

A CASE STUDY IN LITERARY TRANSLATION

Larissa Rohde[□]

This article constitutes an argument for the belief that translation studies cannot afford to ignore concepts from adjacent disciplines. Among other fields of knowledge, translation studies should also be viewed in their connections with literary criticism. However different, the potential new meanings released in the target language, they must have their bearings on the literariness of the source text. In the light of the considerations above, what follows are notes written during the translation process of the Narayan's novel *The Guide*¹. In his numerous novels and short-stories, Narayan showed a special ability to make the rhythms and intricacies of South Indian life accessible to readers of other cultures inside India and indeed to readers everywhere else round the world. Central to this achievement was the creation of Malgudi, the fictional South Indian town, which he peopled with ordinary men and women's entangled emotions made unforgettable by his writing.

Translators are crucial intermediaries of global technological, cultural and literary exchanges, hence subject to a unique set of dangers and opportunities in our multicultural times. Structurally, translators occupy a position comparable to the global currency exchange market. At their best, they render possible a truly equal cultural exchange, in which the achievements of one culture are made available to another. At their worst, they hamper the understanding of the source texts; create extra obstacles to their flow of ideas, mediations and aesthetic achievements. The "task of the translator", to paraphrase Walter Benjamin's² words which make the title of his famous essay on translation, is to think not only what is being translated, but the historical constellations in which it is said; to put it in another way, to transcode a complex cultural matrix, instead of just the words, phrases or individual meanings. This is surely a frighteningly huge if not impossible task, but well-meaning and hard working translators must make the attempt and not lose nerve before the "impossibility" in question. All these issues are exacerbated to the breaking point by two intervening issues: firstly, we are faced with the contemporary mind-boggling tapestry of intercultural connections and specificities; secondly, at a theoretical level, the dismissal of the concept of "original text", and "authorial intention" by post-structuralism has called into question tenets held dear to translation, such as the concept of equivalence itself.

The following review of the bibliography on translation studies means to establish a private inventory of translation strategies applicable to the translation of the novel at hand, to investigate if and how the application of these strategies affects the balance between source text and target text, and, finally, to determine whether this balance is a useful indicator of the direction of the translation as a whole, towards either adequacy or acceptability.

Adherence to the untranslatability of culturally specific words is, to a certain extent, the outcome of the quest for full equivalence. The term "equivalence" itself has always been a notion full of controversy. Although different scholars interpret equivalence from different perspectives to find a way out of the absolute equation implied in the term, starting from Nida's³ "dynamic equivalence", the abstract notion of equivalence and its corollary, the equivalent effect, is hard to pin down. It is a subjective, and, to a certain extent, unconscious yardstick in the assessment of translated texts and in the decision-making process of translation practitioners.

[□] Doutora em Letras – Literaturas de Língua Inglesa pela UFRGS.

¹ NARAYAN, R. K. *The Guide*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2006. First published in 1958.

² BENJAMIN, Walter. The Task of the Translator. In: *Illuminations*. Translated by Harry Zohn, London: Jonathan Cape, 1970, p. 69-82.

³ NIDA, Eugene A. *Toward a Science of Translating*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964.

Literary translation, in particular, is a complex, controversial, and ultimately imperfect endeavour. Striving to carry the original author's art across a linguistic and cultural divide, the translator faces numerous obstacles. Considerable advances have been made in recent years in software design; translation companies now frequently employ semi-automatic translation methods. Nonetheless, these advances have not diminished theoretical and practical problems in the process of translation carried out by the human mind. Literary translation, in particular, remains as controversial as ever. Retaining the novel's cultural specificity, the translator nevertheless must seek to render certain culturally laden phrases intelligible to the speakers of the target language. Interpolated phrases, for instance, may add references that would be inaccessible to a reader unfamiliar with Indian traditional culture, especially when it comes to food-related vocabulary items.

The concept of translation being a norm-governed activity was first put forward by Gideon Toury in *In Search of a Theory of Translation* in 1980 and further elaborated in *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* in 1995⁴. According to Toury, the activity of translation is governed by norms that are relevant in the target culture framework in which the translator operates. These norms can be described as the way society regulates behaviour by establishing what is accepted and what is tolerated, on the one hand, and what is disapproved and banned on the other. Toury remarks that possible deviations from norms take place at the risk of sanctions. The translator then operates between two sources of constraints: the translation's adequacy, or its "adherence to source text norms" (1995, p. 56), and its acceptability, or its adherence to target norms. The choices made by the translator involve a compromise or negotiation between these two poles. The author distinguishes between norms as such and normative formulations found in extra-textual sources; while the latter may reflect actual norms in society, they may also be motivated by subjective reasons, such as the wish to create new norms or alter the existing ones. Although Toury recognizes that the individual translator's use of the socially and culturally acceptable norms may not be fully systematic, the author emphasises that these norms can be used to draw certain conclusions about translation. His notion of "equivalence" derives from notions of acceptability based on the social norms. Toury also claims that the position and function of a translation in a given culture are determined by the target culture. He states that translations are first and foremost "facts of target cultures" (1995, p. 29).

In Brazil, Haroldo de Campos is one of the most important names in this field; his creative translations and accompanying thinking on the matter is well known and object of numerous studies, such as the collection of articles entitled *Transcrições*⁵ published under the auspices of this university. Among the Brazilian scholarly production on translation studies, the recent work of Rosemary Arrojo⁶ and Cristina Carneiro da Cunha⁷ are of importance in the poststructuralist framework.

Among the multiple approaches to translation and to issues related to translation, I found of special interest the one often called "semiotically-oriented" approach. The disciplines of translation studies and semiotics are intertwined by their very nature. Although Roman Jakobson introduced the concept of intersemiotic translation around four decades ago, it was only recently that translation scholars directed their attention towards semiotics-informed approaches to translation. Its starting point can be dated back to the

⁴ TOURY, Gideon. *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995.

⁵ *Transcrições: Teorias e Práticas: Em memória de Haroldo de Campos*, organized by Tânia Franco Carvalhal, Lúcia Sá Rebello e Eliana Fernanda Cunha Ferreira, published in 2004.

⁶ ARROJO, Rosemary. *Oficina de Tradução. A Teoria na Prática*. São Paulo: Ática, 1986 and ARROJO, Rosemary. Os 'Estudos de Tradução' como Área de Pesquisa Independente: dilemas e ilusões de uma disciplina em (des)construção. In: D.E.L.T.A., 14 (2): 423-454, 1998, among others.

⁷ *Tradução e Diferença*, prefaced by Rosemary Arrojo and published by UNESP in 1999.

publication of Jakobson's article "On linguistic aspects of translation" in 1959. There has been a development of this semiotic strand as exemplified by later modifications by Gideon Toury (1995), and Umberto Eco (2007). While Jakobson's typology suggests that translation is not limited to natural languages, the modifications of his typology have expanded the realm in which translational phenomena is studied. Thus, within this line of thought, the general progression has been from the focus on natural language to the entire human culture. This progression has followed the logic according to which translation is an inherent part of semiosis or sign activity, and therefore can be said to be present in any sign process in any living system. One question posed by the above-mentioned ideas is that of borders of translation, in which there are implicit questions about the relationship between translation and interpretation, and between translation process and the signic process. This issue of borders of translation is closely intertwined with the theories of Even-Zohar, whose work stretches the concept of translation and poses important questions to the task of the translator.

All the above-mentioned writings were essential to my initial mapping of the current state of translation theories, but I could not honestly say that I aligned my thinking thoroughly with one or another. "The Blind Men and the Elephant" is a fable that appears in the *Udana*, one of the canonical Hindu scriptures, and has been reproduced with slight changes in a number of contexts. A party of blind men, or, in some versions, seeing men in the darkness, comes across an elephant and quarrel to decide what it looks like. They cautiously take turns to touch the beast. One feels one part of the animal, one feels the tusk, another one the tail, another one the ears. Each one touches a different part, but only one part. The one who had touched the tusk is adamant: the animal is like a spear, the one who touched the tail claims it is just a snake, and so on and so forth. They then compare their impressions and cannot reach an agreement and quarrel bitterly. They are unable to see that each one is describing a different aspect of the same animal.

As I see it, the truthfulness of all the different approaches to translation theories posited by different scholars is well represented by this fable. It explains how each person can feel a part of the elephant, and believe that he or she understands the whole about it, when in fact, the whole is far bigger and infinitely more complex and ultimately beyond anyone's grasp. In the same way, very often different approaches claim "truths" that only partially and imperfectly describe the whole of the translation phenomena.

As for the dichotomy that runs through translation studies I will briefly summarize my position in this regard. In fact, the two poles of a continuum have been tagged with different names by different authors along the secular history of the writings about translation as well in the recent history of scholarly work produced in the area of the so called translation studies. These two binary poles have been variously named depending on which source one looks at: Venuti's rather recent domestication/foreignization; Toury's adequacy/acceptability; Nida's formal/dynamic equivalence. Several other pairs have fallen in and out of favour along the ages, such as faithful/free; close to the letter/close to the spirit, etc. If I were to make any claims regarding something as arguable as "theoretical affiliations" I would say that I am more in tune with source text-oriented approaches. Any such claim needs qualification and commentary, which are provided along the discussion of the confrontation with the literary text.

Central to my reasoning is the realization that a single utterance embodies a range of meanings and connotations derived from the author's experience of its referent. In the novel at hand, there are two layers of translation: the issues inherent to English/Portuguese structures *and* the specific Indian references in the text. In both cases, the translator must determine which meanings are relevant to target readers and in doing so has to choose from among a range of possible translations. Ultimately, however logical, sensible, and insightful the decisions made, it is impossible to produce a translated text that accounts for each and

every feature that makes the source text unique. A translation somehow releases potential new meanings through features that relate only to the target language and culture.

Narayan and his contemporaries played and continue to play a key role in building up the canon of post-colonial literatures. An early exponent of this developing canon, Narayan was a pioneer in experimentally blending Eastern materials and Western techniques, what was to become common practice in the recent decades. In his novels, Narayan mingles two different literary traditions, the English comic novel form and classical Hindu oral patterns of storytelling. The mixture of these diverse forms, performed in his characteristic ironic style, not only made Narayan widely read by non Indian English speakers, but it also made the Indian literary tradition more accessible to a public with growing interest in literature from former colonies.

The revival of the traditions of oral literature and storytelling is a characteristic feature of the writers of independent India who, after 1947, either with or without a political agenda, tend to stay away from the hegemony of the literary discourse inherited from the colonizers, and to revitalize their oral and classical literary traditions. Narayan was the first to consistently resort to these traditions and use them in a novel.

An important convention in the structure of the western novel, the manipulation of the narrator, is also present in Hindi oral storytelling traditions. In many mythological stories different narrators tell the same stories, over and over again as a means to educate their audiences. Sanskrit storytelling and theatre often employ the narrator as a device to call the attention to the threads of the story. In traditional Hindu theater the actors perform a play within a play, address their audience and call their attention to the structure of the performance. This practice is similar to the narrative that calls the reader's attention to textuality of the novel, as it happens in *The Guide*. The ancient storyteller invites the public to a direct dialogue to take them into confidence. As we shall see in this section, Narayan employs the same technique in different stages of *The Guide*. Just like in the traditional tales, the storyteller addresses the listeners, or in this case, the readers, posing them straight questions and seeking their response at various points of the narration.

The Guide, as well as other novels written by Narayan, may be said to bear strong influence from these traditional stories, not only as content goes, but also in the way the plot is told. The constant intervention of the narrator keeps alive the personal ingredient of oral storytelling, and balances the more impersonal narrative of realistic western novels. Resorting to the oral tradition, Narayan reinvigorates it to suit his new goals of reaching both domestic and international readers. The post-colonial self-reflexive novel which Narayan pioneers, maintains much of the flavour of traditional narrative practices, and at the same time as it employs the western tradition of the realistic novel form.

In the following excerpt, right at the beginning of the novel, the sentence in brackets marks the first of a series a series of shifts from third to first person narrator. It is also the first indication of the organizing presence of an authorial voice, supposedly overlapping with the author's voice; or at any rate, the story teller is the one who here takes this decision of giving Raju the autobiographical point of view.

Meus problemas não teriam começado (disse Raju mais tarde, ao narrar a história de sua vida para esse homem chamado Velan) se não fosse por Rosie. (p.4, between brackets in the source text)

In this next example, the narrator addresses the reader through his immediate audience, Velan, as is bound to happen elsewhere. Let us observe the underlined phrases:

Ao ouvir seu nome, não imagine que vestisse minissaia ou cabelo curto. Sua aparência combinava com a dançarina ortodoxa que era. (p. 4)

In fact, the narrator addresses the reader repeatedly, in every stage of the plot. In some cases these utterances also work as a mild satire on the context of the situation at hand.

Você talvez pergunte por que ou quando virei guia. (p.5)

Como você deve ter adivinhado, toda essa expansão dos negócios de nossa família me ajudou a atingir um fim desejável—largar a escola sem chamar a atenção. (p.31)

Não se engane com minha atual demonstração de humildade; na época não havia limite para minha autocongratulação. (p.143)

Here the narrator seeks Velan's (and our) approval. The reader is constantly being reminded of the narrator's presence:

É o destino. *Não ria* de minhas associações com a ferrovia. A ferrovia entrou no meu sangue muito cedo na vida.

Often the narrator addresses the reader in a very familiar way, as if he or she could actually be at the station. This strategy adds thickness of reality to the fictional Malgudi.

Se você me visse me afastando na direção da barreira enquanto a locomotiva ainda estivesse deslizando pelos trilhos até a plataforma poderia estar certo que não havia nenhum cliente para mim no trem. (p.45)

Sometimes this voice establishes an imaginary dialogue, anticipating the reader's thoughts:

Você pode muito bem se perguntar como eu encarava isso tudo. (p. 47)

Here is another instance of the narrator establishing a dialogue with the reader and anticipating his or her expectations, seeking the reader's approval in this key passage. From the outset, the narrator coaxes the reader into seeing Rosie as a woman capable of arising unexpected emotions from Raju, who does not see himself as a poetic person.

Não que fosse muito glamorosa, *se é isso que você imagina*, mas tinha um porte, delicado e esguio, muito bem proporcionado, olhos brilhantes, pele não branca, mas com uma luminosidade que a tornava apenas parcialmente visível—*como se você a visse* através de uma película de suco de coco maduro. Perdoe-me se meu tom for poético demais para seu gosto. (p.49)

In this next example, the narrator also pokes at the scholar type:

Se o cliente fosse do tipo acadêmico, tinha o cuidado de evitar qualquer menção a fatos e dados e me limitava a descrições genéricas, deixando que o próprio sujeito falasse. *Pode estar certo* que ele não perdia a oportunidade. (p.43)

Finally, it is also worth noticing the inclusion of the reader through the use of pronouns. In this case, the "our" is not directed at Raju's primary audience Velan, who does not live in Malgudi. In this case the narrator is addressing the author's imagined readership, people who have read his previous novels and can identify with Malgudi, or at least be so familiar with it as to consider it their adopted town. Graham Greene may fit in this category,

with his statement “Narayan [...] has offered me a second home. Without him I could never have known what it is like to be Indian [...] No one could find a second home in Kipling's India or Forster's India.”⁸ (1981, p. 26)

Se tivesse me avisado que ia encontrar uma criatura tão elegante na *nostra* estação talvez tivesse me vestido de forma apropriada. (p.49)

Here and everywhere in the text we find the possessive pronoun “our” “our station”, “our train”, “our town”, to include the reader in Malgudi, to get the reader's complicity.

It is useful to consider some aspects of the textual level. Let us start with a quotation right at the beginning of the first chapter:

Homens e veículos, porcos e meninos—o panorama da vida me fascinava. (p.8)

“Men and vehicles, hogs and boys—the panorama of life enchanted me.” This statement is the key to the effect of the novel; regardless of the kind of happy or disastrous events, the flow of life itself is a source of joy, a notion in keeping with Hindu concepts. After flipping the last page, this is the feeling that lingers on; the variety, the eternal on goings of human actions. Besides this notion, which is to me the interpretative backbone of the novel, there are other important ideas. From now on, these other ideas are pinpointed in the text.

This is the first instance of many allusions to the idea of inexorability of fate. This notion is at the core of Hinduism, and arguably at the core of Raju's narration.

Era um guia pela mesma razão pela qual outros são sinalizadores, carregadores, ou guardas. É o destino. (p. 5)

There are many others. This is one of the most explicit instance of textual evidence highlighting the inexorability of fate.

“Sim, senhor,” disse Velan. Levou os dedos à testa e disse, “O que quer que esteja escrito aqui vai acontecer. Como poderíamos evitar?” (p.14)

Less obvious than references to fate though are certain nuances of the narrator standing towards the peasant's worldview and Raju's personality outlook.

Vacas pastando à distância davam uma sensação de quietude sublime. Deu-se conta que não tinha alternativa: tinha que assumir o papel que Velan imaginara para ele. (p.24)

With such an unassuming sentence, without any explanation or commentary on why Raju could not go back to his hometown or just try loitering in any other of the thousands of similar villages, temples or river bank, the narrator assumes that there is really no alternative. It is as if this notion was a given, not worth further ado. Such details in the narrative technique, alongside the way the narrator mildly smiles at the apparent incoherent dialogues between the villagers, are at the core of Narayan's deceptively straight forward style. This art of understatement has been highlighted in criticism.

⁸ This line has become emblematic of Greene's role in “advertising Narayan”. It is quoted in 9 out of 10 prefaces of Narayan's novels and in every other academic article. Also in GREENE, Graham. *Discovering Narayan*, *The New Republic*. April, 4, 1981.

Also regarding the main character:

Não esperava por isso, então disse, “Não podemos discutir isso amanhã? Agora estou com muito sono.”

Ela estava a fim de brigar. Disse, “Pode me dizer em uma palavra porque fez isso e dormir imediatamente.” (p.157,158)

Soon later:

Ela sentou reclinada no travesseiro com um periódico na mão, aparentemente lendo, mas na verdade se preparando para a briga. Fingiu ler por alguns momentos e perguntou de repente, “Por que queria esconder o livro de mim?” (p. 158,159)

The reader is constantly reminded of one of the main traits of Raju’s personality, the constant putting off of anything that is unpleasant, in this case by pretending to be sleepy. Throughout the phases of the narrative, this feature of Raju remains unaltered; he methodically avoids facing problems in the hope they go away on their own. Here we feel, at the same time, the comedy of the situation. This scene of a couple in bed, the woman insisting on talking and the man trying to dodge an annoying confrontation could be in any contemporary sitcom script. In fact, the woman willing to “discuss the relationship” while the man tries to dodge it is a stock situation in sitcom comedy commonly found on TV from the 1950s on. Interestingly, Narayan wrote *The Guide* during his visit to the U.S. on exchange program for writers, and one is entitled to wonder if this passage has been inspired by a TV show. Whatever the source of inspiration, this scene exemplifies the comic undertone of the novel. One of the talents of Narayan lies in this skilled wording, always adding a humorous layer or sometimes a subtle philosophical irony at the same time as he reinforces the character’s main psychological issues.

All along the narrative we come across hints of how the plot will unfold.

Desde o instante que esse homem viera sentar diante dele, fitando seu rosto, experimentava uma sensação de importância. Sentia-se como um ator de quem se espera uma fala adequada. (p.9)

This sentence foreshadows the core of Raju’s predicament. The whole plot stems from his urge to say what is expected of him. Another instance, early in the first chapter, is:

“São produtos da nossa terra e temos orgulho em oferecê-los ao senhor.”
Raju não precisou perguntar mais nada. Aos poucos passou a se enxergar como líder nessas ocasiões. Já havia começado a achar que a adulação a sua pessoa era inevitável. (p.11)

This sentence foreshadows the plot at the same time as it hints at the idea of inescapable fate which is to be found everywhere in the text. Next example shows again how the idea of fate is embedded in the same passages that contain a foreshadowing of the plot. The concept of fate, after all, is that one’s actions are already a given, so that peeking into the future, be it of the narrative of a novel or of one’s life, comes down to the same movement.

Raju ficou preocupado. “Tenho que representar o papel que esperam de mim; *não tenho saída*.” Quebrou a cabeça secretamente, tentando achar um jeito de começar. Poderia falar sobre atrações as turísticas de Malgudi, ou deveria dar lições

de moral? Tipo, era uma vez havia um tal e tal, tão bom ou tão ruim que quando veio a fazer isso ou aquilo sentiu-se tão desesperadamente só que começou a rezar, e assim por diante? Fiquei entediado. O único assunto sobre o qual podia falar com alguma autoridade agora parecia ser a vida na cadeia e suas vantagens, especialmente para alguém confundido com um santo. Eles esperavam respeitosamente por sua inspiração. “Ah, idiotas,” teve vontade de gritar. “Por que não me deixam em paz? Se me trazem comida, deixem lá e não me incomodem, obrigado.” (italics mine, p. 37, 38)

This passage places side by side the idea of a pre-programmed fate: “não tenho saída” (“There is no escape” in the source text) in the lightest of moods with which Raju handles the situation, and the mocking of the typical religious inspirational tale that bores the fake guru. He “felt bored.” It seems that all the unfolding steps of his journey that constitutes the plot of the novel derive from this “boredom”. The chain of ideas implied build on this surrealistic base indeed: since he feels bored, he is trapped, if he is trapped, his fate is sealed.

In a different key, but always with a comic effect, some passages subtly refer to western attitudes, such as this:

“Veja, essa entrada só pode ter sido uma improvisação posterior; a caverna em si, eu sei, deve pertencer ao século I a. C. Veja só, aquele tipo de pórtico alto e vestibulo com alto-relevo popularizou-se em século VII ou VII, quando os soberanos do sul da Índia passaram a apreciar...” Não parava de falar. Coisas velhas e decadentes pareciam soltar sua língua e incendiar sua imaginação, em vez de coisas vivas que se moviam e balançavam as pernas. Tinha pouco a fazer como guia; ele sabia muito mais sobre tudo! (p.62)

Marco is here depicted as a caricature of western scholar, blind to the local culture and sensitivity. Another instance is more subtle:

O professor sugeriu, “Não me entenda mal, mas poderia conversar com esses garotos sempre que puder?” Isso deu a Raju a chance de transmitir aos garotos suas opiniões sobre a vida e eternidade. Falou a eles sobre santidade, limpeza, abordou Ramayana 60, os personagens dos épicos; palestrou sobre todo tipo de coisa. (p. 34)

The source text reads: “He spoke to them on godliness, cleanliness, spoke on Ramayana, the character of the epics; he addressed them on all kinds of things.” This sentence is a clear satire on to the now infamous Victorian saying “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” This saying was first recorded in the writings of Francis Bacon; his “Advancement of Learning” of 1605 one reads: “Cleanness of body was ever deemed to proceed from a due reverence to God.” In 1791 John Wesley in one of his sermons wrote that “Slovenliness is no part of religion. Cleanliness is indeed next to Godliness.”⁹ It is remarkable that this saying shows in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, in the mouth of Nelly Dean, the Earnshaw's housekeeper, in one of the several pieces of advice handed out by this embodiment of Victorian morals. Narayan learned to read and write English mostly from an immersion in English novels from childhood throughout his life; he was an eager reader of the Brontës. It is not surprising that a saying from those early readings springs up in his mature novels. The English speaking readers of Narayan would not have missed the irony of the juxtaposition of quintessential Victorian and Hindi wisdom, or Brontës and Ramayana. This irony is here

⁹ Details about the proverb from *Morris Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins* by William and Mary Morris (New York: HarperCollins, 1988) and also in the *Random House Dictionary of Popular Proverbs and Sayings* (New York: Random House, 1996) by Gregory Y. Titelman.

unfortunately lost in the translation, as there is no proverb that links the words “santidade” e “limpeza” in Portuguese.

The following examples highlight the author’s typical use of parallelism:

Mais tarde na vida, descobri que todo mundo que via um lugar interessante sempre lamentava que não tinha ido com a esposa ou filha, e falava como se tivesse roubado a alguém uma coisa boa da vida. *Mais tarde*, quando já havia me tornado um guia turístico maduro, seguidamente induzia meu cliente a um tipo de melancolia ao comentar, “Eis algo que deveria ser apreciado por toda a família,” e o homem jurava que voltaria com toda sua parentela na próxima estação. (p.43)

“Later... Later...” Here the stylistic device helps convey the impression of the regular pace of time.

To close this section, a rather personal commentary prompted by the passage:

Viajantes são uma turma entusiasmada. Não se importam com qualquer inconveniência desde que tenham alguma coisa para ver. Porque razão uma pessoa se dispõe a passar sem comida nem conforto e sacolejar por cento e tantos quilômetros para ver um lugar, nunca consegui entender, mas não era da minha conta perguntar os motivos; assim como não me importava com o que as pessoas comiam ou fumavam na minha loja, só me tocava fornecer os suprimentos e nada mais. Parecia-me tolice viajar centenas de quilômetros para ver a nascente do Sarayu se ele tinha se dado ao trabalho de descer a montanha e chegar até nossa porta. Não tinha nem ouvido falar da nascente até aquele momento; mas o homem que foi até lá disse maravilhas do lugar. (p. 42, 43)

This paragraph about tourism strikes a deep chord with me. Engaged into the mass tourism of our age as we all are one way or another, we can maybe benefit from this idea of enjoying the available, near at hand landscapes rather than spend time, money and patience to catch a glimpse of a supposedly exotic one. Reading Narayan and other writers of Indian background has reinforced my belief that wherever one looks, human behaviors and endeavors are just “more of the same”, dressed as they may be with varying mythological apparatuses and cultural guises.

I used to take pride in being a seasoned reader and by that I meant a reader not easily daunted by dense style, intricate grammar or unorthodox punctuation. That was until I started translating some literary texts and reading every book with the eyes of a translator. With those eyes I noticed beautiful details that had henceforth escaped me, but also a multitude of concerns came along. Alongside the blow of my pride in being an attentive reader, other illusions followed. The integrity of the English language revealed itself to be a chimera in a very practical manner. One thing is to be theoretically aware of the fallacy of a totally coherent language system and be acquainted with different Englishes. To translate one of these different Englishes into another language is an entirely different matter. When translating each author, a new English emerges, and with it a new way of using its age-old words, a new idiolet, so to speak. When the author’s English is not his childhood language, but acquired at first from reading, as is the case of Narayan, these facts are enhanced even more.

On the syntactic level, the eye of the translator is also sharper than the eye of the casual reader. The use of a pattern of verb tenses that just flows delightfully in a novel, for instance, can cause headaches to the reader/translator, who must decide how to replace this pattern when that tense does not work in the target language, having in mind what consequences that replacement might have on other syntactic choices. The crucial substance of any novel is ultimately human reactions to other humans, and all languages have adequate

words to convey these interactions. When it comes to words for artifacts that refer to cultural specificities, a translator note comes in handy to shed light on a cultural specificity. The same cannot be said regarding syntax. No explanatory note will do when the particular syntax of the author is at odds with the standard syntax of the language, as is the case here. The key issue is the structure of the verb tenses, the length and disposition of the sentences, the connections between its parts, the way the pronouns are used. In this aspect, there are not two authors who handle their syntax in the same way.

As a translator I aim at creating a reading experience in the target language as close as possible to that experience in the source text. When the author breaks a grammar rule and there exists the same rule in the target language, one would at first imagine that the translator should also break the same rule in order to achieve the same effect. But that apparently sensible decision does not always achieve the intended plan. Sometimes, breaking the same rule in the target language does not achieve the same effect. A case by case study is made necessary, and no wholesale strategy is possible. This minute treatment of the text is necessary especially when we take into account that here we are not dealing with a standard British English. Even if we acknowledge Indian English as a language on its own, the problem remains, since what may appear as a deviation - translated as such in Portuguese - might be the norm. The complexity is further increased by the fact that Narayan's attitude towards English was ambivalent. In one of the several essays in which he touches on English¹⁰, for instance, he writes:

For me, at any rate, English is an absolutely *swadeshi* language. English, of course, in a remote horoscopic sense, is a native of England, but it enjoys, by virtue of its uncanny ability, citizenship in every country in the world. It has sojourned in India longer than you or I and is entitled to be treated with respect. It is my hope that English will soon be classified as a non-regional Indian language (1988a, p. 26).

It seems clear that Narayan is not advocating a servile reproduction of the English language or the culture it represents. For him, the English language is one of the several Indian languages and dialects, and its use as a literary vehicle in his novels does not jeopardize the other Indian languages. In a characteristic ironic tone, he describes English with an Indian word, "swadeshi", which means natural or native to a country. The word Swadeshi derives from two Sanskrit words. "Swa" means "self" or "own" and "Desh" means country. When Narayan supports the use of English in India, he does not mean a nonexistent "pure" English; rather he underscores the English variety that has been influenced by the Indian context and sprayed with words and structures from the native languages and dialects. In another essay¹¹, the author says:

We have fostered the language for over a century and we are entitled to bring it in line with our own habits of thought and idiom. Americans have adapted the English language to suit their native mood and speech without feeling apologetic, and have achieved directness and unambiguity in expression (1988b, p. 197).

Obviously, his claim that Americans have "achieved directness and unambiguity" is highly arguable, and the same goes for any generalizing claim anyone can make about how a variety of any language is like in one or two adjectives. His main point

¹⁰ NARAYAN, R. K. To a Hindi Enthusiast. In: A Writer's Nightmare: Selected Essays 1958-1988. New Delhi: Penguin, 1988, 26-28.

¹¹ NARAYAN, R. K. A Literary Alchemy. In: A Writer's Nightmare: Selected Essays 1958-1988. New Delhi: Penguin, 1988, 196-198.

though is that a “purist” conception of the English language does not make sense anywhere, and definitely not in the cauldron of exposure to Indian languages and culture.

In Portuguese, the freedom to place the subject before or after the verbs bestows flexibility to the language. The words can change places in a sentence far more easily than in English. But changing the place of words is not something the translator can do lightheartedly – there may be a price to pay, he or she may be meddling with the rhythm the author wanted to impose to this or that character’s speech. Every change has consequences, and the same way the translator is always suspicious of slippery words, he or she must be always alert to word order in the sentence, always aiming at keeping track of the novel’s intended effect on the target reader.

Punctuation is unequivocally related to syntax and rhythm. The final period in English, be it standard or Indian, for example, is somehow invisible to the reader, while in Portuguese it does create a stronger impression of staccato. English, in all varieties I have come across, uses far less commas than Portuguese, and even less semi-colons. But then Narayan sprinkles every paragraph with semi-colons. When an author strays away from the standard use of punctuation, the translator’s anguish doubles, he or she is unanchored in a totally subjective area. In spite of the unending attempts of translation scholars to tame the wilderness of raw data and systematize procedures, in this realm there are no rules, no fixed palette to choose from. When it comes to decisions about use of commas and semi-colons, for instance, every new paragraph, even in the same chapter, presents problems anew and craves for unique solutions. The translator, always suspicious of his or her own judgment, cannot trust previous choices, he or she has again to try to grasp why the author chose this or that particular way to express this or that idea, and then proceed to try to render it in the target language so that the target text produces the closest possible effect.

I highlight that my choices are in keeping with the underlying belief. Between adequacy and acceptability, I aim at achieving balance, and when this is not possible, I do privilege the source text, even at the cost of causing the target reader to be surprised at times.

Let us now direct our attention to concrete examples from the novel. Narayan’s text is riddled with sentences starting with *but*. The usual pattern is a short sentence or fragment of sentence interrupted by a period, followed by another short sentence or fragment starting with *but*. Often this first *but* is echoed in a second time in the next lines. In the passage below, the text in Portuguese follows the same pattern, including the repetition of the connector *and*:

Retomei meus afazeres normais com todo o empenho. *Mas* tudo parecia tão irreal. Dispensei o garoto da loja, ficava sentado lá e servia os fregueses e recebia o dinheiro, *mas* sempre com a impressão que era uma ocupação tola. (italics mine, p.107)

With all seriousness I returned to my normal avocation. *But* everything looked so unreal. I relieved the boy at the shop, sat there and handed out things and received cash, *but* always with a feeling that it was a silly occupation. (italics mine, p.107)

Let us look at a passage right on the first page of the novel:

Minha filha mora aqui perto. Eu tinha ido fazer uma visita; agora estou indo para casa. (p.1)

The source text reads: “I had gone to visit her”. This phrase - “visit her” - imposes a difficult choice: the standard written language “visitá-la” or the colloquial “visitar ela”. The facts that the character, Velan, is an illiterate peasant, therefore very unlikely to use the correct form, and that this is a dialogue, weigh in for the use of “visitar ela”. Moreover, the form “visitá-la” sounds too awkward in an oral informal dialogue in Portuguese, even if the speaker were an educated one. My choice “fazer uma visita” dodges the quandary for the moment, as it is informal enough not to interrupt the normal flow of the talk in the target language and it is also in keeping with the author’s decision to use standard English throughout the novel, regardless of the social standing of the speaker or the likelihood of their use of formal registers of the language.

Let us now focus on another issue:

“O almoço que trouxe ontem foi comido.” (p. 23)

The source text reads: “The food I brought yesterday has been eaten.” This short simple statement presents the translator with an interesting quandary. There are two issues that influence each other, one is the lexical item “food” and the other is the passive construction “has been eaten.” For the purposes of the commentary, let us consider the alternatives:

- a) “A comida que trouxe ontem foi comida.”
- b) “A comida que trouxe ontem não está mais lá.”
- c) “A refeição que trouxe ontem foi comida.”
- d) “O almoço que trouxe ontem foi comido.”

Item a) is obviously not a choice, as turns the sentence into an unintended pun. Item b) sounds alright because it avoids the passive construction, always less natural in Portuguese than it is in English. The problem is that in doing away with the undesirable passive construction, the statement now implies that the speaker may suspect that Raju might have taken the food away with him, and this idea is absent in the source text. This choice would be a translator intromission in the delicately nuanced dialogue, which derives its comic effect and significance to the future unfolding of the plot precisely from the allusions to eating, and eating in the temple. The word “refeição” is not necessarily a formal word, but still, less likely to be heard in the mouth of the villager. Although the use of the word “almoço” entails a semantic reduction, as it involves the replacement of the generic “food” to one specific meal, this alteration is preferable to the one in item b) because it is localized at the statement level and does not have consequences in the foreshadowing function of the passage.

This other passage is an instance of pronoun preceding the verb, in keeping with the tone of the text in this particular passage of the narrative. When Raju speaks, in the first person part of the narrative, I left the pronoun before the verb, a typical collocation of spoken or informal writing in Portuguese. When the narrative is in the third person, on the other hand, I used the more formal usage - the pronoun after the verb.

A polícia cercou a plataforma e não deixou a multidão entrar. Me senti traído.
(p. 27)

This next passage contains a typical example of the repetition of the connector “and”, to be found everywhere in the novel. This constitutes a feature of the text, and is kept in Portuguese whenever possible:

Era uma árvore velha e frondosa, com muitas folhas, no meio das quais macacos **e** passarinhos viviam, se acasalavam **e** tagarelavam sem parar, alimentando-se das folhas **e** frutas. Porcas **e** seus porquinhos vinham de não sei onde **e** farejavam o chão repleto de folhas caídas, **e** eu brincava lá o dia inteiro. (p. 89)

It was an ancient, spreading tree, dense with leaves, amidst which monkeys *and* birds lived, bred, *and* chattered incessantly, feeding on the tender leaves *and* fruits. Pigs *and* piglets came from somewhere *and* nosed about the ground thick with fallen leaves, *and* I played there all day. (italics mine, p. 89)

The way a character behaves is also made evident through the use of lexical repetition:

Minha mãe mostrou indiferença. “Para que esse incômodo extra em casa, cavalo *e* ração para cavalo *e* tudo mais, quando uma parelha de búfalos já dá trabalho que chega?” (p. 28)

Repetition echoes the woman’s nagging, just like in the source text: “Why should you have all this additional bother in this household, horse *and* horse gram *and* all that, while the buffalo pair is a sufficient bother?”

Let us now turn our attention to the translation of lexical items. The items under discussion are underlined in the excerpts. This first example touches upon a commonplace word, but it is the attention to this sort of deceptively simple or easy words that makes or breaks the tone of a text, and should not be a random choice. A careful translation cannot afford to overlook details; all words are worth a second thought, and not only the ones that pose a more evident challenge.

“Não se deve visitar um genro com muita frequência,” explicou o *morador do povoado*. (p.2)

The word “villager” in the source text can be translated as “morador do povoado”, “morador do vilarejo”, “habitante do povoado”, “habitante do vilarejo”. The word “vilarejo”, carries with it a derogatory undertone, absent in the narrator’s attitude. For the same reason, the word “vilão” was discarded. Hence the use of the more neutral “povoado”. I also opted for “morador” instead of the slightly more formal “habitante” in order to stay close to the familiar tone of the text. The word “vilão” is hardly ever used in its original meaning and has not been considered. The choice of “aldeão” would have the advantage of avoiding the replacement of one word for three, but it was also discarded due to its possible associations with medieval fairy tales, which I, at least, cannot fail to make when I read this word.

Let us now look at a different kind of lexical choice:

Logo ao primeiro sinaldo trem eu já detectava o cheiro de um cliente. Possuía um tipo de instinto de *adivinhador de água*. (p.45)

The phrase “adivinhador de água”, (“water-diviner” in the source text), is the title of a book by Eduardo Escorel, (Cosac e Naify, 2008) one of the most celebrated film directors linked to “cinema novo”. The title takes its cue from a man who combed the arid lands of the Brazilian northeast “guessing” which places were worth digging in search of water. It was my option instead of “perfurador de poço artesiano”. Using this last phrase would have meant to add an explanation that was absent in the source text; to clarify things for the reader; to domesticate the text. My general guideline in the translation of the novel

follows the opposite direction. “Adivinhador de água” keeps the text closer to the source text, which is my objective.

The following example brings to casual the way with which Narayan uses vocabulary. Let us consider the passage and its translation:

Se alguém quisesse ver uma *cobra-real* expandir seu enorme capuz, arranjava um sujeito que oferecia o show.

Teve uma garota que veio lá de Madras e tão logo pôs os pés em Malgudi me perguntou, “Dá para me mostrar uma *naja*—tem que ser uma *cobra-real*—que dance ao som de uma flauta?”

“Por quê?” perguntei.

“Gostaria de ver, só isso,” disse ela.

O marido disse, “Temos outras coisas para fazer, Rosie. Isso pode esperar.”

“Não estou pedindo que esse cavalheiro arranje uma imediatamente. Não estou exigindo. Estou só perguntando, só isso.”

“Se está interessada, faça seus próprios planos. Não conte comigo para ir com você. Não suporto *cobras*—seus interesses são mórbidos.” (p. 48, 49)

If someone wanted to see a *king cobra* spread out its immense hood, I knew the man who could provide the show.

There was a girl who had come all the way from Madras and who asked the moment she set foot in Malgudi, “Can you show me a *cobra*—a *king cobra* it must be—which can dance to the music of a flute?

“Why?” I asked.

“I’d like to see one. That’s all,” she said.

Her husband said, “We have other things to think of, Rosie. This can wait.”

“I’m not asking this gentleman to produce it at once. I am not demanding it. I’m just mentioning it, that’s all.”

“If it interests you, you can make your own arrangements. Don’t expect me to go with you. I can’t stand the sight of a *snake*—your interests are morbid.” (p. 48, 49)

This is a key moment in the narrative. Rosie’s first appearance in the novel is from the outset marked by the dancing cobra and its array of male sexuality symbology, which foreshadows her relationship with Raju and Marco. This is the first of the several occasions in which the author uses the words “snake”, “serpent”, “king cobra” and “cobra” interchangeably to refer to the same animal. At first let us consider the following set of pairs: [the English word *cobra* = Portuguese *naja*; English *king cobra* = Portuguese *cobra-real*; English *snake* = Portuguese *cobra*.] These sets of equivalence that immediately spring to mind gives us pause for thought. One of the most commonplace “false cognates” present in every language student’s list is the English word “cobra”, as normally it translates as “naja”, rather than the similar looking Portuguese “cobra”. For the Portuguese unspecific “cobra”, on the other hand, the normal English equivalent, in most contexts, is “snake”. Having that in mind, my first impulse was to keep this pattern, and use the Portuguese “cobra” when the source text read “snake”, and the Portuguese “naja” when the source text read “cobra”; and also to keep the rather biblical, or at least more formal, “serpent” as “serpente”, and “king cobra” as “cobra-rei”.

After reading and rereading the novel uncountable times, however, it became clear that keeping the apparently common sense criteria described above did not suit the needs of this particular text. To begin with, according to a variety of zoological and scientific sources, there are at least three popular names in Portuguese for “king cobra” (*Ophiophagus hannah*): “cobra-rainha”, “cobra-rei” e “cobra-real”. King cobras are just one of the species of cobra. I chose to use “cobra-rei” not because of the parallelism “king—rei”, but due to its overwhelming prevalence in internet stats: 133.000 entries against 87.000 for “cobra-real” and

mere 88 for “cobra-rainha”. But not all cobras are king-cobras and can be trained to react to music.

There are 2.300 species of serpents (ophidia) , a suborder of the reptiles. As for “naja”, the second out of 10 entries is defined by Houaiss as “nome com que, inespecificamente, se designam as *cobras*, venenosas ou de aspecto ameaçador ou gigantesco” [italics mine]. Internet stats for the phrases attest to that collocation, both in English and in Portuguese. As an illustration, here follows a partial result of the research. The numbers speak for themselves: “encantador de serpente” = 637.000; “encantador de cobra” = 43; “encantador de naja” = 0; “mulher serpente” = 53.600; “mulher cobra” = 32.000; “mulher naja” = 5 2; “dança da serpente” = 3.900; “dança da cobra” = 171.000; “dança da naja” = 32.

To make a long story short, the rendering of the above mentioned phrases in the following chapters was made in keeping with the tone of the source text, which favours common usage. The Brazilian reader, as much as the English speaking one, will not miss the mythological connection between serpents (and all its variants) and the whole array of symbology enticed by the reptile, ranging from danger and risk to sexuality to the untapping of divine powers.

Given the importance of this creature to the unleashing the development of the plot as well as its connections to both Rosie and Hindu gods, this first instance of “cobra-rei” has a note in the target language. This note reads as follows:

A cobra-rei sempre foi importante na mitologia do Extremo Oriente. Tem sido usada como modelo em pequenas estátuas, joalheria e decoração. Esse é um gênero próximo das najas-indianas, porém maior, sendo conhecida também como cobra-rainha. É considerada a maior serpente peçonhenta do mundo, podendo chegar a 5 metros. Consegue erguer um terço do seu corpo e andar com a cabeça a 1,8 metros de altura. Tem um comportamento agressivo, no qual expande o capelo (capuz) injetando em suas vítimas cerca de 3 ml de veneno, o suficiente para matar um elefante ou 14 adultos. Encontrada em todo o sul asiático, é considerada a mais inteligente entre as serpentes e vive até 20 anos. Certos cultos hinduístas a veem como encarnação do deus Shiva.

Let us now look at another type of choice:

Gaffur foi embora, resmungando. Logo em seguida ouvi a buzina—igual aos motoristas de ônibus enfurecidos quando seus passageiros param em uma *lanchonete* de beira da estrada. (p.102)

The source text reads “teashop”. The phrase “casa de chá” connotes a sophisticated place in our culture. In British usage, the place is rather a cafeteria, small restaurant serving light meals, not necessarily a nice or posh one. The same is true in India. In the 2008 Man Booker prize winner novel *White Tiger*¹², written by the Madras born Aravind Adiga, Maria Helena Rouanet translates it as “casa de chá”. The writings of Adiga, Narayan, as well as other novelists of Indian background, bear out the fact that in the north of India, the poor are in the habit of drinking tea on a daily basis, while in the south coffee is the staple beverage among the poorer castes.

The smallest of the words does not mean the smallest of pauses for thought, as the next two quotes show:

É uma noite bonita,” falei, para puxar assunto. Ela disse, lacônica “É.”
(p.114)

¹² ADIGA, Aravind. *O Tigre Branco*. Translated by Maria Helena Rouanet. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 2008. Also, ADIGA, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. London: Atlantic Books, 2008.

The source text reads: “She briefly said ‘Yes.’” The use of “Sim” in Portuguese is much more restricted and gives the text an awkward formal flavour. This is one of those cases in which I prefer to make this small change. It seems to me that there is nothing more laconic in dialogue in Portuguese than “É. period.”

Let us now see another example of a near-but-not-quite equivalent which is recurrent in the novel:

As crianças ficaram encantadas com a aula de Raju (até o mestre ficou boquiaberto, ouvindo extasiado). (p.36)

The author uses the words “schoolmaster” and “teacher” interchangeably, without any visible criteria, but the word “teacher” prevails. Narayan seems to reserve the word “master” for sentences where there is a possibility of irony or understatement. In this case, I have kept the distinction by using the word “mestre” instead of “professor” which was formerly employed. The term “mestre-escola” has been ruled out for its old fashioned ring.

There is only one instance of onomatopoeias. The source text form “chug-chug” was kept intact.

Quando o chug-chug do trem cessou, tentei dormir novamente, tendo sido perturbado por sua chegada barulhenta. (p.108)

The closing of this section is also the closing of the novel. The last paragraph reads:

Velan inclinou-se para o Swami e disse, “Os médicos dizem—”

Em resposta, Raju pediu que o homem chegasse mais perto e sussurrou, “Me ajuda a levantar,” e ergueu-se apoiado em seu braço. Ficou em pé. Teve que ser sustentado de cada lado, por Velan e um outro. No mais profundo silêncio, a multidão o seguiu. Todos caminhavam em um ritmo solene, silencioso. O céu oriental estava vermelho. Muitos no acampamento ainda dormiam. Raju não conseguia caminhar, mas insistiu em se arrastar assim mesmo. Arquejava com o esforço. Desceu os degraus do rio, parando para tomar fôlego a cada passo, e finalmente chegou a sua poça d’água. Entrou, fechou os olhos, e se voltou para as montanhas, os lábios murmurando a oração. Velan e o outro o seguravam pelos braços. O sol da manhã havia nascido a essa altura; um vasto facho de luz iluminava o ambiente. Estava difícil manter Raju em pé, ele tendia a cair. Seguravam-no como se fosse um bebê. Raju abriu os olhos, olhou em volta, e disse, “Velan, está chovendo nas montanhas. Sinto a chuva surgindo embaixo dos meus pés, subindo pelas minhas pernas—” Seu corpo cedeu. (p.196)

The last sentence of the novel is a key to its openendedness and ultimate interpretation of the plot. The source reads: “‘I can feel it coming up under my feet, up my legs—’ He sagged down.” In fact, the whole interpretation of the novel comes down to this very last three-worded sentence which in Portuguese would become a single-worded sentence if the choice were “Desabou”. The choice here was to keep the form and render it also in a three worded sentence: “Seu corpo cedeu”. The very last word concentrates crucial meaning. It is a matter of life and death for Raju, a matter of deciding between opposite worldviews for the reader and *the* matter of the toughest of choices for the translator. The very last one in a string of taxing decisions. Needless to say, it is an ambiguous word. Its ambiguity must not be resolved in the translation at the cost of impairing the reader’s freedom to make of Raju’s destiny whatever we want. The challenge lies in the verb “to sag”. It is in the semantic field of the loss of stability, going downwards, becoming weaker, general loss of firmness. Most collocations in the body context have to do with aging and methods to prevent body parts from “sinking” or hanging down. It could be rendered in a variety of ways, from “ceder” and

“sucumbir” to “cair”, “descer”. Other words spring to mind: “afundar”, “perder as forças”, “desfalecer”. Each of them adds a different array of associations and opens or closes a palette of interpreting possibilities. But then, the core of a translator’s is made of tough choices. Raju sagged, but the translator cannot.