

# Brazilian Sinologist Reis's Translation Strategy: Comparing His Portuguese Translation of Mo Yan's Novel *Wa* With Goldblatt's English Version

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**Abstract**—Amilton Reis is the first Brazilian sinologist who translated Nobel Prize Winner Mo Yan's novels from Chinese into Portuguese. He has translated Mo Yan's *Bian* (*Mudan qǐ/Change*, 2013), *Sanshi nian qian de yici changpao* (*Uma corrida há 30 anos/A long run thirty years ago*) and *Wa* (*As rãs/Frog*, 2015). This paper, based on first-hand examples, takes his Portuguese translation *As rãs* as the research object, and examines his translation strategy from aspects of cultural replacement, cultural omission, cultural dilution, cultural interpretation, cultural annotation, cultural literal translation, language beautification, language dilution, and so on. In order to better understand the characteristics of his translation strategy, this article compares his Portuguese translation with the English translation *Frog* by American sinologist Howard Goldblatt. The study found that, while Goldblatt's translation strategy is basically "reader-oriented", Reis's translation strategy is more "reader-oriented" or "reader-centered".

**Index Terms**—Amilton Reis, translation strategy, *As rãs/Frog*, Portuguese translation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Amilton Jorge da Costa Reis is the first sinologist who translated Mo Yan's novels from Chinese into Portuguese<sup>1</sup>. He has translated Mo Yan's *Bian* (*Mudan qǐ*)<sup>2</sup>, *Sanshi nian qian de yici changpao* (*Uma corrida há 30 anos*)<sup>3</sup> and *Wa* (*As rãs*)<sup>4</sup>. He has also translated Mai Jia's novel *Jiemi* (*O criptógrafo*)<sup>5</sup>. At present he is translating Shen Congwen's literary works (Canofre, 2021; Diplomacia Business, 2022). We searched some of the popular online bookstores which offer services for Portuguese-speaking readers like *Amazon*, *Fnac*, *Estante Virtual*, etc. and found that *Amazon* and *Estante Virtual* is selling Reis's *Mudan qǐ* (*Change*), *As rãs* (*Frog*) and *O criptógrafo* (*Decoded*), and *Fnac* are selling Reis's *Mudan qǐ* (*Change*) and *As rãs* (*Frog*). To be specific, *Fnac* has sold 9543 copies of *As rãs* with a popularity rating of 4.5/5 marks (the full score is 5). And *Amazon* gives a similar popularity rating (4.3/5 marks). There are 19 comments from the readers, of which 16 are positive, 1 negative and 2 mixed. In the positive comments, "attractive", "fascinating" are high-frequency words. The above information suggests that Amilton Reis is already a well-known Chinese-Portuguese translator. In spite of his popularity, few academic publications on Amilton Reis himself and his translations can be found at home and abroad except one MA thesis by Liu (2018), one paper by Hu and Roberto (2018), and another paper by Yang and Shiwang (2022). Liu (2018) examines from linguistic and socio-cultural perspective the domesticating translation strategy in Reis's Portuguese translation of *Bian* (*Change*). Hu and Roberto (2018), from the perspective of ecocriticism and ecofeminism, focused on discussion of the ecological phenomenon in the Portuguese translation of *Wa*, as well as Reis's translation strategies. Yang and Shiwang (2022) conduct an initial exploration of the culture-loaded words in Reis's Portuguese translation of *Wa* (*Frog*). Such being the case, there is still a great space for further researches on Reis's translation. Based on first-hand examples from Reis's translation of *Wa*, this study further investigates the characteristics of Reis's translation of *Wa* and explores his translation strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> João Martins published his Portuguese translation of Mo Yan's novel *Feng ru fei tun* (*Big Breasts and Wide Hips*) in 2007, which is 6 years earlier than Amilton Reis's first publication of his Portuguese translation of Mo Yan's novel. But Martin's Portuguese translation is based on H. Goldblatt's English translation. Later, in 2012, Vasco Rato published his Portuguese translation of Mo Yan's novel *Bian* (*Change*), which is also based on H. Goldblatt's English translation.

<sup>2</sup> Published in 2013 by Cosac Naify Press.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished (Diplomacia Business, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Published in 2015 by Companhia das Letras.

<sup>5</sup> Published in 2022 by Companhia das Letras.

## II. AMILTON REIS: AS A TRANSLATOR OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Born and raised in Brazil, Reis got his Bachelor's degree on linguistics from the University of São Paulo in 1994; He received a systematic training on literary translation at *Casa Guilherme de Almeida* in São Paulo in 2016, the courses including translation theory, the history of literary translation, workshops on poetry, prose translation, literary translation, and intersemiotic translation, and so on; he earned a Master's degree on Chinese etymology in 2020 from the University of São Paulo (Reis, 2020). He is currently a PhD candidate on Chinese-Portuguese literary translation in the University of São Paulo.

He became interested in Chinese language and culture when he was a university student. After graduation, he furthered his study of Chinese for a year in Sichuan University (Wang, 2017). Then, he worked in China for several years, first as an editor in China Radio International (Beijing), later as a translator in Xinhua News Agency (Beijing) and Cultural Affairs Bureau (Macao). He translated Mo Yan's *Bian* and *Sanshi nian qian de yici changpao* during his stay in China. Reis returned to Brazil in 2013, he worked for six years at Companhia das letras and El país brasil, where he translated Mo Yan's *Wa* and Mai Jia's *Jiemi*. He is currently an editor of *The Journal of the Confucius Institute* at the University of São Paulo, and he is now translating the literary works of Shen Congwen, a very famous modern Chinese writer (Canofre, 2021; Diplomacia Business, 2022).

As a sinologist, Reis received professional and academic trainings on Chinese language and culture; as a translator, he is experienced in Chinese-Portuguese translation. In recent years, he has been active in academic activities on Sino-Portuguese translations. For instance, he participated in "The Chinese-Portuguese Literary Translators Forum", "The Award Ceremony for the First Chinese-Portuguese Literary Translation Contest", and so on (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2019). In 2022, Reis was invited as a judge for "The 2nd Chinese-Portuguese Translation Contest for Higher Education Institutions in China".

Reis is the first Brazilian translator who translated Nobel Prize Winner Mo Yan's novels from Chinese into Portuguese. In an interview with Xinhua News Agency in 2017, he said that although some Portuguese translations of contemporary Chinese literature (mostly re-translations based on English translations) have been published in Brazil, contemporary Chinese literature including Mo Yan's works is known only to a very small number of Brazilian readers (Wang, 2017). So far, only a few Chinese literary works have been translated into Portuguese-speaking countries (Li, 2010; as cited in Gao & Xu, 2010).

Reis tends to translate the works of internationally well-known Chinese writers. He confesses that he translates Mo Yan's works because Mo is a Nobel Prize winner and Brazilian readers are eager to know Mo Yan (Wang, 2017).

Reis thinks that the characteristics of the original itself influence the translator's choice of translation strategy (Zeng, 2015). Some of Mo Yan's novels have strong local linguistic and cultural characteristics, which are very exotic or even strange to average Brazilian readers. He says he cannot convey all the exotic flavor to Brazilian readers because of the great linguistic and cultural barriers. Therefore, he believes that the most important thing in translation is to capture the main story line and linguistic connotations, and then recreate them in Portuguese, trying his best to ensure that the translation sounds natural and fluent, retaining some of the original flavor (Zeng, 2015). What he states here reflects to a great extent Reis's translation strategy.

Reis says that some factors like the publisher can have a vital impact on translation, the publisher may constrain the translator's translation strategy (Wang, 2017). He says that when he translated the meanings of certain characters' names in Mo Yan's works, "the publisher did not want him to insert too many annotations or notes into the work because that would negatively influence the readability. But without annotations or notes, the reader cannot understand the meaning of the characters' names" (Wang, 2017). Moreover, his creative Portuguese translations of some dialects in Mo Yan's work had once made the publisher suspect that his translations were problematic. To make a positive response, he "had to use his handwritten translation-related notes which are usually much longer than the translations concerned to explain to the editor why he translated in that way" (Wang, 2017).

## III. AMILTON REIS'S TRANSLATION STRATEGY

Different scholars may have different understandings of what a translation strategy is. For example, Krings (1986) believes that translation strategies are "translator's potentially conscious plans for solving concrete translation problems in the framework of a concrete translation task" (p. 18). Chesterman (1997) thinks that the characteristics of translation strategies are as follows: a) they involve text manipulation; b) they must be applied to the process; c) they are goal-oriented; d) they are problem-centered; e) they are applied consciously; f) they are inter-subjective (p. 93). According to Zhang (2004), translation strategies include "literal translation, sense-for-sense translation, semantic translation and communicative translation, foreignizing translation and domesticating translation". Venuti believes that translation strategies are domesticating strategy and foreignizing strategy (Baker, 2021, pp. 240-244). He adds that "determining whether a translation project is domesticating or foreignizing clearly depends on a detailed reconstruction of the cultural formation in which the translation is produced and consumed; what is domestic or foreign can be defined only with reference to the changing hierarchy of values in the target language culture" (Baker, 2021, pp. 240-243). According to Venuti's explanation of translation strategy, we can understand that translation strategies are actually the cultural values that translators adhere to in their translations.

In Reis's translation of *Wa (Frog)*, he has almost adopted all the common means of translation, including domesticating translation, foreignizing translation, literal translation with annotation, transliteration and so on. But domesticating translation prevails as a whole, thus making his overall translation strategy obviously "reader-oriented". Mo Yan's *Frog* is rich in culture-loaded phrases, and its language is colorful and abundant with colloquialisms. How to deal with the cultural expressions and the linguistic features in *Frog* is not only a great challenge for the translator, but also an effective perspective for us to examine the translator's translation strategies. In what follows we will analyse Reis's translation strategies at cultural and linguistic level.

#### A. Cultural Aspect

*Frog* is rich in Chinese culture-loaded phrases, they are related to China's ecological, social, material, religious, linguistic culture and so on, some of which are historical allusions, some are interesting metaphors that are euphemistic or profound in meaning. Because of the great cultural gap between Chinese and Portuguese, it is difficult to fully convey the original cultural elements. For the sake of readability, Reis adopts many translation methods. The following are typical ones.

##### (a). Cultural Substitution

Cultural substitution is the replacement of ST cultural elements with TT cultural elements. It is an adaptation to the language, culture and aesthetics of the translated language (Yang, 2014, p. 32). Cultural substitution removes the cultural barrier for the readers.

Example 1: 我们向父亲报告了小狮子身怀六甲的喜讯, 年近九十的父亲, 顿时老泪纵横, 胡须颤抖, 感激地说: 苍天有眼, 祖宗显灵, 好人好报, 阿弥陀佛! (Mo, 2020, p. 267).

Portuguese TT: "O céu atendeu nossas preces, os ancestrais nos acudiram, o bem foi recompensado, bendito seja!" (Reis, 2015, p. 390).

English TT: Heaven has eyes, he said emotionally. Our ancestors have revealed themselves. The good shall be rewarded, Amita Buddha (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 307).

苍天有眼 (Heaven has eyes) is a traditional Chinese value of good and evil being returned, and 好人好报, 阿弥陀佛 (The good shall be rewarded, Amita Buddha) is a Buddhist perception of good and evil being returned. These Chinese cultural elements are replaced with Christian cultural elements in Reis's Portuguese translation: 有眼 (has eyes) is replaced by "atendeu nossas preces" (promised prayer) and 阿弥陀佛 (Amita Buddha) by "bendito seja (Deus)" (thanks to the Lord/God). The English translation is a literal translation, which preserves the original cultural elements. In other words, the Portuguese version is more reader-oriented than the English one.

Example 2: 一个自认为犯有罪过的人, 总要想办法宽慰自己, 就像您熟知的鲁迅小说《祝福》中那个捐门槛的祥林嫂, 清醒的人, 不要点破她的虚妄, 给她一点希望, 让她能够解脱, 让她夜里不做噩梦, 让她能够像个无罪感的人一样活下去 (Mo, 2020, p. 272).

Portuguese TT: Uma pessoa que se sente culpada sempre busca algum meio de se consolar, como a viúva de Xiang Lin que procurava se redimir no conto "Sacrifício de Ano-Novo", de Lu Xun, que o senhor bem conhece; quem tem lucidez não deve apontar para os devaneios, dê ao perturbado um pouco de esperança, algum alívio, para que não tenha pesadelos à noite, para que viva como qualquer um sem o sentimento de culpa (Reis, 2015, pp. 396-397).

English TT: Anyone burdened with feeling of guilt must find ways to comfort herself, as Xiang Lin Sao did in the Lu Xun story "Benediction", a character who, as you know well, offered a threshold for people to walk on to atone for what she considered her crimes. Clear-headed people were wrong to have laid bare her illusions, and should have given her hope, let her gain release, have no more nightmares, and live a life free of guilt (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 312).

In traditional Chinese culture, 门槛 (threshold) is sometimes regarded as a symbol or incarnation of a person or a family. 捐门槛 (offer a threshold) originates from Chinese superstition, which is related to the Buddhist idea of "atonement". "Offer a threshold" refers to donating money to a temple so that a threshold, which is superstitiously thought to be the symbol or incarnation of a person, is made for visitors to step on. In this way, the person can alleviate or atone for his or her sins. In Lu Xun's fiction "Benediction", Xiang Lin Sao, a poor woman, whose son and two husbands died in her middle age, feels that she has sinned deeply in her past life. So, she follows the advice of Liu Ma, a superstitious old woman and a firm believer in Buddhism, and offers a threshold to the local temple with her hard-earned money. Reis translates the phrase 捐门槛 (offer a threshold) into "procurar se redimir" (self-redeem). And "redimir" means "redeem", which is closely related to the Christian belief of atonement, redemption, and salvation. The original Buddhist cultural element is substituted by Christian value, which, though does not convey the original cultural element, makes the translation easier for the readers to understand. The English translation is a literal translation, which transmits the Chinese cultural element of "offer a threshold". It is noteworthy that Goldblatt does not use the Christianity-related word "redeem" or "redemption" to express "atonement", but chooses a neutral phrase "atone for" for it, which avoids mixing Christianity with Buddhism.

Example 3: 许司令说了, 用八人大轿抬不来, 就用绳子给老子捆来, 先兵后礼, 老子摆大宴请他! (Mo, 2020, p. 272).

Portuguese TT: O comandante Xu acrescentou: "Se recusar o tapete vermelho, irá amarrado mesmo. Mas como não

batemos sem assoprar, depois ganhará um banquete!” (Reis, 2015, p. 23).

English TT: Commander Xu said if an eight-man sedan chair won't do the trick, he'd hogtie him and take him under escort to a banquet in his honour (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 46).

八人大轿 (eight-man sedan chair) is a variation of the idiom 八抬大轿 (a sedan chair carried by eight men). In Chinese culture it is a sign of respect or important social status. In this example, it is used as a metaphor. Reis replaces the “eight-man sedan chair” with “o tapete vermelho” (red carpet), which in western culture denotes respectability or importance. The cultural element of the original text is not translated, and the replacement “o tapete vermelho” makes the translation easier for Portuguese readers to understand<sup>6</sup>. “Red carpet”, as a sign of honour, respect or importance, can be traced back to the earliest existence in the classic Greek play *Agamemnon* written by Aeschylus in 458 BC. When Agamemnon, the commander of the allied Greek forces, returns home after the Trojan War ends, his wife Clytemnestra prepares a path paved with red carpet to welcome him. Since then, “red carpet” has been a sign of respect and dignity. This is similar to “eight-man sedan chair”. The English translation “eight-man sedan chair” is a literal translation, which faithfully transmits the original cultural elements.

#### (b). Cultural Omission

Cultural omission means that the translator omits the cultural elements of the original text in the translation. Cultural omission is used mainly because the translator considers that the TT readers may have difficulties in understanding or accepting the cultural elements of the original, or that the original cultural elements may affect the fluency or readability of the translation, and consequently affect the reader's reading interest.

Example 4: 这又是你犯糊涂了, 姑姑道, 他爱小狮子, 那是他剃头挑子一头热, 小狮子并没说要跟他好 (Mo, 2020, p. 272).

Portuguese TT: “Deixe de bobagem”, disse minha tia. “Ele pode amar Leoazinha, mas é unilateral, ela nunca disse que queria namorar com ele” (Reis, 2015, p. 237).

English TT: You're wrong again, she said. His love for her is a one-sided affair, like a barber's carrying pole – only the pail on one end is hot. Little Lion never once expressed any interest in him (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 184).

剃头挑子一头热 (a barber's carrying pole – only the pail on one end is hot) is a Xiehouyu, also known as a two-part allegorical saying (Lai, 2008). Xiehouyu is a special form of Chinese language, the first half being the riddle and the second half the answer. The two parts are metaphorically combined in a witty and funny way, which often gives the reader or listener a happy surprise. To make TT readers understand Xiehouyu 剃头挑子一头热, an explanation of 剃头挑子 (a barber's carrying pole) is necessary. “A barber's carrying pole” is usually a carrying pole with a pail of hot water hanging at one end and shaving and washing tools hanging at the other. This cultural element is missing in Portuguese culture. To avoid adding a reading burden to the readers, Reis abandons the original culture in his translation and only translates its connotative meaning “unilateral”. The English translation is basically a literal translation, but “the pail” is added for readers' comprehension.

Example 5:

嫂夫人, 您可千万别开这种国际玩笑, 您与小跑, 是绝配。

确实是绝配, 小狮子道, 连根孩子毛都没生出来, 不是绝配是什么? (Mo, 2020, p. 272)

Portuguese TT:

“Cunhada, não exagere na piada, vocês formam um casal perfeito”.

“Casal perfeito, pois sim”, retrucou Leoazinha, “não geramos nem o fio de cabelo de uma criança, isso é que é perfei ção, não é?” (Reis, 2015, p. 298).

English TT:

No more of your world-famous joke please, Wang Gan said. You and Xiaopao are an ultimate match.

We must be, Little Lion said, since not even a glimpse of a child has appeared. If that's not an ultimate match, what is it? (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 235).

The first 绝配 (ultimate match) means that the couple is well-matched, while the second and third 绝配 are puns: they mean a) the couple is well-matched, and b) they do not have the competence to bear a child, which, according to traditional Chinese value, is a great insult or humiliation for the couple. The puns are difficult to translate. Both translators omitted the second meaning in the puns.

#### (c). Cultural Dilution

<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that the same cultural phrase 八人大轿 is translated differently by Reis in the following example:

她哭着说, 姑姑啊, 姑姑, 我上了他的当, 我被他骗了, 即便他用八人大轿来娶我, 我也不会嫁给这样的畜生 (Mo, 2020, p. 272).

Portuguese TT: Chorava muito. “Tia, por favor, tia. Fui eu que caí nessa, ele me enganou. Agora, mesmo que me fizesse uma bela proposta de casamento, não me casaria com aquele monstro” (Reis, 2015, p. 316).

English TT: Gugu, she sobbed, dear Gugu, he tricked me, he lied to me. I wouldn't marry that bastard if he sent an eight-man sedan chair for me (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 46).

This time, Reis translates 八人大轿 into “uma bela proposta de casamento” (a good condition for marriage) to match the context. This is a cultural interpretation. The Portuguese translation does not convey the cultural overtones and metaphorical rhetoric of the original, but is simple and straightforward and easy for the reader to understand. The English translation is again a literal translation, which retains the cultural elements.

Cultural dilution means that the translation conveys only part of the culture embodied in the original text. Cultural dilution is “a way of cultural adaptation in translation, which can reduce or eliminate cultural conflicts or avoid cultural overload” (Yang, 2019, p. 69).

Example 6: 学校伙房里的王师傅，参加过抗美援朝，他说飞行员是用黄金打造的 (Mo, 2020, p. 29).

Portuguese TT: O mestre Wang, do refeitório da escola, que tinha participado da Guerra da Coreia, dizia que os aviadores eram feitos de ouro (Reis, 2015, p. 48).

English TT: Cook Wang from the school kitchen, who had fought in the Korean War, was of the opinion that they were made of gold (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 36).

The original 抗美援朝 literally means “fight against the US and help the North Korea”, which happened in the early 1950s. It is actually part of “the Korean War”. The term 抗美援朝 refers to the period when the Chinese People’s Volunteers participated in the war, including the mass movement of the Chinese people to support the North Korean people in their fight against the American invasion (Feng, 2011, p. 2). The original term contains then-dominant Chinese ideology and narrative skill, it partly differs from “the Korean War” in cultural connotation. The Portuguese translation “a Guerra da Coreia” (the Korean War) and the English translation “the Korean War” convey part of the original culture concerned, and they dilute the cultural connotations of the original.

Example 7: 他拉着王小梅给他当三陪，少不了把王小梅当礼物送给那些人玩弄 (Mo, 2020, p. 211).

Portuguese TT: Ele levava Wang Xiaomei de acompanhante, chegava a dar a moça de presente para os convidados (Reis, 2015, p. 314).

English TT: So he dragged Wang Xiaomei along to drink and eat and entertain the officials, probably even offering her up as a gift for their pleasure (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 247).

The term 三陪 (literal meaning: triple companion) is a Chinese cultural term with pejorative connotations, it generally refers to young and beautiful women who are invited (usually by corruptive bosses) to eat, drink and play (or even sleep) with officials or businessmen. It also refers to pretty waitresses who are invited to drink, dance and sing with officials or businessmen in nightclubs. The Portuguese translation “de acompanhante” (as accompany) conveys part of the original cultural elements, it greatly dilutes the original cultural connotations. The English translation “to drink and eat and entertain the officials” conveys more cultural elements than the Portuguese translation, but some of the original cultural connotations are also diluted.

Example 8: 我姥姥家也是贫农 (Mo, 2020, p. 30).

Portuguese TT: Minha avó também vinha de uma família pobre do campo (Reis, 2015, p. 49).

English TT: My maternal grandmother’s family was also dirt poor (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 35).

The term 贫农 (poor peasant) is a political term as well as a cultural term in China. It refers to a) a poor peasant, and b) a politically reliable ally for proletarian revolutionaries. At the end of 1952, the Chinese government issued an official document concerning “class origin”, in which the “poor peasant” (as a political class) was given a relatively high social status. To be more specific, the social status of “poor peasant” is higher than employed peasant, middle and lower peasant, middle peasant, upper and middle peasant, rich peasant, landlord and bully landlord.

For more than 30 years, “class origin”, as a political and cultural phenomenon, had profoundly affected the lives of hundreds of millions of rural Chinese. The idea of “class origin” gradually disappeared after the mid-1980s. The term “poor peasant” is rich in connotations in China. Both the Portuguese translation “de uma família pobre do campo” (poor rural family) and the English translation “dirt poor” (extremely poor) only convey the first meaning, leaving the second meaning unattended, which dilute the cultural connotations of the original.

#### (d). Cultural Interpretation

Cultural interpretation means that the translation only conveys the general meaning or implied meaning of the cultural elements of the original text, without presenting the original cultural elements. Because of the great linguistic and cultural differences between the ST and the TT, cultural interpretation in translation can reduce the reader’s reading burden and enhance readability.

Example 9: 多少人死在你的手里，老娘手里有枪，立马儿就崩了你！姑姑伸出右手食指，指着老太太的头。姑姑当时是个十七岁的大姑娘，竟然自称“老娘”，把很多人逗笑了 (Mo, 2020, p. 272).

Portuguese TT: “Quantos morreram em suas mãos? Se eu tivesse uma arma, estourava seus miolos agora mesmo!” Estendeu o braço direito com o dedo indicador, imitando o cano de uma arma apontada para a cabeça da parteira. Ao falar, minha tia usava expressões de gente velha, apesar de ser uma mocinha de dezessete anos, o que fez muita gente rir (Reis, 2015, p. 34).

English TT: I don’t know how many people have died at your hand, but if a woman like me had a gun, she’d happily put a bullet in your head. Gugu pointed her finger at the old woman’s head. She was all of seventeen at the time. The crowd tittered at her use of ‘a woman like me’ (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 23).

China has a long and deep-rooted traditional culture of “respecting the old”, in which “old” means authority, qualifications, experiences, etc. The seventeen-year-old Gugu calls herself 老娘 (literal meaning: old mother), obviously trying to increase the authority of what she says. Generally speaking, this self-appellation “old mother” is culturally difficult for TT readers to understand. It’s very likely that a literal translation would create a cross-cultural

communication barrier. The Portuguese translation of the first 老娘 is “eu” (I), which does not have the cultural elements of the original; the second 老娘 is “minha tia usava expressões de gente velha” (my Gugu uses the expression of an older woman), which has a slight indirect relationship with the cultural elements of the original, but is still a cultural interpretation. The two 老娘 in the English translation is interpreted as “a woman like me”, which merely conveys the general meaning of it.

Example 10: (陈颖的两个老婆) 后来因为打架, 闹得鸡犬不宁 (Mo, 2020, p. 10).

Portuguese TT: (as duas esposas) por causa do escarcú que aprontavam com suas brigas (Reis, 2015, p. 20).

English TT: (The two Chen wives) fought like cats and dogs (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 10).

鸡犬不宁 (literally chickens and dogs are not at ease) is a four-character idiom, which means “very disturbing, or very noisy”. It is both a metaphor and a hyperbole. It comes from a famous Chinese literary classic “Snake Catcher” (捕蛇者说). The origin gives the idiom some special linguistic and cultural characteristics. The Portuguese translation “escarcú que aprontavam com suas brigas” (the scene is noisy because of the fight) conveys its general meaning, it is a cultural interpretation. Goldblatt adopts the English idiom “fought like cats and dogs”, which creatively conveys most of the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the original.

Example 11: 姑姑在不知情的情况下, 被他们蒙骗, 吃过青蛙肉剁成的丸子, 就像你大爷爷跟我讲过的, 周文王在不知情的情况下, 吃了自己的儿子的肉剁成的丸子。后来周文王逃出朝歌, 一低头, 吐出了几个丸子, 那些丸子落地后就变成了兔子, 兔子就是“吐子”啊! (Mo, 2020, p. 310).

Portuguese TT: Fui enganada, sem saber comi bolinhos de carne de rã Como seu tio-avô havia me contado, sem saber, um imperador comeu almôndegas feitas com a carne de seu filho. Mais tarde, quando foi forçado a sair da capital, vomitou algumas almôndegas que, ao tocarem o chão, viraram coelhos, e “coelho” em nossa língua tem a mesma pronúncia de “vomitar o filho” (Reis, 2015, pp. 445-446).

English TT: When King Wen fled from Change, he lowered his head and retched several meatballs, and when they landed, they turned into rabbits, which sounded to him like ‘son’s bits’ (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 353).

In the original, 兔子(tuzi, rabbit) and 吐子(tuzi, spit out the son) are a homophonic pun. The pun is difficult to translate. The Portuguese translation “viraram coelhos, e “coelho” em nossa língua tem a mesma pronúncia de “vomitar o filho” (turned into rabbits, which in our language is pronounced the same as “spit the child”) is a cultural interpretation, the subtlety of the pun is not conveyed, but the translation is easy to understand. The English translation “they turned into rabbits, which sounded to him like ‘son’s bits” conveys part of the pun subtlety, but the difference in pronunciation between “rabbits” and “son’s bits” is too great for readers to sense the homophonic coincidence.

#### (e). Cultural Annotation

Cultural annotation means the translator explains the original cultural elements by means of footnote or endnote in the translation. We find that, besides some endnotes, Reis mainly adopts footnotes for his cultural annotations in his translation<sup>7</sup>. To be more specific, he makes cultural annotations mainly in the following cases: a) where an annotation is needed to help readers have a better understanding of the original, and b) where the translator intends or wants to introduce a cultural element to the reader. For example:

Example 12: 姑姑冷笑道: 孙悟空本事再大, 也逃不出如来佛的掌心! (Mo, 2020, p. 124).

Portuguese TT: Tia zombou disso e disse, “Nem o Rei Macaco, com todo seu engenho, conseguiu escapar da palma de Buda!” (Reis, 2015, p. 188).

English TT: Gugu sneered. Even the magical monkey Sun Wukong could not escape from the Buddha’s palm (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 146).

Gugu thinks she seems to have the magic power of a Buddha, i.e. in her community any woman who wants to give birth to a baby must ask her to deliver it. This is something like the classic story “The magical monkey Sun Wukong could not escape from the Buddha’s palm”, which is from the famous literary classic *Journey to the West* (《西游记》). The Portuguese readers may not understand what Gugu means if they do not know the story. For the sake of readers’ comprehension, Reis adds a detailed footnote for it: O Rei Macaco e a palma de Buda é um episódio da *Jornada ao Oeste*, romance mitológico que narra a peregrinação do monge Xuanzang em busca das escrituras budistas. Confiante em seus poderes mágicos, o Rei Macaco apostou com Buda que seria capaz ir até o fim do mundo. Ele então voou grandes distâncias e chegou a uma montanha de cinco picos. Acreditando ter atingido o sustentáculo do céu, urinou ao pé do pico central e regressou para contar sua façanha. Buda então estendeu a mão ao Rei Macaco e pediu que cheirasse a própria urina em seu dedo médio, fazendo-o entender que jamais havia deixado a palma de sua mão (Reis, 2015, p. 188). With this annotation, the Portuguese readers can not only understand what Gugu says, but also learn a very interesting Chinese classic story. The English version is a literal translation without annotation. Perhaps Goldblatt thinks that English readers may be familiar with this classic story as its English translation has been circulated in the English world for more than 100 years; English versions of *Journey to the West* like Timothy Richard’s *A Mission to Heaven: A Great Chinese Epic and Allegory* and Arthur D. Waley’s *Monkey* have been widely circulated and influential (Zheng & Wu, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> There are 15 cultural footnotes (Reis, 2015, pp. 39-412) and eight cultural endnotes (Reis, 2015, pp. 487-488) in Reis’ Portuguese translation of *Wu (As rãs)*.

Example 13: 有人打太极拳，有人遛鸟，有人拉二胡 (Mo, 2020, p. 327).

Portuguese TT: onde uns praticam tai chi, outros passeiam com gaiolas de passarinho, outros tocam erhu (Reis, 2015, p. 468).

English TT: people are practising Tai Chi, carrying bird cages and playing the two-stringed erhu (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 372).

二胡 (Erhu) is a very common traditional stringed musical instrument in China, which has been played for over a thousand years. In the English translation, “two-stringed” is added to serve as a simple annotation to help the readers conjure up a general picture of the musical instrument. In the Portuguese translation, a more detailed footnote is added: erhu: instrumento musical tradicional chinês com duas cordas e um arco, cujo som se assemelha ao da voz humana. O nome deriva dos Hu, minoria étnica nômade do norte da China na Antiguidade (Reis, 2015, p. 487). This annotation can help Portuguese readers have a better understanding of this traditional Chinese musical instrument and its cultural background.

#### (f). *Literal Translation to Preserve TT Culture*

In order to maintain some of the important distinctive culture of the original text, Reis sometimes adopts literal translation. For example:

Example 14: 陈鼻: 您帮她们借种, 您帮他们借地, 您偷梁换柱, 暗度陈仓, 瞒天过海, 李代桃僵, 欲擒故纵, 借刀杀人……三十六计, 全都施过。姑姑: 只有两计让你施了: 声东击西, 金蝉脱壳 (Mo, 2020, p. 325).

Portuguese TT: a senhora pede semente emprestada para umas, e terra emprestada para outros, “rouba as vigas e troca os pilares”, “avança em segredo para Chencang”, “atravessa o mar sem deixar o céu saber”, “sacrifica a ameixeira em favor do pessegueiro”, “solta quando quer capturar”, “mata com espada de outrem” ... já empregou cada um dos Trinta e Seis Estratagemas. TIA: Só deixei dois para você usar: “tumultuar o Leste para atacar o Oeste”, “abandonar a pele como a cigarra dourada” (Reis, 2015, pp. 464-465).

English TT: So you borrowed seeds and soil, you replace beams with rotten timbers, you used Chencang as a decoy, you deceived the heavens to cross the ocean, you sacrificed the plum to preserve the peach, you let someone get away in order to capture, you killed with a borrowed knife...you have used all the thirty-six stratagems from The Art of War. Gugu: You used only two – you made a sound in the east and attacked from the west, and you escaped like a cicada sloughing off its skin (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 369).

三十六计(The thirty-six stratagems) is a generalization or summary of ancient Chinese military practices and warfare experiences. It is a valuable Chinese cultural heritage. Both Portuguese and English translations are literal translations, in which the important classic Chinese culture is well preserved.

Comparing Reis’s *As rãs* with Goldblatt’s *Frog*, we find that the Portuguese version has significantly less literal translations of this kind than the English version, which suggests that the Portuguese translation is more “reader-oriented”.

### B. *Language Aspect*

Mo Yan’s *Frog* is rich in vocabulary; its language features strong local flavor and impressive literariness. To translate these linguistic features, Reis utilizes many translation techniques, the most impressive ones being language beautification and language simplification.

#### (a). *Language Beautification*

To preserve the language literariness and aesthetic sensibility, or for the sake of readers’ reading habits, Reis embellishes many original words and sentences.

Example 15: (陈鼻的母亲) 艾莲是苏修飞行员的姘头 (Mo, 2020, p. 32).

Portuguese TT: Ai Lian fora amante de um piloto revisionista soviético (Reis, 2015, p. 52).

English TT: Ailian was the Soviet hero’s lover (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 37).

姘头 (pin tou) is a pejorative term for “lover, paramour, or mistress”. The Portuguese translation “amante” (lover) and the English translation “lover” both convey a neutral meaning, which is not derogatory and ornaments the original.

Example 16: 卫生院院长, 你们都认识他, 那个忘恩负义的小畜生 (Mo, 2020, p. 210).

Portuguese TT: O diretor do Posto de Saúde, vocês todos conhecem, era o filho do Huang Pele, da aldeia Hexi, o Huang Jun, aquele ingrato (Reis, 2015, p. 312).

English TT: You know the hospital director, that ungrateful bastard (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 246).

畜生 (chu sheng) usually refers to a pig or a dog, or, in its broad sense, refers to domestic animals like cattle, donkey, and so on. When used as abusive language, it is a very strong and vulgar expletive to express the speaker’s anger, aggressiveness and maliciousness. The Portuguese translation “ingrato” (ungrateful person) is a relatively elegant expression, which embellishes the original. The English translation “bastard” is closer in vulgarity to the original.

#### (b). *Language Simplification*

Language simplification means the implied meaning of the original is simplified in the translation when the original linguistic characteristics are significant but difficult to transfer.

Example 17: 她的饱经沧桑的脸上, 已经显出老者的凄凉 (Mo, 2020, p. 173).

Portuguese TT: Mas seu rosto, marcado pela vida, já mostrava a desolação da velhice (Reis, 2015, p. 261).

English TT: And yet her weatherworn face had the sad look of someone much older (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 205).

沧桑 is a fixed phrase derived from 沧海桑田 (originally means the sea has become a farmland), which implies great changes have taken place. When it is used to describe a “face”, it is both a metaphor and a hyperbole. The Portuguese translation “marcado pela vida” (branded by life) is a metaphor (without hyperbole), so is the English translation “weatherworn” (weathered by wind and rain). Therefore, 沧桑 is simplified in both translations.

Example 18: 领导命令我: 立即回去, 坚决做掉! (Mo, 2020, p. 112).

Portuguese TT: O chefe me ordenou: “Volte para casa agora e garanta que esse aborto vai acontecer!” (Reis, 2015, p. 171).

English TT: I was ordered to return home without delay and make sure the pregnancy was terminated. (Goldblatt, 2014, p. 132).

做掉 is a colloquialism referring to abortion, but its overtone is harsh, vulgar and inhumane. The Portuguese translation “garanta que esse aborto vai acontecer” (guarantee this abortion will be made) and the English translation “make sure the pregnancy was terminated” are both simple statement or general narrative; the original harshness, vulgarity and inhumanity are greatly diluted.

#### IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

We made a comparative study of the Portuguese and English translation with the original text of *Frog* and found that both translations are complete versions without abridgments or deletions<sup>8</sup>. Mo Yan does not use quotation marks for conversations in the original, it is one of the linguistic features of *Frog*. The English version preserves this feature, but the Portuguese version does not.

From the above comparative analyses, we can see that the Portuguese translation is relatively more “reader-oriented” than the English one. However, we believe that changes will slowly take place in the situation. According to Even-Zohar’s polysystem theory, when the translated foreign literature in one country occupies a peripheral position in its literary polysystem, translators usually tend to adopt domesticating translation strategy (Even-Zohar, 2012; Munday, 2016, p. 172); when the translated foreign literature in one country occupies a very important position in its literary polysystem, translators usually tend to adopt foreignizing translation strategy (Even-Zohar, 2012; Munday, 2016, p. 172). Nowadays Chinese literature (including Mo Yan’s works) occupies a peripheral position in Brazil (Li, 2010; as cited in Gao & Xu, 2010; Wang, 2017), therefore, Reis’s “reader-centered” or domesticating strategy is appropriate at the moment. With the continuous rise of China’s international status and the increasing economic and cultural exchanges between China and Brazil, Chinese literature is likely to rise to an important position in Brazilian literary polysystem. If this happens in the future, the strategy for Portuguese translation of Chinese literature may gradually be adjusted towards foreignization.

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<sup>8</sup> Before Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012, abridgments and deletions were not few in English translations of many of his works, such as *Red Sorghum* and *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, etc. (Jiang, 2016; Han & Jiang, 2021). The same is true of Martins’ Portuguese translation of *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, which is based on Goldblatt’s English translation. After Mo Yan was awarded the Nobel Prize, his literary status rose significantly, and abridgments or deletions are very difficult to be detected in translations of his works.



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