

A _____ STUDY ON TRANSLATION

- a. () *Short*
- b. () *Brief*
- c. () *Concise*

— *IT'S 'JUST' A MATTER OF COLLOCATION.*

Murilo Matos Mendonça
UFSC

1. Introduction

Translation is as old an activity as it is inescapable for interaction at higher levels between different peoples to take place. Human beings must have been engaged in the activity of translating since shortly after languages 'appeared' in the world. Needless to dwell upon the importance of translation today if one thinks of the fast-paced rhythm in which information is exchanged and spread across the world, both on account of and for the sake of the ever amazing technological developments of humankind.

However, in academic terms, only recently has translation been acknowledged as a discipline in its own right. Educational institutions worldwide have progressively felt the need for taking translation studies more seriously. As a result of this need, translation starts to be increasingly found as part of the syllabuses of such institutions. Since the notion of translation as a science is something that can be regarded as relatively new, one can easily notice that this young discipline draws on the theories and findings of other related disciplines in order to form the grounds upon which it will later develop its own methods, procedures and theories as well.

The question of which disciplines would better contribute to this process is a controversial one. As a linguistics student, I cannot but

stress my perception that modern linguistics has much to offer to the emerging discipline of translation studies. Nearly all aspects of social life — and this is meant to include interaction between distinct speech communities — can be considered as relevant to translation, in that they involve to a greater or lesser degree the generation and negotiation of meanings within and between different groups of people in different cultural milieux. Modern linguistics, in turn, is a discipline which studies language not only *per se* but also as an instrument for generating and negotiating meanings. Some sub-divisions or sub-disciplines of modern linguistics can provide us with valuable insights as to the nature of and functions being performed by a given language, and thus guide translators through the choices they will have to make — especially if one bears in mind that a great deal of a translator's work consists of making choices.

I am interested in one of the sub-divisions of modern linguistics in particular, namely, pragmatics, upon which I shall base this study. Pragmatics is concerned with studying language in use rather than language as an isolated system. From amongst a wide range of aspects encompassed by pragmatics, I have chosen to analyse the issue of collocation for sheer personal fascination for it as the challenge it might represent for any translator rendering a text in a target language (TL) which is not his/her mother tongue. This is true of the reverse process as well, i.e., to translate from a foreign into one's mother tongue, but frequently not with the same degree of difficulty in what regards collocation.

Firstly, I will be commenting briefly on the issue of translation equivalence above word level — the broader context in which collocation is placed in translation studies — and collocation proper. Secondly, I intend to carry out an analysis of collocational problems spotted in two sample texts translated from Portuguese into English. Finally, some remarks will be made as to other problems identified in the translated texts, but that lie outside the scope of this study.

2. Translation equivalence above word level

Although there are several aspects related to problems of equivalence at word level, I am particularly interested here in equivalence above word level, because in most instances of communication in-

volving words, these do not occur as isolated units of meaning. Rather, they are used strung to other words, forming stretches of language. In spite of their plasticity and versatility, words cannot be combined at random in any language if one's goal is to convey meaning. There certainly are restrictions for stringing words together in a given language, as well as different levels of acceptability and meaningfulness deriving from the choices made when words are grouped to form an utterance.

There are certain sorts of restrictions which allow for no exceptions. Most frequently such restrictions are organised in the form of rules, and the words under these rules are sorted out in classes. This systematisation of language is part of its formal structure, most commonly known as grammar. On the other hand, however, there are restrictions which allow for flexibility to a certain extent. These restrictions are applicable to individual words instead of classes of words and cannot be expressed in terms of rules, though. The parameter then used to 'gauge' the acceptability of combinations of words is recognition of such words as recurrent patterns in the language in question. Hence, under this point of view, lexical arrangements are judged on the basis of their naturalness and/or typicality as well as of the likelihood of certain words occurring together with others (Baker, 1992).

In translation studies two main headings are generally used to classify lexical patterning: *collocation* and *idioms and fixed expressions*. This study focusses exclusively upon collocation.

2.1. Collocation

Collocation, in broad terms, has to do with the tendency certain words have to co-occur, and such lexical patternings as well as their restrictions cannot always be accounted for by meaning. There are no semantically logical reasons grounding the constraints to such lexical combinations seen as unacceptable where neither meaning nor grammar are compromised. The decision to accept or refute a given sequence of words strung together in these cases is arbitrary.

If the way in which some words are grouped were meaning-dependent, we could naturally come up with such an expression as *drive a bicycle*. However, English speakers normally *ride a bicycle*. Ana-

logically, how would we be able to understand that someone *runs a company*? According to Baker (1992), it is also interesting to notice that words considered synonyms or near-synonyms are very likely to have distinct sets of collocates, i.e., words with which they frequently occur, as is the case of *skip* and *jump*, for instance. In English it is possible to *skip a lecture*, but the notion of *jumping a lecture* is hardly conceivable and would render hilarious at best. There are also examples of sets of two words that collocate in all grammatical forms and orders, and others that do not (ibid, 1992). Examples of the former would be *broken seal*, *unbreakable seal*, *breaking the seal*, and so forth. As examples of the latter, we could think of the words *kill* and *time*. It is perfectly fine to say that *someone is killing time*, but on the other hand to say that *time was killed* sounds rather odd.

The examples above would serve to show how arbitrary and meaning-detached the collocational patterns of a language appear to be. Although I have only given examples of the English language, the other languages behave by the same token. When I say meaning detached of a collocation, I am talking about semantic meaning, for the choices made for some combinations can indeed convey meaning above semantic level. For example, what could we tell from the fact that in English women *deliver* babies whereas in Portuguese women frequently 'receive' babies? Despite the possible interpretations that there may be, it is at least curious that in this case two distinct societies look at the same event from completely opposite points of view.

3. Analysis

The object of analysis of this study consists of four short texts aimed at providing tourist information about Florianópolis to foreign visitors. Two of these texts were originally written in Portuguese, the source language (SL), and the two others are their respective translations in English, the target language (TL).

The texts are part of a bigger corpus comprising a whole collection. Nevertheless, they can be treated *isolatedly* because they are self-contained and independent from one another. The two texts selected serve well the purpose of this work, for they are two complete information units rich in examples of miscollocation. It is also worth mentioning that the translation was done from the translator's mother

tongue into a foreign one. This is to a certain extent a relevant remark if we are to remember that seldom will a foreigner achieve the same degree of command of collocation (as well as idioms and fixed expressions) in a given language as a native of that language. For this very reason, both the identification of most of the odd collocations and the proposition of possible alternatives for them were based on the help of a native English speaker, since my mother tongue is Portuguese. Therefore, I will be using we throughout the analysis.

We found the first of a series of strange collocations in the expression *composed a very expressive contingent*. This collocation sounds rather unnatural in English, where one would be more likely to find make up a contingent instead. Although meaning in this case is not impaired, the natural flow of the text is interrupted by an unusual combination of words, thereby distracting the reader's attention. In Portuguese, the expression *compor um contingente* is not only acceptable but also an unmarked collocation, which means that it is a usual combination of words. Another aspect of the English word *compose* in the sense of *make up* is that it has a somewhat limited collocational range as opposed to the Portuguese word *compor* when used in the same sense.

Collocational markedness has to do with how usual (unmarked collocation) or unusual but acceptable within a given context (marked collocation) a combination of words is. Collocational range means the set of collocates a certain word is associated with (Baker, 1992).

The stretch *voltado, notadamente, para a pesca, a caça e a agricultura rudimentares* was translated as *turned to the practice of fishing, hunting and primary agriculture*. English speakers do not say that someone is *turned to the practice of something*, not to mention problems related to grammar (it should be *practices*) and questionable equivalence at word level (*primary*). In English, *someone* simply *practices something*. This seems to be a case of incompatibility between accuracy and naturalness where the latter should have prevailed. Since the translator opted for the former, the result is a translation of little, if any, sense in the TL. Any attempt to offer an alternative translation here would imply the reconstruction of the whole sentence.

A very strange sentence construction with an awkward collocation as well is *to whom it is imputed the nowadays denomination of*

Santa Catarina. The English verb *impute* has its use restricted to quite formal contexts and therefore it sounds rather out of place here, for the overall tone of the text is informal. The original Portuguese text reads *a quem se atribui denominação atual de Ilha de Santa Catarina*. A better alternative would have been the similar English verb *attribute*, which is more neutral and has a much broader collocational range than *impute*. Once again, the easy flow of the text is interrupted by a brusque and inappropriate shift of *register*.

Register and collocation are context-bound. There are some collocations which although untypical of everyday language are common enough within specific contexts. Register-specific collocation constitutes a difficult area on the way to mastery of any foreign language.

The clause *the Portuguese crown has determined the coming of more than 5,000 Azorians* bears a high degree of unnaturalness and results in empty rhetoric as far as English language standards are concerned. *Determined the coming of* could be simply and straightforwardly replaced with *decided to send*, as it fits considerably better within English stylistics. Besides, it would have the same absence of markedness that its counterpart, *a Coroa Portuguesa determinou a vinda de mais de 5.000 açorianos*, does.

The phrase *ancient Center*, standing for *Centro Antigo*, is an example of overlapping between problems of equivalence at word level and above word level. At word level we can detect a problem related to *expressive meaning*, which has to do with the degree of expressiveness, intensity and/or evaluation conveyed through one's word choices. The English adjective *ancient* is normally associated with: a) something belonging to times long past; b) something or someone very old with a jocose connotation. The *Center* referred to here is not as old to be called *ancient*, and the tone of the text is not jocose either. Above word level we have, as a result of non-equivalence at word level, an odd collocation in this specific context. The most suitable alternative would then be *old*. These comments are also valid to the title *Ancient Florianópolis*, where once again the word *ancient* is misused.

The passage *a Coroa Portuguesa preocupada com a defesa do território* is translated as *the Portuguese Crown worried about the territory's defense*. The verb *worry* can collocate with *Portuguese*

Crown without compromising meaning. However, the sentence loses expressiveness if, by contrast, we replace *worried* with *concerned*. Native speakers of English would normally choose to say *concerned about/over* to refer to such things as social problems (*Longman Language Activator*, 1993).

Let us now examine the string *desde a época das suas construções* and the respective translation *since their constructions*. The omission of the word *época* (which could be expressed as *time* in this context) from the English text rendered a strange collocation. In order to give more naturalness to the text we could opt for either translating the word *época* as *time* or using the passive voice as *since they were constructed*. The fact that the strategy used by the translator is possible for the Portuguese language might have interfered with his/her decision. Sometimes translators get so engrossed in the SL text that their view of the TL becomes now and then blurred.

Another instance of accuracy prevailing over naturalness can be seen in the clause *The Azorian architecture keeps the signs of a time*, as opposed to *A arquitetura açoriana guarda as marcas de uma época*. Although one can *keep* abstract things such as *a secret* or *the faith*, the collocational range of the verb *keep* in this sense is not very broad and *keep a sign* lies outside this range. Alternative translations such as *The Azorian architecture is a record of* or *is a good example of* would serve to convey the idea expressed in Portuguese and accuracy at word level would have to be sacrificed.

The passage *a histórica Catedral Metropolitana abriga no seu interior a imagem de* was translated as *it [the cathedral] presents inside it the image of*. In English, the idea of a cathedral presenting something is rather comic because people and not things are associated with the verb *present*, whereas in Portuguese the action of presenting (*apresentar*) can be performed by both people and things, but with different meanings for each. It would be preferable to say *it shows* or *inside you can see* instead.

The phrase *palco de grandes acontecimentos da vida política e social* was translated as *the stage of many political and social happenings*. As regards collocation, the problem here is the literal translation of the Portuguese word *palco* into English as *stage*. Both words have the same *propositional meaning*, i.e., according to Baker (1992), they represent or describe the same thing in the real world of both

cultures (words can have identical propositional meanings in an imaginary world as well). Thus, *palco* and *stage* stand for 'platform or area (usually in a theatre) on which plays are performed to an audience' (*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 1989) in their respective languages, even though *stage* has further meanings. In the Portuguese version, *palco* was used metaphorically and *stage*, in turn, does not reproduce the same metaphor in the TL. Although meaning is not totally compromised, a great deal of liveliness is lost for the TL reader. A better word to convey an approximate image to that intended by the SL text would be *setting*. Additionally, the word *events* would collocate much better with *political and social* than *happening* does.

4. Final Remarks

Although languages are made up of a large number of words, these cannot be combined at will. Despite how semantically meaningful some words may sound when put together, we must always bear in mind that the isolated semantic meanings of words not always — as they very frequently do not — account for the acceptability of their combinations. The compatibility between words is generally arbitrary and culture-bound. That is why it is impossible to learn a language in isolation from the culture it is part of. Language and culture are indissociable. A translator must be constantly aware of the cultural elements of the languages s/he is dealing with.

In the texts we analyse in this study, the translator failed to observe the cultural aspects of the TL and was too engrossed in the SL. The Portuguese language is, in general terms, more rhetorical and has a more elaborate stylistics which cannot be reproduced at word level in English. The translation should have been centred upon meaning above word level, for it normally prevails over meaning at word level as it was previously discussed.

Finally, the translations analysed indicate a rather wanting command of the TL on the part of the translator. They show all sorts of problems other than collocational, with a frequency that would be more than desirable. In general, the translated texts lacked coherence and were often incomprehensible when submitted to English native speakers with little or no knowledge of Portuguese. Accord-

ing to Catford (1965), an SL text is supposed to have an SL meaning. Correspondingly, a TL text should have a TL meaning. From the point of view of our analysis of collocation, the TL text has for the most part failed to fulfill this condition.



REFERENCES

Baker, M. (1992) *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. London: Routledge.

Catford, J. C. (1965) *A Linguistic Theory on Translation: An Essay in Applied Linguistics*. London: Oxford University Press.

DICTIONARIES

Longman Language Activator (1993).

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1989).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Stephanie Heever, who kindly helped me to detect problematic collocations in the TL texts and proposed alternative solutions too.



APPENDIX

TUDO COMEÇOU EM...

Até onde se tem notícia, muito antes de ser descoberta pelo navegador português Gonçalo Coelho em 1503, a ilha já era habitada pelos índios carijós que compunham um contingente bastante expressivo voltado, notadamente, para a pesca, a caça e a agricultura rudimentares.

Batizada com o nome de Ilha dos Patos em face à grande quantidade dessas aves, o século XVI reservou, ainda, a visita de notáveis navegadores portugueses e espanhóis em expedições ao Atlântico Sul, a saber: D. Nuno Manoel e Cristobal de Haro (1514); Juan Díaz de Solís (1516) — descobridor do Rio da Prata — Sebastián Caboto (1526) a quem se atribui a denominação atual de Ilha de Santa Catarina, em provável homenagem a sua esposa Catarina de Medrano.

Por volta de 1675 o bandeirante Francisco Dias Velho funda a povoação de Nossa Senhora do Desterro, elevada aos foros de cidade em 1823. Em homenagem

EVERYTHING HAS BEGUN IN...

Before it was discovered by the Portuguese navigator Gonçalo Coelho in 1503, this island was already inhabited by Carijós Indians who composed a very expressive contingent mainly turned to the practice of fishing, hunting and primary agriculture.

Baptized with the following name Ilha dos Patos (The Island of Ducks) because of the many birds it had, the XVI century had also the visit of famous Portuguese and Spanish navigators who were in expeditions to the South Atlantic to make known: D. Nuno Manoel e Cristobal de Haro (1514); Juan Díaz de Solís (1516) — discoverer of River of Prata — Sebastián Caboto (1526) to whom it is imputed the nowadays denomination of Santa Catarina, probably in honor to his wife Catarina de Medrano.

Around 1675, the Bandeirante (member of expeditions) Francisco Dias Velho founded the village of Our Lady of Desterro, turned to the category of city in

ao Mal. Floriano Peixoto, líder da revolução federalista, a partir de 1894 a cidade passou a se chamar Florianópolis.

Em meados do século XVIII ocorreu um fato marcante na vida social e econômica da ilha. Ameaçada e atacada constantemente pelos espanhóis e especialmente por piratas belgas e holandeses, a Coroa Portuguesa determinou a vinda de mais de 5.000 açorianos com a finalidade de consolidar a posse da ilha e, ao mesmo tempo, defendê-la. Adaptados em seu novo "habitar", os açorianos desde logo se integraram com os nativos passando-lhes cultura, tradição, hábitos e engenhosidades que até hoje perduram em pontos vivos na Ilha de Santa Catarina destacando-se as vilas de Santo Antonio de Lisboa e do Ribeirão da Ilha, autênticas pérolas açorianas preservadas. Também o Centro Antigo oferece amostras em quantidades da arquitetura açoriana, com seu casario e ruelas característicos. Um passeio que não deixa de ser um convite a reviver toda a tradição do admirável povo açoriano.

FLORIANÓPOLIS ANTIGA

Assediada constantemente por corsários belgas e holandeses,

1823. In honor to Marshal Floriano Peixoto, a Federal Revolution leader, from 1884 on the city was then called Florianópolis.

In the middle of the XVIII century a very special fact had happened. Constantly threatened and attacked by Spanish, Belgian and Dutch pirates, the Portuguese Crown has determined the coming of more than 5,000 Azorians in order to consolidate the island's possession and at the same time to defend it. Adapted to the new habitat, the Azorian people integrated themselves very soon with natives by passing to them culture, tradition, habits that can be observed until today in many places in the island of Santa Catarina, such as the villages of Santo Antonio de Lisboa and Ribeirão da Ilha which can be considered authentical preserved Azorian pearls. Also, the ancient Center offers many aspects of Azorian architecture which characteristic group of houses and straight streets. This is a kind of tour that means an invitation to live once again all the tradition from this admirable Azorian people.

ANCIENT FLORIANÓPOLIS

Constantly attacked by Belgian and Dutch pirates and also

além dos navegadores espanhóis que viam na ilha o último porto seguro até o Rio da Prata e por isso, objeto de dominação para garantir a expansão colonizadora, a Coroa Portuguesa, preocupada com a defesa do território mandou edificar uma série de fortes, que hoje representam um acervo histórico dos mais importantes do Brasil.

Constituindo-se em uma das mais belas atrações que Florianópolis oferece aos visitantes, os fortes e as fortalezas que resistiram ao tempo, desde a época das suas construções em 1739, e que podem ser visitados são: Fortaleza de Santa Cruz, na Ilha de Anhatomirim (1739); Fortaleza de São José da Ponta Grossa, entre Daniela e Jurerê (1740); Fortaleza de Santo Antonio, na Ilha de Ratonés Grande (1740); Fortaleza de N. S. Conceição, na Ilha de Araçatuba (1742); Forte Sant'Ana (Atual Museu das Armas) construído em 1761, etc.

É importante destacar a história social e cultural do povo Florianopolitano, viva que está em seus inúmeros museus e igrejas. A arquitetura açoriana guarda as marcas de uma época que pode ser vista no antigo palácio do governo, hoje Museu Cruz e Souza, homenagem ao poeta catarinense expressão maior do

by Spanish navigators who considered the Island the last safe harbour until River of Prata, a denomination object to warrant the colonizer expansion, the Portuguese Crown worried about the territory's defense has built several forts that represent today one of the country's most historical pile.

As they can be considered one of the most beautiful attractions Florianópolis has to offer, these forts have lasted since their constructions in 1739 can be visited such as: Fortress of Santa Cruz in the Anhatomirim Island (1739); Fortress of São José da Ponta Grossa, between Daniela and Jurerê beaches (1740); Fortress of Santo Antonio in the Ratonés Grande Island (1740); Fortress of Our Lady of Conceição in the Araçatuba Island (1742); Sant'Ana Fort (a weapon museum today) (1761), etc.

It is important to observe that the social and cultural history of Florianópolis people is alive in its numberless museums and churches. The Azorian architecture keeps the signs of a time than can be seen in the ancient Government palace, today Cruz e Sousa museum, in honor to the Santa Catarina's poet with greatest symbolist movement expression; the Custom House trans-

movimento simbolista; a Casa da Alfândega, transformada no Museu Histórico de Santa Catarina, a Casa de Vitor Meirelles, pintor que registrou em suas telas pedaços vitais da história brasileira como a Batalha de Guararapes; Museu do Homem de Sambaqui, Museu do Ribeirão da Ilha e o Universitário.

No alto da Praça XV de novembro, região central, a histórica Catedral Metropolitana abriga no seu interior imagem de José e Maria na fuga para o Egito entalhada em madeira e esculpida pelo artista tirolês Demetz. A igreja Nossa Senhora do Rosário, exemplo importante da arquitetura trazida pelos portugueses; Igreja de São Francisco de Assis; Igreja da Nossa Senhora da Conceição; Igreja Nossa Senhora da Lapa; todas centenárias e tantas outras espalhadas pela cidade, marcam a fé e a religiosidade dos que apostaram nesta ilha e que seus descendentes conservam até hoje.

Nessa viagem ao passado, difícil será não visitar o Mercado Público, velho e charmoso prédio construído em 1898 — na época ladeado pelo mar e com vários trapiches de atracação — com seu rico pescado e ponto obrigatório dos intelectuais e artistas da cidade.

formed in the Historial Museum of Santa Catarina, Victor Meirelles House, a painter who registered in his canvas important places of Brazilian history such as the Guararapes Battle; Museum of Sambaqui Man, Ribeirão da Ilha and Universitarian Museum.

Downtown, there's a historical Metropolitan Cathedral placed in the highest part of XV de Novembro Square. It presents inside it the image of Joseph and Mary going to Egypt engraved in wood and carved by the Tyrolese artist Demetz. Our Lady of Rosário Church is an important architecture example brought by Portuguese; São Francisco de Assis Church, Our Lady of Conceição Church, Our Lady of Lapa Church are all centenary ones. There are many others in the city that are also a symbol of faith and of those who bet in this island and that their descendants keep until today.

In this travel through time, it will be difficult not to visit the Public Market, an old and charming building built in 1898 — at that time bordered by the sea and with many docking quaiies — a fishing place and main meeting place of intellectuals and artists.

Também a ponte Hercílio Luz — cartão postal conhecido nacionalmente — uma das maiores pontes pênséis do mundo, inaugurada em 1926, com uma extensão de 821,75 m, tendo um vão pênsil de 339,47 m de extensão e altura de 30,86 m na maré média, sendo que a altura das torres é de 69,76 m a partir dos pilares da fundação. Na época constituiu-se num verdadeiro desafio à tecnologia disponível, tendo em vista ser a única do mundo construída por sistema de suspensão formada por correntes de barras de olhal em aço. Uma loucura! Não longe dali, em direção ao centro, sobre vistoso jardim plantado na Praça XV de Novembro, ergue-se a imponente e centenária figueira palco de grandes acontecimentos da vida política e social da cidade e testemunha de juras de amor e de romances bem sucedidos. Faça a prova se você não acredita!

There is also the Hercílio Luz Bridge, a nationally known post card, one of the world's greatest suspension-bridge, inaugurated in 1926, that is 821.75 long, a hanging bay of 339.47 long and 30.86 m high in the average tide. The height of towers is 69.76 from the foundations pillars. At the time of its construction, it was considered a challenge to the technology existent then as it was the only one in the whole world to be built in a system of suspension formed by chains made of archway bars in steel. Such a crazy thing! Not far from there, downtown, placed at XV de Novembro Square, there's a centenary fig tree. It may be considered the stage of many political and social happenings and also the witness of love's wath and successful romances. Do it by yourself if you do not believe in it.

