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The Curious Incident of Feminist Translation in Galicia: Courtcases, Lies and Gendern@tions

María Reimóndez
University of Vigo

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Abstract

This article will use a personal and highly controversial case, my translation of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by British author Mark Haddon into Galician, to explain how my contract was terminated by the publisher *Rinoceronte Editora* due to my use of feminist translation strategies. As I will explain, such strategies implied not translating gender neutral nouns in English into masculine or feminine according to patriarchal expectations. I will describe and analyse this case study in the light of feminist translation theory, with a view to understanding not just my choices but the reactions this public case elicited from several of the parties involved and the public. I will also draw some conclusions on how intertwined notions of gender and the nation informed in the ensuing public discussion.

Resumo

Este artigo parte da descrición dun caso persoal e altamente controvertido no eido da práctica da tradución en Galicia: a miña tradución ao galego *O curioso incidente do can á medianoite*, do autor británico Mark Haddon, e de como o meu contrato pola Editorial Rinoceronte foi rescindido debido ás estratexias tradutivas feministas que eu implementara no texto. Como explicarei, ditas estratexias implicaban que os termos con xénero neutro en inglés non se habían de transformar en masculinos ou femininos en galego, atendendo a prexuízos patriarcais. Describirei e analizarei este caso á luz das teorías de tradución feminista, co obxectivo de entender non só

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ás miñas opcións como tradutora, senón as reaccións que este caso provocou tanto nas partes involucradas coma no público lector en Galicia. Finalmente, as miñas conclusións profundarán nas relacións entre xénero e nación e como estas lle deron forma ao debate público que arrodeou esta controversia.

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Theory first...

There are many who think that there is always a great gap between theory and practice, whatever the area or subject matter in question. Such a view is not alien to the field of Translation Studies, where significant work has already been published that addresses this vacuum directly (Wagner and Chesterman 2002). As can be gleaned from this literature, practice is invariably based on some degree of theory, be it academic or self-taught.

There have been many theories about translation throughout history, but it was only from the 1950s onwards that the discipline of Translation Studies began to develop, with a view to analyzing this important mode of human interaction. Translation Studies was first seen as a 'natural branch' of linguistics, and more specifically of comparative linguistics. At that time, focus was placed on the product –i.e. on the translation itself– and most theoretical discussions revolved around equivalence and fidelity, and subsequently treated any departure from the original work as undesirable or deviant. Those first studies depended heavily on traditional concepts of language and therefore developments in the field of linguistics also led to changes in the field of Translation Studies. One of these changes was undoubtedly the emerging view of language as a power construct and of meaning as an essentially social notion. This was to become a pivotal question for translation, as debates moved away from an understanding of meaning as static –mere metaphysical matter linked by means of an ill-defined, mysterious process to a signifier– to what Stolze summarized as follows:

Equally, for the listener the sign does not stand for 'something' statically, rather it is a parameter of reference (cf. the tradition of thought by Peirce); the sign is constructed and gains 'meaning' only following the recognition and interpretation of the immanent relations of the sign by the recipient: "Nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign". (1997: 44)

Steadily, meaning was to be established as a convention, always subjected to power-related and social forces. Feminist critiques of language have also moved away from dichotomous notions of 'sign' and presented a much more complex understanding of language as a construct. These critiques have brought into relief well-entrenched patriarchal definitions of language, which more often than not use grammar as an argument to fight structural transformations to the benefit of gender equality, ignoring the fact that grammar is a construct built by a particular gender, class and race. I shall return to feminist analyses of language later on, as these have had a considerable influence on feminist translation strategies which will be discussed in this study. Within the field of translation, as Holmes states:

Work in the field of translation theory over the past twenty-five years has been done primarily by linguists, theoretical or applied. They have, by and large, moved down a different road, one that has turned out to be a dead end. (1988: 100)

It was not until the 1980s that translation began to be analyzed from a variety of perspectives, and mainly understood as a form of (political,

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For a study of the power differentials that inform the translation of theories, with a particular focus on how Barthes' post-structuralist works and French feminisms were translated into Turkish and English respectively, see Susam-Sarajeva 2006.

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See for instance Miguélez-Carballeira's study on how the field of Hispanic Studies may still be seen as using theoretical concepts from Translations Studies that do not find much currency in the latter discipline anymore (Miguélez-Carballeira 2007b)

ideological or cultural) mediation. This new outlook was brought about by the so-called 'cultural turn' in Translation Studies, a paradigmatic shift going from mainly formal and linguistically defined notions of translation to historicized and discursive ones, and whose description has occupied a central space in histories of the discipline (Snell-Hornby 2006; Singh 2007). The fact that languages do not live in isolation, but develop, thrive or die in societies sheds light on the view that translation practice is a mediation between two sets of cultures. Once again, as we have seen in the case of language, culture could not be taken for granted either. The concept of culture itself is a site of struggle and its meaning can vary vastly from one discipline to the next. Despite the difficulties of defining culture, the so-called cultural turn in Translation Studies paved the way for a new understanding of translation as a cross-cultural activity, the study of whose process took precedence over the study of the final product. Postcolonial theory's contribution to these reflections on cultures also highlights the power inequalities that inevitably underpin any form of intercultural negotiation, of which translation is, of course, an example.¹ An analysis of the works selected for translation and of the strategies used to translate works from non-Western cultures once again reveals the political position from which translation is carried out. Such analyses often tend to focus on literary texts but they are also relevant to other types of translations such as interpreting –for example, politically charged translational situations such as international forums where the interests of developing and developed countries tend to differ a great deal, and are crucially mediated by the perception that the interpreters have of those interests and conflicts. The choice of texts to be translated from non-Western cultures –or peripheral cultures within the West– has much to do with the expectations from the decision-makers engaged in that process –translators, publishers, etc.– and tend to rely on western-centric notions of the exotic, as is explained by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978).

Owing to this paradigmatic shift, translation could no longer be seen as an isolated linguistic process in which language A is introduced in a black box (Kring 1986) and delivered in language B. Translation therefore began to be seen as an activity also marked by power and inequalities. One of the main logical corollaries of this process was to analyze how power was created and by whom. The translator was now in the spotlight.

Before we analyse the role of translators in what I would like to call the 'translator turn', let me just underline that although I have presented this evolution as a linear process, many theoreticians, and particularly those working from within disciplines other than Translation Studies, will still use concepts that have been largely superseded in the field, such as equivalence or fidelity.² Yet it is in the context of non-specialist discussions about translation that notions such as fidelity or equivalence still reign supreme. What feminist and postcolonial theories have come to demonstrate, however, is that the denial or downplaying of the translator's role is not just an innocent instance of theoretical disagreement between different views of translation but a pretext to conceal –and therefore, perpetuate– mainstream –that is, patriarchal and imperialistic– values. Denying the role of translators and their interventions therefore means abdicating responsibility for the reproduction of patriarchal and imperial values. Whenever translation practitioners or theoreticians claim that the translator is simply a black box, it is more often than not because they are consciously or unconsciously complying with mainstream values.

Analyzing and giving visibility to the role of translators takes us back to a key philosophical concept: that of ideology. In the context of what we may call 'traditional' translation theory, ideology was viewed in an unfavourable light, and often as an inner force, an evil bias, that ran counter to the professionalism of translators. This kind of approach has much to do with definitions of ideology in Marxist theory before Althusser. Those definitions usually referred to what we now identify as 'dominant ideology or mainstream ideology', i.e., the ideology of those in power, usually taken for granted and reproduced without explanation. In the words of the philosopher, mainstream ideology is the one

which we cannot fail to recognize and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out (loud or in the "still, small voice of conscience"): "That's obvious! That's right! That's true!". (Althusser 1997: 161)

But the Althusserian concept of ideology radically changed this view and brought about the by now fairly widespread belief that all human activities are ideological. Ideology is now widely understood as 'todo conxunto de coñecementos, experiencias e valores que interveñen na nosa interpretación da experiencia' (Reimóndez 2001: 19-20). In comparison to previous Marxist analysis of ideology, Althusser claims that

ideology is not simply a set of illusions, as *The German Ideology* seems to argue, but a system of representations [...] concerning the real relations in which people live. But what is represented in ideology is 'not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live'. (Althusser 1971:155, in Belsey 1980:57)

It is for this reason, therefore, that translation can never happen 'outside' ideology. To put it in Althusser's terms: 'what thus seems to take place outside ideology [...], in reality takes place in ideology' (1997:59). All translations are marked by the ideology of whoever produces them: manipulation is no longer a curse, but the very nature of this activity and a phenomenon to try to study and contextualise in its own right. Of course, ideological intervention in translation can also take place in a more conscious and purposeful way, and this is indeed the case with those who work against mainstream values. Conversely, those who strive to deny or camouflage this intervention are consciously or unconsciously endorsing mainstream ideology, the only ideology that attempts to be invisible so that it can be taken for granted as the 'truth'. By so doing, those who stand behind the mechanisms of mainstream ideology help to silence the voices that attempt to champion a change in power structures. Such an understanding of the negotiations underlying the translation process brings about a new set of questions, which the field has been addressing as the main goal of Descriptive Translation Studies. Questions such as who translates, why or for whom, are now of pivotal importance for the discipline, although they have been posed and answered mainly by scholars conducting research in the field and not by the practitioners themselves. The present case study is a first-person account by a practitioner who is also a researcher in the field of Translation Studies, and as such it aims to be a thought-provoking and suggestive example of the type of work that still needs to be carried out.

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Feminism, translation and the Galician context

Feminist translators and theoreticians have unmasked the ideological character of translation in a myriad of ways. For example, sustained and detailed analysis of what works have been and are translated and by whom has uncovered the fact that it is usually male authors who are translated by invisible women (Simon 1996). This reality can be linked to the theoretical tenet, and also a contribution of feminist translation theory, that sustains that translation is a second-class activity, and as such, a feminine task (Chamberlain 1988). In this dichotomous scheme of things, the author –male– is the one who creates and deserves credit for his work, while the translator –female– is the one who merely copies, imitates and tries to emulate the author. She is a shadow performing a task almost devoid of value. This conceptual relationship between translation and women can be seen in a clearer light when we analyse the metaphors used to refer to it throughout history. Translators have been defined as handmaidens to authors, or in a more explicit metaphor, as women who, if beautiful, had to be unfaithful (Simon 1996: 1). Feminist Translation Studies have uncovered this conceptual framework, regarded as irrelevant by many but crucial to the practical working conditions of translators, not only female. If translators are only handmaidens to authors, then of course there is no need to pay them a real wage for their –laborious, highly intellectual and time-consuming– work. There is no need to acknowledge their authorship or for them to show any professional skills: it can be done by anybody who understands two languages and has some ‘female’ intuition for words. This context provides us with a prime example of how theory and practice interact. The fact that translations are nowadays included in copyright law on an equal footing with original works is the result of a shift in the theoretical paradigm that defined translation for too long. This shift was highly influenced by the work of feminist scholars.

However, feminist Translation Studies have also focused on wider projects, such as the analysis of translations of women authors, the drawing of histories of women translators, and the promotion of a sustained translation of more female authors, in order to compensate for the heavy male bias observable in the corpus of translated literature. Regarding the analysis of translations of women authors, a case that has attracted a great deal of attention has been the study of Simone de Beauvoir’s translation into English (Simons 1983; de Lotbinière-Harwood 1991; Simon 1996; von Flotow; 1997; Castro 2008), which created a breach between French and Anglophone feminism. The translator, Howard Parshley, decided to erase ‘irrelevant’ parts of the work, such as for example de Beauvoir’s references to female historical figures. Of course, there is no evidence that Parshley ever saw himself as a patriarchal and ideological manipulator; he might have thought that he was just technically adjusting the text to suit its target audience better. This leads me to the final point that I would like to make with regard to feminist Translation Studies, which concerns the issue of translation strategies.

In general terms the most important feminist translation strategies have been summarised as follows: prefacing, foot-noting, hijacking and supplementing on the one hand, and providing visibility to women’s text or highlighting sexism or other gender roles, on the other (Lotbinière-Harwood 1991). These strategies were first developed in Canada and have since become an inspiration to many feminist translators, but there is

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I have had access to this information through a personal communication with the translator.

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Exceptionally, reviewers who are also Translation Studies scholars, or who may have access to both the source and target language, will make a point of foregrounding the work of the translator. See for instance Helena Miguélez-Carballeira's reviews of María do Cebreiro's translation *Tres vidas*, Eva Almazán's *Brooklyn Follies* or Marga Rodríguez-Marcuño's *O segundo sexo* (Miguélez-Carballeira 2006, 2007a, 2008). This reviewing practice remains marginal in the Galician cultural system.

still a need to look into how they may be applicable –or not– in different cultural contexts, when working with language pairs other than French or English or with non-literary genres. Even in literary contexts, some of these strategies remain difficult to use unless they are part of a project by a feminist publishing house. Canadian poet and translator Erin Moure had to face enough opposition, for example, when publishing her rendition of Pessoa's poem 'O Guardador de Rebanhos' into English as 'Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person'. The guardians of Pessoa's legacy did not want to grant her the rights as they did not deem her translation suitable on the grounds that she had moved the setting to current Toronto and introduced her feminist approach to the text.³ However, there are far less visible strategies that feminist translators implement when they go about their jobs. These concern, mainly, issues to do with grammatical shifts between languages, and particularly those concerning grammatical gender. Normally, this type of decisions go unnoticed –what to do, for instance, with gender-neutral words in English– but the case study in this article is an exception. Occasionally, feminist-identified translators will use prefaces or other paratextual material to explain what translational strategies they plan to put to use. I will turn to the issue of prefacing later on.

If we now turn to the Galician context, we see that the above theories have had a rather belated impact. Despite the fact that there are scholars in Galicia who have been working on feminist translation for over a decade (Reimóndez 1997; González Liaño 2003; Castro 2004), the issue of feminist translation practice remains to be studied in detail. After the public controversy aroused by my translation into Galician of Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, there is no question that there is at least one active feminist translator in Galicia. I have translated, after all, over a dozen books so far, live exclusively from this activity –not in the literary field, but as an interpreter– and pay my taxes as a translator. However, several questions need to be asked as to whether there are other feminist translators in Galicia, what strategies have they used and what has happened to the works by women and more particularly feminists who have been translated by non-feminists –this is of course an open call for feminist translation scholars to conduct more work on the Galician context–. As regards the first two questions, the existence of practising feminist translators in Galicia remains moot. However, if they do exist, they have most likely been overridden by the type of discussions on translation that will typically be given coverage by the media, namely the number of books translated, or the relevance of translation for language standardization and use (see for instance Anonymous 2007). However, although there have been many recent articles on the relevance of translation in the literary system, there has been little discussion regarding the actual choices and standpoints, ideologies and strategies used by translators. Outside scholarly publications such as *Viceversa*, where we can almost invariably find an article written in the first person by a translator where they explain their choices and strategies, there is hardly any space left for translators to be visible. Book reviews tend to focus on the book itself and are rarely reviews of the translation. In other words, they will tend to speak of the literary work in hand as if it were an original.⁴ More often than not, whenever the translation is analyzed, it is done without any knowledge of the two languages involved, from a merely linguistic point of view and, without any consideration for the general approach to the text by the translator. In contrast, the reviews tend to be riddled

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In an article included in this issue, María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar ponders over the question of why even consolidated literary authors are not given this opportunity when working as translators. Her argument is based on the paper she delivered at the International Conference on Translation and Publishing Policies, held in October 2008 (University of Vigo).

with judgemental comments based on the reviewer's personal criteria and these can be highly repetitive. For example, they will typically focus on whether or not the language used complies with the Galician written norm, which may not be relevant to the context at hand, or may even on occasion, derive from a lack of understanding of the literary work itself, where rudimentary uses of language –low lexical variation, inaccuracies or awkward uses of syntax are a key element in the narration. Although these circumstances are beginning to change, up until recently there seemed to be one sole commentator of literary translations in the Galician press, Mr. Moisés R. Barcia, also the co-owner and publisher, together with Penélope Pedreira, of *Rinoceronte Editora*. Having only a single voice to speak about all the translations and translators in Galicia implies an obvious bias and a dangerous trend towards a single, dominant discourse on translation, at least from the point of view of how translation is portrayed in Galician literary criticism. Galician translators will normally not be granted a space in which to give a full-blown account of their work and spell out the ideological position from which it has sprung. Prefacing is rarely allowed in Galician translations unless there is some specific feature in the actual work translated that forces the publisher to introduce such a space.⁵ That is the case of, for example, with my translation of *Little Theatres*, where the use of Galician by Canadian poet Erín Moure clearly demanded an explanation. Even in that case I was not allowed to have a preface as such, but a small text that the publisher initially wanted to call 'Nota da tradutora', misleading as that could be. The text was finally called 'A tradución dos teatriños' (Reimóndez 2007: 145-147) and it offers the reader an insight into my standpoint when translating the poetry collection, not simply an explained inventory of my linguistic choices. Unfortunately, in the few remarkable examples where a preface to the translation has been allowed, the preface will focus exclusively on the formal aspects of the translation process –this can be found, for instance, in the collection 'As Literatas', or in the translation *O segundo sexo* by de Beauvoir, both published by Xerais-. Translations are always about choices and, as we have briefly seen in the introduction, evading responsibility has a long tradition in translation practice. It is perceived to be more comfortable not to be under the spotlight, not to be accountable for one's complicity with mainstream values, as too much exposure would probably bring about fierce opposition from many sources. The reactions in the Galician press that we will analyze in the last section of this article, demonstrate that being visible always entails the risk of being criticized or attacked. However, this is sometimes the only way to affect the patriarchal, imperial, theoretical –and therefore practical– framework in which we work.

The Curious Incident...

With the above theoretical and contextual considerations in mind, let us now turn to the public case of my translation of Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. I will use this example in two ways. Firstly, I want it to show how feminist translation in Galicia exists and is at work. Secondly, I would like to put it forward as an instance of the genuine struggle taking place –even in the courtroom– between patriarchal and old-fashioned concepts of translation and an ethical translation practice taken to the extreme. I will then analyze the public repercussions of this

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For a more detailed textual study of the translational choices in *O curioso incidente do can á media noite*, see Castro 2009, forthcoming.

case and how the flurry of media coverage that followed it may shed light on issues that go beyond translation and meet the intersecting notions of gender and nation.

I will try to present the case as briefly as possible, as the process spanned a long period of time, from 2004, when I was verbally hired by *Edicións Xerais* to translate Mark Haddon's book, until 2007.⁶ After this verbal agreement, as there was no hurry in publishing the book, I was given plenty of time to work on the translation and finally delivered the final text to the editors in February 2007. At that point, it emerged that the rights to publish a translation into Galician of Haddon's novel had just been bought by *Rinoceronte Editora*, a publishing house that specializes exclusively on the translation of literary works of difficult access for Galician-language readers and, more recently, also of Galician literature into other languages. As a result, *Xerais'* plan to publish the book was stymied. It is worth clarifying at this point that the practice of not buying the rights of a book before its translation is commissioned is fairly common in Galicia, where the number of translations remains low and translation policies vary widely from one publishing house to another. At the time I was familiar with *Rinoceronte* publishing house as I was a subscriber to their catalogue, and *Xerais* mediated in order that the director of *Rinoceronte*, Mr. Moisés R. Barcia, and I could meet to discuss what the fate of my already completed translation should be. In the event of no agreement being reached between *Rinoceronte* and myself, *Xerais* would pay for my translation but the book would not be published. The text was then sent directly from *Xerais* to Mr. Barcia, who was given the time to go over it in detail and assess its value. Mr Barcia then called me to sign the agreement in spring 2007. On that day he showed me some pages with 'corrections', which I found completely unjustified as he had changed synonyms or expressions that he simply found more suitable. I informed him that I would not argue with him over such things unless he changed something that I considered sensitive from the point of view of my interpretation of the book. The agreement was then signed. As regards the terms of the actual contract, other aspects of this could be considered controversial, but I shall limit myself here to the description of those irregularities that are relevant from the point of view of feminism. As this had been an unusual working situation all along, I agreed to the conditions for the sake of publishing the book as soon as possible.

When I received the first corrections I was stunned by the level of irrelevant intervention and change introduced into the text: changes involving, for instance, the substitution of certain words with their absolute synonyms in Galician, such as 'colexio' and 'escola', both meaning 'school'. I decided not to comment on any of these; however, I did comment on some amendments that concerned my use of feminist translation strategies. In some cases my text had been masculinized. For example, 'the police' –which I had translated with the gender-neutral, collective noun 'a policía'– had been changed to 'os policía's' –literally, 'policemen'–. Similarly, 'the publishers', which I had translated as 'a editorial' –literally, 'the publishing house'– had been changed to 'os editores' –'the editors', in the masculine form. More disturbing indeed was the change of two words that showed a conscious sexist bias: 'windsurfer', which I had translated 'a surfeira' (female surfer)– in my translation, and 'liar', which I translated as 'mentireiro' (liar, in the masculine form) in my translation. The gender of these two words was changed by the editor, with the result that 'surfer' became 'surfeiro' –in the masculine– and 'liar'

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became 'mentireira' –in the feminine– for no obvious reason, as we can see from the respective textual contexts below:

Then Mrs Shears came over and cooked supper for us. And she was wearing sandals and jeans and a T-shirt which had the words WINDSURF and CORFU and a picture of a windsurfer on it. (Haddon 2003: 37)

But Willesden Junction wasn't on pages 42 and 43. And I found it on page 58 which was directly under page 42 on the KEY TO MAP PAGES and which joined up with page 42. And I looked round Willesden Junction in a spiral, like when I was looking for the train station in Swindon, but on the map with my finger.

And the man who had shoes that did not match stood in front of me and said, 'Big cheese. Oh yes. The Nurses. Never. Bloody liar. Total bloody liar.'

Then he went away.

And it took me a long time to find Chapter Road because it wasn't on page 58. It was back on page 42, and it was in square 5C.

And this was the shape of the roads between Willesden Junction and Chapter Road 230. (Haddon 2003: 230)

The second quotation has been reproduced at some length in order to make clear that there is no reason to think that 'the man who had shoes that did not match' was referring to a woman. The only other two points when he is mentioned are here:

And everyone who got off the train walked up a staircase and over a bridge except me, and then there were only two people that I could see and one was a **man and he was drunk and he had brown stains on his coat and his shoes were not a pair and he was singing but I couldn't hear what he was singing**, and the other was an Indian man in a shop which was a little window in a wall. (Haddon 2003: 228, my emphasis)

And here:

And I paid him £2.95 with my money and he gave me change just like in the shop at home and I went and sat down on the floor against the wall like **the man with the dirty clothes** but a long way away from him and I opened up the book. (Haddon 2003: 229-230, my emphasis)

When I sent Mr. Barcia my comments stating that I did not agree with the correcting procedures adopted, but that I would only oppose the above cases for the reasons that they run counter to my translation practice, he refused to accept my criteria and stated that it was acceptable for me to use non-sexist language in my own creative writing but not in my translations. For some months the discussion continued with bitter statements from Mr. Barcia regarding the fact that as the publisher he had the right to have the final judgement on the text and would ultimately not accept such practices. I reminded him several times that I was the author of the translation and that it was my name that was going to appear on the book. He suggested that I either signed the translation that included

his alterations with a pseudonym or he would terminate my contract and assign the translation to somebody else. For some reason he was also unhappy with the first corrections and decided to send me a second text which had been revised by himself. In this version he claimed that he would try to reach some compromise regarding the controversial words. When the correction was sent to me, the sexist choices were still present. I therefore decided to remove my name from the visible parts of the book –front cover and title page– and leave it only on the copyright as a final act of protest. He was opposed to this option on the grounds that it both violated the collection's format and breached the term of the contract which stated that the translator's name is to appear on the front cover –of course, this is a translator's right, which he or she can choose to give up; it is not an obligation–. Upon my allegation that he did not have my permission to publish the translation with my name on the cover and that, should he do so, there would be legal implications in response to this action, he terminated my contract and did not remunerate me for my work. When I was already in talks with a lawyer about the contract and only a few months following these events, I saw the published work in a bookstore. The translator of Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* into Galician was listed as Moisés Barcia.

At this point in time I decided to issue a statement to the press regarding the whole incident (Reimóndez 2008). The events that immediately ensued from this action form the second part of my analysis. The news first emerged on a Galician news website, *gznacion*, an informal privately-owned portal for Galician news (*Gznacion* - Redacción, 2008). Immediately after this release *Rinoceronte* issued a declaration. Given that the file has been erased from the website and is currently inaccessible, I attach the text here:

29 de marzo de 2008

Rinoceronte e o feminismo túzaro e malintencionado
MARÍA REIMÓNDEZ DENUNCIA Á EDITORA POR REXEITAR
UNHA TRADUCIÓN SÚA

Un medio dixital publica hoxe a noticia da denuncia de María Reimóndez contra a nosa editora. Malia estar xa en marcha a nosa resposta legal á súa iniciativa, queremos mostrar dende aquí a nosa versión dos feitos.

– Rinoceronte Editora adquiriu os dereitos para editar e traducir ao galego o libro *The curious incident of the dog in the night time*. Cando xa tiñamos firmado un contrato cunha profesional da tradución para vertelo ao galego, chegou aos nosos oídos que había unha tradución xa feita por Reimóndez.

– Malia ser norma da casa non aceptar traducións non solicitadas, fíxose unha excepción neste caso e propúxoselle a Reimóndez aceptarlle con dúas condicións: restariámoslle do soldo os gastos da corrección necesaria para que o texto acadase o noso estándar habitual de calidade (aínda así o soldo resultante, 10 € folio, é un 20% superior ao que adoita pagar a competencia) e a tradución sería sometida a un nivel de intervención alto (para ilustralo mostróselle un fragmento de 10 páxinas con correccións en vermello en todas as liñas). A tradutora aceptou sen obxeccións, e non indicou que houbera ningún tipo de intervención ao que se fose opoñer.

– No proceso de revisión advertiuse que Reimóndez manipulara

o orixinal, traducindo sistematicamente os neutros ingleses por femininos, agás cando tiñan connotacións negativas (un borracho vai chamándolle a alguén liar; nós, como a tradutora ao castelán, supuxemos que se refería á súa esposa; Reimóndez, en cambio, considerou que aludía a outro home). Tamén converte masculinos en femininos (unha rata que se chama Toby, e á que se refíren como he) e en neutros (uns men pasan a ser 'xente'). Ante a negativa de Reimóndez a cambiar o seu uso 'non sexista' da lingua e crendo nós que o autor é o responsable último da súa obra, contactamos coa axente de Haddon para que se manifestase ao respecto, cousa que fixo, dándonos a razón.

– Contrariada por isto e privada de argumentos, Reimóndez decidiu que non quería que o seu nome aparecese na cuberta do libro nin na páxina 5. Fíxoselle saber que esa pretensión non era algo que puidese esixir a tradutora, xa que alteraba as características da colección e contraviña o especificado no contrato. A resposta de Reimóndez foi unha ameaza de denuncia. Chegados a este punto comunicóuselle que se resolvía o contrato, amparándonos nas cláusulas 3 e 4.

Feito o relato do acontecido, queremos engadir unha serie de apreciacións:

– A acusación de Reimóndez, coñecida hoxe pola prensa, é a de cometermos 'prácticas machistas na tradución', 'despido improcedente' e 'apropiarse da súa tradución'. Sobre o 'machismo' da tradución xa se pronunciou o autor, verdadeiro responsable da súa obra, mal que lles pese a Reimóndez e outros 'tradutores-creadores'. Se o 'despido' é procedente ou non xa o determinarán as instancias oportunas. Baste dicir que se debeu ao incumprimento de dúas das cláusulas do contrato. E a idea de que nos 'apropiásemos' da súa tradución move á risa, tendo en conta que fomos nós quen lla rexeitamos. Só hai que comparar. Por fortuna para os lectores, a tradución finalmente publicada d'*O curioso incidente do can á media noite* fíxose ex novo, cun nivel de calidade equiparable ao dos outros títulos da editorial e libre dos ideoloxemas que subrepticamente intentou coar Reimóndez. Por outra banda, parece ser que Reimóndez rexistrou como "súa" a versión da súa tradución profundamente revisada polos correctores habituais da editora. Tal acto dará lugar ás oportunas accións legais por falsidade, xa que esas modificacións, que emendaron a pobreza e inexactitude iniciais do texto, son propiedade dos seus autores e da editorial que os remunerou.

– Durante todo o proceso, o editor intentou chegar a un acordo con Reimóndez, buscando a mediación de profesionais do mundo da edición e da tradución. Reimóndez rexeitouno. Queda constancia de que o ton usado por un foi flexible e conciliador e o empregado pola outra foi groseiro e agresivo.

– A actitude de Reimóndez, publicitando de inmediato a súa denuncia, e os diversos comentarios previos a coñecidos comúns sobre a súa intención denunciadora, indican que a súa única vontade –rexeitada por ela a posibilidade de mediación e acordo– é a de causar o maior dano posible á única editora galega especializada en tradución.

– María Reimóndez é tradutora e intérprete. Tamén é fundadora e presidenta de Implicadas no Desenvolvemento, ONG que promove

a xustiza social no Terceiro Mundo. Seguindo a súa política corporativa, Rinoceronte Editora doou a Implicadas no Desenvolvemento o 5% dos seus beneficios obtidos ao longo do ano 2006. A título particular, no domicilio de Moisés Barcia tamén son socios de Implicadas.

The publisher's statements and my own differed considerably. In this first public statement by the publisher many conflictive points were made: most of them can be explained by translation theory and its associated debates. The publisher claimed that I had manipulated the text as I had translated all neutral names in English into the feminine in Galician. He also claimed that I had translated as masculine only those names that had 'negative connotations', which was of course not true and can be easily proven by an analysis of my translation.

Rinoceronte also gave some examples of how I had 'manipulated' the text, including the feminisation of 'rat', a gender neutral noun in Galician, with feminine grammatical gender but referring to both male and female rats –there are few names of this kind in Galician, some of them are animals such as 'frog'(a ra), or human-related nouns such as 'victim'(a vítima). This example was later echoed in the article published in *The Telegraph* (Govan 2008) without any reference to this fact about Galician grammar, thereby creating an image of myself as a madwoman who had gone as far as to alter the sex of a rat.

Apparently *Rinoceronte* contacted Mr Haddon telling him that I had changed the gender of some characters in the book, and the author apparently dismissed my strategy –it goes without saying that I would never have changed the gender of any character in the novel. Furthermore, it seems that *Rinoceronte* contacted the author's agent –not Mark Haddon directly–, which actually invalidates any potential claims made in the name of ownership of the text. In their statement, the publishers offered a link to a paragraph of the e-mail they have allegedly received from the agent to support that claim, but the text was not complete and therefore not at all clear in terms of who had written it and the context of that response. However, this was in the eyes of many enough reason to justify that I should have followed the publisher's orders and made 'windsurfer' masculine and 'liar' feminine. We will examine the implications of this assumption later .

Another issue in the statement concerned the nature of the text that I had registered in the copyright registry. The file in the copyright registry cannot be accessed except with a legal warrant or permission by the author (see *Real Decreto* 281/2003), therefore there was no possible way for the publisher to know what text I had registered, and this was an unnecessary comment made in order to undermine my credibility in the case of a plagiarism litigation. The publisher even went as far as to publish a page of my text and his text, which is of course illegal as he has no right to publish my translation, in order to prove that the texts –that is, one page of them– were not identical.

Another issue brought up in the publishing house's statement was related to contractual matters. In their statement, *Rinoceronte* claimed that I had breached my contract because I did not want my name on the cover. The statement also referred to my rudeness, –although the statement itself included insults such as 'túzaro', an emphatically derogatory term in Galician–, and Mr Barcia also subsequently made the following comment on the Galician-language online newspaper *Vieiros*: 'se quere que todos os

personaxes sexan mulleres, que faga ela literatura'(Pérez 2008). Finally, there was mention of the fact that he had donated money to the NGO that I founded and over which I preside, an issue completely irrelevant to the matter in question.

Obviously the strategy was to undermine my credibility and portray me as *the madwoman in the translation attic*. Indeed, his statement succeeded in creating that public image of me, a corollary of this process that I shall discuss later. In later communications with the press, as we have seen, he challenged me to write my own works, which I evidently already do, but he thereby ignored the fact that I have been a translator since I graduated from university in 1997, have published over a dozen literary translations and am a reputable professional and scholar. This strategy is of course nothing new. Feminists in all fields usually have to face this kind of representation, as feminism, though one of the most important theoretical frameworks for the past two centuries at least, is still often dismissed as nonsense or old hat, and effectively demonized in the media.

If we analyze this reaction from a theoretical point of view, a series of interesting theoretical issues arise which warrant our further attention. To begin with, many of the commentators that later discussed this case in a number of forums, as well as Mr. Barcia himself, used the word 'manipulation' to refer to the strategy of not translating all neutral forms in the text as masculine, which I implemented. Nobody mentioned that precisely translating all neutral forms in the text as masculine is in itself an ideological intervention and, therefore, also an act of manipulation. The only difference is that their course of action –the Spanish translator of the text sided with Mr Barcia as she had made the same gender choices– was backed by mainstream patriarchal values and mine was not. The discussion involved criticism of feminist non-sexist language strategies as a whole, which were dismissed in a translators' internet discussion group, *Tradgal*, as 'unha gilipollez' (rubbish)–the forum is only accessible online to registered professionals–. The masculine gender was portrayed as the generic form, inclusive of women too and therefore the only one likely to be used in the translation of such neutral names in English. However, this theory is flawed in the examples that triggered the actual controversy in the beginning, as Mr. Barcia decided to translate 'liar' as feminine –claiming it referred to the man's wife, but as we have seen in the full context of that word there is no indication of such a thing–. Eloquently enough, he never objected to my feminine translation of 'nurses', therefore implying that sometimes neutral names in English can be translated into the feminine, that is, whenever they comply with patriarchal values. All this confirms the results of my on-going empirical research –unpublished– on the choices made by translators from English into Galician in such cases. On most occasions it is patriarchal values that are adhered to, taken as the norm and therefore never questioned, unless there is a transgression that is perceived as dangerous and unsound, as with the case in question. Here we see, therefore, how theoretical concepts have a clear role to play in translation practice and also how translation perpetuates or confronts sexist values.

In line with this kind of thinking, we can analyze the two main accusations to which I was subjected to in this case: that my translation was 'ideological' and that I was 'unprofessional' –see the list of websites in the cited references where the topic is discussed for further reference, such as Tyrael 2008 quoting Govan 2008. We have already discussed the implications of ideology for translation –see also the opinions of

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other translators in Salgado 2008— and how ideology is perceived there as something that permeates all human action. It is only mainstream ideologies, patriarchy in this case, that go unnoticed and mask themselves as non-ideological. Therefore, my choices are perceived as springing from a kind of partisan, political agenda. Mr. Barcia's position was, however, perceived to be free of that claim. As for the charge of unprofessionalism, this claim was made usually in relation to ideology and has much to do with our previous discussions on the translator's invisibility. Numerous translators —though not all— implied in their comments that I had gone too far. Many of these claims were voiced on the basis of misleading information but my concern is that they would not have differed much even if the people who commented on this case had had access to a more balanced account of the events. There is still a widespread belief, in the Galician context and generally, that translations must be faithful —to whom?— and that translators have to be secondary figures, invisible and quiet. That attitude is in line with traditional translation theory, which has come down to us through centuries of submission and complicity with mainstream values. Many translators who would endorse such claims would probably also complain about the very low rates that customers pay for their work, in doing so failing to notice that both circumstances are in fact inextricably linked.

I was also portrayed as 'unprofessional' on the grounds that I did not comply with the contract. As the publisher was paying, I was supposed to accept his orders uncritically. To begin with, I never signed a contract that forced me to write a translation with sexist choices in it. Secondly, the generalized view that the customer is always right may lead to implications that are, quite frankly, terrifying —the work of Kate Sturge on translation practice under Nazi rule has examined this fact in great detail—. The dubious right of a customer not to pay for a service without any legally sound reason —as the contract by *Rinoceronte* unlawfully states in one of its terms— leaves the possibility open for all translations to be done without pay, as any customer can claim upon receiving the text that it was not up to the required standard. There have been cases in the Galician Association of Translation and Interpreting Professionals in which a customer denied payment due to the alleged poor quality of a translation. In this case the customer was a company and the text was not meant for publication, so it was not a public issue. The law has always been on the side of the translator so far. In this particular case it is enough to think why, without any sound reason, the publisher claims that his gender choice is more correct than mine and reaches the point of terminating a contract because of two words that are irrelevant to the plot. Why these two words exactly? For me the answer is clear, but I will let everyone come to their own conclusions regarding the matter. What I can assert, however, is that this is against the usual practice of publishing in Galicia and elsewhere and also against copyright law, which recognizes authorship of a translation as belonging exclusively to the translator. This means that if any changes are made in a translation, they have to be approved by the translator, and in the case of any disagreement, it has to be the translator's criteria that has to be respected, as he or she is ultimately the owner of the text. We must not forget that a translation contract in the field of literary translation implies permission to use the work, but ownership is always in the hands of the creator of the text (*Ley de Propiedad Intelectual 1996*). Besides, it is the translator's name that will be associated with the text and criticism

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of any kind will target her or him. In other professional contexts outside the literary –think for instance in the case of the translation of exhibition catalogues or travel guides–, it is often the case that professional translators refuse to have their name on texts that have been altered to great extent.

The issue of ownership is also related with the power-related asymmetries which characterize the relationship between author and translator in more ways than one. There is still the widespread belief that the author must have the final say on his –masculine intended– text. While we have seen that from the legal point of view, it is the translator who is the only owner of his or her text, from the moral point of view, many think that he or she has to be subjected to the criteria of the author. In short, then, translators are still seen as handmaidens to authors. Any translation is an interpretation of the text, and therefore the author has no right to decide over that new text. Even when the author is alive –which is not always the case– and even in the rare cases when they actually understand the language into which the text is being translated, the translator has the option of contacting the author, but not the obligation. There are translators who feel more confident if they have the author's support, or authors who go to great lengths in order to control the translations of their work, but this does not mean that there is any basis of any kind to assume that a translator must contact the author. The visible obsession with contacting the author that the statement by *Rinoceronte* displayed can be explained by the fact that concept such as 'the author's intent' still holds sway in literary translation. That in this particular case, several articles and comments were written which questioned my 'manipulation' of the text against the will of the original author and ridiculing my attempt to be smarter than him also testify to this view (Monzó 2008).

Gender-n@tions

The events so far have shed light on the many mismatches still in full force between translation theory and practice. However, there is another interesting aspect in this whole case that I would like to mention briefly. Apart from the statements made by myself and the publisher, there was a large number of comments published on websites and other media, which went beyond the discussion of mere translation practices and focused on the notions of gender and the nation in the current Galician context.

As we have seen, the publisher's strategy focused from the outset on portraying an image of me as the madwoman in the translation attic. If we consider that I have always presented myself as a feminist, both in my writings and in activism, and the bad press that this sort of positioning will normally elicit, this case opened the door for a whirlwind of criticism and insults about my general standpoint as a feminist. What is interesting to see is that *Rinoceronte* has been seen as an innovating project in the Galician literary system, relevant for the Galician language, inasmuch as its mission statement as a publishing house professes a clear interest in the 'quality' of their translations and the 'dignification' of the translation profession in Galicia (see *Rinoceronte's* website). The publishing house set out to 'fill a gap' and offer Galician readers access to literatures that would not be easily accessible otherwise. A worthy cause, and one that I myself supported. However, in the course of time there were some aspects in the project that showed relevant flaws. Firstly, the list of books published so

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far shows a noticeable androcentric and Eurocentric bias. Their claim that they hire only professional translators is also questionable –and there is no proof whatsoever of this statement. Only a few of the translators who have worked for them and whose texts have been published have either experience or a translation degree, and even fewer have both. There are also inconsistencies with their policy on payment terms and conditions –the representative of *Rinoceronte* recently claimed in an interview that they deducted up to 40% of the translator fees to pay for corrections (Valado 2008: 13). All these aspects were overlooked when this controversy was unleashed.

In view of this, *Rinoceronte* has emerged as the questionable defender of translators and of Galician culture and language, whilst I have remained the mad feminist who wanted to destroy such a worthy project. There were many supporters of this cause (Jaureguizar 2008) who in turn took the opportunity to show their true colours about gender issues. This has been a constant trend in public spaces such as the digital platform *Vieiros*, where online discussions have included as many as over a hundred comments, many of them of a highly insulting nature, whenever a feminist-identified individual writes about a given topic (Castro 2008a). Above all, the statements show that the concept of the Galician nation is capable of integrating patriarchal projects, and also projects that go against the rights of workers or directly exploit women –see, for example, the eloquent case of Zara–. However, the national project does not seem able to digest a redefinition of the nation in which the values of gender equality and feminism are heralded. The fact that the arguments used to defend *Rinoceronte's* position were linked to its commendable project says a great deal about the imaginary upon which the notion of Galician nation has been built. This is in fact one of the most disturbing issues linked to this entire process, as it has wide implications for the political reality that is being constructed in Galicia. While language specialists in Galicia, as Olga Castro claims (2008a), have no problem with the introduction of neologisms –such as those for common concepts such as ‘beirarrúa’, the word for ‘pavement’ or ‘pacovazquista’, a term referring to a follower of former mayor of A Coruña, Paco Vázquez–, they reject non-sexist language options by appealing to an understanding of grammar that most people would deem anachronistic or unnecessarily rigid in other contexts. As Castro claims, it is not @ that disturbs, but women (2008a).⁷

There are many arguments, however flawed, that could be used in this public controversy. The publisher could have simply claimed that he has the final right to decide over a translator, though of course this would be in contradiction with copyright law and with the fact that he has also worked as a translator on other occasions and may himself have not accepted such a stance from the publisher. The use of his worthy enterprise as one of the main arguments against the ‘feminista túzara’ (pig-headed feminist) is worrisome and actually shows that there is an acute need for far more feminist intervention in ongoing redefinitions of the nation (see Hooper 2006 and Miguélez-Carballeira 2009 for a discussion of this issue in the literary field). Portraying somebody as a madwoman undermines the public visibility and worthiness of her cause, and this strategy is so old that society has got used to such portrayals. In its milder version, this strategy also manifested in the voices of those who wondered why I did not keep quiet about the issue, an admonition that is dangerously redolent of the silence that encircles gender violence or

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The symbol @ has been for some time used in written Galician as a gender-inclusive noun ending, as it conveniently comprises both an 'o' (masculine ending) and an 'a' (feminine ending).

other gendered violations of human rights. This case therefore underlines the need for alertness when handling exchanges of information about such important matters. It has also served to demonstrate how feminists have been and continue to be portrayed, and how such distortions usually interlock with patriarchal definitions of the nation.

Conclusions

The case that I have presented, although personal and unique, clearly shows some of the implications of feminist translation theories in practice. This is an interesting, if also extreme case, as well as, it needs to be added, the only one I have encountered in my eleven years as a professional translator where a publisher has opposed very mild feminist translation strategies –what I call ‘minimum intervention’, Reimóndez 2001– to the point of terminating a contract and not paying for the work. This article also aims to expose the true colours of many apparently progressive –or openly sexist– commentators who immediately resorted to the mad translator metaphor –and charge– without having any detail about or fair understanding of how this case had come about.

This whole controversy may serve to teach us a number of important lessons. Firstly, it has brought into relief the need to continue applying feminist forms of intervention at all levels –translation, press, theory– in order to avoid –or at least minimize– the ongoing ridiculing of feminists in the cultural, political and intellectual arena, and especially to promote a definition of the nation that has no room for sexism, racism or any other kind of oppression. Secondly, it has highlighted the need to unmask non-ideological translations as patriarchal. As was previously noted, much work still needs to be carried out in the Galician context along these lines. By engaging with this type of critical enquiry, we will be able to understand the ideological character of all translations as something that is inherent to them, and therefore, formulate a new definition of professionalism that can no longer be based on fidelity and a subjection to the author’s intent, but on ethical choices that acknowledge our role as mediators in a site of power struggles and inequalities. Translation, as both theoreticians and many practitioners have been saying for over two decades now, is about making choices. It is time that we stop making these choices undercover and let everybody be responsible for their actions in clear light of day. In my case, this painful process has not deterred me from pursuing those objectives; quite the opposite, it has shown how far we are from the nation where I and many others would like to live.



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