".

The difficulty caused by polysemy in other languages is paid back in the same coin when natives of these countries set about translating our Brazilian books. A Frenchman who had only a superficial knowledge of our vocabulary would be easily deceived when coming upon our word *papagaio*, as it designates not only the multi-colored bird (parrot), but the toy known also as a kite. And even if he is not unaware of this meaning he will be up the creek without a paddle if he comes upon a story in which someone pays for a whole truckload of merchandise with a single *papagaio*, that is, a bank draft or promissory note.

One of the causes of polysemy is the tendency of our spirit towards metaphor, which can be noted in every language. It seems natural to call a child a cub, a beautiful woman a flower, or to speak of the leg of the table, the heart of the problem, the head of the mutiny. When the metaphor is so obvious that it exists in all languages, or even when it represents a new way of seeing, peculiar to the author, it can be translated with the greatest fidelity. The difficulty begins when the metaphorical expression comes to be a stereotyped part of the language, transforming itself into a figure of speech. Someone who uses it in his own language no longer even notices the image that gave it birth; but the translator who, through ignorance, considers them individual creations, and re-establishes the image, would make a dreadful mistake.

Let us take, for example, the German *Handschuh* (glove), made up of *Hand* and *Schuh*. The image of "shoe" does not even occur for a German; it would be absurd to translate it thus. This mistake is highly unlikely, since not only is it a very common word, but because the elements of the word are combined. Whereas the French expression *belle-mère* (mother-in-law), *belle-fille* (daughter-in-law), *beau-père* (father-in-law), and *beau-fils* (son-in-law) are responsible for innumerable blunders, even though they are connected with a hyphen. The situation gets worse when the words that make up the expression are not even connected with a hyphen: thus *tête de mort* (death's head, or skull), and *tête de Turc* (whipping-boy, the butt of a joke, though in English a Turk's head is a sort of knot).

In English, there is "matchmaker"-not a match manufacturer, but one who arranges marriages; and "sleeping partner", the secret

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partner in a business deal, who usually keeps his eyes wide open. Identifying these sorts of snares requires, in addition to good sense, lots of attention and sufficient experience.

One of the most curious cases is when the metaphor itself is used metaphorically. Those who know English well know that the expression "man-of-war" denotes a warship. The contributor to the *Jornal do Brasil*, who had to translate a story about an intrepid swimmer who was to swim from Cuba to the U.S., knew this as well; but he did not know that the expression "Portuguese man-of-war" was another metaphor to indicate the sea creature known to Brazilians as *medusa* or *água-viva*. And thus he was to bravely write that the sportsman would encounter serious difficulties, as those waters were infested by Portuguese warships, without noticing how absurd such a statement was. Here a little good sense would have advised the use of the dictionary.



We can distinguish polysemic words from homonyms, pairs of words of identical appearance, but differing in meaning, which also give rise to many mistakes. Doubtless we have these in our own tongue, but there we get out of difficulty thanks to the context in which they appear. In Brazil, if our guest says during lunch that he will *fazer uma sesta* (take a nap), we know that he is going to snooze, rather than make a basket (*fazer uma cesta*). In a foreign language, however, we can get into trouble if we only know one of the homonyms, or if we do not understand the context.

When it is simply a case of two homophones, words with the same sound, but written differently, their appearance warns us: *sceau* (stamp), *seau* (bucket), and *sot* (fool) are recognizable and differentiable due to their spelling. But when it is a matter of homographs, words identical in form, errors are easier to make. For someone who does not know the French word *nue*, a rarer synonym of *nuage*, the expression *tomber des nues* will be a puzzle, since for him those letters only signify "nude". The same is true with the word *mine*. If you only know this as the equivalent of "mine", you will not understand when you are complimented on your good appearance: *Vous avez bonne mine*. The translator from English will have similar surprises if he cannot distinguish between pole (North) and pole (rod), or between pool (of water) and pool (pot, in gambling).

We will mention another few pairs of homonyms which are responsible for a great deal of confusion: in French, *feu* ("fire" and "deceased"); in English, *light* ("of little weight"; "illumination"); in Spanish, *pez* ("fish", if masculine; "pitch", if feminine); in Italian, *vita*, ("life" and "waist"); in German, *Weise* ("wise" and "manner"). Indeed, in each one of these languages you would be able to make a list of dozens of these pairs of tricky words.

But this number is infinitely increased by the inattention or ignorance of translators. Magalhães Jr. cites a colleague who took "General Staff" for the name of a superior officer; and I myself have already found *j'ai attrapé un rhume terrible* translated by "I drank a horrible glass of rum", due to the confusion between *rhum* ("rum") and *rhume* ("cold").



You might think that synonyms, at least, do not constitute a problem, but rather a help to the translator. It seems logical, in fact, in the cases in which we are not finding a satisfactory equivalent for a term, to look for the equivalent of one of its synonyms.

At the same time synonyms, although they do not present a perceptible difference in meaning, generally correspond to different levels of language, so that they may not always be exchangeable. In comparing *début* and *commencement*, the first belongs more to the literary sphere, the second to oral usage; of *j'ai entendu dire* and *j'ai ouï dire*, the first is more modern than the second. In expressions, synonyms cannot be substituted one for another; in Portuguese one *rompe-se com a namorada* (breaks up with one's girlfriend), but *quebra-se a cara* (breaks someone's face). For another even more convincing example, Portuguese *progenitora*, a synonym of *mãe* (mother), but which in the majority of cases cannot be used without producing a smile. Pascal used to say that there were passages where it was necessary to say *Paris*, and others where *capitale du royaume* was appropriate, an observation which is as important for the translator as for the writer. The question of synonyms is really a question (*continued on next page*)

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of style, as Jules Renard knew well when he wrote "there are no synonyms; there are only the necessary words, and the good writer knows which they are."



Much worse enemies for the translator are the so-called "false friends", or deceptive cognates, that is, words with similar form in two languages, but differing in meaning. Frequently they are words from the same origin, but which in the course of evolution have assumed different meanings. Thus French *jument* is neither Portuguese *jumento* (donkey) nor *jumenta* (she-donkey), but *égua* (mare), French *mater* is not Portuguese *matar* (kill), but simply to mate in chess; French *remarquer* is not Portuguese *remarcar* (hall-mark), but to observe or note.

More than once, however, the resemblance is sheer coincidence: stemming from different origins, the words were brought together by the phonetic and orthographic evolution of the respective languages: French *fiel* (gall) has nothing to do with Portuguese *fiel* (faithful), nor French *cor* (horn, or corn) with Portuguese *cor* (color).

Worse are the false friends that are not always false: that is, they are equivalent in some senses, and not in others. An example of this is the English "intelligence", which corresponds to Portuguese *inteligência* in the sense of "intellect", but not in its sense of "information" (e.g. the Central Intelligence Agency); or "devout", which sometimes can be Portuguese *devoto*, but also Portuguese *entusiasmado*.

Every translator will remember, from his own experience, some amusing example of the ill effects of false friends. Magalhães Jr. tells of a "translator" who rendered *éleveur de moutons* (sheep raiser) by *elevador de carneiros* (sheep elevator). Julio Cortázar notes this find from a "Latin-American professional": *la vaca no habla* ("the cow doesn't speak") as a translation of *res non verba* ("things, not words").

Interlegibility is the possibility of reading another language which one does not speak, which is the case for Brazilians with respect to Spanish. It is at the same time both a help and a danger. The similarity of the two languages frequently leads us to guess rather than interpret: if we were to go to the dictionary, we would know that Sp: *crianza* = Pt. *criação* (education), not *criança* (child), *polvo* is *pó* (powder), not *polvo* (octopus), *ratito* is *momentinho* (a moment), not a little mouse. Even when there is not such a chasm in meaning between these words which are identical in form, the current use of the two can differ substantially: and this is why many times we understand less of the Portuguese translation of a Spanish book than we would the original.



In this quick review, it should be understood, it is impossible to review all the sorts of pitfalls that the translator encounters in his professional activity. Even so, we cannot overlook the risks stemming from difference in cultural background. Every language is an archive of historical reminiscences, of allusions and events and characters from a common past, whose knowledge is indispensable for one who lets himself in for translating.

When one says in Hungarian "*Hátra van még a feketetelevés*" ("The black soup is still ahead"), speakers of this tongue understand that the worst is still to come. It was discovered that the sentence had been uttered for the first time at the end of a banquet to which the Turkish sultan had invited some Hungarian nobles, in order to announce that coffee would be served, which was still without a name in Hungarian in the sixteenth century. But

as the guest, soon after the coffee, were arrested and imprisoned, the utterance earned a tragic connotation.

Fragments of culture preserved in the language do not always have this historical halo: they can be the simple reflections of common habits of day-to-day life. There existed in Paris an ultrarapid system of communication, by which letters written on onionskin were sent through tubes by means of compressed air from one neighborhood to another. Such a missive was given the name *lettre pneumatique*, shortened to *pneu*. The translator unaware of such an institution would not understand why a certain character in a novel, who didn't even own an automobile, would be given a tire. His surprise would be no less learning of a schoolboy, who being promoted, moved from the fifth to the fourth grade — since in France the grades are numbered in reverse order. Reading, in a story by a Hungarian author, that a peasant woman put on her skirts to go out, the jejune translator, judging that the problem was an evident typographical error, would change the plural to the singular — since he would not know that it is the custom of Magyar peasant girls, especially on feast days, to wear at once all the dresses that they own.

These minutiae help us to understand that translating is much more than simply replacing the words of one language for those of another; it is establishing a series of contacts between two cultures, two realities, without a keen knowledge of which the act of translation is doomed to failure. They also demonstrate that the translator cannot be an uncultivated person, with limited horizons; he has to be someone with an ever-lively curiosity, since ignorance of the environment of the original does not constitute an attenuating circumstance, just as ignorance of the law does not exempt the malfessor from blame.

We will mention now proper names. These, at least, should not bring complications for the translator. But, here as well, appearances are deceiving.

As far as translating personal names is concerned, there are more practices than rules. Italians, for example, translate everyone's forename and speak of Pietro Corneille and Onorato de Balzac; the Spanish do the same and speak of Juan La Fontaine, which seems highly ridiculous to us. Nevertheless, when it is a matter of fictitious characters, the custom is to translate them in Brazil as well. More recently the tendency is to leave both intact.

In the majority of languages there are affectionate forms of personal names, called hypocoristics. Robert is familiarly called Bobby in the U.S., Giuseppe Beppe in Italy, Aleksandr Sacha in Russia. The translator must notice when in a work a character is designated by two or more names; he must not mistake the sex of the male characters, whose hypocoristics end in a, such as Valia, Volodia and Duma (in place of Valentin, Vladimir and Dmitri). He should respect Russian usage of employing the person's forename and the patronymic in respectful speech: Ivan Ivanovich. He should also know that in certain languages transcription noticeably changes the form of the names: Heine becomes Geine in Russian, Homer Gomero, and Theocritus Feocrit. He cannot ignore the fact that names from Greco-Latin antiquity have different forms in the various modern languages: in Italian, for example, Jupiter is Giove and Juvenal Giovenale.

A curious case is that in which proper names are employed to represent common names: Tom, Dick and Harry are Fulano, Sicrano and Beltrano in Portuguese, Tizio, Caio and Sempronio in Italian; reduced to only two in German, Hinz and Kunz; and in French, to one, M. Untel.



But certainly numerals must present no problems. Another mistake. In the land of translation half can equal one, and four equal six. While the Brazilian refers to a man *de meio olho* or *meio perna* (half an eye, half a leg), English refers to a one-eyed or one-legged man. There is much diversity in the area of indeterminate quantities: a boy who does whatever he wants in France has 36,000 whims (*faire ses trente-six mille volontés*). Portuguese has a clear preference for seven: one speaks of a cat with seven breaths, a man with seven instruments, something locked with seven keys. It often happens that a foreign figure of speech using numerals is translated into another with no allusion whatsoever to numbers: *se mettre sur son trente et un* is simply to put on one's Sunday best. As can be seen, we must always be careful in this area as well.

He would be mistaken, finally, who might judge that one only translates language, that is, words. There are many other elements, in addition to words, which contribute to the meaning of a text: the order of the words, the use of capitals and lowercase,

the choice of the typeface, even the arrangement of the blank spaces. One needs to know the conventions that regulate the use of all these ingredients, which can differ from one language to another.

As far as the placement of the words, their order in a Latin sentence can vary to infinity, but each different order corresponds to a different nuance of thought. Whereas in French the word order is generally rigid and has thus no influence on the meaning of the whole. But there are exceptions, especially in the case of qualifying adjectives which change in meaning or connotation depending on their placement before or after the noun: we recall *un homme bon* and *un bonhomme*, *mon propre cahier* and *un cahier propre*, *un sacré farceur* and *un devoir sacré*.

Differences in the use of upper and lower case can also be noted. In the neo-Latin languages, to begin a noun with an uppercase letter is a sign of emphasis; in German it is a grammatical obligation. In English it is normal to write the personal pronoun in the first person with a capital; in other languages it would be a sign of megalomania.

In Brazil the dash opens and closes characters' speeches, while in England this function is served by quotation marks, and the dash represents suspense or shock.

In conclusion: every element, even non-verbal ones, on a page contributes to the message, and for this reason must not be neglected.

We have arrived at the end of our reflections. Translation one learns by translating. The craftsmen of earlier days were trained as apprentices by their master's side, with whom they spent long years. It is very difficult to find a master translator who accepts apprentices. Courses in translation teach the basic and indispensable tools of the trade, but how to do it is the object of an individual apprenticeship. Each translator ought to be his own master. He himself should invent his own exercises, compare an original with some printed translation, compare his own translation with one of these versions, juxtapose two or more versions of the same text, put together his own lists of false friends, of idiomatic expressions, of syntactic equivalents. One must resign oneself to doing these unpaid exercises before daring to do paid translations. The Horatian motto — *Multa tulit fecitque puer, sudavit et alsit* ("A youth must do and bear much, and sweat and shiver") — is particularly applicable to the translator. ■

Paulo Rónai (1907-1992) was an eminent Brazilian translator, professor, and writer. He was the author of several books, including *Como aprendi o português, e outras aventuras* and *A tradução viva*.

Giving Voice to the Voiceless: Providing Interpretation for Survivors of Torture, War, and Refugee Trauma

by Adeyinka M. Akinsulure-Smith, Ph.D.

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There are many challenges that face the international community today. Bombings, mass killings, armed mobilization of armies, coups by ethnically, religiously, and racially aligned leaders, and many other forms of conflict are far too common. War, torture, and human rights abuses exist in every part of the world. Such events have displaced millions of people from their countries of origin. According to the US Committee on Refugees, as of 2002, there were approximately 13 million refugees and asylum seekers worldwide. It has been argued that one out of every 115 people on earth has been forced into flight.

The Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture (PSOT) provides comprehensive, multidisciplinary care for refugees and asylum seekers who have experienced torture, war, and other human rights abuses. Since our program began in 1995, we have cared for over 1,000 men, women, and children from more than 80 different countries. PSOT is the first and largest program of its kind in the New York City area and has established an international reputation for excellence in its clinical, educational, and research activities. Currently, we have an active caseload of 616 patients, and we receive five to 13 new referrals every week, of whom about seven are accepted. We currently have a month-long waiting list for patients.

Since it is virtually impossible to provide skilled, professional staff that is also multilingual in some 25 languages and numerous other dialects, when a care provider and a client speak different languages, interpreters play a critical role. The interpersonal nature of health and mental health care relies heavily on verbal communication to establish rapport, assess needs, diagnose illness, and conduct treatment. In a setting like ours, interpreters may be utilized in many contexts, including brief and singular contacts, clinical situations, and other non-clinical interchanges. Examples of brief contacts might include reception, registration as a new patient at the hospital, or even telephone communications to arrange appointments. Clinical situations could be intake evaluations, psychological assessment, psychotherapy sessions, psychiatric appointments, and medical visits. In addition, clients may require an interpreter/translator when filling out forms, applying for jobs or job training, or receiving assistance with legal services.

One of the biggest challenges PSOT faces is finding competent interpreters for the less commonly spoken languages (e.g., Fulani, Tibetan, Diola, or Bambara).

Many people who do not work with refugees and asylum seekers often confuse their status with that of immigrants. The distinction is important, as it can be a matter of life and death. There are key differences between refugees and immigrants.

i) **Deciding to leave the home country vs. being forced out.** Immigrants choose to migrate. By definition, they come to this

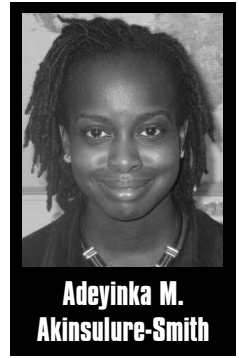
country to be reunited with their family, to work at a specific job, or to invest in some business in the US.

The process is initiated at a US immigration office outside the country and may take up to two years. Refugees, on the other hand, are forced to flee and typically experience pre-flight trauma. Typically, they are fleeing danger of arbitrary torture, detention, or death.

- ii) **Choice.** Immigrants have choice. They can decide when they will leave and which country they will go to. Refugees usually are unable to decide in which country to resettle; the country selected may not necessarily be the country of their first preference.
- iii) **Planning.** Immigrants have the luxury to make decisions, plan, pack, and arrange for transfer of belongings and finances. Refugees often decide to flee quickly, have not arranged for such a move, usually experience trauma and stress related to their flight, and often arrive in the country of first resettlement with almost nothing. If they are fortunate to have any resources, they usually do not have the time to liquidate their assets and may be prevented from doing so by the laws and practices of the country they are fleeing.
- iv) **Pursuit.** Immigrants have not left illegally, or while being pursued. Refugees often have to flee. They may have little or no documentation and may never feel safe or welcome to return to their home country — even after change in the political regime.
- v) **Transition Process.** While immigrants know where they are going and have arrangements for when they arrive, refugees are in a transition process. Once in a safe haven, they have to find a politically acceptable permanent residence for themselves.

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children estimates that 80% of refugees are women and children. The US alone hosts almost half a million refugees (US Committee for Refugees, 2002), and this number does not include asylum seekers or undocumented people. Refugees and asylum seekers are everyday people — teachers, lawyers, farmers, business executives, political leaders, bankers, and peasants. Some were wealthy; most were poor. Many of these people have been displaced for a number of reasons, primarily war and torture. Often, these individuals have not only experienced war-related trauma, but they have also suffered other forms of violence. It has been estimated that somewhere between one-third and one-half of all refugees have been tortured (Gorman, 2001).

Torture is practiced systematically in over 100 nations around the world. Torture is defined as the infliction of physical or emotional



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Akinsulure-Smith

pain, anguish, agony, and torment in order to obtain information, to change the views of the tortured person, or to break the will of an individual or community. Torture methods are designed to force the victim to do what the torturer wants. Torture is deliberate, designed to maximize the degradation of the individual. When torture victims flee from these countries, approximately 20% of those bound for the United States resettle in the New York area, where an estimated 75,000 survivors now reside. Many of these individuals continue to experience grave physical and emotional difficulties as a result of the abuse they endured.

Many forms of torture have been documented, from physical techniques (e.g., beatings, electric shock, deprivation, sexual violence, etc.) to sophisticated psychological ones (accusations, threats of death, or fake executions). Left untreated, the physical and psychological consequences of torture can cause extensive human suffering (anxiety, depression, nervousness, sleep difficulties, nightmares, headaches, etc.) and prevent both children and adults from successfully adapting to their new lives. Fortunately, if given relief from their symptoms and appropriate social and legal supports, most survivors can regain a level of health that enables them to develop satisfying, productive lives.

PSOT's treatment of survivors of this type of violence hinges on a treatment philosophy that is based on three pillars: i) rebuilding of individuals' lives using resources and strengths they have demonstrated in surviving the trauma; ii) reintegration of individuals into healthy society, without fear of further abuse or maltreatment; and iii) the use of multi-disciplinary (mental health and medical) treatment to address severe symptoms and problems.

The importance of verbal communication cannot be underestimated in the treatment and care of traumatized individuals. Working with survivors of torture and refugee trauma from over 80 different countries necessitates the recruitment of multilingual personnel as well as the frequent use of interpreters in a variety of situations. Be it a brief contact or an in-depth interaction, an understanding of potential language barriers and the means to overcome them is a critical component of care.

The use of interpreters in a health care setting is fraught with problems and complexities that require a great deal of thought and preparation. Furthermore, treating torture survivors and other traumatized refugees makes for a challenging task. While competence as an interpreter is especially critical when giving voice to a person's traumatic experiences, there are certain areas of self-exploration that I feel are important for an interpreter, before and during work with this population. Thus it is important for interpreters to reflect on their own traumatic, refugee, or torture history (if there is one) or reflect on their own reactions to the material that they are interpreting. How might their emotional and physical reactions influence their ability to give voice to the person's needs?

For interpreters who share a cultural, ethnic, or religious history with the person they are interpreting for, this can be a double-edged sword. Such a commonality may elicit strong reactions ranging from overidentification (which can be manifested by going above and beyond the interpreting role to doing additional services for the individual) to feelings of overwhelming sadness, guilt, or discomfort.

One of the biggest challenges comes when interpreting in sessions related to mental health. It becomes useful to think about one's own notions of mental health, as there is considerable stigma around receiving mental health services in many cultures. What stereotypes does the interpreter hold about the benefits of receiving support for emotional difficulties? How familiar are they with terms used in that culture or language to express emotional turmoil and suffering? In the healing process, an interpreter is a vital part of a larger, multidisciplinary treatment team.

As a care provider in this field for many years, I believe that it is impossible to engage in this type of work and not be affected by it in some way. Vicarious traumatization, the development of trauma reactions (e.g., intense fear, helplessness, or horror) secondary to exposure to clients' traumatic experiences is not uncommon among professionals who provide services to traumatized clients. Repeated exposure by listening to and interpreting explicit details of clients' traumatic experiences can lead to changes in trust, feelings of control, issues of intimacy, esteem need, safety concerns, and intrusive imagery among interpreters and other service providers. Interpreting traumatic stories on a regular basis can create its own type of stress. Vicarious traumatization can present a serious health hazard for interpreters working with this population.

There are a number of ways to cope with vicarious traumatization. At PSOT, staff and volunteers are encouraged to use a number of methods to combat the problem. In peer support groups we discuss, share, and support each other through the challenges faced by this type of work. In addition, there is a fair amount of education about the impact of client traumas on care providers. Finally, the most important coping mechanism involves finding enjoyable and fulfilling pursuits outside work that can provide respite and relaxation to nurture our own spirits.

While working with this population presents many challenges, it is very satisfying work on many levels. On the one hand, as care providers we are confronted on a daily basis with horrible stories about evil. But we are also witnesses to the resilience of the human spirit and the amazing ways in which traumatized people have struggled and can triumph. Interpreters play a very critical role in facilitating this healing process. Anyone interested in volunteering interpreting services to such a worthy cause can contact me at 212-994-7162. ■

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- US Commission on Refugees, World Refugee Survey, 2003

Dr. Adeyinka (Yinka) M.A. Akinsulure-Smith has extensive clinical experience working with war trauma survivors, refugees, persons afflicted with and affected by HIV/AIDS, and culturally diverse populations. She has been involved in human rights investigations in Sierra Leone with Physicians for Human Rights and the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, Human Rights Division. She is also the Co-Chair and Co-Founder of Nah We Yone, Inc., a nonprofit organization that provides social and psychological services to displaced African war victims in the New York metropolitan area.

CIRCLE NEWS

ATA-NYCT Entertainment Seminar

The ATA held a seminar, Translating and Interpreting for the Entertainment Industry, on May 22 and 23 in Newark. The seminar included four presentations on Saturday and two on Sunday. The Sunday presentations were organized by the NYCT. We had about 60 to 65 participants for the Sunday sessions and more than 100 for the Saturday sessions.

It was our first experience organizing this type of event with the NYCT. Special thanks go out to Lisa Anderson, our new secretary, and Slavica Zecevic-Pralica, our program director. Their hard work, their initiative, their fast thinking, and their unconditional dedication during the seminar made all the difference. We could not have done it without them! A million thanks!

New Secretary

Those of you who have attended the last two meetings have already met our new secretary, Lisa Anderson. Lisa was



appointed to fill in as secretary of the Circle following Nancy Wright's resignation. Thanks to all the members who answered our call for candidates to fill the position. We will certainly ask for your help when needed. Lisa has been a member of the Circle for a few years, and she brings to the secretary's position a strong background in event management and finance. We are very pleased to officially welcome her on board!

President-Elect

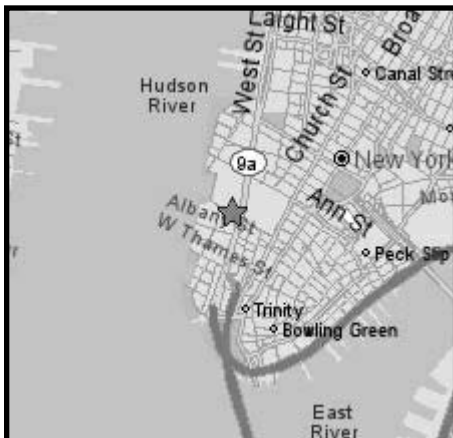
Luke Sandford has just resigned from his position as president-elect. As you can read from his resignation message on page 11, he has accepted a job in Montreal as senior translator for a big corporation. We wish him luck in his new endeavors and hope that he will stay in touch. A new president-elect will be appointed as soon as possible. Members who are interested in applying for the position should contact NYCT president Guylaine Laperrière.

Let's Party Together...YOU are our VIP guest!

It's that time of year when we usually have our summer party. But this time, there's much more to do than simply welcome summer. This year marks the NYCT's 25th anniversary!

We translate. We interpret. We do voiceovers. We do so many things. We do literature and poetry, play instruments....We are a multi-talented organization! Each of us has something to tell and a great talent

to share. So come and share what you like to do - be it an anecdote, a poem, a song, anything. Or just come and enjoy the company of your colleagues and friends.



Saturday, June 26, at 12 noon

SouthWestNY

(Located on the ground floor of Two World Financial Center, facing the Hudson River)

225 Liberty St.

**Two World Financial Center
New York, NY 10281**

(212) 945-0538

Price: \$36

(three-course meal; drinks paid for separately)

Please preregister for this gathering by e-mailing Slavica Zecevic-Pralica, Program Director, at programdirector@nyctranslators.org no later than 6PM on June 22nd. The restaurant needs the number of guests by that day in order to accommodate us. Please don't wait until the last moment. Thanks!

We hope you won't miss this opportunity to join with other NYCT members. SEE YOU THERE!

Intimacy in the Verbal Expression of Rio de Janeiro

Every nation constructs its identity around certain shared values. Each nation creates itself by acknowledging what its peculiar vices and virtues are, in the belief that those vices and virtues are not present (or at least not to such a degree) in other countries. This superlativist view of things finds its perfect poetic expression in the famous *Song of Exile* by the Brazilian poet Gonçalves Dias (1823-1864), the second strophe of which sings:

Nosso céu tem mais estrelas, (Our sky has more stars)
Nossas várzeas têm mais flores, (Our meadows have more flowers)
Nossos bosques têm mais vida, (Our woods have more life)
Nossa vida mais amores. (Our life more loves)

It is worth noting that the culmination here is *mais amores*, because fundamental to the Brazilians' view of themselves is the idea that Brazilians are warmer, more loving, more friendly, more simpático, more passionate in lovemaking, more connected to each other. (And the necessary correlate of this is that other nations, particularly the United States, are lacking in precisely these areas.)

Brazilian Portuguese, as it is used in Rio de Janeiro, is notably full of expressions of intimacy and relatedness, and even the way that Cariocas use personal pronouns tends to blur personal boundaries. The Brazilian way of being has shaped the language that is used to express that being, and the language in turn enables expressions of intimacy to be shared in Brazilians' interpersonal space. Simply the act of speaking this language for a non-native makes possible the performance of a new personality, a new person with new possibilities, in the same way that even the sound of a speaker's voice alters in shaping vowels and combinations that are not present in another tongue. This notion is found in proverbs from many countries, dating back at least as far as the saying attributed to the multilingual Charles V. Different languages have different expressive possibilities, and the romance languages seem to have a particular gift for romance.

Greetings and farewells

In the physical sphere, these points of transition for Brazilians are almost always marked by touch, whether handshakes, pats, embraces, or kisses. Verbally, the Brazilian is also creating and renewing intimacy here as well.

Some styles of greeting:

E aí, mermão, beleza? Tudo bem? Tudo joia?

Here *mermão* is Carioca for *meu irmão*, "my brother". This may be used for one who is an acquaintance, a friend whose name you can't recall at the moment, or simply a stranger on the street. Cris Dias tells us that alternatives here are *maluco*, or *figura* for a male; *cara* (lit. face, fig. guy), is also possible. Two women greeting each other may use *querida*, *linda*, *menina* (dear, pretty, little girl). The feminine form of *mermão* does exist (*mermã*), but it is much less commonly used. A child or adolescent who

addresses a person of their parent's generation who is a stranger will most likely greet them as *tio*, *tia* (uncle, aunt). The assumption in Rio is that life is beautiful (*beleza*), that things are going well (*bem*), that life is joy (*joia*), though it is possible to greet someone with the neutral *como vai?* (how's it going?)

Some styles of leave-taking:

A farewell, if not in person (i.e. on the phone, by instant messaging, by mail or e-mail) will almost always include an expression of intention to see the friend again soon (*até mais*, *até já*, *até logo*; see you soon, see you again right away, see you soon), an expression of the corporal affection that would be non-verbal in person (*um beijo*, *beijos*, *beijinhos*, *mil beijos*, *um abraço*, *abração*; a kiss, kisses, little kisses, a thousand kisses, a hug, a big hug), and finally *tchau* (borrowed from the Italian, and unlike the practice in Italy, used only in farewell, not in greeting). The verbal expression is gender-marked in the same way as the physical affection, so that men will hug men (*abração*), but not kiss; women will kiss women, and men will kiss women.

Terms of endearment

The Carioca has a wide range of possibilities in choosing to express relationship with another Carioca. In addition to the uncles, aunts, and brothers mentioned above, the city is full of potential children, as it is common for a friend, or even a stranger, to address another as *minha filha* or *meu filho* (my daughter, my son). This is independent of age as well: it is quite possible for a daughter to address her mother this way. It is usually used in the context of giving advice, talking seriously about something, admonishing (*olha, vou te contar, quero lhe dizer*; look, let me tell you, I want to tell you). Another very common endearment is *nega*, *nego*, *neguinha*, *neguinho* (black, blackie), which, perhaps surprisingly to American ears, is independent of skin color. It is most commonly used with the possessive (e.g. *minha nega*), as it is found in the title of the famous samba by Paulinho da Viola (*Coisas do mundo, minha nega*; "The world is like that, honey"). Here the force of the endearment is something like "honey" or "sweetie" in English, and unlike the previous endearment, is never used in a scolding or reproving way.

The range of expressions used to express affection for the opposite sex, whether in the context of a love relationship or not, is almost infinite, and almost always focusing on the attractiveness and desirability of the person being addressed. Here, of course, there is the possibility of overstepping the line, expressing too much intimacy, but that line is at a different place than in American culture. The most commonly used expression is *gata*, *gato*, *gatinha*, *gatinho*, or *gatão* (all forms of "cat"), used to mean someone who is attractive (in English, *continued on next page*)



Tom Moore

a "babe" or a "hunk"). *Gata* and *gato* are unmarked as far as age is concerned; *gatinha* (the diminutive form) is generally used for adolescent girls in the third person, but as a term of endearment it can be used for older women as well. *Gatinho* seems to be almost as common as the feminine form. *Gatão* is fairly common (there is a famous comic strip called *Gatao de meia-idade*, "Middle-aged hunk"). Also frequent are the various forms of *lindo/a*, *bonito/a* (handsome, pretty), and also *gostoso/a* (literally, "tasty", but in its figurative use so sexual that it can only be used with great care; in other words, something that might lead to a slap in the face for the male who used it unwisely).

Diminutives and augmentatives

The use of the diminutive forms (*-inho*, *-inha*) is pervasive in Brazilian Portuguese, almost always with an affectionate and familiar tone. They can be used to modify seemingly unexpected (to American ears) nouns and adjectives, to give the conversation a more homey, intimate feeling (e.g. *leve*, *levinha*; "light, nice and light", and *cheirosinha*; "nice and fragrant"). They are ubiquitous with names (not so different from what obtains in the US, of course) as a way to create intimacy. One notable difference in names is in fact the use of the first name of the addressee even in situations demanding respect. For example, the President of Brazil is Fernando Henrique or Lula in public discourse, not Cardoso or Silva. Almost anything can receive the diminutive treatment (*um chopp*, *um choppinho*; a draft beer, the latter not being a small draft, but a "nice beer"). In fact, for many things in Brazilian life, the diminutive form has become the standard (*um cafezinho*; a little coffee, though here the cup really is small, and *uma caipirinha*, a potent drink of *cachaça* and lime juice, named for the *caipira* or backwoodsman. Here the diminutive is not for its size but for the "friendly" quality of the potion).

The use of the augmentative can also express intimacy, though sometimes mixed with a certain respect. The musician who plays *chorinho*, if he is a master of his trade, is a *chorão* (though literally this would be a "big crybaby"). A man can be *lindão*, *gatão*, even *gostosão*, and, as one might expect, these augmentatives are more frequent for the male than for the female. In Brazil the Godfather from the movie series did not become *padrinho* (a diminutive form for the relationship denoted by godfather in English, and hence connoting familiarity and friendliness) but rather *O Poderoso Chefão* ("The Powerful Big Boss").

Membership and belonging

The cordial Brazilian is far more likely to define himself in terms of relationship to a social group or groups than the individualistic and often isolated American. A Carioca can be a member of a *torcida* (a group of fans for a particular team; for someone to be part of the *torcida do Flamengo* means that they share some trait with the multitude); root for or march with a samba school or *bloco*; and almost every Carioca has a *turma*, a "gang" of fellow students or just colleagues or friends.

Colloquial Portuguese tends to use an impersonal third person form in which the referent can be vague. This is *a gente* (lit. "the people"), where the implicit meaning is something between "me", "we", and "the gang". For example, a Web site may say

fale com a gente ("talk with us"), or a common phrase refers to *gente como a gente* ("people like us"). It is certainly true that who "we" is can be open to interpretation and negotiation. But for *a gente* this seems to be even more the case. The third person equivalent is *as pessoas* — literally "the people" but colloquially "they" — and again the referent is not quite as demonstrative as *eles* or *elas*. The whole effect is to blur who is in and who is out, so that the boundaries are more permeable, with less of a clear distinction between "me" and "you" or "us" and "them". Perhaps it is not so surprising that the motto on the Web site for the Brazilian federal government is *um país para todos*, "a country for all".

Tropical heat

Finally, and perhaps entering on treacherous ground here, the level and nature of sexual and sexualized banter among homosexual and heterosocial groups is notably higher than is usually the case in North American culture. Sexual metaphors are quite common in normal (if not in formal) discourse. *Tesão* is properly used for sexual tension (*me da tesão*, "it turns me on"), but can be used by extension for almost anything that is exciting — music, clothes, and so forth. *Sacanagem* (lit., illicit or non-standard sexual behavior) was until fairly recently sexual enough that it was shocking for polite conversation; now the metaphorical meaning (something that is offensive, immoral and so forth) has come to dominate. *Sacanear* is to do something especially to irritate someone. Some one who is *safado/a* is lewd; but the addition of the diminutive can make this a positive quality ("she's lewd, but I mean that in the good sense of the word....") A well-known song lists the qualities of the girlfriend the singer is looking for: *bonitinha*, *cheirosinha*, *bem safadinha* ("pretty, smells nice, very nice and lewd") — the last is almost impossible to translate into English. For the same reason the various parts of the body which are unmentionable in polite conversation are often softened by diminutives, losing some of their taboo quality and power, and gaining intimacy. ■

Tom Moore contributes to the online magazines Brazil and Brazilmax. He translates from Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, French, and German. He can be contacted at querflote@yahoo.com or querflote@hotmail.com.

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Democracy in America: A New Translation

By Michelle Mead

A panel discussion took place on Wednesday, April 7th at Florence Gould Hall, in the series "The French Institute Alliance Française welcomes The Library of America".

The event, "**Tocqueville in the 21st Century**", was moderated by Max Rudin, publisher, from The Library of America, and featured Arthur Goldhammer, whose new translation of the classic masterpiece, *Democracy in America*, was being celebrated. Also on the panel were Olivier Zunz, Commonwealth Professor of History at the University of Virginia, the volume's editor and president of the Tocqueville Society; Eric Foner, DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia; Andrew Delbanco, Julian Clarence Levi Professor in the Humanities at Columbia; and Nat Hentoff, syndicated columnist for the *Village Voice*.

It is encouraging to see a translator put so much of his heart and wisdom into a translation. Many of us can attest to the fact that some translations are painful to read; their awkwardness feels like walking around in ill-fitting shoes. The Library of America's publication of this new translation injects new energy into a work which still speaks to the passion, energy and the foibles of America and the American condition.

Many of us remember Tocqueville's work from our college days, when we studied a slim book of extracts from the book in our introductory French literature classes. What a pity that we are often presented with the work at an age, and in circumstances, which are not the best for digesting the contents of a work of this depth and magnitude.

So, what would be the reason behind a re-translation of such a classic work which straddles both American and French history? Arthur Goldhammer admits he liked the challenge of being an interpreter of the work, not merely a translator. Tocqueville's grounding in the classics meant that his writing was very much in that style - a style not always respected in past translations. When asked about his approach to the task, Goldhammer said that he went back to the original source in French, keeping past translations for reference, of course, but relying on the style and the flow of the original French text. The responsibility of re-translating Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* was not lost on Goldhammer, as this classic work remains one of the most perceptive and influential books ever written about American politics and society.

Alexis de Tocqueville was born in Paris in 1805, into a family of the Normandy "*petite noblesse*". His mother was the granddaughter of Malesherbes, the defender of Louis XVI. In 1831, Tocqueville joined his friend, Gustave de Beaumont, on a voyage to study the prison system in America. His observances and reflections on America were published in a first volume in 1835, followed by a second volume in 1840. While Tocqueville was obviously taken with the idea of democracy, his background and upbringing did not naturally dispose him to think highly of it at first. Tocqueville's comments, one must not forget, are the reflections of a young man coming from an old country, and a country

which had just lived through a bloody revolution, in which many of his own family had perished.

What are some of the ideals and concepts brought up in his work, and what is their relevance to the present? Tocqueville was interested in the very shape of democracy and the fact that, messy as it was, it worked because of, not in spite of, its inherent chaos. He did feel that if democracy worked at all, it would only be in the context of a small state, not a large one. His fascination with the issues of slavery, the separation of church and state, the role of politicians, and the importance of voting and education are topics that still fuel lively debate to this day. It is amusing to note that Tocqueville met Davy Crockett, and was most unimpressed by this national American icon, thinking him an uneducated woodsman.

It is also interesting to note that Tocqueville's works were already being translated during his lifetime, and not always to his satisfaction. His translator, the Englishman Henry Reeve, sometimes took license with his translations, making Tocqueville's opinions seem stronger than they were. According to Professor Zunz, he would rail that Reeve "makes me more wicked than I am".

Tocqueville: Democracy in America, A new translation by Arthur Goldhammer is published by The Library of America, a nonprofit publisher, "dedicated to preserving America's best and most significant writing". ■

A Message from President-Elect Luke Sandford



It is with great regret that I must resign my position as President-Elect of the New York Circle of Translators.

I have been offered a full-time translation job in Montreal and will thus be moving to Quebec in late June.

My ten years in New York have been marked by wonderful experiences and wonderful people, many of whom I met through the Circle and its activities.

I look forward to seeing you all, either on your trips to Montreal or my (hopefully frequent!) trips back to NYC.

Best wishes to the members of the Board, and best of luck with all of your endeavors.

Sincerely,

Luke Sandford

THE GOTHAM TRANSLATOR



The New York Circle of Translators (NYCT) is a New York State not-for-profit corporation regrouping independent translators and interpreters as well as companies and organizations. It is a chapter of the American Translators Association (ATA) which is, in turn, an affiliate of the International Federation of Translators (FIT).

NYCT members work in a variety of languages and specialties. Our members are committed to the exchange of ideas and mutual support. One of our goals is to educate the general public about the professional nature of interpreting and translating.

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