Translability in the movie

Tradutibilidade no filme

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RESUMO:
Este texto fala sobre a tradutibilidade entre o livro Cidade de Deus (Cidade de Deus, 1997) e o filme homônimo, de 2002. Cidade de Deus retrata a nova sociedade brasileira dos negros, mestiços e pobres, que vivem em favelas, controlados e dominados por gangues de traficantes. Aqui vamos discutir o significado de tradutibilidade como denotador de fidelidade ou traição entre fonte e texto alvo. Nós escolhemos trabalhar com a teoria dos signos, de Peirce, com as três categorias: 1) Qualidade, 2) Existência, e 3) Razão. Em seguida, mostramos as diferenças entre o livro e o filme: icônico, indicial e transformações simbólicas, que o tornam um filme de uma nova representação autônoma.

Palavras-chave: Literatura; Cinema; Tradutibilidade.

ABSTRACT:
This text talks about the translability between the book *City of God* (Cidade de Deus, 1997) and the homonym movie of 2002. *City of God* portrays the new Brazilian society of black, brown and poor people, living in slums, controlled and dominated by gangs and drugs lords. Here we discuss the meaning of translability as it denotes fidelity or betrayal between source and target text. We choose to work with the theory of sign, by Peirce, with the three categories: 1) Quality, 2) Existence, and 3) Reason. We then show the differences between the book and the movie: iconic, indexical and symbolic transformations that a make a film a new representation autonomous.

Keywords: Literature; Cinema; Translatability.

How can we define translability? Some researchers say that translability is greater when the source language and target language are on an equal cultural level of development. We know nevertheless that there is always a certain degree of loss in meaning when a text is translated. The concept of fidelity is guiding then the process of interpretation of a text translated. But we also know that the translation's process is more complex and can be influenced by the cultural, social, and political environment of the target languages. During

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the translation process some nuances, that represents a creative work, can be lost and modified, involving rewriting rather than translating a text. Is there a good translation theory that can present the adequate tools to meet source and target texts and its socio-cultural features?

Traditionally, translation has dealt with the linguistics aspects of a text, but we know that the semiotics aspects of the references of discourses should be incorporated in order to make cultural transfer possible. For the purposes of translating novels into movies the cultural situation is important because it creates the context and thus meaning. We know that Jakobson distinguished the intersemiotic translation of the interlingual and intralingual ones, and then he opened the possibilities of analysis of the passages from verbal messages to messages with another support significant. A verbal sign can be interpreted in three different ways: it can be translated into other signs of the same language, into another language, or into verbal system of symbols. The translator can create an effect or response that is similar to that of the source text, when he creates new signs and relationships between verbal and non-verbal elements.

In our study, we can deal with two operations that are complex and demand more analysis about the features and boundaries of the source and target texts. The first is to examine the process of de verbalizing texts with a complex plot that is closed, (the reader has in his hands its beginning, middle and end). It becomes an audiovisual text with many transformations added by the performance the actors/actress, the soundtrack, clothes, and scenarios, all developing itself into a open plot that we can only go to the end if you have a DVD at home. In the cinema, we are required to stay until the story ends.

The second operation deals with betrayal and/or fidelity. The majority of literary readers sometimes are not happy with the translation from the book to the film. They can't understand why the filmmakers reduce or amplify traits of characters, change references of the space, or change the socio-cultural signs of ambiances, and modifies the destiny of people that live in their favorite fictional universe.

With these two operations, we will deal with one of the three translations of Jakobson. The intersemiotic translations can be used in different communicative channels. One example is a translation from the novel *City of God*, by Paulo Lins (1997), to the homonym movie of the filmmaker Fernando Meireles in 2002. The film was seen everywhere in the world. This is an example of the complexities of polysemiotic translation, verbal descriptions, verbal

images, depicted by brutal Brazilian realism[2]. These are put into an animated audiovisual narrative with its soundtracks, unknown actors (primarily black poor people), and audio description with its modern recourses of representation. Verbal to non-verbal texts is of course one of the classiest kind of intersemiotic translation. It is made the most in the world, being nevertheless one of the most difficult to explain and to propose a systematic method. I attempted it (SOUZA,2009) dealing with two different kinds of sign conception. The first was Christian Metz that has a binary and saussurean way of working; the second conception by Peirce is about triadic model of sign. My idea was to isolate the narrative sequences as Barthes did in the seventies, and see how they could be transformed into Metz's filmic syntagms. The results were favorable because it could show a determined action enchained or framed[3] in the verbal narrative. Consequently, it becomes the primary action on the film or becomes an enchained that could transform or adjust the main action.

Fidelity or Betrayal

There is no exaggeration to say that there exists no form of translation in which the notion of an original version is completely sustainable. Considering an original text as a source means that it is a precedent literary form that has its own narrative sequences. The translator will study the organization of this sequences and decide to keep, to inverse or to omit one or several elements of the blocks in the original sequences. The translator can also pick up a small element that is irrelevant in a sequence and transform by shifting it to the beginning or to the end in a film's syntagm[4].

There can be no perfect equivalence through semiotics translation, but the originality of this phenomenon seems to be the capacity to create another work with specific language features that was only inspired by the source. A target text is then composed of unchained and

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[2] According to Antonio Cândido (1999) it is a new esthetic tendency that represents the organized crime in Brazil, especially in the slums of Rio de Janeiro.

[3] In my book *Représentation et idéologie : les téléromans au service de la publicité.* I distinguished unchained and framed block of action (*enchâssé* and *encadrée) .* The unchained (enchâssé) is one that introduces a new action but it is very linked with the main action. The framed is a block that is introduced to show some circumstance, an advertisement, for example, but the presentator and his discourse aren't very important to the main action. It can be a propaganda block, (as we say in French, a Capsule publicitaire).

[4] I think of the rooster in *City of God* that exists in a paragraph in the middle of the book and becomes the shifted narrative piece moved from the beginning of the main action of the film till the ends with this rooster. There is a flashback to tell to the past of the community of City of God. At the end, the first scenario of the rooster returns to conclude the story. We explain it more later.

framed scripts. The enchained one should ensure the connection between new syntagms and the central argument of the source. For example, the translations by Madame Bovary.

Everybody knows Flaubert's novel about the famous protagonist Emma Bovary. She received an excellent education in a convent. Her personality and behavior were formed by reading books with high romantic content. She became addicted to romantic love, because she saw her husband as a bored and mediocre man. She committed adultery to escape her empty world, but she wasn't happy and eventually killed herself. She was indebted to loan sharks because she wanted to live her fanciful dreams with her lovers. Since the XIXth century, several translations into the theatre pieces were made. Since 1932 the work has been transformed to the cinema. Several writers already said that Emma of Chabrol (…) is a result of the media. She is played by Isabelle Hupert who has facial expressions compatible with the boredom that the protagonist feels. However, the emphasis in the boredom caused by the emptiness, that a marriage without passion provokes, differs from the book by a small element. It is very important to note that the cause of Emma's troubles comes from reading too many romantic novels that Flaubert cites with irony: She wanted a prince " brave as a lion"........ The reading in the film is very short and does not have the same importance that Flaubert gives to it, because he wanted to show that eternal repetitions of love's clichés were damaging the personality formation of young girls. Flaubert tells us in the book that her notions of love were wrapped by cheap romantic literature. In the film, the cause of Emma's trouble comes from the bored life that she lives at the side of her husband, Charles Bovary. The film has a psychological approach of *ennui* situation that makes people loose the meaning of reality and always look at an abstract platonic world. Chabrol adds and invents unchained scripts that increases this feeling (*ennui*): An unconscious behavior as if people don't belong to the world where they are living. The best examples were the syntagms filmic about provincial life where the presentation of a feminine body (Hupert) exists as the most important sign. This sign generates a beam of psychological meanings. With this example, we can see that the source and target text are not completely equivalent.

Equivalences or differences

We know that the term Semiotics refers to the science of signs and it is derived from the Greek word *semeion.* It concerns the study of the signs systems by which meaningful communication or literary discourse occurs. For years, researchers used the European

Semiotics, that developed methods for the analysis of the verbal texts, to observe all kinds of material. People were not happy, because they wanted to work with appropriate tools to describe sonore and visual productions, without the mediation of the semiotic used to verbal ones. For example, it wasn't heuristic to look for the equivalent of phonemes and morphemes during the analysis of a picture or a painting. That way, researchers were at pains to decode the Peircean semiotics which did not have a linguistic basis; its principal point of reference is not in verbal language. In the Peircean theory, signs are strictly logical and depend on tributary mathematical reasoning. The advantage of this theory is also that it includes as a necessary part of the real, together with the complexities of social and individual features. Language and signs must be observed on a behavioral basis and not as it happens in semiology, where the exam chain goes from languages to linguistic pragmatics.

First of all, Peirce's theory is based in three categories[5] that have been understood as ultimate universal forms of thought or cognitive behavior. Categories allow a kind of relational dynamism of signs that can be felt by the mind with the moves between qualities or feelings, meaning of existence, and construction of habits and conventions. Such a relational conception of sign can be emphasized because it makes meaning independent of natural languages. In a film, for example, a relation of one image sequence that needs the support of narration, occurs with argumentative links between icons, indices and symbols.[6] The rule of certain types of relations governs representations, and according to the relation rules, various possible representations are conceivable. On this basis, we find here a new concept of reality - cognition of the real- caught by the human mind, but with an interesting point that a reality is capable of representing another one, which is different and not dependent on it.

Iconic Translation

According to Plaza (2010), the iconic translation is governed by the principle of similarity of structures. Qualities, appearances, sensations, are the elements that create an iconic atmosphere and the material of the first kind of transcription. The transference of

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[5] The three categories are: Firstness is a conception of being that is independent of anything else. Firstness corresponds to an emotional experience. Secondness is the mode of being that is in relation to something else. This second mode becomes an existent and concerns a kind of experience of the world. The thirdness is the domain of rules and laws. It is the category of thought, language, representation, and the process of semiosis; it makes social communication possible. Thirdness corresponds to intellectual experience.

[6] The most well-known class of Peirce is that class the object of the sign: Icon, Index, and Symbol.

sensitive realities to another realities in filmic syntagms is not an easy task. In *City of God*, for example, we have some passages that talk about the childhood of some that will become bandits later. Paulo Lins describes how the children play on the river where the water is mixed with red clay making for a playful atmosphere. Later, this force of the color red on the river will refer to the blood of the people that take part in "drugs war". At that time, there is another passage that shows the sensitive qualities of people coming to the new community where they will live. People come singing and dancing with their old things, beliefs and old feelings of hate, sympathy or antipathy.

The work, with iconic transcription, guides a "metaphor of alive form" as though Einsenstein (*apud* PLAZA, p. 138). A film, generally, is not a copy of the alive organism, but is represented with so many moves and dynamism, as if it was a natural organism. This is the principle of the "expressive montage" (EINSENSTEIN, *apud* PLAZA, p. 139), that the filmmakers link plans to provoke an aesthetic effect. One of the first scenes in the movies depicts pastel colors that can connote the dust. In these pastel ambiance, we can see people that steal gas cylinder when a delivery man arrives. People come and go in quick movements that show the realistic style of the book. Similarly, we can see later the red color that connote the blood of people killed.

The iconic translation in *City of God* deals only with unchained syntagms where all the signs are important to the principal action. Nöth (2012) discuss as the status of images not linked directly to a real referent. Further, he shows the power of visual images to shift cognitive ways to perceive the world. On the other hand, Fisette (2014) also contests this habit to link a visual image to a referent. He analyzes the well-known photography of Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother*, of 1936. The recipient is able to see the anguish on the woman's face only a mother protecting her children can enunciate. It is a stronger image than several signs of destruction that emanate from a situation of crisis. We can notice that both, Nöth and Fisette, accepts the Peirce's perspective that visual images are cognitive conducts of feelings and behaviors without the need of representing all the real context.

We can also observe Film Theory that Ehrat (2005) develops with a combination of Bergson-Deleuze-Peirce thoughts. In his part *What "Is" Cinema?* the author shows that cinema has to deal with narrative time, and then it needs to reflect by movement what a sequence-syntagm can transmit. Iconicity must transform characters and their ideas moving in a verbal text with the support of the verbs tenses. We can go easily from the past to the future, in syntagms where the camera tells how they act with their feelings and beliefs. In *City*

of God, the final syntagms can show how iconicity can be used by a film about drug gang was that transform the community on the screen in a place of quick movements of gunfire. This iconicity is an identifiable register of meaning to understand what is happening to the poor communities of Rio and in the world. The aesthetic effect, as pragmatic values of narrative purpose, can be built by the montage of signs moving in a temporal development.

Indicial translation

We talked about Iconicity that produces specific aesthetic effects, in our film, with a high degree of fidelity. What about indices? The second class of signs concerning the object of the sign is supposed to show a social context. Indices refers to the existence category and they are determined to tell a story that develops in a space and time. According to Eisenstein idea, in a movie, the syntagms and the narrative montage are constructed. The translation of book sequences to syntagms can modify the dynamical objects of a reality that a work is showing. We have then two kinds of translation to do: Transformation of an audiovisual text, not only the real represented in the source text, but transformation of the representation structure of the source text to a target text.

City of God is told during a period of three decades (1960, 1970, 1980) during which organized crime increases in Rio's slums. The passage of one decade from another witnesses the growth of children that are abandoning their games to be trained in the drugs business. Naturally, as the index in an audiovisual text needs the support of icons, the reality of the source text (a verbal text) is done in another perception of the real with a new causal relationship with their objects. It is the effect of the movement, the effect of what is filmed. The cinestesia of the iconic parties are transforming, sound and image, to produce a new flux of senses from the imagined world in a book to a perceived world in a scene. In its transit one can see conflicts or harmony between signs and realities, but what is important is that the principle of synchronicity causes resonances in the movement of icons that are linked to form a *gestalt* configuration.

In Photo 1, we are in the third decade, 1980, when the boy Dadinho grows up and became the dangerous Li'l Zé. He has prospered and owns the whole slum. He rules with violence and fear as he wipes out rival gangs easily. The boys growing up in a violent neighborhood took different paths: one became a photographer, another a drug dealer, other commandant of militias. In the film, there is a strong scene when Li'l Zé is teaching a little

boy how use the gun to kill another boy, as punishment by the favela tribunal. It is interesting to say now that all events and the passages between decades are seen, in the movie, through the eyes of Rocket, another poor black boy that doesn't want to be a criminal. He takes a camera and film and tell what happens in this community.

We can perceive that there is a change of narration. In the movie, the world is captured by one boy that escapes from the criminal world and he can compose the plot of his people. He can give form to this powerful image about a pedagogy of the crime, while all the events in the book are told by several narrators, without definitive points of view. What Rocket captures with his camera is that each generation is learning from the previous. Several times, the powerful Li'l Zé thinks about his role models, Tender Trio of his childhood (of the 1960's), just as the majority of kids look to Li'l Zé to see what they should aspire to be in their adult lives.

There are several kinds of arrangement of images, music and dialogues in an index strategy that acts by contiguity. They compose several unchained syntagms that allow characterization of each decade with causal links. But the camera of Rocket, (which is a secondary character) goes almost unnoticed in the book visually, is the tool to weave the links between time and territory. It means that the camera is capturing, not only the relationships between text and context, but also producing a metatext that reflects the possibility to transmit plural forms to shape the universe reference of the community City of God. In the movie, Rocket became the iconic central point of the narrative. He is a departure and an arrival point. Every action has been shaped by his camera and he becomes the capturer of relationships between signs and objects. He is also and the creator of the fictional world of the film *City of God.*

Photo 1. Pedagogy of crime.   Photo 2. Delivery of gas cylinder

Photo 3. Narrator Rocket.

Symbolic translation

In the field of symbolic translation, we are in the field of the convention; of the habit of thought, of the reflection. We know already that book and film talk about the life of a poor community of black people that was formed with people expulsed of others communities by inundations. They didn't have enough resources to develop an honest life. They didn't have the protection of the Right State and they had to follow crime's way to survive. In the third decade, in the 1980's, the drug business is already installed in the periphery of Rio, and dealers gangs began to confront themselves killing several people. The social problem of inequality between classes in Brazil was debated and reflected after this work. However, several researchers have thought that the representation of crime in slums do not contribute to reflect about the social problem. It is rather an iconic film filled with adrenaline rushes and the quick language of MTV in order to attract spectators.

But to show the power of the symbolic translation is to observe the meta-activity of Rocket. With his camera, he is able to explain why and how the community exists. He proposes to the spectator not only a referential view of the drug war, but also a way to reflect how it happens and how it can be formed. Rocket has in the film a way to communicate, to tell, to construct a story: *Jornal do Brasil.* This newspaper is the canal of his enunciation when he can allow the transit of icons and index to the symbols.

There is a new way to perceive the daily horror that is set up in contemporary Brazilian society. Rocket's photos follow the news mediated texts in *Jornal do Brasil* that talks daily about an aggressive universe that surrounds Brazilians citizens. They are texts with photos that condense the organicity of iconic and indexical language based on realistic movements of nature, children, daily life of criminals and their actions in their clashes. The symbolic translation has a centripetal force to emphasize several links between expressive and

narrative montages. The expressive highlights formation of metaphors when the camera amplifies or reduces icons that should create a strong kinesthetic effect. Symbolic relational structures embody the characteristics of the dynamics of environment interaction between icons and index in a very internal structure: It is the narrative montage that has a metonymical feature. It provides thoughts, conceptualizations and reflections.

We can observe the photo n. 4 that corresponds to an image of Li'l Zé some minutes after have been killing by kids. These children are some that were trained by the leader to kill another kids in photo 1. At the end of the movie, these children come together to take part in a new criminal organization called *Comando Vermelho* (Red Command). In photo n. 4, we see the same photo of a dead Li'l Zé, but it is dynamized in a newspaper, told in a context that reflects the criminal life of City of God. A newspaper (that has no importance in the book) is the privileged canal to give body to a narrator that grew up in the community (he has an authorized voice) and could give form to a symbolic narration about the growth of drug business in Brazilian society. The filmmaker breaks the causal logic of the book and creates new unchained syntagms with them owns qualities and relationships.

Photo 4. Li'l Zé killed

Photo 5. Li'l Zé in the *Jornal do Brasil.*

Conclusions

We should recognize that it is not very easy to translate a verbal work into an audiovisual work; a book to a film. We also notice that the question of fidelity or betrayal are not very important. Further, it is something that makes a translated work genial. In the movie *City of God,* a fundamental relay, to create the ambiance of the slum and to begin the narration, is the rooster scene that begins and ends Li'l Zé's saga as photographed by Rocket.

A character's relay is discovering the potentiality of someone that can become principal the film's plot and bring a semantic change. In the movie, Rocket is honest, while in the book there is not a character able to convey a message of hope. Rocket belongs to a gang, called Cocotas, that is not compose of criminals. Finally, the film has the relay of narration when the act of taking pictures (that is not important in the book) becomes fundamental in constructing the visual story of *City of God*.

We notice then that in the semiotic field, iconic translation has its syntagmatical relay with the expressive montage. Further, indicial translation has its syntagmatical relay with the narrative montage; and the symbolic translation has its semantical relay with the construction of thoughts, values, reflections in a logical way that each movie demands. More important that telling a story is to show how we can construct a story, said Eisenstein.

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