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‘Words which could only be your own’: the crossroad between lyrics translation, culture, Brazilian fans, and non-professional translators

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Resumo: Nos estudos da tradução, um tópico que tem rendido discussões interessantes se apoia na intervenção do tradutor no que se refere à transferência de aspectos culturais do texto de origem para o texto de chegada. No entanto, a pesquisa concernente à tradução da música pop para fins de entendimento tem sido negligenciada. As diferentes mídias em que letras traduzidas podem ser encontradas no Brasil e os diversos perfis de seus tradutores proporcionam um campo de estudo ainda inexplorado. Esse artigo tem por objetivo estabelecer até que ponto as fontes de acesso às letras traduzidas domesticam ou estrangeirizam os aspectos culturais presentes nas letras do cantor Morrissey. Apesar de não baseado em técnicas acadêmicas, mas em aprendizado empírico, o trabalho coletivo dos fãs produz um texto final de boa qualidade.

Palavras-chave: Tradução. Prática metodológica, Cultura. Letras de Música. Tradutores amadores.

Introduction

The importance of popular music in the Brazilian Culture is undeniable. Although music education is not inserted in the vast majority of schools' schedule, it is possible to say that songs are used in order to teach not only languages (including the mother tongue) but lyrics are also created to facilitate the learning process. The tradition of introducing lyrics in public schools' language classes is very popular among Brazilian students, who always suggest their favorite artists or songs to be used as basis for the next lessons. The aim of producing translated lyrics does not lie in making them singable or able to replace the original. The aim is to present a final text that can be used as a complement to enhance the listener experience. The final text of lyrics translated for understanding purposes has always generated a certain degree of discomfort among their readers due to some artificialness presented in the target text. This unnaturalness is the major concern among readers, who have been discussing this characteristic of translated lyrics since the late seventies. These readers finally could join forces to try to change this situation, writing and rewriting their translations collectively on websites and virtual communities in the beginning of the new century. These ever-changing translations reveal not only the most important aspects of a good translation of lyrics to this specific audience but also the empiric methodology they applied in order to achieve what they considered the best solution to minimize the artificialness presented in translations done by a single person, without any explicit cooperation. This artificialness may be due to non-professional translators lack of experience, low level of both source and target language knowledge, but it may be also due to an inability in recognizing or dealing with cultural aspects present in the source text. Aixelá (1996, p.56) recognizes that culture-specific items "are usually manifestations of a surface nature, outside the structure of the text". There is a tendency to identify culture-specific items with the most arbitrary area of the language, such as names (of people, places etc). In this respect, Morrissey's lyrics constitute a respectable source of cultural-specific item. According to Bracewell (1998, p.219), "Morrissey's project was organically English at a time when popular culture was synthetically international". His lyrics are also abundant in arbitrary nouns, such as products, services etc, whose rendering are crucial to the understanding of the message. The multidisciplinary of the subject,

which involves music, language, translation, and culture, requires multiple abilities and knowledge from its translators. Theories on the translation of pop music (KELLY, 1987, and LOW, 2003) and the notion of domestication/ foreignisation (VENUTI, 1997) are applied to resonate the analyses of selected examples to support the subsequent description of non-professional translators' methodologies to make their final texts sound right. In order to have a broad picture of lyrics translation in Brazil, a description of their source and their producers is provided, along with an introduction of Morrissey's background, production, insertion into the Brazilian audience, and the level of involvement his fans are keen to dedicate him.

1. Pop songs as object of translation

The adequacy of a translation to its intended audience seems to be a premise to produce a successful target text. Professional translators have a great number of theoretical approaches to support their choices for a translation. Although theories trying to describe/prescribe the practice of translators of pop lyrics are quite recent, the audience's complains about the apparent inadequacy of the target text when compared to the source text is as old as the first translation published.

The translation of pop lyrics was prescribed for the first time when Kelly (1987) proposed a methodology based in the respect of some aspects present in the source text that should appear in translation, such as rhythms, meaning, style, rhymes, sound, intended listeners and the original. This methodology showed to be useful when he used it in foreign language classes to test the students' fluency in French. Kelly's methodology inspired Low (2003) to simplify the formula into five categories. Low called his method the Pentathlon Approach because it is based in trying to score the highest points possible in each one of the five items looking for a harmonic end product. The Pentathlon Approach looks to reveal the best translation in terms of singability, sense, naturalness, rhythm, and rhyme. Low applied the Pentathlon Approach for the translation of commercial songs with great success. These methodologies serve perfectly to create singable translations, but they may not be suitable for translations of lyrics intending to facilitate the audience's understanding of them.

The inadequacy in using those theories may be explained taking into account the fact that the music, the rhythm or the melody of the song give the audience an idea about the lyrics that may not be present in the source text. Apart from, maybe, rhythm, these features are not present in the target texts. The strangeness between lyrics and the audience's idea of them may also be due to the translator's inability to render all information the source text contains because, sometimes, the target language may not have the same properties and capacities of multiple meanings, which narrows the focus of the target text.

The demand for translated pop songs in monolingual countries whose culture is intimately related to music, as is case the of Brazil, can be traced back until the seventies¹ when small magazines with chords for acoustic guitar players used to present translations of the songs they were teaching the readers how to play. Done line by line, these translations served just as a guide aiming to help the guitar player to learn the lyrics by heart. In the eighties, magazines devoted to popular music became very popular, and the section on translated lyrics was present since the first edition. These translations were such a success among the readers that they turned into independent magazines, achieving the same level of popularity enjoyed by the magazines they derived from. Occasionally, the magazines published a small note about a mistranslation or grammatical mistake present in previous editions. In the mid nineties, the internet started to gain space, and the 'audience' for translated pop lyrics migrated to this new media. The internet provided a wider archive combined with an unbelievable reduced time of research. Another advantage internet brought was the possibility of interaction between readers and the website where the translations are published, and interaction among users.

2. Inadvertently working as a team

The translations available on the internet provided a new level of interaction, which made possible not only the best understanding of the lyrics but also helped to build an environment where the users are active agents, producing and constantly revising each other's translations. These interventions usually happen in three main

¹ The oldest of those magazines we were able to find dates back to 1974. This date is quite impressive taking into consideration that popular music was acknowledged as a mass culture product in the mid 50's when Elvis Presley's image became as profitable as his music.

ways: a) a reader post a comment in which a 'mistake' is highlighted; b) a reader decides to mend the translation using an online device provided by the website; c) the reader decides to offer a new translation. The way in which online target texts improve depends highly on the media where they appear.

The translations done in fan websites are usually as static as the ones provided in magazines because they do not change unless the person who creates them decides to revise the translations. Some of these fan websites encourage their readers to suggest corrections, but very few of them update their translations after a different rendition to a word/phrase/line is offered. This may be due to a difficulty in accepting a new reading for the text, an impossibility to check the information provided, or both.

Another source of translated lyrics is virtual communities. They are ruled by fans, and rely on their members' involvement to feed their pages. These members not only post their translations, comments, and suggestions to modify the proposed translation but also post their own new translations inside the same topic without deleting the previous texts. This practice allows us to trace exactly what seems to not sound right in the first translations and how the new translations solved aspects as varied as mistranslations, misspellings, inadequate register, ambiguous expressions and so on.

The most popular online source of translated lyrics is major websites, whose translated lyrics section is mainly managed by fans. Once a person is registered, it is possible to add song's lyrics, translations, or comments. It is possible to propose changes to the translations presented on their pages. That is the moment when there is some intervention from the website, which hire people to judge whether the changes are appropriate or not. They use the fans' knowledge of the singers to ensure the quality and accuracy of the information posted.

3. Morrissey, his lyrics and his fans

Stephen Patrick Morrissey was born in Manchester on 22nd May, 1959. His Irish origins and his virtually affectionless, solitary childhood were crucial to direct Morrissey to look comfort in the arts. In 1982, Morrissey was 'saved' from the

reclusion of his room by Johnny Marr, a young guitar player who knocked Morrissey's door in search for an artistically inspired partner able to write lyrics to start a band. After the first meeting, they had two songs written. The group was named The Smiths, as homage to ordinary, quintessentially British people. Other members were added (Andy Rourke in the bass, and Mike Joyce in the drums), all of them second-generation Irish. According to Campbell,

The Smiths as an expressly *second-generation* venture that eschewed the constrictions of both Irish essentialism and English assimilation, and pointed to an often intricate accommodation of Anglo-Irish issues (marked by in-between-ness). (CAMPBELL, 2010, p.45)

The group lasted five years (1982-1987), but left profound marks in the music scenario, not only in the United Kingdom but also in many parts of the world. "To this day, there is a collective understanding that The Smiths were one of the greatest of all British rock groups" (FLETCHER, 2012, blurb). After The Smiths, Morrissey embarked in a solo career, whose success has seen ups and downs, but the quality of his lyrics remain unpaired. The amount of external references present in Morrissey's lyrics encouraged Goddard (2009) to launch an encyclopedia to clarify many of them to international (and also to UK) fans. Before Morrissey, only Bob Dylan's lyrics received the same treatment.

Morrissey's fans are known as one of the most dedicated and obsessive audiences. Differently from other fans, Morrissey's audience looks for a more personal contact with their idol. "The concert ritual of "apostles" leaping on stage to hug, touch, kiss or shake the hand of Morrissey dates back to the beginning of the Smiths" (GODDARD, 2009, p.125). It appeared on video for the first time on BBC2's *Oxford Road Show* on 10 February 1984. These attempts to reach Morrissey are usually compared to religious rituals, and so is the pilgrimage to The Smiths/Morrissey related locations not only in Manchester but also in London, Fairmount, Los Angeles, Rome etc². Morrissey's fans' devotion goes beyond the consumption of his music. These fans appropriate the artist's work in order to

² For more details on Morrissey's fans, their peregrination and devotion, read Flinterud (2007), Hazard (2011), Maton (2010), Snowsell (2011).

produce their own³. In Brazil, Morrissey's fan major production is the effort to provide highly accurate translations to the singer's lyrics.

Morrissey's lyrics have the power to touch his listeners, bringing to the fore their most hidden feelings. The lyrics are crafted with such mastery they seem to be

speaking directly and emotionally, soul to soul, to his fans. Morrissey's nonconformist attitudes and his willingness to articulate melancholia won over a huge constituency of music listeners. The music made a very personal appeal, something that reflected grimness, violence, loneliness. (HASLAM, 1999, p.131)

Stylistically, Morrissey's lyrics present a vast collection of metaphors, alliteration, assonances, wordplays that are easily spotted out by his listeners. Interestingly, his lyrics also present graphic sign whose additional meaning is apprehended only by highly involved listeners, the ones who dedicate their time to read the lyrics. Words such as 'love' or 'life' are usually written with a capital 'L', other words appear in inverted commas. The lyrics present lines written in capital letters, different speeches mixed and enjambements/pauses unnoticeable in performance. Lyrically, "Morrissey is undoubtedly the most literary singer of British popular music" (HOPPS, 2009, p.xi). His lyrics deal with varied subjects, ranging from working-class issues to unrequited love. Whatever is the lyrics' subject, Morrissey wraps it with culture-specific items that are a deep reflection of his roots. According to McLuhan & Fiore (1967, p.53), "time' has ceased, 'space' has vanished. We now live in a global village". This may be the reason why Morrissey's high culture-specific lyrics work as narratives that can find a mirror in many countries/cultures, and are able to touch so deeply his audience. However, Morrissey's cultural allusions and references, especially during The Smiths era, have a great number of words that can only be entirely understood if both source culture and target culture have an intersection.

4. Morrissey's culture-specific items in translation

The translation of culture-specific items is a challenge because no rules seem to have been established to produce totally accepted equivalents.

³ Among fans' productions it is possible to find books (Willy Russel's *The Wrong Boy*, David Coupland's *Grilfriend In A Coma*, and many others), music (Radiohead is just one in a long list), movies (Andrew Overtoom's *My life with Morrissey*, Kerri Koch's *Passions just like mine*), comics, paintings, masters dissertations, PhD Thesis, articles on fields such as Music, Linguistics, Literature, Sociology, Psychology, Arts, Anthropology etc.

The problems do not depend on the source text itself, but on the significance of the translated text for its readers as members of certain culture, or a sub-group within that culture, with the constellation of knowledge, judgment and perception they have developed from it. (SNELL-HORNBY, 1988, p.42)

Cultural references present in Morrissey's lyrics range from proper names, toponyms, and literary/cinema references to proverbs, wordplays, vocatives, and arbitrary nouns whose usage is not the same in both cultures involved or which are inexistent in the target culture. In the present work, the focus lies on the translation of culture-specific items. The translations provided in Brazil for these culture-specific items vary considerably from media to media. The translation of toponyms, for example, seems to follow the target language grammatical rules; i.e. 'London' ('Panic', 1986) is translated as 'Londres', and 'Luxembourg' ('Ask', 1986) is translated as 'Luxemburgo'. The *Manual de Redação e Estilo* (Martins, 1997), states that there are no definite rules for the translation of toponyms. Since many names were already adapted into Brazilian Portuguese, these adaptations must be used; the toponyms whose adaptations are yet to be carried out must retain the original spelling. The translation of 'Luxembourg' as 'Luxemburgo' lies on the linguistic adaptation in which '-burgh/bough' is rendered as '-burgo'. However, this adaptation is not carried out in 'Pittsburgh' ('On The Streets I Ran', 2004). The line 'take people from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania' received mixed styles of translation. The translation presented in the website Terra kept the word 'Pittsburgh' untranslated even with the accepted orthographic adjustment in which '-burgh' should be rendered as '-burgo'. Castañeda-Hernandez (2004, p.06) explains that "the 'o' in *burgo* did not make it across the Atlantic. (...) Unlike their European counterparts, in Spanish these American towns keep their original names when rendered into other languages". This seems to be the case of Brazilian Portuguese as well. Although the name of the city maintained its original calligraphy, the state 'Pennsylvania' was orthographically adapted to fit the Portuguese spelling, being rendered as Pensilvânia.

The main issue in the translation of toponyms in Morrissey's lyrics is not their calligraphy but their meaning within the song. In 'Maladjusted' (1997), for example, the characters are described by their addresses' references. In the lyrics, a fifteen-year-old prostitute wonders about life while heading to a client's home.

- 12 As the Fulham Road lights stretch and invite into the night
- 13 From a Stevenage overspill we'd kill to live around
- 14 SW6 with someone like you

In the above three lines, the listener is presented with a road, a city and a post code. The locations, however, received different treatments in translation. The road in line 12 was kept untranslated. The city in line 13, completely unknown for the Brazilian audience, was understood as a pun with the lyricist's first name (Steven) plus the word 'age', whose new word was understood as meaning an epoch of his life in which an overspill took place. The city, located 50km north of central London, and its industrial origins was completely deleted from the target text. The lyricist political statement, in which working-class girls have few opportunities in decadent industrial cities, especially when the government reallocate poor people to other cities/neighbourhoods in order to open space to new, fancy buildings, is deleted. The information added depends highly on the reader's knowledge of the artist's life before fame. Morrissey's family was transplanted twice (from Moss Side to Hulme, then to Stratford). The region SW6, which is the first half of Fulham District postcode, is a neighbourhood in London whose properties reach high prices. This information can be inferred by the lyrics context. The postcode system in Brazil does not say much about the status of where the person lives. It is given by city zones. Thus, the translator for the website Terra decided to render meaning by translating the postcode SW6 as 'área sudoeste seis' (southwest six area). The prestige of the zones is not a fixed concept in Brazil. In Porto Alegre, south is the most prestigious zone, as well as in Rio de Janeiro (where the most expensive homes in the country can be found), but that is not the case in São Paulo where the South zone is the home of the poorer part of the population.

The adaptations the translator provided may not reproduce exactly the original lyrics, but is able to give the reader a picture in which is possible to infer Morrissey's intended meaning. Venuti (1998, p.12) believes that "the popular aesthetic requires fluent translations that produce the illusory effect of transparency", and this effect is achieved when the translator's renditions are recognisable or rings a bell to the target audience.

Being the most fruitful source of culture-specific items in Morrissey's lyrics, the understanding of arbitrary nouns is based on cultural habits, products, services etc that may not have the same meaning/usage in source culture and target culture. Culture-specific items may pass unnoticed if the translator is not aware of them. The accommodation system at Universities, for example, is completely different in Brazil and in the UK. When a student decides to join a university in Brazil, the accommodation is not part of the package. Differently from the UK, the universities do not offer accommodation, although some universities left some of their buildings to receive students who cannot pay for private accommodation. In these cases, the accommodation is free, and the houses are 'administrated' by the residents, who participate actively in the selection of new residents. In Brazil, these accommodations are known as 'Casa do Estudante' ('Student's Houses'). There is virtually no offer of rooms to let for students in the private sector, and renting a house/flat is too expensive for most students. As the huge majority of Brazilian students opts to go on living with their parents, they try to be admitted to universities in the cities they live or in the surrounding areas. In the UK, all first-year students are offered a place in a Hall of Residence, which is administrated by University staff, who maintain the cleanness and order 24/7. Private accommodation is also available, and the students move to a room in a house with other students or young professionals. The students do not choose whom they are living with. The Brazilian audience recognises this type of student accommodation because a similar system appears in many American teenage films. So, when a 'scholarly room' appears in 'Handsome Devil' (1984) to refer to a place where a sexual encounter takes place, it was supposed that the translations were able to render the source text meaning. The original is

24 and when we're in your scholarly room
25 who will swallow whom?

A scholarly room alludes to the room students hire during the university term. In Brazil, students' rooms do not change much when they enter the university. Most books are kept in the house bookshelves, the term files are kept in the computer desk drawers, and the backpack is hidden inside the wardrobe. Students in Brazil do not have a bedroom full of books, and they usually do not prepare for exams or study in their rooms. The usual place for studying is the dining table, which is usually in the

same room as the family bookshelves. The location received three different renditions in translation. 'Handsome Devil' was first translated by magazine Bizz in the late eighties⁴. The translator transferred the focus of the culture-specific item from the room to its occupier.

Source text	and when we're in your scholarly room
Target text	e quando estivermos em seu quarto de garoto estudioso
Back translation	and when we're in your studios boy room

Differently from the journalist-translator, fans-translators did not change the focus of the culture-specific item, but the location of the meeting changed considerably. The word 'room' was maintained, however it did not refer anymore to a bedroom in a university accommodation. The translator for the virtual community Morrissey – Letras Traduzidas understood 'scholarly' as an office at a department inside one of the university buildings.

Source text	and when we're in your scholarly room
Target text	e quando estivermos em sua sala acadêmica
Back translation	and when we're in your academic room

Most undergraduate students do not have an academic room in Brazil or in the UK. So, it is possible to infer that the translator for the virtual community considered the character as a graduate student. The last translation, presented in the website Terra, added a socio-economic status to the character. The chosen location is in the student's house, but in a room reserved and decorated to serve as a place to study, which is not common for the great majority of university students in Brazil or in the UK.

Source text	and when we're in your scholarly room
Target text	e quando a gente estiver no seu quarto de estudo
Back translation	and when we're in your study room

The impossibility of rendering the exact meaning for the phrase 'scholarly room' led the translators to domesticate⁵ it. This domestication although produced the same understanding of the lyrics, placed the action in different, and at certain point

⁴ The uncertain date is due to the source of the translation, whose photocopy was given to the authors of this article by a friend. He made this photocopy for his private use and no bibliographic data was collected at the time.

⁵ Domestication is a term coined by Venuti (1995, p.20) to refer to a translation in which an 'ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values' occurs.

public, places. The boldness of the characters is accentuated in translation. Sex is not a taboo in Brazil, where young adults are allowed to have sex in their rooms but not in common areas of the house or in public places as an office at the university.

The culture-specific items related to the field of services, provided some interesting translational challenges. The types of health care offered in the UK left the translators with no options but to domesticate the public health service quoted in 'Stop Me If You Think You've Heard This One Before (1987) to a type of public health service available in Brazil. In the lyrics, the main character exemplifies his social life stating he passes the

23 Friday night in Out-patients

'Out-patients' is a section in a hospital where patients receive diagnosis and treatments for diseases with no need of being hospitalised. It includes serious diseases such as cancer, or simple procedures such as changing a bandage. Emergencies and hospitalisation are the other sections in British hospitals. In Brazil, the 'out-patients' service is available, but receives no specific name. A hospital is divided into two parts: the 'emergency' shows a huge identification; and the sector with 'clinics', which is subdivided into specialisations. Any non-urgent procedure, being it a chemotherapy session or an exam to start an exercise is carried out in the clinics. In the lack of a specific denomination, and the unspecific description present in the dictionaries, 'out-patients' was understood as the 'emergency'. This word was used in all available translations: website Terra and virtual Community Morrissey – Letras Traduzidas. The strategy of adopting an absolute universalization - when "the translator cannot find a better known culture-specific item or prefer to delete any foreign connotations and choose a neutral reference for their reader" (AIXELÁ, 1996, p.63) - does not interfere with the idea of spending a Friday night under health treatment instead of having fun. The same strategy was used to render meaning to a product. In the song 'King Leer' (1991), a character tries to surprise a prospective lover offering a drink.

05 I tried to surprise you
06 with vodka
07 or Tizer
08 I can't quite remember

Tizer (line 07) is an exclusive UK soft drink made of a mix of citrus and red fruits, launched in 1924. Tizer is not as popular as other famous soft drinks, and cannot be found among prestigious supermarkets or restaurants. Being a product sold exclusively in the UK, Tizer does not have any resonance among the Brazilian audience. It is not difficult to find the product's webpage on the internet or a description of it on Wikipedia, but none of these sources of meaning is able to provide an equivalent of it for the target audience. The solution found by the translator for the virtual community was to substitute the culture-specific item by means of absolute universalization.

Source text Or Tizer
Target text ou Tubaína

'Tubaína' is the commercial name of a guaraná soft drink whose main public is among the lower working-class population. This soft drink is not sold in many states and its reference can be obscure to some Brazilian fans. Aiming a bigger audience than virtual communities composed only by Morrissey's fans, website Terra presented a solution in which the trademark was substituted by its category.

Source text Or Tizer
Target text Ou refrigerante
Back translation Or a soft drink

This substitution leveled the product to the same category of the one cited in the previous line (vodka). The added parallelism is welcomed in Brazilian Portuguese, so the disappearance of the word 'Tizer', although felt by the readers, was not demanded back.

Conclusion

The translation of culture-specific items provoked non-professional translators to adopt translational strategies that they did not experienced in any other translational challenges. The difficulty some translators presented in understanding the meaning of some arbitrary nouns diverted the target texts from the source texts, but the new, domesticated target texts work perfectly to the target audience. The adaptations the translators provided were accepted by their communities because

they promoted a more fluent text than the translations whose main preoccupation was to reproduce the lyricist's words in translation were able to provide.

The lyrics for understanding purposes do not aim singability, rhythm, rhymes, as proposed by Low (2003) and Kelly (1987), but sense and naturalness are secured by means of domestication. The encyclopedic knowledge Morrissey's lyrics ask his audience may not be so straightforward visible to native speakers. The translations offered by non-professional translators in Brazil ends up to be the best rendering to meet the singer's audience expectations. The presence of comments, not only on the virtual community but also on website Terra, provides a further space where the meaning is built.

After analysing the translation of culture-specific items in Morrissey's lyrics, it is possible to say that the collective building of meaning and the domestication of localized culture-specific items produce a text whose naturalness is respected, and whose sense suffers minor injuries. The empiric use of translational strategies to render meaning proved to be a relative success. The bad fame the translation of lyrics have among the Brazilian audience does not match the work being done by their translators.

Abstract: In Translation Studies a subject that has produced interesting debates is the translator's intervention on the transference of cultural aspects from the source text to the target text. However, research on the translation of pop songs for understanding purposes has been neglected. The different media where translated lyrics can be found in Brazil and their translators' varied profiles provide a yet unexplored field of study. This article aims to establish to which extend the available sources of translated lyrics domesticates or foreignises the cultural aspects present in Morrissey's lyrics. Although their practice are not based on academic techniques, but in empirical knowledge, it is noticeable that the fans' collective work, despite lacking theoretical validity, provides high quality final texts.

Keywords: Translation. Methodological practice. Culture. Pop lyrics. Non-professional translators.

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