CONSIDERATIONS FOR TRANSLATING "GRANDE SERTÃO: **VEREDAS" INTO LIBRAS**

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ABSTRACT: This essay provides an annotated translation with commentary of the title and opening three short sentences of João Guimarães Rosa's "Grande Sertão: Veredas" from Portuguese into Brazilian Sign Language, Libras. A Libras translation uses elements of space and highly iconic structures to recreate the story is a visual form. The commentary here considers the challenges involved in translating the brief section of the Portuguese text, including accommodation of deaf literary norms to those of contemporary Brazilian society, the search for appropriate Libras signs for the regionally specific context of the novel, the needs of a deaf audience to see the visual aspects of the story, and the decisions made on how to represent Guimarães Rosa's idiosyncratic style of Portuguese in Libras. It highlights the importance of the sign language translator working as a "translator-actor" where the written text told in first person is translated into Libras, producing a translation that is embodied and presented by the translator, who takes the role of the narrator's "I".

KEYWORDS: Libras; Translation; Translator-Actor; Deaf Translation Norms: Grande Sertão: Veredas

RESUMO: Este artigo apresenta uma tradução anotada com comentários sobre o título e as três frases iniciais de "Grande Sertão: Veredas" de João Guimarães Rosa, do português para a língua brasileira de sinais, Libras. A tradução em Libras usa elementos do espaço e estruturas altamente icônicas para recriar a história em uma forma visual. O comentário apresentado considera os desafios envolvidos na tradução desse pequeno trecho do texto em português, incluindo a acomodação de normas literárias surdas às da sociedade brasileira contemporânea, a busca de sinais apropriados de Libras para o contexto regionalmente específico do romance, as necessidades de um público surdo para ver os aspectos visuais da história, e as decisões tomadas sobre como representar o estilo idiossincrático do português de Guimarães Rosa em Libras. Destaca-se a importância do tradutor de língua de sinais trabalhar como "tradutor-ator", no qual o texto escrito em primeira pessoa é traduzido em libras,

produzindo uma tradução que é incorporada e apresentada pelo tradutor, que assume o papel do eu narrativo. PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Libras; Tradução; Tradutor-ator; Normas de tradução surda; Grande sertão: veredas

INTRODUCTION

This essay provides an annotated translation with commentary of the title and opening three short sentences of João Guimarães Rosa's "Grande Sertão: Veredas" from Portuguese into Libras:

Grande Sertão: Veredas

- Nonada. Tiros que o senhor ouviu foram de briga de homem não. Deus esteja. 1

I consider the challenges involved in such a translation, including accommodation of deaf literary norms to those of contemporary Brazilian society, the search for the appropriate Libras signs, the needs of a deaf audience to see the visual aspects of the story, the visible role of the translator as both actor and translator, and the decisions made on how to represent Guimarães Rosa's idiosyncratic style of Portuguese in Libras.

"Grande Sertão: Veredas" (Rosa, 1956), is widely considered a classic in Brazilian literature. The story is set around the start of the 20th century, and told as a first-person narrative by an elderly prosperous farmer, Riobaldo, to a visiting "man from the city", who plays no active role in the book. The story tells of Riobaldo's earlier life as a jagunço, or independent armed fighter, in the northeast of Brazil, specifically in northern Minas Gerais. The language in the book is grammatically and lexically challenging, using a mixture of archaic and regional dialect forms, liberally mixed with words, phrases and other constructions made up by Guimarães Rosa, but with an authentic feel.

The decision to attempt a translation of the opening lines into Libras was made after seeing Professor Berthold Zilly's comparison of the translations of these words into various European languages² during his course entitled "Análise de texto e análise de tradução. Grande Sertão: Veredas de João Guimarães Rosa e suas traduções" from April to June 2016, which gave a clear understanding of the complexities of creating a good literary translation of a Brazilian classic. I undertook this translation with two colleagues, Klícia Araújo de Campos and Márcia Felício.

Our work was done to further two areas of understanding translation. Firstly, we wanted to provide one more comparison to the translations of the other written languages, with commentary, using Libras, as a language unrelated to any of these languages and in a different modality, in the hope that it would allow other translators to gain a broader understanding of the complexities of translating the work. Secondly, we wanted to further research on literary sign language translation. Translation of children's literature into Libras is not uncommon, but there are very few translations of longer prose work for adults, although the translations by Heloise Grippe and Roberto Gomes de Lima of works by

¹ First edition

² English, German, French, Dutch, Spanish, Italian – although a translation into Hebrew has recently become available

Machado de Assis and José de Alencar are notable exceptions (KARNOPP, 2008). There has been some research into the process of literary translation into sign languages, especially of poetry (EDDY, 2002; BARROS, 2015; SPOONER, 2016) and of children's literature (RAMOS, 2009) but very little into the analysis of prose translation of materials aimed at adults, and we wished to further this.

Sign languages have frequently been devalued by hearing society (and even by deaf people who have been taught that their language is inferior to spoken languages such as Portuguese). Much of the language of the northeast has also been devalued by speakers of standard Portuguese and the use of the regional and social dialect in "Grande Sertão: Veredas" was a political act at the time of publication in 1956. Therefore, the translation of what has now become a highly respected literary text such as "Grande Sertão: Veredas" into Libras can also be seen as a political act of asserting the status of Libras (BENJAMIN, 2000; BRISSET, 2000, SPOONER 2016). Additionally, it can provide access to Brazilian literature that is otherwise inaccessible to Brazilian deaf audiences for whom Portuguese is their second language. A work such as "Grande Sertão: Veredas" is especially challenging because of its language and literary style, and a signed translation can help signers share in wider Brazilian society³. In many cases, deaf audiences are unfamiliar with concepts described in the literature as well as with the language. Thus, the translator needs to be aware of when to translate words and when truly to "interpret" them. In our translation, we sometimes needed to create signs to fill lexical gaps that would explain to audiences a flavour of what the word meant without explaining it.

Traditionally, translators have been encouraged to work as 'invisible' mediators between the author and the readership of another language, so that readers barely notice that they are reading a translation (VENUTI, 2013). Literary translations from written Portuguese into written Libras (using scripts such as Sign Writing) also leave the sign translator invisible but such translations are rare (KARNOPP, ROSA and HESSEL, 2011). In a signed Libras translation, however, the translator is visible and becomes a performer of the translated text. The concept of translator-actors is well-established in Brazil, following the work of Quadros and Souza (2008) who recognised that the embodied performance of any translation into sign language requires the corporal performance of an actor. However, the idea has not been developed in the more dramatic, literary sense of an "actor artist". Spooner et al (2018) suggest that the role of literary translators between written and signed languages might be recast as a special case of "translator-actors," because they add an embodied visual performance component to traditional literary translations. Even though a literary translation from Portuguese to Libras is a linguistic task, Spooner et al note that successful translations into sign language are characterised by performance of visual imagery. In our translation of "Grande Sertão: Veredas", we attempt to create powerful visual images in which the translator is also the actor of the narration.

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³ See Campos and Sutton-Spence, 2016, making a similar point about the translation of Cordel literature from the north-east of Brazil.

The implications of the embodied translator in literary sign language are wide-reaching. Sign language poetry "speak[s] the self of the poet differently" (ROSE, 2006, p. 131) from written poetry (which is detached from the poet's voice and body), because there is "no separation between artist and art, poet and poem" (ROSE, 2006, p. 134) in the poet-performer's body. This applies just as strongly to the translator-performer's body. Consequently, as Rose notes,"[t]he literary power of ASL⁴ literature is defined by, and coexistent with, its theatrical or performative power" (ROSE, 2006, p. 131) and this has major implications for the translator working from the written text into the performed signed text. Rose questions what happens to an ASL literary text when it is signed in the same language by another person, and we see that translators face a similar question. In our specific case study, we need to consider that the translator actor is embodying the character of the retired jagunço Riobaldo, created by the author Guimarães Rosa. For a translator, the challenge is to integrate the author's style, in parallel with performing the character's style, to achieve the right balance between the writer's presence, the character's "I" and the interpreted "I".

Dirksen Bauman notes that

Signing through an interpreter [...] precludes the Deaf "I", as such, from being received in the hearing world, for once it is spoken by the interpreter, the "I" is no longer autobiographical but, rather, a biographical rendition spoken by the interpreter in the first-person singular.... As this new "I" embarks on a narrative journey through a body to which it no longer bears reference, it is subjected to the vicissitudes of a stranger's memory, ideologies, voice, skills, alertness, sexuality, regionality, ethnicity, gender, dress, hairstyle, grammar, education and more. (1996, p. 49-50).

This also occurs when the translator of a written text takes the storied "I" on its narrative journey in sign language. Although this shift is an issue for any translator in any modality, when the signing translator becomes visible, their personal "demographic profile" is foregrounded, especially if it is noticeably different from that of the author or the character. Most ASL-English interpreters are white, female and under 40 (MACDOUGALL, 2012), and the pattern is probably not dissimilar in Brazil. Although Gouadec (2007, p. 89) notes that most translators of written texts are also women, such translators are "invisible" as their work is presented entirely in the disembodied written form. Wilcox (2003, p. 389) raises the question of "whether the visual display of an actual signer—a person whom we may all recognize, whose history we know, and whose personality we see in every nuanced articulation—is the same as an anonymous written word". His implication is that it is not. Audiences seeing a Libras translation could potentially perceive conflicts in its delivery such as a young woman translator performing the character of the elderly man (as in the case of our translation). The ethnicity or regional affiliation of the translator may also

⁴ American Sign Language

effect the audience's engagement with the text so that, in the case of "Grande Sertão: Veredas", an interpreter who is clearly of northern-European descent (for example) may inspire less confidence than someone who conforms to the physical expectations of a "north-eastern Brazilian".

Literary translation is not literal, and translators aim for "fidelity" by reconstructing "contextual significance" in the text, using analogous forms of expression in the target language that are comparable to the intention of the original text (SPOONER, 2016). Venuti notes that the work of a literary translator is to de-contextualize and re-contextualize the text for a different linguistic and cultural audience (VENUTI, 2013). This is what we aimed for in our translation of "Grande Sertão: Veredas".

Libras has a strong (unwritten) literary tradition, with its own norms (TOURY, 2012, STONE 2009) that can guide translators working into Libras. As it is a visual and spatial language, its literature draws upon the resources made available by the visual medium (ROSE, 1992; PETERS, 2000; ROSE, 2006; SUTTON-SPENCE and KANEKO, 2016). Thus, elements such as the speed of signing, the position of the hands in space, the choice of handshape used in the selected signs and ways to incorporate the appearance and behaviour of characters in a text, especially through facial expression, are of great importance for a Libras translation (BARROS, 2015).

Spooner notes that:

the ASL-English translator must make deliberate decisions about how to interpret and "perform" various characters as the text unfold. For instance, if the translator performs a character as being more (or less) evil, insane, collected, or on the verge of a breakdown than the author intended (or if it was meant to be ambiguous for the readers), this interpretation becomes a part of the translation. If the performance is biased or inaccurate, it may skew the audience's understanding of the text. (2016, p. 71)

A further consideration for our translation is that many signs in Libras are visually motivated. For example, in our study we researched the various signs in Libras that are used to mean the Portuguese word 'Sertão', and found that each sign is motivated by different imagery associated metonymically with the concept of Sertão, such as drought, small farms, cactus vegetation, stunted vegetation, cattle, or an empty expanse. This visual metonymy can work to the translator's advantage, for example, when introducing a new idea that does not need explaining, but can also be a challenge when attempting to choose a sign that necessarily reduces the ambiguity in the original work or suggests a different meaning, as I will describe in the case here.

João Guimarães Rosa explicitly wanted to unsettle his readers who may have become complacent about the dominance of standard Portuguese, by using non-standard forms of Portuguese that are more akin to oral patterns of speech (ZILLY, 2013). As Libras is also unwritten and shares linguistic patterns with oral speech, many of the perceived oddities in Guimarães Rosa's work are not odd when rendered in Libras. Considering the debate about "foreignisation" or

"domestication" of a text, such as discussed in great depth by Venuti (1994), we decided to lean towards a translation that is linguistically more domesticated. Our main rationale for this is that deaf people already face so many barriers to access Brazilian literature that deliberate obscuration to match Guimarães Rosa's intention would be counter-productive. Additionally, the literary form of Libras is already markedly different from the daily form of signing. We aimed, therefore, to produce a clearly understandable, but nevertheless visually powerful, Libras text that uses literary devices recognised within the Deaf community.

For our work, we followed the rationale described by Zilly (2013), using a process of close reading and micro-analysis, taking each word and punctuation mark in the title and opening section, and considering its meaning in the immediate context and in the broader context of the book, as well as in the wider social, political and historical context of the setting of the book (a macroanalysis).

THE TITLE

Zilly has observed that:

A title should give some indication or make certain insinuations about the plot, the place, the period, the characters, the narrative technique of the work in question, keeping a careful balance between information and mystery, to pique the reader's interest (Zilly, 2013, p. 315. Translation mine⁵)

This guided us in our translation of the title.

SERTÃO

The word Sertão that occurs in the titles of the two great literary works of Euclides da Cunha ("Os Sertões") and Guimarães Rosa ("Grande Sertão: Veredas") has been translated into English as "Backlands" ("Os Sertões" as "Rebellion in the Backlands" translated by Samuel Putnam and "Grande Sertão: Veredas" as "The Devil to pay in the Backlands" translated by James Taylor and Harriet de Onís). However, the two books present very different aspects of the idea of the Sertão region. Da Cunha's Sertão is arid and barren, whereas the Sertão of Guimarães Rosa is a vast expanse of largely uninhabited, but more hospitable, land. This presents the first difficulty for our translation because although there are various signs in Libras to refer to "Sertão", the better-known

⁵ "Um título deve dar alguns indícios ou fazer determinadas insinuações sobre a trama, o lugar, a época, os personagens, a técnica narrativa da obra em questão, mantendo um certo equilíbrio entre informação e enigma, para atiçar a curiosidade do leitor"

signs reflect aridity. There is a sign that metonymically reflects the more fertile agricultural aspect of the Sertão of Minas Gerais, referring to a bull and farms, but this sign fits less metaphorically with the idea of the book that the Sertão is a complicated tangle of barriers, through which the contrasting "veredas" cut a clearer path.

Research on various sign languages has shown an association between handshapes in sign language which are bent or "clawed" at the joints and negative connotations (KANEKO, 2011; SUTTON-SPENCE, 2005). As we wanted to show the contrast between the two main words in the title, we opted for the sign $SERT\tilde{A}O^6$ that uses a clawed '5' handshape (that is, with all five fingers open and spread) on both hands. It is a widely-known sign and although it refers to the stunted vegetation more suited to da Cunha's Sertão than Guimarães Rosa's, we decided that the symbolic potential for the sign outweighed the metonymy behind it.

Other signs that use 'clawed' handshapes include CONFLICT, DEVIL, WAR, SHOTS, FIGHTING, VIOLENCE, INTENSE-SUN and DIFFICULTY, all of which are either mentioned or implied in the opening section of the book and later parts. Thus the form of the sign *SERTÃO* fits the context of the work better, even if the implication of drought is slightly misleading.

GRANDE

The sign we chose for the word *Sertão* also has the advantage that it can be moved freely through space to make it larger, implying by analogy a larger area, allowing us to incorporate the idea of "Grande" directly into the sign *SERTÃO* to create a readily understandable single sign *GRANDE-SERTÃO*. This created an aesthetic symmetry of one sign to the left and one to the right of the colon that provides the axis for the title "Grande Sertão: Veredas". We also found that we could close the hands as the sign moved inwards towards the body to create a greater sensation of suffering (hunger, poverty, war, drought and emotional tension) that would emphasise the negative side of 'Sertão" in preparation for the relief of "veredas".

THE COLON:

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Close reading requires us to pay attention to punctuation of the text as well as the words. We chose not to represent the colon directly because the vertical axis dividing the signing space can substitute for it in a more satisfyingly visual way. We decided to use the different placement of the signs *Sertão* and *Veredas*

⁶ We will follow the convention in sign language studies that small caps represent signed glosses.

to show a comparison between the two opposing ideas, being of a problem and a solution, or a confused pathway and a clear way out.

We could have placed the sign VEREDAS in the middle of the sign GRANDE-SERTÃO, which would have been aesthetically neater, and would have suggested that the path out of the problem lay within it. However, we decided to place it on the opposing side so that the two concepts were physically separated to show their separate natures, reflecting more closely the colon punctuation mark.

VEREDAS

Unlike the sign SERTÃO, there is no well-known sign VEREDAS (CAMPOS, We could have used transliteration by fingerspelling the word, to reproduce its Portuguese form in Libras using manual letters. This transliteration is a common device for representing written words in Libras (NASCIMENTO, 2009) and is a tactic that Zilly (2013) considers for his German readership, to simply leave the word untranslated. We decided against it for three reasons. Firstly, it would be an unnecessary challenge for a Deaf audience; secondly, fingerspelling is actively repressed in signed literary works (RYAN, 1993); finally, a signed translation would allow for a more aesthetic solution.

We chose to create a neologism that blended the movement and spatial arrangement of the hands that suggest a river, with handshapes that could be interpreted as TREES-ALONG-A-RIVER-BANK. This sign is also made with the relaxed '5' handshape, but with the fingers open, to provide a positive contrast with the tenser, clawed '5' handshape of GRANDE-SERTÃO. The movement offers a suggestion of the idea of a pathway. To emphasise the contrast between the two sides of the title, GRANDE-SERTÃO is made with a more 'tense' facial expression and VEREDAS is made with a more relaxed facial expression.

FIRST THREE SENTENCES FOR TRANSLATION

- Nonada. Tiros que o senhor ouviu foram de briga de homem não. Deus esteja.

It's nothing. The shots you heard were not men fighting. God be praised. (Translation James Taylor and Harriet de Onís, 1963)¹

¹ First edition

THE SPEECH MARK

We know from the speech mark that Riobaldo is speaking. Readers of the written text can choose their image of Riobaldo, perhaps based on their encyclopaedic knowledge, and construct it as the narrative progresses, but the Libras translator must take the part of an actor, and incorporate the character of Riobaldo as narrator from the first sign so that the audience can see it. This incorporation of a character is recognised within sign language literature (RYAN 1993; SUTTON-SPENCE & KANEKO 2016) and its skilful production is highly valued in the Deaf community, so getting it right from the outset is crucial to a translation. We chose to use non-manual elements and a style of signing that would suggest a confident older man, perhaps with elements of pride, tranquillity and sincerity.

NONADA.

"It's nothing."

This word, "Nonada", essentially a neologism in Portuguese (although not in Spanish), has been a challenge to translators. We decided to domesticate it, because it is the first sign of the text and there is already a lot for the audience to take on board in this story told in real time. We chose the standard Libras sign glossed in Portuguese as NADA, placed to the side of the signer to show lack of concern (following the cognitive metaphor that LACK OF CONCERN IS FURTHER FROM THE BODY). We moved the signer's trunk away from the sign and used a facial expression of unconcerned dismissal of an idea to highlight that the speaker was totally unconcerned and thus the audience should be, too.

TIROS QUE O SENHOR OUVIU

"The shots you heard" (translation James Taylor and Harriet de Onís, 1963) or maybe "The shots that you heard, Sir"

Libras does not use articles, so the lack of definite article before "tiros", while marked in Portuguese, is not a problem for a Libras audience. We decided not to make any further issue of this.

Shots in Libras are shown metonymically through the image of a gun firing. Thus we need to decide what sort of gun is being fired. The shots from a rifle, shotgun or revolver will be shown differently. As we find out soon in the story that the men on the farm were probably shooting a mutant calf, we can assume that the gun was a shotgun. This shows the importance of considering the larger context of the text before choosing a sign.

We also need to know how many shots were fired. In Portuguese, the plural marker -s simply tells us that there was more than one shot. Libras distinguishes 1, 2, 3 or 'many' shots, so we need to show information in the signed translation that is not present in the text. However, as we know the men are killing a calf, we can assume it was no more than two. We opted to show the gun firing twice and in the same direction.

Libras does not mark honorifies in the same way as Portuguese. A similar problem exists with the English translation 'you', but that can be resolved, partially at least, with the addition of the word "Sir". However, the sign SENHOR is usually reserved to mean LORD in a religious context and would be inappropriate here. As Libras does not even need to use the sign YOU if it is obvious where the addressee is, we opted simply to use the direction of gaze towards where we selected to place the (non-participating) interlocutor. In keeping with Silva's research on formality in Libras (SILVA, 2013) we chose to use a respectful facial expression to match the idea that a man confident in his social standing such as Riobaldo is nevertheless being polite to his guest.

The idea of hearing anything suggests that neither character is deaf. However, the text is being presented in the language of deaf people to a deaf audience. A thoroughly domesticated translation for a deaf audience might substitute the idea of a flock of startled birds flying, to show visually that shots had been fired. A foreignised text for deaf audiences refers to hearing a noise. We chose the latter, as being truer to the text, on the grounds that deaf audiences are familiar with the idea that hearing people react to sounds, and creating deaf characters would be an adaptation well beyond the original author's intention.

FORAM DE BRIGA DE HOMEM NÃO.

"were not men fighting." (translation James Taylor and Harriet de Onís, 1963)

The Libras sign FIGHT does not show what type of fight was happening, although its handshape may imply several people fighting. We know from the context of shots, however, that the fighting would be construed as a gunfight and, if there were only two shots, then they must have been between no more than two men. We chose, therefore, to use a neologistic sign FIGHT-BY-SHOOTING using two hands, each in the classifier handshape representing a gun being fired. We retained the facial expression that goes with the sign FIGHT.

In Portuguese, the phrase-final negation "não" is marked, but it is not in Libras. Moving it away from phrase-final position in the Libras translation would only make it seem like badly-transliterated Portuguese if moved to be phraseinitial, or would make it simply meaningless if moved to anywhere else, so we left the negation at the end. We chose the accompanying negating facial expression and head-movement as one in keeping with Riobaldo's character and intention to show lack of concern. Of the various Libras options for a negating sign, we chose the sign with an 'O' handshape that suggests 'zero', to echo the sign NADA meaning 'nothing' in the earlier "nonada".

DEUS ESTEJA.

"God be praised." (translation James Taylor and Harriet de Onís, 1963) or perhaps "Praise be."

The location of God in this incomplete phrase is of considerable importance to the central theme of the book, as it questions where God and the devil are. Is God in heaven, near to us on earth or inside the person? In Libras, all signs need a location, so the translator needs to choose the location of this sign carefully. We decided to locate the sign GOD in its conventional place above the head, suggesting God-in-heaven, but moving the sign for GOD'S-BEING slowly and with a thoughtful facial expression towards the signer's body, but in an illdefined way before coming to a thoughtful stop. Thus, we hoped to capture something of the doubt about where God might be, and to reflect that incompleteness of the phrase.

CONCLUSIONS

In this short consideration of the literary translation of just the title and first sentence of "Grande Sertão: Veredas" into Libras, we have seen the benefit of taking a close reading approach to the translation. We show the importance of a deep understanding of the literary processes that create aesthetic, culturally valued works in Libras, and we have shown, perhaps most importantly, that a work as linguistically complex as this can be represented in Libras.

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