

Three *Mesdames Bovary*, three works of art

Lenita Maria Rimoli Pisetta*

Cynthia Beatrice Costa**

Introduction

In his appraisal for the *London Review of Books*, English writer Julian Barnes (2010, n.p.) mentioned that “Davis’s *Madame Bovary* is a linguistically careful version, in the modern style, rendered into an unobtrusively American English.” This may have not been his intention, but it seems logical to attribute the ownership – or authorship – of a new version to the person who wrote it, in that case American writer and translator Lydia Davis. *Madame Bovary*, as written in American English and published in 2010 by Penguin Random House, winner of the French-American Foundation Translation Prize, is Davis’s work. As much as Mario Laranjeira’s rendering, published one year later by Penguin Classics Companhia das Letras in Brazil and awarded a Prêmio Jabuti in 2012, is his work.

Considering the literary translator as the owner of the work she/he translates provokes, however, heated debates. The “translation game” (BRITTO, 2012, p. 28) prevents us from claiming a role for translators that is not socially or commercially attributed to them. One can also argue that assigning translators a role that is not theirs — that of creators of novels — does not value their work, but rather deflates it, since it suggests a mistaken equivalence

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between creation and re-creation. As we will claim in this study, there is a technical specificity in the literary translation of complex novels, one that coexists with the artistic aspect of the task.

Reinforcing the hypothesis of literary translation of complex literary texts as art, which has already been suggested by several scholars, we illustrate translation as the fruit of someone's creativity and diligence by exploring the case of Davis's translation into American English and Laranjeira's translation into Brazilian Portuguese of the novel *Madame Bovary* (1856), by Gustave Flaubert.

Before approaching Davis's and Laranjeira's endeavor, however, we open the discussion by briefly investigating the premises that support the central hypothesis.

Translation as technical and artistic re-creation

In the present discussion, two main premises support the notion of literary translation as art: translating literature as a re-creating task and the sensitivity of each translator as a point of differentiation between projects resulting from the same source text.

The conception of translation as re-creation is a milestone in Brazilian literary criticism. Considering both poetry and complex prose as "verbal art" (2013, p. 147), Brazilian poet and translator Haroldo de Campos developed a theoretical approach to translation based on considerations by Max Bense, Walter Benjamin, and Paul Valéry, among others. In "Da tradução como criação e como crítica" ("*Translation as creation and criticism*"), Campos suggests that the translation of creative texts is an impossibility; however, within the realm of possibility, it could only be an act of re-creation, whose result is autonomous aesthetic information linked to its source by an isomorphic, reciprocal relation. Both, original and translation, would be then crystalized within the same system (CAMPOS, 2010, p. 34-35). The idea echoes Benjamin's "translatability" concept: translations maintain a relationship to their source through their potential to be translated, existing in a sort of non-chronological line of texts related to one

another. The more challenging the text, the more “re-creatable” it would be, “more seductive as an open possibility for re-creation.”¹

According to Campos, it is the sign, not the signified, that should concern translators — they should re-create the materiality, the physicality of the text (CAMPOS, 2010, p. 35). As we can see, re-creation² has a clear relation to literary criticism, since the translator would have to be able to choose a potentially re-creatable text and then analyze it to distinguish what makes it unique before attempting to re-create it in another language. Of course, Campos’s view carries the weight of his domain, concrete poetry. Campos (1976, p. 24) considered Ezra Pound to be the ultimate translator/re-creator of their time, which also explains his adherence to the Poundian concept of “criticism by translation” (POUND, 1968, p. 74).

A close take on re-creation can also be found in Mario Laranjeira’s commentary on poetry translation as an “*escritura* of a reading of a poem” (LARANJEIRA, 2003, p. 40) — *escritura* for him as *écriture*, descending from Roland Barthes’s notions.³ Laranjeira, a scholar and literary translator who is one of at least 11 translators who rendered *Madame Bovary* into Brazilian Portuguese,⁴ condemns the idea of translation’s “secondarity” (*secundariedade*; 2003, p. 34), arguing that both original and translation are perfectible, “and this perfectibility should be seen as positive, as it guarantees perpetuity”⁵ (LARANJEIRA, 2003, p. 41). But Laranjeira draws a limit to re-creation, which should not be so entirely free, at the risk of transforming the relation between texts into “simple intertextuality”⁶ (LARANJEIRA, 2003, p. 103).

¹ Unless otherwise stated, translations are ours: “mais sedutor enquanto possibilidade aberta de recriação.”

² Also named by Campos as “transcreation, transtextualization, reimagination, transparadization, translumination, transluciferation” or “transcrição, trantextualização, reimaginação, transparadisação, transluminação, transluciferação” (CAMPOS, 2013, p. 79).

³ Barthes changed his view on “*écriture*” through time, varying from conscious engagement in the act of writing to the inscription, in the text, of the writer’s unconscious drives (see PERRONE-MOYSÉS, 2005, p. 38-39).

⁴ According to Davis, in English there are circa 20 different translations of the novel (DAVIS, 2022, p. 488). For a comprehensive study of *Madame Bovary*’s translations in Brazil, see GOMES, 2018.

⁵ “são perfectíveis, e essa perfectibilidade há que ser vista positivamente, pois é a garantia de perenidade”.

⁶ “simples intertextualidade”.

The defense of translation as re-creation is, evidently, not exclusive to Campos and the concrete movement. Many scholars have long been advocating for literary translation as the result of artistic creativity and as a process of “re-creative writing” (O’CONNOR, 1979, p. 61) — not only of poems, but also of novels, among them *Madame Bovary*, which is often considered syntactically challenging for translators, since, as Henri Peyre puts it, Flaubert was “the impeccable and patient polisher of sentences” (1967, p. 111). Style was, after all, the French author’s main goal: “Flaubert wanted to transform reality through style” (AUERBACH, 2003, p. 357).

In *The Art of Translating Prose*, Burton Raffel analyses six translations into English of *Madame Bovary*,⁷ which he names Flaubert’s “greatest book”. Having written before *The Art of Translating Poetry*, Raffel (1994, p. x) states that his previous book “argues in favor of re-creation and approximation, rather than any struggle for a ‘literal’ and ‘exact’ reproduction.” Prose, however, would be “a very different matter” and “a very different linguistic nature”, requiring a particular attention to syntax and style:

The fundamental argument of *The Art of Translating Prose*, accordingly, is that proper translation of prose style is absolutely essential to proper translation of prose, and close attention to prose syntax is absolutely essential to proper translation of prose style [...] In the translation of prose, therefore, to ignore or to maltreat style is to fail even before you begin. (RAFFEL, 1994, p. x-xi)

In his highly critical comparison of excerpts from the novel with their respective sources in the six translations, Raffel seems to emphasize the linguistic knowledge and the technique needed to understand Flaubert’s style and reconstruct it in English. However, he still considers the translator’s work an art — therefore, creative, not exact or predictable —, as the very title of his book emphasizes. “Translation, like the creation of literature, is an art and not a science” (RAFFEL, 1994, p. 51), he states while discussing *Madame Bovary*’s

⁷ Those of Eleanor Marx Aveling, J. Lewis May, Allan Russell, Mildred Marmur, Francis Steegmuller, and Lowell Bair.

translations. Meaning that, even though syntactic tracking is key, as well as lexical approximation, there is plenty of room for differences in interpretation and attitude towards the text between one translator and another. This leads to very different results. At the end of his analysis, Raffel chooses Francis Steegmuller as the best translator and mentions both his ability to “track the syntactic movement very well indeed” and his “sensitivity” (RAFFEL, 1994, p. 54), suggesting how translating such a novel requires technical and artistic endeavor at the same time.

Commenting on Davis’s Flaubertian translation, and referring to the fact that she confessed more than once her little sympathy for Emma Bovary, Barnes (2010, n.p.) also proposes a balance between creativity and technique: “Lydia Davis’s *Madame Bovary* shows that it’s possible to produce a more than acceptable version of a book with which you are profoundly out of sympathy. In that sense, it confirms that translation requires an act of the imagination as well as a technician’s proficiency.”

Paulo Henriques Britto (2012, p. 14), another Brazilian poet and translator who has been developing theoretical approaches to literary translation, stresses that translating highly complex literary texts would be very easy if it was just a question of knowing the “names” of things and changing them. He defines this task as, in fact, *difícilima* (much too difficult, arduous). He then ponders:

Since the common-sense view of the work of translation is deeply mistaken, every time a translator undertakes the task of giving the general audience an idea of his craft, he is obliged to start by correcting these misunderstandings. It is always necessary to affirm the non-trivial character of the translation work, clarify the true nature of the activity, emphasize the difficulties and what is creative and intellectually instigating in this profession, and deny the old prejudiced clichés.⁸ (BRITTO, 2012, p. 18)

⁸ “Como a visão do senso comum a respeito do que seja o trabalho de tradução é profundamente equivocada, toda vez que um tradutor empreende a tarefa de dar ao público uma ideia de seu ofício ele é obrigado a começar por corrigir esses mal-entendidos. É preciso sempre afirmar o caráter não trivial do trabalho de

Britto also brings to the table a more pragmatic view by reminding us that no matter what academia might envision, translation is presented “as the same thing”, and thus cannot be regarded as an autonomous re-creation:

Following Wittgenstein’s view, however, I would say that the translation of texts follows certain rules that constitute what we can call the “translation game.” Here are some rules of this game: the translator must assume that the text has a specific meaning — in fact, a certain set of specific meanings, in the case of a literary text, since one of the rules of the “literature game” is precisely the assumption that texts should have a plurality of meanings, ambiguities, indefiniteness, etc. Another rule of the game is that the translator should produce a text that can be read as “the same thing” as the original, and therefore must somehow reproduce the effects of meaning, style, sound (in the case of translating poetry), etc., allowing readers of the translation to claim, without lying, that they have read the original.⁹ (BRITTO, 2012, p. 28-29)

Britto is of course right in regarding the commonsense notion of translation and the expectations of editors and readers. Anyone who reads Laranjeira’s or Davis’s *Madame Bovary* expects to have read the same book written by Flaubert. Commercial aspects aside, however, against this view weighs the fact that translation can be accurately seen, at most, as more or less the same thing, but never the exact same thing. In general, it is argued that the plot is maintained, which would justify the derivative nature of translation. In other words, the story remains the same, but the way it is told changes on a spectrum that varies from a lot to a little, depending on the languages and

tradução, elucidar a verdadeira natureza da atividade, enfatizar as dificuldades e o que há de criativo e intelectualmente instigante nessa profissão, e negar os velhos chavões preconceituosos”.

⁹ “Seguindo a visão de Wittgenstein, porém, eu diria que a tradução de textos segue determinadas regras que constituem o que podemos denominar de “jogo da tradução”. Eis algumas regras deste jogo: o tradutor deve pressupor que o texto tem um sentido específico – na verdade, um determinado conjunto de sentidos específicos, tratando-se de um texto literário, já que uma das regras do “jogo da literatura” é justamente o pressuposto de que os textos devem ter uma pluralidade de sentidos, ambiguidades, indefinições etc. Outra regra do jogo é que o tradutor deve produzir um texto que possa ser lido como “a mesma coisa” que o original, e portanto deve reproduzir de algum modo os efeitos de sentido, de estilo, de som (no caso da tradução de poesia) etc., permitindo que o leitor da tradução afirme, sem mentir, que leu o original”.

cultures involved in the operation, the time of production and the translator's project, among other factors. Translators' intervention can be regarded as an almost irrelevant detail — considering the whole experience of reading a novel — or as crucial to the potential interpretations of the text and to the perception of the novel's style.

Before developing the analysis, some more information about the translators

After 40 years translating from French and having just finished Proust, Davis had decided not to translate book-length projects anymore, but the invitation to translate *Madame Bovary* was an irresistible challenge (DAVIS, 2022, p. xv). It gave her the opportunity to correct what she perceived as other translators' errors and embellishments — a view not always shared by critics, who tend to value Steegmuller's work, as is the case of the aforementioned Burton Raffel and of Julian Barnes, who will come later into this discussion. At the time of her translation's publication, she said in an interview: "But it's amazing how different they [the translations] all are. Some are fairly close, but then they'll [translators] add a metaphor that Flaubert doesn't have. And some are outrageously far away" (ANDERSON, 2010, n.p.).

"Of course, a translation even of a less exacting stylist requires millions of tiny, detailed decisions; many reconsiderations; the testing of one word or phrase against another multiple times", writes Davis (2022, p. 504), in full possession of her effort to match Flaubert's style. She describes translation as a multilayered task: "The quality and nature of translation (let's say from the French) depend on at least three things: the translator's knowledge of French language, history, and culture; his or her conception of the task of the translator; and his or her ability to write well in English" (DAVIS, 2022, p. 496). This set of variables reverberates an underlying notion of re-creation as discussed in the previous section: the translator is also a critic and a writer. Reminding Britto's (2012) considerations on the difficulty of the task of literary translation, one sees how Davis is also aware of this, facing it as a challenge. For her, it is the third,

the ability to write well in her own language, the most important qualification (DAVIS, 2022, p. 496).

Davis's statements denounce a paradox with regard to the translation of complex literature, of highly stylistic texts, as it is known to be the case of *Madame Bovary*. The diligent translator is often obsessed with translation accuracy, trying not to deviate from what she/he interprets as the author's style. It is an inglorious task, as Davis herself admits about the difficulty to achieve Flaubert's cohesion: "It's the final, perfect fit between the style and the material [...] It's impossible to achieve in English. It's organically related" (ANDERSON, 2010, n.p.). But it is possibly in this operation, in the effort to achieve something similar in one's own language, that the translator ends up creating an innovative work — one that carries, besides the remains of the source, a second layer of style, that of the translator.

An experienced translator of French as well, having worked with authors such as Baudelaire, Voltaire, and Barthes, Laranjeira seems to have had a different reaction facing Flaubert: almost 20 years after publishing his theoretical approach to the translation of poetry (LARANJEIRA, 2003), he did not consider translating *Madame Bovary* especially difficult. Questioned about the French author's literary rigor and the help that his experience with poetry might have provided him in the task, he declared in an interview to Faleiros *et al.* (2018, n.p.): "I don't think Flaubert is exceptionally more difficult than the others. I think Voltaire, for example, has equally difficult things, as well as other authors I have translated. But I never thought about it."¹⁰

While Laranjeira's translation has been receiving more of an academic treatment since its publication, Davis's *Madame Bovary* was also vastly praised in the media, listed as a best-seller in 2010, and soon placed as a contemporary canon among translations (we cannot completely ignore the commercial prowess of the mega publisher Penguin behind such phenomenon in the United States). In *The New York Times*, Kathryn Harrison (2010, n.p.) praised Davis's

¹⁰ "Eu não acho que Flaubert seja excepcionalmente mais difícil do que os outros. Eu acho que Voltaire, por exemplo, tem coisas tão difíceis quanto, e outros autores que eu traduzi. Mas eu nunca pensei nisso".

sensibly measured faithfulness: “Faithful to the style of the original, but not to the point of slavishness, Davis’s effort is transparent — the reader never senses her presence. For ‘Madame Bovary,’ hers is the level of mastery required.” Barnes was an exception in writing a more in-depth review, which he finishes by comparing Davis’s work to prior efforts by translators Geoffrey Wall and Francis Steegmuller, stating that: “If you want a freer translation, Steegmuller is best; for a tighter one, go to Wall” (BARNES, 2010, n.p.). In *The Guardian*, documentary producer Nick Fraser defended Davis’s effort from Barnes’s more rigorous approach by saying:

But I don’t agree with the eminent Flaubertians (Julian Barnes among them) who find Davis’s efforts clunky. Emma’s passions extend to shopping as well as sex, and the connection is spelled out by Davis’s spare prose. She has also caught for the first time in English the powerfully filmic aspect of Flaubert’s narrative – the way in which he is able to cut without apparent effort between close-ups and wide shots. (FRASER, 2010, n.p.)

In the next section we will present a comment on the differences and similarities between Davis’s and Laranjeira’s translations, in an effort to demonstrate different sensitivities dealing with the same text.

Two sensitivities

Let’s begin with the following passage:

Mais plus Emma s’apercevait de son amour, plus elle le refoulait, afin qu’il ne parût pas, e pour le diminuer. Elle aurait voulu que Léon s’en doutât; et elle imaginait des hasards, des catastrophes que l’eussent facilité. Ce qui le retenait, sans doute, c’était la paresse ou l’épouvante, et la pudeur aussi. (FLAUBERT, 2014, p. 173)

Mas, quanto mais Emma se dava conta de seu amor, mais o recalcava, a fim de que não aparecesse e para diminuí-lo. Ela gostaria que Léon duvidasse dele; e imaginava acasos, catástrofes que facilitassem isso. O que a retinha, por certo, era a preguiça e o espanto, e o pudor também. (FLAUBERT, 2011, p. 201)

But the more conscious Emma was of her love, the more she suppressed it, to keep it from being visible and to diminish it. She would have liked Léon to suspect it; and she imagined chance events, catastrophes, that would have made that possible. What held her back was probably laziness or fear, and discretion, as well. (FLAUBERT, 2010, p. 94)

One first observation is Laranjeira's general use of words with the same root, made possible by the proximity of French and Portuguese, both romance languages. In the case of *refoulait/recalcava/suppressed*, however, we can argue that Flaubert's and Laranjeira's choice of verbs allude now — obviously not in Flaubert's time — to the Freudian interpretation often adopted in regard to *Madame Bovary*. *Refoulement* and *recalque* correspond to what is generally translated into English (from German *Verdrängung*) as repression. Davis translated the term as *suppressed*, thus not easily suggesting such allusion. *Doûta*, from the verb *douter*, is translated by Laranjeira into a verb of the same Latin root (*duvidar*), while Davis deviates from a possible use of *doubt* (from the same origin as *douter* and *duvidar*) and chooses *suspect* instead. Finally, *épouvante* and *pudeur* also receive different treatments, with an unusual use of *espanto* by Laranjeira and a more palatable use of *fear* by Davis; the American translator, however, again distances herself from Flaubert's text by choosing *discretion* for *pudeur*.

When fully compared, it is palpable that Laranjeira and Davis conceived different translation projects for *Madame Bovary*.

Let us examine another excerpt where these tendencies can also be observed:

Il ne pouvait se retenir de toucher continuellement à son peigne, à ses bagues, à son fichu ; quelquefois, il lui donnait sur les joues de gros baisers à pleine bouche, ou c'étaient de petits baisers à la file tout le long de son bras nu, depuis le bout des doigts jusqu'à l'épaule ; et elle le repoussait, à demi souriante et ennuyée, comme on fait à un enfant qui se pend après vous.

Avant qu'elle se mariât, elle avait cru avoir de l'amour ; mais le bonheur qui aurait dû résulter de cet amour n'étant pas venu, il fallait qu'elle se fût trompée.

songeait-elle. Et Emma cherchait à savoir ce que l'on entendait au juste dans la vie par les mots de félicité, de passion et d'ivresse, qui lui avaient paru si beaux dans les livres. (FLAUBERT, 2014, p. 94)

Ele não podia impedir-se de tocar continuamente em seu pente, seus anéis, seu fichu; por vezes, dava-lhe nas bochechas grandes beijos com plena boca, ou eram beijinhos enfileirados ao longo do braço nu, desde a ponta dos dedos até as espáduas; e ela o afastava, meio sorrindo e entediada, como se faz com a criança que se dependura na gente.

Antes de casar, ela achava ter amor; mas não tendo chegado a felicidade que deveria resultar desse amor, era preciso que ela tivesse se enganado, pensava. E Emma buscava saber o que exatamente se entendia na vida pelas palavras felicidade, paixão e embriaguez, que lhe tinham parecido tão belas nos livros. (FLAUBERT, 2011, p. 114)

He could not refrain from constantly touching her comb, her rings, her scarf; sometimes he gave her great full-lipped kisses on her cheeks, or a string of little kisses up her bare arm, from the tips of her fingers to her shoulders; and she would push him away, with a weary half smile, as one does a clinging child.

Before her marriage, she had believed that what she was experiencing was love; but since the happiness that should have resulted from that love had not come, she thought she must have been mistaken. And Emma tried to find out just what was meant, in life, by the words bliss, passion, and intoxication, which had seemed so beautiful to her in books. (FLAUBERT, 2010, p. 30)

As mentioned in the previous section, one of the aspects Fraser considers remarkable in Davis's *Madame Bovary* is cinematic fluidity. The original's seamless transition between the two points of view (Charles's in the first paragraph; Emma's in the second) and the evocative images suggested by the description of Charles's caresses are filmic, as Fraser, a filmmaker himself, observed. And according to him, they are skillfully re-created in English (FRASER, 2010, n.p). Indeed, both translations seem to reproduce this fluidity in the passage from one point of view to the other, although Laranjeira's adherence to the French language may jeopardize this characteristic.

While Davis chooses to facilitate, to a certain extent, the reader's approach to Flaubert's constructions, which attests to her "transparent effort" (HARRISON, 2010, n. p.) and also to her rendition of Flaubert's text into an "unobtrusively American English" (BARNES, 2010, n.p.), Laranjeira in several passages takes another course, importing the French author's terms and constructions to his Brazilian Portuguese translation. This can be noticed in the word "fichu", which is rendered "fichu" and "scarf" by Laranjeira and Davis respectively.¹¹

But it is in the syntactic aspect, as Raffel (1994) emphasizes as Flaubert's peculiarity, that the difference between the two translation projects becomes more evident. For Flaubert's sentence "il lui donnait sur les joues de gros baisers à pleine bouche," while Davis opts for "sometimes he gave her great full-lipped kisses on her cheeks," Laranjeira chooses to stick to the French, with "dava-lhe nas bochechas grandes beijos com plena boca," which is not a usual expression in Brazilian Portuguese.

For "Avant qu'elle se mariât, elle avait cru avoir de l'amour," Davies opts for "Before her marriage, she had believed that what she was experiencing was love," elongating, explaining the phrase and also making it clearer. Laranjeira's option, "Antes de casar, ela achava ter amor" is very close to the French construction, probably causing some sense of strangeness to the reader.

Another relevant passage is that when Flaubert describes Emma's conclusion as "il fallait qu'elle se fût trompée, songeait-elle." Davis chooses to translate it for "she thought she must have been mistaken," while Laranjeira, once more, adheres to the French with "era preciso que ela tivesse se enganado, pensava." There is a very subtle difference in the use of "falloir", "must" and "precisar/ser preciso." While the French and the Portuguese verbs are restricted to the meaning of "need", "must" in English refers both to an obligation or necessity and to a probability/deduction. In English, the reader is led to assume

¹¹ Interestingly enough, there is an entry in *Houaiss Online Dictionary* for "fichu", and there is no indication that the term was borrowed from French, though the word is not commonly used in Portuguese. On the other hand, Davis sometimes uses "fichu" in her English translation.

that Emma came to the conclusion that she was mistaken, while in French and Portuguese she considers her mistake as a necessity, which may sound a little bit weird in both languages.

Lexically, another point of interest in the English translation is Davis's choice of words for *félicité*, *passion* and *ivresse* (FLAUBERT, 2013, p. 94). By choosing "bliss" instead of "happiness", "joy" or even the archaic "felicity", Davis establishes (consciously or not) an intertextuality with Katherine Mansfield's story "Bliss", another tale about a housewife's bittersweet experience.

Other examples of Laranjeira's adherence to the French text

Below, the reader will find a chart in which the two translations are collated with Flaubert's source text. By showing the closer proximity of Laranjeira's choices to the source, the examples are self-explanatory:

Chart 1: Comparison of passages in the French original and in the two translations

Charles se traînait à la rampe, <u>les genoux lui rentraient dans le corps</u> . (FLAUBERT 2014, p. 114)	Charles se arrastava na rampa, os joelhos <i>lhe</i> <u>entravam no corpo</u> . (FLAUBERT 2011, p. 136)	Charles was dragging himself up by the banister, <u>his knees were giving way under him</u> . (FLAUBERT 2010, p. 46)
Malgré <u>ses airs évaporés</u> (c'était le mot des bourgeoises d'Yonville), FLAUBERT 2014, p. 191).	Apesar de <u>seus ares evaporados</u> (era o termo das burguesas de Yonville), (FLAUBERT 2011, p. 220).	Despite <u>her flightiness</u> (this was what the townswomen of Yonville called it), (FLAUBERT 2010, p. 109)
– ...Si elle était comme tant d'autres, contrainte à gagner son pain, elle n'aurait pas <u>ces vapeurs-là</u> (FLAUBERT 2014, p. 191).	–...Se ela fosse como tantas outras, forçadas a ganhar o pão, não teria <u>esses vapores</u> (FLAUBERT 2011, p. 221).	If she was obliged to earn her living, like so many others, she wouldn't be having <u>these vapors</u> (FLAUBERT 2010, p. 110)

– <u>D'où vient que</u> personne, jusqu'à présent, ne m'a jamais exprimé des sentiments pareils? (FLAUBERT 2014, p. 308).	– <u>De onde vem</u> que ninguém, até agora, nunca me exprimiu sentimentos assim? (FLAUBERT 2011, p. 349).	“ <u>Why is it that</u> no one, before now, has ever expressed such feelings to me?” (FLAUBERT 2010, p. 210)
– <u>D'où vient</u> , reprit-il, que vous n'êtes pas venue chez moi? (FLAUBERT, 2014, p. 377).	– <u>De onde vem</u> – retomou ele – que a senhora não veio me procurar? (FLAUBERT 2011, p. 425).	“ <u>How was it</u> ,” he went on, “that you never came to me?” (FLAUBERT 2010, p. 269).

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The singular behavior of languages

French linguist Jean-Claude Milner makes a point about the differences between languages that is certainly relevant to translators. According to Milner, when we say “languages,” we are assuming that there are several languages and that they can be grouped together. But, more than that, we assume that we can distinguish between them. Milner concludes that “this plural [“languages”] is actually a collection of singulars,” for languages are “at one and the same time alike and discernible” (MILNER 1990, p. 58).

Probably Milner was not thinking specifically about the act of translation when he formulated his concept of “a collection of singulars,” but this formulation surely encapsulates translation's very *raison d'être*. Translation exists exactly because languages are alike and discernible. Nonetheless, the “two singulars” involved in a translatory operation have their own rules and norms, a fact that sometimes brings difficulty to translators, and sometimes facilitates their work.

A good case in point for the translations analyzed here are the terms of address. For each of the three languages involved, terms of address should abide by each language's norms. For example, we know that French (even today, but

surely in the nineteenth century) recommends formal terms of address between speakers who are not very intimate. Portuguese, in its turn, is not so strict about that nowadays, but it surely was in the nineteenth century, too. Some decades ago, children should address their parents in Brazilian Portuguese using terms such as “o senhor” and “a senhora”. Nowadays “você” is certainly more used by children addressing their parents. As for English, it has been changing through time and nowadays terms like “thou”, “thee” and “ye” are only seen in literary books of earlier centuries, like Shakespeare’s works, for example. “You” is almost a universal term of address to use with interlocutors in English.

This divergence in the use of terms of address ends up creating a certain difficulty for the translator into Portuguese, while in English the problem simply does not arise. Let’s take as examples interactions between Emma and her lovers. The first is from the letter Rodolphe writes her, after having decided not to run away with Emma, as they had agreed to do.

Ah! si vous eussiez été une de ces femmes au coeur frivole comme on en voit, certes, j’aurais pu, par égoïsme, tenter une expérience alors sans danger pour vous. Mais cette exaltation délicate, qui fait à la fois votre charme et votre tourment, vous a empêchée de comprendre, adorable femme que vous êtes, la fausseté de notre position future. Moi non plus, je n’y avais pas réfléchi d’abord, et je me reposais à l’ombre de ce bonheur idéal, comme à celle du mancenillier, sans prévoir les conséquences. (FLAUBERT 2014, p. 271)

Ah, se você tivesse sido uma dessas mulheres de coração frívolo como se veem tantas, por certo, eu teria podido, por egoísmo, tentar uma experiência então sem perigo para você. Mas essa exaltação deliciosa, que faz ao mesmo tempo o seu encanto e o seu tormento, impediu-a de entender, adorável mulher que você é, a falsidade de nossa situação futura. Eu tampouco, não tinha refletido sobre isso de início, e repousava à sombra dessa felicidade ideal, como à da mancenilha, sem prever as consequências. (FLAUBERT 2011, p. 309)

Oh, if you had been one of those women with a frivolous heart — who certainly exist — I could have selfishly experimented without putting you at risk. But the delicious exaltation of feeling that is at once your charm and your torment has prevented you from understanding, adorable woman that you are, the falseness of our future position. I, too, did not think about it at first, and I lay down to

rest in the shade of that ideal happiness, as in the poisonous shade of the fatal manchineel tree, without foreseeing the consequences. (FLAUBERT, 2010, p. 178)

Despite the close relationship they have as lovers, Rodolphe addresses Emma in a formal way, using “vous,” which in Portuguese (“vós”) would be inadequate, so Laranjeira adopts “você,” which is informal and denotes intimacy. In Davis’s translation, the problem simply does not impose itself.

The second moment is an interaction between Emma and Léon, shortly before their passion is consummated. They treat each other in a formal register, even in an intimate talk, which would be inadequate in Portuguese, and simply cannot be reproduced in English.

– Qui nous empêche donc de recommencer ?

– Non, mon ami, répondit-elle. Je suis trop vieille... vous êtes trop jeune...
oubliez-moi! D'autres vous aimeront... vous les aimerez.

– Pas comme vous! s'écria-t-il.

– Enfant que vous êtes! Allons, soyons sage je le veux! (FLAUBERT 2014, p. 309)

– Quem nos impede então de recomeçar?...

– Não, meu amigo – respondeu ela. – Eu estou velha demais... você é muito jovem... Esqueça-me! Outras hão de amar você..., você as amará.

– Não como a você! – exclamou ele.

– Criança que você é! Vamos, tenhamos juízo! Eu quero assim! (FLAUBERT 2011, p. 349)

“What’s to prevent us from beginning again now? . . .”

“No, my dear,” she answered. “I’m too old . . . you’re too young . . . forget me!
Others will love you . . . and you’ll love them.”

“Not as I love you!” he cried.

“You child! Come now, let’s be sensible! That’s what I want!” (FLAUBERT 2010, p. 210)

Despite all the differences between languages, registers, and treatments, one thing remains the same in both translations: the respect for Flaubert's singularity, thus the effort of "syntactic tracking" (RAFFEL, 1994) and pursuing a similar style in their own languages.

The following (and last) excerpt to be analyzed is a passage close to the end of the book, in which the apothecary Homais enumerates accomplishments that have hauled him (or so he imagines) to a higher place in society. Homais's train of thought alternates between the first and the third person singular, as if he is imagining that other people (and not only himself) are referring to his feats:

1° S'être, lors du choléra, signalé par un dévouement sans bornes; 2° avoir publié, et à mes frais, différents ouvrages d'utilité publique, tels que... (et il rappelait son mémoire intitulé: Du cidre, de sa fabrication et de ses effets; plus, des observations sur le puceron laniger, envoyées à l'Académie; son volume de statistique, et jusqu'à sa thèse de pharmacien); sans compter que je suis membre de plusieurs sociétés savantes (il l'était d'une seule).

– Enfin, s'écriait-il, en faisant une pirouette, quand ce ne serait que de me signaler aux incendies. (FLAUBERT 2014, p. 422)

1o. Ter-se destacado, na época do cólera, por uma dedicação sem limites; 2º. ter publicado, às minhas próprias expensas, diferentes obras de utilidade pública, tais como... (e ele lembrava seu relatório intitulado *Da sidra, sua fabricação e seus efeitos*; mais, observações sobre o percevejo lanígero, enviados à Academia; seu volume de estatística, e até sua tese de farmacêutico); sem contar que sou membro de várias sociedades científicas (ele o era de uma só).

– Enfim, exclamava ele, fazendo uma pirueta —, ainda que fosse somente ter-me distinguido nos incêndios! (FLAUBERT 2011, p. 476).

(1) For having been distinguished, at the time of the cholera epidemic, by a limitless devotion to duty; (2) For having published, at my own expense, various works of use to the public, such as . . . (and he cited his treatise entitled On Cider, Its Manufacture and Its Effects; also, observations on the woolly aphids, sent to the Academy; his volume of statistics; and even his pharmaceutical degree thesis); without taking into account the fact that I am a member of several learned societies (he was a member of only one). "Lastly,"

he exclaimed, with a pirouette, “if only because I acquit myself with such prowess while on fire-duty! (FLAUBERT 2010, p. 308)

Flaubert’s minute work of revision is well known to his readers and to the public in general. Therefore, we can conclude that this apparent “confusion” between first and third person was deliberately constructed, perhaps with the intent, as suggested earlier, of creating a polyphonic account of Homais’s deeds, both narrated by himself and by third parties, which would increase his renown. Whether this was Flaubert’s intention is impossible to know. But we can observe that the same “confusion” is aptly recreated both in Portuguese and in English.

Final remarks

There is no dispute, at this point, that Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, ultra-canonized as it is, is a masterpiece of Western literature. In this brief study, we approach two translations of the novel carried out almost concurrently in the United States, by Lydia Davis, and in Brazil, by Mario Laranjeira. Both are experienced translators of literary and theoretical texts from the French language, also recognized for their studies and essays. The result found, discussed in the previous sections, is a pair of different sensitivities — Davis’s and Laranjeira’s — that reinforce the importance of linguistic knowledge and technique in the translation of complex prose and, at the same time, suggests this endeavor as one of personal attitude, aptitude, and creativity; thus, an artistic task as well.

Supported by the concept of re-creation proposed by Campos, but also considering Britto’s more pragmatic view and Raffel’s differentiation between the translation of poetry and the translation of prose, we analyzed excerpts from the translations as artistic works that show their translators’ different treatments of the source text. Davis and Laranjeira demonstrate a conscientious concern with Flaubertian craftsmanship, but without submission: there is an added layer of style, the result of each translator’s set of decisions and strategies. In general, Davis tends to distance herself from the text and make it more palatable for the contemporary Anglophone reader, giving it a fluidity not always found in

Flaubert; Laranjeira, in turn, remains almost always close to the novel in French, often producing almost a collage and thus recreating in contemporary Brazilian Portuguese a syntactic and lexical challenge for Flaubert's readers.

Their projects are not always homogeneous and cannot be reduced to just one interpretation of Flaubert's text. They maintain the multiplicity expected from complex literature because they re-create, in their respective languages, the unusual verbal game — full of gaps, twists, and turns — expected from *Madame Bovary* and which is very likely one of the central reasons for the interest that this novel still arouses among readers and scholars.

A case like this of the “Mesdames Bovary” reinforces literary translation as an act of re-creation and, as such, as an artistic task. Were it not for their ability to write in their own language and their sensitivity in reading Flaubert, in addition to an admirable diligence in reconstructing such an intricate style, there would be no renewing of the classic.

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Abstract

As a way of illustrating literary translation as an artistic task, this article focuses on Lydia Davis’s and Mario Laranjeira’s translations of the classic *Madame Bovary*. Based on a brief analysis of the translations and on the translators’ comments, it draws attention to the creativity, sensitivity and diligence involved in the task. Furthermore, it considers two premises within the realm of literary translation studies — translation as re-creation and translators as the authors of



their work — as a way of favoring the hypothesis that literary translation is an art.

Keywords

Madame Bovary; Gustave Flaubert; Lydia Davis; Mario Laranjeira; Translation as art.

Resumo

Como forma de ilustrar a tradução literária como tarefa artística, o presente artigo debruça-se sobre as traduções de Lydia Davis e de Mario Laranjeira do clássico *Madame Bovary*. Fundamentada em uma breve análise das traduções e em comentários dos tradutores, a discussão proposta chama atenção para a criatividade, sensibilidade e diligência envolvidas na tarefa. Além disso, considera duas premissas no âmbito dos estudos da tradução literária — a tradução como recriação e tradutores como autores de suas obras — como forma de favorecer a hipótese de que a tradução literária é uma arte.

Palavras-chave

Madame Bovary; Gustave Flaubert; Lydia Davis; Mario Laranjeira; Tradução como arte.