

INTRODUCTION

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In the mid-nineties, when preparing an entry on “Autotranslation” in Routledge’s *Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* at Mona Baker’s request, it was still possible to say that little sustained interest had been shown in the topic. Given the (not so) hidden monolingual agenda of much critical writing about so-called “national” literatures, it came as no surprise that self-translation had remained under the radar in traditional literature departments; that it had also gone largely undetected by scholars working in such potentially polyglot areas as comparative literature, seemed a bit more disturbing. We should add in all fairness that whenever those scholars did study bilingual writers, they came across matters relating to self-translation. Such was the case, among other examples, in Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour’s *Alien Tongues* (1989), a beautiful book dealing with the bilingualism of Russian émigré writers, and of course in Leonard Forster’s landmark lectures on *The Poet’s Tongues* (1970), which, in George Steiner’s words, “introduced a large, unexplored field” (1975, p. 121).

Things have evolved considerably since then, as documented in the revised and updated version of that encyclopedia entry (Grutman 2009). We have come to realize that self-translation is neither an exceptional nor a particularly recent phenomenon. In today’s world, there are probably writers translating themselves on every inhabited continent, with some areas literally buzzing with activity: post-Franco Spain, the former Soviet Union, immigrant communities in much of the Western world. Self-translation has also been popular among writers hailing from the scattered remains of Europe’s colonial empires, in Africa or in India for instance. Nor is the practice limited to today’s writing, be it postcolonial or not. Looking back in time, we see hundreds of self-translators from centuries past, with some eras signaling themselves as particularly fertile periods. The late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, which witnessed a vast knowledge transfer (*translation studii*) from learned Latin to state-sponsored vernaculars, immediately come to mind. Over time, gravitational forces would attract scores of writers to

some of those very vernaculars, which had in the interval been empowered as national languages that carried considerable international clout. Historically speaking (roughly until the Second World War), French was perhaps the single language that benefited most from the centripetal forces underlying self-translational dynamics, a cultural prominence that is duly reflected in Hokenson and Munson's *Bilingual Text* (2007, p. 15), the most ambitious attempt thus far to chart the *terra incognita* of self-translation.

Their book bears testimony to the currently explosion of research in what Simona Anselmi (2012, p. 17) has very recently termed “self-translation studies”, an explosion that can be tracked in the regularly updated online bibliography on self-translation¹. First launched in 2010 in Italy, at the University of Pescara (Università degli Studi “Gabriele d’Annunzio” di Chieti-Pescara), in preparation of the international conference on *Autotraduzione: teoria ed esempi fra Italia e Spagna (e oltre)* organized at that venue by Lucia Bertolini and Marcial Rubio Árquez, this online bibliography quickly incorporated Julio-César Santoyo’s (Universidad de León, Spain) earlier print bibliography. Since November 2012, it has been edited by Eva Gentes (Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, Germany). As these names and institutions suggest, research on self-translation, once it took off in earnest, became a truly international and collaborative effort, quickly going beyond the most iconic names (Samuel Beckett and Vladimir Nabokov, most notably, the twin gods of bilingual writing) that had thus far attracted most, if not all, attention, at the expense of many other writers who had chosen to translate their own work. Raymond Federman, Vassilis Alexakis, André Brink, Nancy Huston, Rosario Ferré, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o are just a few 20th century examples of writers whose self-translating activity has become the subject of research in the past few years.

An even broader widening of the horizon is advocated by Rainier Grutman in the opening article of this special issue. In “Beckett: a Quintessencia da Autotradução?”, he proposes a typology of self-translators based on the idea that we need to get out of the long shadow cast by Samuel Beckett, to look beyond Beckett as it were, to get a better view (and a more holistic understanding) of self-translation per se. Currently, such understanding is hindered by the assumption that Beckett represents the quintessence of self-translation, whereas his particular practice – bidirectional, increasingly simultaneous, systematic and symmetric – is actually a lot

¹Readily available on Eva Gentes’ blog at <http://www.self-translation.blogspot.ca/>, which has permanently replaced the original website www.autotraduzione.com.

less common and representative than unidirectional, consecutive, occasional and asymmetric self-translation, the lot of most writers who fit the profile.

In addition to gaining a wider scope, research has also seen its main focus shift somewhat. Initial work tended to concentrate on the comparative textual analysis of original and translated versions by the same author. However, as pointed out by Maria Filippakopoulou in her “Self-translation: reviving the author?” (2005), other questions need to be asked since self-translators do not translate in a vacuum, any more than regular translators do. What kinds of pressure drive them to translate, and thereby rework, an already finished (and, not uncommonly, already published) text? For whom do they set out on such a time-consuming venture? What consequences, if any, does self-translation have: what are the risks and benefits, both for the self-translating individuals themselves and their newly gained audiences? Which conditions are most likely to give rise to this activity? Paraphrasing Joshua Fishman’s (1965) famous question, one could ask: who self-translates in what language for whom, when, how, why, with what purpose and with what effects?

This issue of *Tradução em Revista* will attempt to cover a number of these questions. As will become evident, self-translation’s many characteristics clearly depend upon the (biographical, cultural, social, even political) context in which the activity takes place. There is a need to further investigate the contexts and conditions that not just surround self-translators but, to a certain extent, prompt them to reach out to a different audience in another language. Almost all self-translators whose cases are studied in this issue, either hail from the Americas (as is the case with Canadian-born, American-bred and France-based Nancy Huston) or were active in the Americas as self-translators (Carlo Coccioli, Marco Micone), or both (João Ubaldo Ribeiro, Paulo Britto, Ana Maria Machado, and Antonio D’Alfonso, born in Montreal from Italian immigrants).

Moving from South to North, we start with a cluster of two articles on Brazil, one of the lesser-studied countries, thus filling in a “blank space” of self-translation studies. In their article, Maria Alice Antunes and Bianca Walsh discuss the contexts, causes and consequences of self-translations by João Ubaldo Ribeiro and Ana Maria Machado, whereas Brazilian poet, essayist, scholar and (self)translator, Paulo Britto, analyses his own English reworking of a poem originally written in his native Portuguese. An interesting avenue of research is indeed “to register, and reflect on, the different attitudes and approaches self-translators themselves have

towards this practice” (Anselmi 2012, p. 11). Do authors see their work as translation? Why (not)? Which other terms do they prefer? In these pages, after a careful comparison between phonetic and semantic components of both texts, Britto comes to the conclusion that his English text (initially termed “Uma Autoversão Poética,” as per the article’s title) is, in fact, the product of a translational procedure.

Italian-born Carlo Coccioli only started translating his own work after moving permanently to Mexico, where he would write in French, Italian and Spanish. In her analysis of Coccioli’s consecutive self-translations of *Piccolo Karma* (published in Italian in 1987, in French in 1988, in Spanish in 1988 and again in 2001), Valentina Mercuri focuses on the role played by time in the confection of the end-result. For Mercuri, the second Spanish self-translation of *Piccolo Karma*, published thirteen years after the first version, is a tribute to the self-translator’s constant quest for perfection. She also emphasizes the fact that in Coccioli’s career, repeated self-translation has triggered less-desirable hyper-corrective writing reflexes, which raises another stimulating research question: what is the bearing of systematic self-translation on the writing of new work in one of a writer’s two (or in this case, three) languages?

Leaving behind Coccioli, who left Italy for personal reasons, we come to a cluster of articles studying the characteristics of self-translation in more traditionally motivated (i.e. socio-economical) immigrant settings from an Italian background. While similar cases no doubt exist in the US, the articles included here focus on two Italian-Canadian writers belonging to what is known as generation 1.5, i.e. the young children of the actual immigrants that decided (or had) to leave the home country. The family of both writers, Antonio D’Alfonso and Marco Micone, came from the Molise region in Southern Italy and spoke the Molisan dialect, not standard Italian (a not insignificant factor, as we shall see), and resettled in the bilingual milieu of Montreal. While reflecting official Canadian bilingualism, D’Alfonso’s collection of poems, *The Other Shore / L’autre rivage*, also points to the fact that neither English nor French (nor even Italian) can fill the void left by the uprooting of his mother tongue, Molisan. For D’Alfonso, Alessandra Ferraro suggests, self-translation thus represents the search for a mythical language in which all his languages can resonate. Paola Puccini examines the comparable case of Québec playwright Marco Micone, who continually rewrote his French-language play about the Italian immigrant experience, *Gens du silence*, before translating it into Italian and then almost immediately back into French, with surprising results. As Paola Puccini shows by retracing the many steps of

Micone's work in progress, Micone's first self-translation (into Italian) results in an almost entirely new text, yet does justice to the original project by merging the play's ideal (Italian) language and audience with its author's culture of origin.

Firmly focussed on Nancy Huston, the last two articles of this issue seem to lead us into well-charted territory, as Huston, who has a dozen self-translated novels to her credit, has been the topic of much critical attention, both in her native (Canada) and adoptive (France) countries. In her contribution, Valeria Sperti shows that Huston's self-translation projects, going back to the ill-fated French version of *Plainsong* (1993) – which was awarded the Governor General (of Canada) award for original fiction in French in 1993, thereby unleashing quite a controversy in French Canada – are part of a much larger pattern, as the practice of doubling (words, languages, characters, storylines, citizenships, identities, and so on) permeates her entire oeuvre. Yet while Huston's ambidextrous French-English writing may make her seem "typically Canadian" to foreign observers, fellow Canadian Trish Van Bolderen, in an effort to define categories of self-translators along national lines, comes to the conclusion that Huston, often seen as the poster girl for Canadian bilingualism, is not in fact a Canadian self-translator (all her writing and self-translating took place outside her native country) but rather a self-translator who holds Canadian citizenship by birth.

We round up this special issue with a review article on the development of self-translation studies in Italy. In addition to providing a wealth of examples, as we have seen, Italy has indeed been at the forefront of self-translation criticism, not in the least by hosting the first conferences solely dedicated to the topic at the universities of Udine (in 2010 and again in 2012), Pescara (in 2010) and Bologna (2011). The proceedings of the first three of these encounters have been published and attest to the existence of a lively debate as well as scholarship of the highest standards. Given the fact that most papers included in these collections are in Italian, we asked Tiziana Nannavecchia to provide the readers of *Tradução em Revista* with an overview of the most important issues surrounding the study of self-translation in her native country and language. As guest editors, we hope this as well as the previous articles may help foster similar scholarly interest in the Americas and particularly in Brazil.

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