How Peripheral Is the Periphery?
Translating Portugal Back and Forth

*Essays in Honour of João Ferreira Duarte*

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PART IV

LOOKING BACK INTO THE PERIPHERY
TRANSLATION STUDIES IN PORTUGAL
AND INTERVIEW
WITH JOÃO FERREIRA DUARTE

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In a volume discussing the position and role assumed by translation in a semi-peripheral system such as Portugal, it seemed relevant to reflect upon the development of Translation Studies as a discipline and include the testimony of one of its most prominent scholars, to whom this volume intends to be a tribute. This final article will thus include an overview of the central moments behind the assertion of the discipline of Translation Studies within the Portuguese academy, followed by the discussion of the institutional space occupied by the discipline. Finally, it includes an interview to Professor João Ferreira Duarte.

The discussion around translation issues has been receiving attention from Portuguese scholars for over three decades. We believe it finds itself at a crossroad where more than asserting itself as a discipline in its own right, it needs to reflect on where it is going. For that to happen it is important to first reflect on the path taken as well as revise the discussion developed by scholars that made it all possible. João Ferreira Duarte is undoubtedly one of the most prominent scholars to which Translation Studies and younger scholars will be forever indebted. The interview here included started as a pleasant conversation in a café and gives us crucial information on how Translation Studies came to being a discipline on its own within Portuguese academia, the reasoning behind certain events and projects as well as the path that it seems to be taking.

1. The Institutional Space of Translation

On October 24th 2011, different Translation scholars met in the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon to discuss “that strange
object named translation”. Gone are the days when translation was not even worth discussing, and that was exactly the starting point for another unsettling lecture by João Ferreira Duarte. Both young and older scholars were united in the expectation that Ferreira Duarte would once again shake everyone’s assumptions by problematizing the very own foundations of the discipline in an already characteristically polemic discourse.

In this lecture, Ferreira Duarte drew attention to an apparent paradox that has underlined Translation Studies overall: how have Translation Studies managed to develop as a successful academic discipline when it has low symbolical capital, that is, when its object of study is traditionally perceived as inferior, derivative, secondary? If this is a pertinent question to be posed regarding Translation Studies in general, it is even more so when considering the development of Translation Studies in Portugal. Given the fact that this strange object has been discussed in Portugal for more than three decades now, this volume intends to ponder on the path taken, and its apparent peripheral condition within a system usually assumed as equally peripheral.

It is possible to identify two very different and autonomous circuits regarding translation in Portugal: one dedicated to the training of professional translators and another focused on translation as a product of which norms, function and context should be studied.

The need for professional translators and specific training was increasingly noticeable in the 1950s and 1960s, most probably due to an increasing number of tourists in Portugal which ended up not only promoting the cultural contact between Portugal and other European countries, but also fostering interest in commercial products and literature from the rest of Europe. In 1962, the Higher Institute of Languages and Administration (ISLA) opens its doors and, even though other institutions opened degrees on translation in the following years, its pioneering role should be acknowledged. Looking at the curricula of these different degrees, their focus on technical and legal translation becomes clear and it is possible to pinpoint a clear separation in training and status between technical translation and theatre and literary translation. While specific and technical training was taught at these institutes (not universities), theatre translation was left in the hands of actors and directors the same way.

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1 Lecture entitled “Esse Estranho objecto chamado tradução” [That Strange Object Named Translation] given by João Ferreira Duarte in the context of ETC... Monthly Talks on Translation Studies (University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies—ULICES) at the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon.
literary translation was assumed by writers or university scholars, most of the times specialized in the author they were translating.

This is in fact how universities first started to have translation under consideration. In the 1970s it is already possible to distinguish academic work being developed on translation in the Germanic and Romance departments as well as Linguistics. The former focused on literary translation and history of translation; the latter, on the linguistic aspects of translation and formal equivalence. The increasing interest in translation by the academic community is met by a parallel increase in the number of translations now possible with the abolition of censorship after the Carnation Revolution in 1974.

It is nevertheless in the 1980s that one can say Translation Studies gives its first steps as an academic discipline in Portugal. In 1983, GUELF—the University Group on French Literature Studies—organizes their second meeting, now entirely dedicated to Translation Studies, and consequently a book publication entitled Problemas de tradução: escrever, traduzindo [Translation Problems: Writing, Translating], including essays of prominent scholars such as Maria Alzira Seixo and João Almeida Flor.2

It is also in the 1980s that the figure of the translator sees rightfully recognized its presence in the dominion of text production and publishing companies, through the inclusion of the translator in the Authorship Rights Law and the creation of the Portuguese Translators Association (APT). Simultaneously, one could also say that it was in the late 1980s that the scholars in Translation Studies (and Translation Studies as a discipline in itself) became visible. In 1986/87 a group of scholars establishes the Portuguese Association for Comparative Studies (APLC) and, in its first international congress in 1989 in Lisbon, an entire section was dedicated to Translation Studies. The fact that scholars such as José Lambert, Lieven D’hulst and Armin Paul Frank were invited to participate denounces a clear development of Portuguese Translation Studies along the same lines as the Cultural Turn proposed by Susan Bassnett, André Lefevere, Even-Zohar, Gideon Toury, among others. This recognition of the discipline in the 1980s seems to be confirmed by the growing number of publications solely dedicated to translation, namely in journals such as Dedalus, and, finally, by the promotion of the first Masters Degree in Literary Translation at the University of Coimbra (within the department of Germanic Studies) in 1982-1983. A publication came out in 1986 entitled Problemas da tradução literária [Problems of Literary Translation] collecting students’ final year essays.

2 See Chapter Two.
If the 1980s were the moment of recognition of translation as an area of study, one can say the 1990s were the moment when it became progressively independent from both Comparative Literature and Linguistics while strengthening its position in higher education institutions. In the context of what could be called the “institutionalization of Translation Studies”, several courses in Translation were made available in different institutions. In 1990, the University of Lisbon opens for the first time a two-year specialization course in Translation [CET: Curso de Especialização em Tradução] with two source languages and covering Translation Theory, Textual Analysis, and Translation History. In 1995, the Institute of Accounting and Administration of Porto (ISCAP) opens a course on specialized translation. Also different research centres start including specific research lines dedicated to Translation Studies. Two good examples are the Centre for Comparative Studies (CEC) at the University of Lisbon and CECC—Research Centre for Communication and Culture (CECC) at the Portuguese Catholic University.


The need for translation and the effort of institutionalization of Translation Studies in Portugal has only been confirmed and reinforced in this first decade of this new century. Now more central than ever before, translation is present in almost all higher education institutions and both teaching and research are diversifying their scope. Besides literary and technical translation, we are now witnessing the development of projects in theatre translation, audiovisual translation and accessibility and translation. There are journals solely dedicated to translation—such as Babilónia: línguas, culturas e tradução (published by the Lusophone University) and Confluências: revista de tradução científica e técnica (an independent and transdisciplinary publication available in open source
although no longer published)—and different research centres have projects on translation. Conferences such as *Translation (Studies). A Crossroad of Disciplines* (November 2002, University of Lisbon) and *EST 2004: Doubts and Directions in Translation Studies* (September 2004, University of Lisbon), not to mention annual colloquia on Translation Studies (Catholic University of Lisbon), have given visibility to Portuguese researchers and placed Portugal in the map of the Translation Studies discipline.

We would like now to take a closer look at the institutional side of translation and what we can learn from that regarding Translation Studies in Portugal.

1.1. Degrees on translation in Portuguese higher education institutions

One cannot but notice a drastic change in the universities’ attitude towards translation, not just in the increase and diversification of translation degrees and areas of specialization, but also in the increase in research programmes and projects. This growing interest has, however, not been paralleled by a complete institutional recognition of Translation Studies as an independent area of study and the fact that there is no translation department in any Portuguese higher education institution is a clear evidence of that. As a direct consequence, we can still find Translation Studies caught in the unfruitful dispute between Literature and Linguistic departments.

The first aspect calling one’s attention regarding the degrees in translation is that the majority of them were open for the first time in the first years of the 21st century and that most of the BA programmes are not solely dedicated to translation, but promote a combination of translation and a myriad of other areas of study instead (e.g. translation and multimedia interpretation).

Regarding post-graduate courses, it is worth noticing that most institutions offering undergraduate programmes also offer post-graduate specialization courses and that these are mainly in Audiovisual Translation, still taken as a more specialized and technical type of translation. At the same time, it is curious to notice that some post-graduate programmes denounce a notion of the translator as communicator (a multi-skilled communicator in fact) and offer combined programmes of Translation and Communication, Translation and Languages or Terminology. Another area worth mentioning, although it has not yet deserved enough attention, is the area of applied technologies and
translation, only offered by the University of Lisbon and the Polytechnic of Porto by 2012.

1.2. Research in Translation Studies

Even though there are no research centres in Portugal entirely devoted to Translation Studies, there are several research centres which have maintained continued research lines in Translation Studies and nurtured a myriad of research projects as well as MA and PhD programmes. It would be impossible to mention all the publications coming out in the last three decades; nevertheless, when looking at the titles of those publications as well as the research projects being developed, five main research areas can be outlined:

1.2.1. Translation history

Traditionally, this line of research has focused on literary translation, but in recent years the scope has widened to include theatre translation, for example. It maintains as its central aim to define the dominant translation norms of each period, the position of translated literature in the history of Portuguese literature, and the dominant viewpoints in Translation Studies in Portugal. A few major projects have been developed in this context, namely Notes for Cartography of Literary Translation History in Portugal (1998-2005, CECC—Catholic University of Lisbon, coord. Teresa Seruya), TradBase: Portuguese Bibliography in Translation Studies (CEC—University of Lisbon, coord. João Ferreira Duarte), Intercultural Literature in Portugal, 1930-2000: A Critical Bibliography (ULICES and CECC, coord. Teresa Seruya, Alexandra Assis Rosa and Maria Lin Moniz), TETRA-Theatre and Translation: Towards a History of Theatre Translation in Portugal, 1800-2009 (CEC—University of Lisbon, coord. Manuela Carvalho).

1.2.2. Text-based analysis

Following Toury’s proposal of a descriptive approach, this research line has assumed a bottom-up methodology as it tries to identify the strategies assumed by translators and the contextual aspects mediating their choices. It starts with the text and moves up to macro-structural constraints of production and reception. This line of research has mostly been developed by individual article publications and doctoral theses. However, two larger projects should be mentioned in this respect: Modern
and Contemporary German-speaking Literature in Portuguese Translation (Research Centre for Germanistic Studies [CIEG]—Catholic University of Lisbon, coord. Maria António Hörster), Modern and Contemporary Portuguese Literature in German Translations: Theory, History and Criticism (CIEG—Catholic University of Lisbon, coord. Karl-Heintz Delille).

1.2.3. Translation as metaphor

In the context of this research line the focus has been on how the concept of translation has been used by other disciplines, namely ethnography, to describe their own work. Two larger projects should be mentioned: Intercultural Translation [Tradução Intercultural] (Centre for Humanistic Studies [CEH]—University of Minho, coord. Ana Gabriela Macedo) and Dislocating Europe: Post Colonial Perspectives in Literary, Anthropological and Historical Studies (CEC—University of Lisbon, coord. Manuela Ribeiro Sanches).

1.2.4. Translation and censorship

The first studies came to light in the context of research in Translation History and later in the context of text-based studies. However, the already considerable number of researchers and publications allows us to consider this as an autonomous research line. It is relevant to mention the project Censorship and Translation in Portugal during the “Estado Novo” regime (1930-1974) (CECC—Catholic University of Lisbon, coord. Teresa Seruya).

These research areas come clearly in line with the development in translation theory in the 1970s and 1980s as well as the background of many of the scholars involved: areas such as Translation Theory, Philology, Postcolonial Studies or Theatre Studies. Other areas have, nevertheless, received growing attention in recent years and one can foresee that the future research in Translation Studies will cross areas such as translation and accessibility, reception of translation, specialized languages in translation, localization, translation and world literature, translation sociology, audiovisual translation and translation and the media.
2. Interview to Professor João Ferreira Duarte

Q: The first question has necessarily to be: why Translation Studies?

A: In this respect my academic story may not be so much different than many other scholars’ stories around the world. I found myself doing Translation Studies basically for three reasons. First, to help reflect on my own practice as a not-too-prolific literary translator; second, as a follow-up of my involvement with Comparative Literature; finally—as I was quick to realize—the study of translation in Portugal, particularly from a historical point of view, was still back in the 1980s next to uncharted territory ready to be discovered and mapped out. It was hard not to be excited and attracted by the newness of it, by the extent to which studying translation made it possible to see literary history in a totally new light. In short, you know, there’s a twofold side to my answer to your question: a “respectable” academic one and a “darker” emotional one!

Q: Looking at the overall of your publications, it is possible to distinguish three main areas of interest: Literary Theory, Translation Studies, and what we can call “Defence of Humanities”. Let’s initially talk about the first two. Was it a natural progression going from Literary Theory to Translation Studies?

A: I didn’t really move from Literary Theory to Translation Studies, and what do you mean by “natural”? In fact, after teaching critical theory for a long time, my “progression” to the study of translation was all but natural and linear. Rather, it involved what at the time looked like a leap into the new, as I told you, perhaps something like a paradigm shift. Having said that, I must add that Translation Studies, as is well known, has borrowed from approaches that first emerged in the field of Literary Studies, therefore a good schooling in theory facilitates the move. When I came across the early writings of Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury, for instance, concepts, arguments and sources were familiar references to me who had read and taught for years the Russian formalists and Czech structuralism.

Q: That movement can be recognized in other researchers now working in Translation leading to the discussion in the 1970s of where to place Translation Studies: Literary Studies or Linguistics? Comparative Literature or Cultural Studies? Where do you think the discipline is nowadays? Still split between disciplines or a discipline in
its own right? Would you currently maintain the title *Translation Studies at the Interface of Disciplines*?

A: One should first be clear about the context in which the term “discipline” is used. If we are talking about the internal organization of academic institutions, then Translation Studies has a disciplinary status alongside all the other disciplines. On the one hand, it can not help but follow the logic of slotting knowledges into a hierarchy of compartments—faculties, departments, programmes, courses—whose function is to legitimate and certify individual skills and competencies, to regulate the circulation of people: teachers, students and researchers. On the other hand, from an epistemological point of view, Translation Studies can hardly be considered a discipline—pretty much like its twin, Cultural Studies—and unlike, say, Sociology or Psychology. I do not want to go into the vexed discussion of the boundaries between Humanities and Social Sciences, but to my mind what distinguishes these two disciplines (among others) from Translation Studies is the fact that they have their own genealogies, they have constructed over time their own conceptual toolkits and repertoires of arguments and, most importantly, they have their own objects of knowledge. None of this applies to Translation Studies, which in an age that privileges flows and hybrids over fixities and purisms as sites of creativity and productivity is indeed an asset rather than a liability and as such goes a long way to account for the extraordinary and swift success of the “discipline”. There is in fact no specific object of the “science” of translation—its coherence stems not from internal, cognitive procedures but from its outside, that is, from processes and products that take place in the social, or, if you like, empirical world; and its conceptual apparatus comes wholly from elsewhere. “Interface” may very well be an apt metaphor for the (shifting) location of Translation Studies within the current disciplinary structure. I once argued that Cultural Studies could be seen as the model of a non-discipline and the same may be argued as regards Translation Studies. Anyhow, the status of “non-disciplinarity” or “interfaciality” has a crucial consequence: scholars are not constrained by historical agendas or protection of territory and hence the feeling that the sky is the limit is what pushes research forward.

**Q:** Throughout your articles one can notice an honest commitment to placing theories, texts and authors in context, referring several times to the discipline’s own internal discussion of its limits and purposes. Why that insistence? Do you think it is important to keep ourselves reminded of how we got here?
A: As you know, Translation Studies started out as a descriptive and historical approach. Texts can be exhaustively described but in order to interpret them you have to contextualize, that is, you must show how they were shaped by which historical agents and forces. The breakthrough that launched the study of translation as an autonomous field and therefore legitimized it occurred when it became apparent that what you can do with originals also applies to translated texts and the age-old marginalization of translation was seen as an ideological rather than an essential fact. In this sense it is certainly important that we never lose sight that Translation Studies is a true child of its time, of the early 1980s (re)turn to history even if it is our own contemporary historical situation that is at stake.

Q: Do you think Translation Studies might be running the risk of becoming too focused on particular aspects and small case studies not giving enough attention to context and its own pathways?
A: Not at all! The more information we can get about particular stories the more clear-cut we see the contours of the bigger picture. What you call “small case studies” only add up to more accurate knowledge and better theories to account for them. Bottom-up research, so to speak, is what allows us to perceive differences and similarities between, say, Western and non-Western translation histories and practices, between past and present and ultimately to better understand and act out “the time of the now”, to borrow Walter Benjamin’s translated concept.

Q: You have not only participated in the general discussion to establish Translation Studies as a discipline in its own right, but you have also worked to place Portugal on the map of Translation Studies through the organization of conferences (both national and international), the establishment of the database TradBase and a course in Translation Studies within the Master and Doctoral Programmes in Comparative Studies. Why did you decide to develop TradBase? Why a course in Translation Studies for students in Comparative Studies?
A: TradBase is an online bibliography of translation and Translation Studies published in Portugal and/or by Portuguese scholars. By the mid-1990s quite a lot of stuff on translation was already published: theses, books and articles, many of them scattered in little-known publications. It dawned on me then that it might be a good idea to collect them under the form of a database to be made available online (it can be accessed at http://tradbase.comparatistas.edu.pt/). My aim was twofold: on the one hand, I wanted to provide a tool to help researchers, as expected from a
database, but at the same time a broader objective was self-consciously—and perhaps too ambitiously—stated: I wanted to contribute to the construction of a kind of “scientific community”, that is, to help to foster among all those who were working on translation a sense of taking part in a collective project which was both national and international. In short, TradBase was supposed to address scholars and students and interpellate them, like here is what we have been doing and as such signals out our identity.

A course in Translation Studies was a natural off-shoot of the emergence of Comparative Literature in the Portuguese academy in the 1980s. The Portuguese Association of Comparative Literature was founded in 1987, held its first congress in 1989 and two years later the first issue of its official journal, *Dedalus*, came out. In the same year an MA programme in Comparative Literature (later evolving to a fully-fledged postgraduate programme and re-named Comparative Studies) was set up at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon. This was indeed a pioneering move in that the programme was independent from the existing departmental structure, had its own board and managed its own budget. That is how the teaching of Translation Studies started out in Portugal. However, a scholarly interest in the study of translation can be traced back to the early 1980s: to my knowledge, the first publication dealing with translation topics was a slim volume collecting four articles (one by a linguist) that came out in 1983 published at the Faculty of Letters.

Q: As your former students who took that same course, we cannot help but consider the broader picture and reflect upon Portugal and its “peripheral condition”. We invited several other scholars to participate in this discussion and we would like to extend the invitation to you. How would you answer the question posed by the title of this volume: how peripheral is the periphery?

A: The binary opposition centre/periphery is a tricky one. It reflects a geopolitical and essentialist representation of the world by means of which certain cultures, societies or regions are deemed “peripheral” and therefore subject to domination. As the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* put it, these categories are at the heart of colonialist discourse, in fact an ideological ploy to arrest history in the interests of those who hold power over those who do not. I must say that I have little use for this opposition, unless as encouragement to resist.
Q: There is a general agreement among Portuguese scholars that all the initiatives you have encouraged have helped to maintain a community of Translation Studies scholars in Portugal. How important is it to nurture this community?
A: I do not think I had ever that influence and opportunity to “maintain” a community of Translation Studies, as you very generously accredit me with. It’s true, though, as I told you before, that a sense of community is crucial, particularly when you work in a new or developing field. And I do not mean an “imagined” community but a situation where you meet people in the immediacy of workshops, seminars, lectures, congresses, and so on. This is how you exchange views, test your hypotheses, start projects, and ultimately guide students into members of the community thereby contributing to its growing. This is how it works everywhere in all scientific and humanistic fields; but one must be aware of what today is taken for granted, that the referent of “community” reaches beyond national borders: a truly effective and productive community is always international.

Q: In the beginning we mentioned your commitment to what we called the “Defence of Humanities”. How do you see your contribution in this area? What challenges are the humanities facing at the moment?
A: A few decades of wholesale deregulation and casino economy brought us where we stand now, on the brink of disaster, and the Humanities may very well be one of its casualties. Look at the recent announcement by the Dutch government that it is going to close down about 30 humanities programmes in universities all over the country. But this is a move that has been going on for a long time: downsizing, closing down departments, for instance, of Philosophy, Classical Studies and Comparative Literature. The functionaries of neoliberal capitalism in power almost everywhere have ruled that there is not a fast enough turnover of investment in the humanities, or worse, no profit to be made. It is not a win-win business, no good leverage for the economy. The prospect then would be of a future world run by functionally illiterate technocrats, a dystopian nightmare. I believe, though, that we should not be unduly pessimistic. Our current predicament is not the end of history and besides there are signs that point to an awareness at the highest level of decision-making that the humanities must be “defended”: I am thinking of the research programme “Cultural Encounters” that HERA—Humanities in the European Research Area, of the European Commission, is launching with a funding budget of € 18.5 million. And there are other pockets of
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resistance to the neoliberal onslaught against the humanities, most importantly, people: students and young scholars who are proactive, intelligent, creative, and serious hard-workers; they too have a vision and are contributing to the accumulation, not necessarily of capital, but rather of knowledge which adds up to the critical self-understanding of society.

Q: We need to bring this interview to an end by asking you: what do you foresee in the future of Translation Studies? What can we find under the topic doubts and directions in Translation Studies seven years after it was proposed for reflection to the entire Translation Studies’ community?

A: “The future’s not ours to see”, as in the famous pop song of the 1950s! I do not presume to foresee the future, although recent developments in the field make it clear that at least one of the possible “directions” is already being signalled. I am hinting at the much welcome information on the history and theory of translation in non-Western cultures as illustrated by books such as Translation in Asia and Chinese Discourses in Translation, published by St. Jerome, or Decentering Translation Studies and Interpreters in Early Imperial China, published by John Benjamins, among others. We need to know much more about these and other non-Western traditions and practices, lest our views of translation become bounded and therefore distorted by Eurocentric conceptual frameworks. But even as regards Europe itself we must realize that a lot of ground has yet to be covered. Hardly any research has been carried out on the role of translation in intercultural relations between cultures and languages other than the dominant ones. What do we know about the translation, say, of Hungarian literature into Portuguese? Or of Romanian literature into Dutch? And, on a different level, how does migration impact translation in our increasingly super-diverse societies? So, you see, paths to be trodden by Translation Studies scholars branch out in several directions; we are not sure where they will lead us to, but this is the beauty of it, is it not?

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