

Interview: John and Sula Jensen – a dynamic duo



Many of us know **John Jensen** from his presentations at our PLD meetings and some of his students are members of our Division. He is Professor of Modern Languages at Florida International University, in Miami, where he has taught since 1978, teaching translation and interpretation since 1999. John has also taught at the University of Virginia and SUNY Albany, with visiting positions at Vanderbilt, Georgetown and USMC West Point and universities in Colombia. Born in the U.S., he has lived in Brazil and Colombia and holds a B.A. in Spanish and English, with courses in Portuguese and Education (Brigham Young University) and a Ph.D. from Harvard University in Romance Linguistics. John has translated professionally since 1967, with simultaneous conference interpretation since 1980. Accredited by the ATA Portuguese into English, John has also published extensively on linguistics, language teaching and translation. He is a member of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese and the Associação Brasileira de Linguística.

Sula Godfrey-Jensen is Brazilian, from Salvador, Bahia, and has lived in Bolivia, Trinidad and Panama before the U.S. She has been a full time South Florida-based conference inter-

preter since 1996, but has interpreted since 1990 and translated since 1980, with ATA accreditation from English into Portuguese. Extensive prior employment with the petroleum industry, pharmaceuticals and international banking. Sula holds a B.A. in Portuguese and English from the Universidade Católica de Salvador and a Simultaneous Conference Interpreting Diploma from the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro. Sula is a member of the American Association of Language Specialists (TAALS – conference interpreter) and of the Sindicato dos Tradutores do Brasil (ABRATES/SINTRA – founding member).

PLDATA: Hello, guys, it's a pity not to be able to do this interview in person. Sula, we have seen John quite often over the last few years in our conferences and meetings, but most of us have yet to see you. Can we count on meeting you any time soon?

S. J.: That depends on what conference assignments may come up during the meetings. As you know, we are never the owners of our own time. I hope to be able to meet with you soon.

PLDATA: I've been thinking of talking to you both for a while because I've been curious and maybe a little envious – it

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Editors' Note

Queridos leitores,

It is not easy to wrap up this issue of our PLData in the middle of the nightmare following September 11th. We have many reasons to remain in terror, full of fear and pessimistic, when the sadness subsides. But we can also choose to take this opportunity to open our minds, read more, listen more and educate our opinions about this country and the new world we woke up to on September 12th. And make a difference. We have a responsibility, as workers of languages. Let us make every hour count. Let us go on.

It has been hectic for Heather and I since our last issue, and we already have two time zones between us! Our designer Galina Raff, the one who really puts this newsletter together for you, is another time zone ahead. We are really all over this country, just like you all. Viva e-mail! But we're still, and increasingly, happy about having had the guts to accept Vera's call in Orlando and "adopt" the PLData. It has returned our love twofold. We hope you like it too.

From ratty ribbons in Bahia to reflections on being a native and a new "legal corner", we bring you a little bit of everything this time. Enjoy and write down your ideas – we may call on you soon!

Tereza Braga 

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!

The 42nd Annual Conference

of the American Translators Association
will be held in Los Angeles, California
from October 31-November 3, 2001.

Information: fax ATA at +1(703) 683-6122 or
visit the conference site at:

www.atanet.org/conf2001/general_information_first.htm

Brazilian Translation Journal is Back!

The tenth edition of
Tradução & Comunicação - Revista Brasileira
de Tradutores"

is now available for purchase.

Please contact: adauri@unibero.br

for more information.

This issue will also be available for sale
at the upcoming ATA Conference
in Los Angeles - Oct 31 - Nov 3, 2001.



FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR – ANNOUNCEMENT OF CANDIDATES

As Administrator of the Portuguese Language Division of the American Translators Association, I am pleased to announce that the following people have been nominated as candidates in the upcoming election of Officers of the Division.

Administrator: Tereza d'Avila Braga – Dallas, Texas

Assistant Administrator: Kátia Pirozzi-Iole - Weston, Florida

Secretary: Arlene M. Kelly – Milton, Massachusetts

Treasurer: Ines Novelli Bojlesen – Lake Oswego, Oregon

Ballots will be mailed to all members of the Division at the beginning of October.

Thank you.

Vera Abreu,

Administrator, Portuguese Language Division, ATA

Following are the biography sketches of the candidates:

TEREZA D'AVILA BRAGA is a freelance Portuguese translator and conference interpreter based in Dallas specializing in legal, marketing, trading, finance and business translation in general. ATA-accredited English into Portuguese. Contract interpreter with the U.S. Department of State. Co-Editor of the PLData and frequent contributor and writer. Native of Brazil and living in the U.S. since 1984. Proficiency in English from Cambridge University with specialization in translation from and into Portuguese. M.A. in International Management from the University of Texas at Dallas. Former Trade Officer with the Consulate of Brazil in Dallas. Passions: translating, writing, philosophy, dancing. "I'm very proud of our PLD – the perfect combination of professional development and fun! Looking forward to keeping up the good work done so far".

KÁTIA PIROZZI-IOLE was born and raised in São Paulo, Brazil and has been in the U.S. for 13 years. ATA-accredited English into Portuguese. Worked 4 years in Brazil as a bilingual secretary. Bachelor's degree from Faculdade Ibero-Americana, Translator/Interpreter – English-Portuguese - 1985. Certificate in Teaching English as a Second Language - University of California, Irvine. Taught ESL for 3 years while also working as an interpreter and translator in California. After moving to South Florida, taught Portuguese for several local businesses. Kátia has been a free-lance translator for about 11 years and an ATA member since 1989, participating in most ATA and PLD meetings, as well as events organized by FLATA and other pro-

fessional associations. Areas of specialization: 10 years of video subtitling, technical manuals and documents, mostly computer hardware and software. Kátia brings us valuable experience as a PLD officer and looks forward to continue serving our division.

ARLENE M. KELLY grew up in the United States and developed an interest in South America and in languages at an early age. In college, she studied in both Portugal (Coimbra) and Spain (Madrid). Master's in Latin American Studies from the University of Florida at Gainesville, and later a Master's in teaching and a PhD in history. Her undergraduate thesis included field work on the Xingu River in Brazil, gathering oral history about the heydays of rubber production and surveying local archives for forgotten written materials. Awarded a Fulbright Grant to spend a year doing research in the Brazilian Amazon Region. Ultimately spent 12 years living in Pará, doing research and often translating and interpreting. After her return to the US, Dr. Kelly wanted to use her language ability. While riding the Boston subway system, she had been startled to hear a variety of languages, including Brazilian Portuguese. She pursued the idea of interpreting in court, passed both written and oral exams and began working as a court interpreter in Massachusetts. Since 1998, she has taught three courses in the Bentley College Legal and Medical Interpreter Program. Arlene wrote: "My goals include the continuing education of others, especially those who use our language services in their daily and professional activities. By "continuing", one can safely understand "never-ending," since misconceptions about us and our services seem to have a perpetual life of their own."

INES NOVELLI BOJLESEN was born and raised in São Paulo by parents who spoke 6 languages and "instilled in me the joy of learning and communicating in other languages. One year as an American Field Service exchange student reinforced the notion that my future was in globalization, although at the time the word was yet to be coined. Back in São Paulo I worked for the American Consulate and US corporations, as a bilingual secretary, while receiving training as a translator/interpreter at the Alumni Association. I earned a Bachelor's Degree in Industrial Design in 1973. Appointed as an Official Interpreter/Translator for the State of São Paulo in 1979, I have since then worked full time out of my home office. Moving to the States in 1998 with my husband and son was nothing short from starting anew! Joining ATA as an active member and the Portuguese Language Division has been instrumental in my involvement in the IT community. I look forward to contributing to the Portuguese Language Division, as Treasurer, and hope to continue the excellent work done by former and present officers." ♦

Interview *Continuação da pág. 1*

seems such a great arrangement to me, but I am not sure, and I ask you – do you feel that being a couple working in such similar fields makes you better professionals?

J.J. and S.J.: Definitely. We complement each other. John's native English and Sula's native Portuguese allow us to work together to produce the best work for our clients. We take on translation projects together and can often replace each other on assignments. It's great when we can travel together to conferences, but John's travel is limited by his university assignments. We love spending time in the office or on the road together, and keeping up with each other in our professional growth. We actually met in an interpretation booth, on Sula's first assignment in Florida. It was a few years later that our personal situations had changed and we could think of becoming a couple.

PLDATA: John, what made you choose Romance Linguistics for your graduate studies? Were you exposed to Romance languages in your childhood? When was your first exposure to Portuguese?

J.J.: My exposure to Romance languages as a child began at age 10 when a second cousin, a sailor, gave me a \$2 cruzeiro note. I kept it around for many years, and when I started reluctantly to take Spanish in high school, I tried to read the bill and became fascinated with its similarity to Spanish. At that point I discovered Brazil and tried to learn the language on my own from books and with some help from my Spanish teachers. It was an exciting time to become interested in Brazil, in the late 50's and early 60's, with the inauguration of Brasília, the advent of Bossa Nova, and other world-shaking events. In college I majored in Spanish but took as much Portuguese as I could fit in. Upon graduation I joined the Peace Corps and was invited to spend two years in the interior of Ceará. That clinched the career choice for me, and I went on and did my graduate work primarily in Portuguese. I have absolutely no family connection to any Romance language, being of Danish and British descent.

PLDATA: Bossa nova a world-shaking event? I love it! – you never said you're also a writer! Thank you, John. Another question: I was revisiting yesterday the keynote speech by Harry Obst at the ATA Conference in Austin (1994, I believe) about professionalism. He explained so well the reasons for the bad perception of the general public about us. I loved it when he said "Maybe the fastest road to respectability would be to just call ourselves "translatologists." When you say, "My translatologist charged me 150 bucks an hour", it somehow sounds acceptable. When you say, "My translator charged me 40 bucks an hour," it sounds outrageous. And he talked about the wide array of university programs for translators and interpreters available in Europe and other countries, but not here! Do you predict or expect more programs like the ones you teach at FIU to spring up in the U.S.? Do you feel that the demand is finally increasing?

J.J.: That's a hard one. We have had an active T/I program in Spanish since 1980, but I really do not see any great or rapid growth in academic programs in T/I, for several reasons: lack of recognition of professionalism, and therefore, lack of demand for credentials; lack of qualified teachers—remember that college teachers generally must hold Ph.D. degrees, and a

Ph.D. in translation/interpretation is rare, if it exists at all (T/I professors tend to be "retreaded" literature or linguistic scholars.) And a lack of qualified students: bilingualism is a pre-requisite that most language "majors" never achieve. Besides, the structure of the American university generally serves people between 18 and 25 years old and at this age students rarely have sufficient background for the career. Translators and interpreters seek formal qualification after achieving certain "maturity" and discovering the existence of the field and their own talent for it, so that T/I becomes a "back-to-school" or "adult education" activity, based on university certificates or specialized diplomas rather than standard academic degrees. It is extremely hard for the academic establishment to accept wholly new fields for M.A.'s and Ph.D's, especially because these expensive-to-offer degrees are normally considered qualification for carrying out research rather than vocational training. T/I could become a "professional" degree, like law or medicine, but with greatly limited scope, due to the size of the field and the difficulty of being qualified to begin study. In short, I think we may see some new programs, but in a very gradual process; and older programs may die as their proponents retire or move, as we have already started to see.

PLDATA: Great answer, John. I appreciate this analysis and I think our readers will, too. I was talking to a project manager on the phone the other day who had just browsed quickly through my resume and for the first time I was asked the question "Do you have a TI degree?" It felt good, like 'we're getting somewhere' on this road to professionalization. And I joked with my boyfriend, who is a database administrator, that the only difference between my métier and his is the order of two letters in an acronym – TI and IT! (unfortunately there is a dollar difference, too – I'm still making five figures....⊗). Do you expect project managers to begin asking this question more often in interviews here in the U.S.?

J.J.: Yes, but very slowly. The perception is still strong that "anyone" who possesses the languages can be a translator or interpreter.

PLDATA: So true... Just a minute ago a friend copied me on one of these cyber-ads for a "Portuguese Translator" position at a high-tech corporation. I could 'smell' it right away: when you read the actual ad, the word 'translator' disappears and it says "our client is looking for a native Portuguese speaker; (...) candidate should be fully bilingual". Aaarrgh...! – this always tickles my "angry" bone!...

Sula, what is it you like the most about interpreting? Does it bring you more satisfaction than translating? If yes, how did you find out? Did it take a long time experimenting with both activities until you felt sure? What is the best advice you could give for someone who does not know yet? Can you be equally good in both?

S.J.: What I like most about interpreting is the adrenalin "rush," and the challenge of being able to learn a little about a lot of things, that is, general cultural knowledge of the world, and the constant updating of what is going on today in many fields. I have been a translator longer than I have been an interpreter, which has helped me a great deal in learning terminology and finding the best solutions for words and expressions with more time to research. However, I feel interpreting is bet-


ter fit for my personality since I am very people-oriented, and translating is a solitary-type of activity, although there certainly is a time for it when I feel like being alone. Someone trying to decide what to do needs to look at his or her personality to see if they have an inward or outward type of personality. And, more than anything else, you must discover if you have the innate ability to listen and talk at the same time, for simultaneous interpreting.

PLDATA: Good point, and I understand there is much controversy on this. The teachers with whom I have studied seem to disagree about this innate ability; most insist that it is, instead, a learned skill. I have thought a lot about this. For me personally, the biggest challenge is the so-called “active listening” skill, vital in simultaneous and absolutely crucial in consecutive. In plain language, it’s the skill of paying attention and retaining information. Piece of cake for people who are natural connoisseurs and experts. I’m not. And it’s probably not genetic at all, except in my own mind. On the other hand, mavens with IQs in the stratosphere generally lack the “people skills” you emphasize so well and can make for lousy interpreters. It’s tricky.

Another question for you, Sula, that occurred to me while e-talking this week with my niece. She lives in the State of São Paulo and is finishing her B.A. in Letras and thinking about a T-I career (no, she does not expect to get rich quickly!) Given the choice, should she go right away to graduate school in one of the good T-I programs available in São Paulo or Rio, or should she come spend some time in the U.S. (since she has never lived outside of Brazil and has zero cultural immersion in the language she hopes to work with)?

S.J.: Being practical, I think she should go to a good school in her country, because it would be financially easier for the family. If she feels that she has the innate ability I mentioned above (this assessment can only be made by the person herself), and thinks she would be happy doing T/I, she can pursue studies abroad in an English-speaking country. I am in love with my profession, and I would certainly encourage young people to pursue the career, if they feel they have it in them to do a good job, and to replace the prior generation.

PLDATA: Thank you, Sula, and thank you, John, for talking to us. This was fun.

Long-distance interview conducted by e-mail by Tereza Braga. 

What will be waiting for us in Los Angeles from the **PRELIMINARY PROGRAM** of the **ATA 42nd ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**Millenium Biltmore Hotel – Oct 31st through Nov 3rd,
2001**

Translating English into Brazilian Portuguese

(Pre-Conference Seminar)

Regina Alfarano

Translating Technical Manuals: What are They? What are They Used For?

João Roque Dias

Translation Theories for the Practice of Translation

Vera Abreu

Do’s and Don’ts of Court Interpreting in the U.S.

Lourdes V. Norton

Behind the Scenes of Script Translation: The Art of Translating for the Movie and TV Industries

Flávia Fusaro, Kátia Pirozzi-Iole and Lucia Leão

Biomedical Translations into Portuguese: A Fascinating Minefield

Lucia Mary Singer

How Much is “Very Much”? Developing a Questionnaire Rating Scale in Portuguese for both Brazil and Portugal

Benjamin J. Arnold

How to Prepare a Nice PowerPoint Presentation

(Pre-Conference Seminar)

Paulo Roberto Lopes

Translating Brazil’s 500th Anniversary

Regina Alfarano

Building a Balance Sheet from Scratch

Paulo Roberto Lopes

Dinosaur Cloning 101: A Whimsical Look at the Process of Cloning

Heather A. Murchison

Nuts and Bolts from Bumper to Bumper

Paulo Roberto Lopes

Collaborative Terminology Networks

C. David Brown, Henry Dotterer, Maria Eugênia Farré

Life Before and Inside the Booth – A Reminder

Paulo Roberto Lopes

Important: Please visit ATA’s website at www.atanet.org for updates on this program and maybe some new stuff ...and see you there!

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A NATIVE

by Steve Vlasta Vitek

*To be born once is no more miraculous than to be born twice. –
Voltaire*

I realized for the first time that I was beginning to lose my native language about 12 years ago, while listening to a Czech TV announcer on a San Francisco TV channel (channel 26). This is a channel catering to linguistically diverse audiences in the salad bowl that is the San Francisco Bay Area. The announcer was speaking Czech, a language that I spoke for the first 29 years of my life. I could understand every single word that was coming out of the mouth of that TV announcer, but for some reason, the language that I heard in that moment had an artificial, funny sound to it. To my surprise, I found the sound of it mildly irritating to my ears.



Puzzled and disoriented, I switched to a Chinese TV channel to hear a differently sounding language and test it on my ears, then to English, and then to Czech again. I remember how baffled I was when I realized that I was beginning to lose the feeling for my first language. It was a confusing yet not completely unpleasant realization. After all, one reason why I left my homeland as a young man was to learn other languages as fluently as possible. Was this perhaps a sign that I was beginning to approach my goal? We can only learn other languages by using those other languages rather than our own native language. In a way, we cannot really learn another language until we start forgetting the first one. It's like falling in love again - it can happen again only when we have forgotten what it felt like the last time around.

Every foreign language has a unique sound giving it a different quality that other languages do not have. Our ears are usually finely attuned to pick up the different, peculiar pitch of those foreign sounds, but we don't really hear the sounds of our own language because we are surrounded by it all the time. It is hard to see a tree in the middle of a thick forest. When I asked a native English speaker a quarter century ago what Czech language sounded like to her, she said that Czech to her is a "shi-shi-shoo-shi" sound. I guess its sounds like a goulash made of sibilants and unpronounceable groups of mine fields called consonants. A fascinating phonological insight from across the English Channel!

To me – a once-native Czech speaker, presently a non-native speaker of several languages including Czech, Chinese sounds like the howling of a wolf. Those falling and rising tones sound so exotic, dangerous, and strangely inviting to my ears. Why is it that none of European languages takes advantage of tones the way Chinese or Vietnamese does? Why leave an entire sonic dimension of a language unexplored and wasted? The best way to build the Wall of China around your civilization to protect it from invading barbarians is probably to combine 5 or 6 falling and rising tones and reinforce the wall with a few thousand complicated ideographs expressing those exotic but melodious howls. Is that how and why the Chinese language was created as it is?

I know a lot of people who have no native language anymore. I believe it is true that you can only be really native in a language if it is the only language that you know. As soon as you become fluent in an additional language, your first language will be tainted by your second one. Conversely, you cannot really become fluent in another language unless you start forgetting your original language. This is, incidentally, a theory that many immigrant parents in America subscribe to. Especially Japanese mothers seem to think that the brain of a child is not big enough to

hold comfortably both Japanese and English. If you try to put both languages in that cramped space, one of them will be flawed. And since English is much more important than Japanese in this country, they simply do away with Japanese.

I personally believe that even if it were true that you can be really fluent only in one language, you are much better off if you can speak two or three or more languages, even if all of those languages will be necessarily flawed as a result of your somewhat excessive attempt at linguistic cross-dressing. This difference of opinion in our house is probably just another symptom of the terrible clash between the Japanese culture of my wife and the Bohemian tradition of her husband. The Japanese believe that you should speak and write only one language if you want to speak and write it really well. The Czechs have an untranslatable proverb that says that you are a human being as many times as many languages you know. (*Kolik jazyku znas, tolikrat jsi clovekem*). If you know only one language, you are alive only once. If you know two languages, you are alive twice, you have two lives and two souls. As far as I know, there is no similar Japanese proverb.

I read in a newspaper about a Hungarian man who was kept in Russia as a prisoner of war for 55 years. Because he never learned Russian, he could not communicate with anybody. It seems to me that he was really a prisoner of his native language. Nobody around him even knew that he was Hungarian. He eventually returned to Hungary, which must have been a completely foreign country to him after all those years. Now this is clinging on to one's native accent a little bit too much. After all, our languages and accents are only a means of communication. As long as we understand what is going on in the world around us and as long as we can express what we want to say, our language or accent is really not all that important. But do we really understand what is going on in the world around us, regardless of our language?

Small children do not distinguish between nativeness and non-nativeness at all because they regard all languages as one before the part of their brain that is processing linguistic information becomes fully developed. They sort of throw all words into one place, the way they throw toys and dirty clothes on the bed to run out and play. I used to have a childhood friend whose grandparents were German. His grandmother never

learned Czech because the small town where I grew up in Southern Bohemia was about half German and half Czech before World War II, although very few Germans were allowed to stay after the war. Because my friend Vasek used to spend every summer with his grandparents when he was a child, every summer he would learn enough German to communicate with his grandmother, only to forget it during the rest of the year when he was away from his grandmother. By the time he was about 13 his parents were complaining that this is not good for his native fluency in Czech and his poor grandmother had to learn broken Czech to communicate with Vasek. By the time Vasek was 15, he did not know a single word of German.

When I lived in San Francisco, we had a Chinese babysitter named Mrs. Took who helped us with my son Andy. This meant that Andy, who was about 2 or 3 years old at that time, spent part of his day completely surrounded by adults and children who spoke only Chinese to each other. I watched with utter amazement when Mrs. Took would say something in Chinese to Andy and he responded just like a Chinese kid. She would say something completely incomprehensible to me and Andy would walk to a chair and bring her his jacket, which she would zip up. Andy was too small to zip up his own jacket, but not too small to learn Chinese. But once he was no longer going to Mrs. Took's apartment, he had no use for Chinese any more and forgot every word of it, just like my friend Vasek. Well, he knows one Chinese word, "wa-wa", which is what Mrs. Took used to call his stuffed penguin. I thought that "wa-wa" meant penguin in Chinese, but I found out that it actually means "doll". As Andy does not need to hold his wa-wa any more when he goes to sleep, wa-wa is forgotten somewhere on the bottom of a box of old toys and so, unfortunately, is Andy's Chinese.

Once puberty strikes and raging hormones take over a child's body and soul, the native language is stored fairly safely in one part of the brain and other languages will be stored in a different part. That is, according to scientists, one reason why it is much more difficult for adults to learn a foreign language than for children. You have to go to a different part of the brain every time you try to speak a different language and that's a lot of extra work.

Which brings us to the topic of adults, such as this eternal teenager, who do not speak their original language any more because not even their immediate family members speak it. The only logical conclusion, based on the results obtained in scientific experiments when electrodes were placed on various lobes of the brain to measure the response of "little grain cells" of native and non-native speakers when words were spoken in different languages, is that my brain, as well as the brains of a good part of my readers who use mostly their non-native languages in everyday life, probably look like scrambled eggs. Everything is kind of mixed together. Or are there perhaps slightly different connections in the part of the brain that processes linguistic information in people like me, as opposed to people who speak only their native language?

It's hard to say. I realize that English is not my native language and never really will be. There will always be details that will probably remain beyond my grasp in a non-native language. That is one reason why I decided to translate mostly Japanese and German patents for a living (the main reason be-

ing, of course, that it pays better than other types of translation). My native fluency is less important in this type of translation than it would be, for instance, if I had decided to translate novels. "Patentese" is a very rigid language using the same constructions, often *ad absurdum*, in order to create a description and lay a claim to an innovative technological step, sometimes an imaginary one. The same principles operate in Japanese, German, Czech or English. No matter which sphere of technology a patent translator is dealing with, it is very helpful to have a solid knowledge of Latin and Greek when looking for an appropriate term that perhaps is yet to be coined in English. I personally believe that a linguistic education is a very important part of the required training for patent translators, as important as their native or near-native fluency in the target language and their understanding of the subject at hand. Technical specialists who are not really linguists are more often than not poor translators. But that would be a different story and a different article.

The fact is that I don't really have a native language any more, or a single country that I could call home. And I don't see why I should. When I am in California or Virginia, I often feel that I am a Czech because I sometime perceive things differently than most Americans. When I am back in Prague or my hometown in Southern Bohemia, I feel that I am an American because I definitely perceive the same reality quite differently from people around me who speak my formerly native language.

In a way, I carry my native language and my native country in my heart and in my brain. That is where my nativeness resides. And when I die, my country and my language will die with me.

And another child will be born somewhere, unhappy with having only one language, one culture, one country and one life, and she will, in her own way, discover the greatest adventure of all: another language, another country, another life – as I did.

Because to be born twice is a little bit more miraculous than to be born once, which may very well be what Voltaire really meant.

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Steve Vlasta Vitek received his master's degree in Japanese and English studies from the Charles University in Prague, Czechoslovakia, in 1980. He worked as an in-house translator for the Czechoslovak News Agency (CTK) in Prague in 1980-81 and for Japan Import Center in Tokyo, Japan, in 1985-86. He has been a freelance translator specializing mostly in translation of Japanese and German patents and articles from technical journals for patent law firms in United States since 1987. He recently moved from Northern California, where he spent almost two decades, to Chesapeake, Virginia. He can be reached at stevevitek@patenttranslators.com (or stevevitek@pattran.com).





“PRIMEIRA AMEAÇA AO REINADO DO AURÉLIO” – O NOVO HOUAISS (FIRST THREAT TO AURÉLIO’S KINGDOM – THE NEW HOUAISS)

Excerpts and comments on a story featured in the Brazilian magazine VEJA about the brand new “Houaiss Dictionary of the Portuguese Language”.

A VEJA de 29 de agosto último traz uma matéria deliciosa de Silvio Ferraz, intitulada “O Poder da Palavra”, sobre o novíssimo Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa, que levou uma década para ficar pronto.

Antônio Houaiss morreu em 1999, pouco antes de ver o dicionário terminado. Além de renomado filólogo, Houaiss foi diplomata de carreira, ministro, presidente da Academia Brasileira de Letras e refinado gastrônomo. Mas nada absorveu mais sua existência, diz o artigo, do que “a obsessão de ver publicado o mais completo dicionário da língua portuguesa”.

Só o tempo dirá se a nova obra será aceita pelo grande público como a fonte primordial da língua viva falada hoje no Brasil. Em números absolutos, o artigo diz que ela é imbatível. Com 228.500 verbetes, tem 68.500 a mais que o Aurélio. Em Portugal, diz Silvio, o recém-lançado dicionário da Academia de Ciências tem 120.000 verbetes. Os livros foram impressos na Itália por causa das exigências técnicas especiais – 3.008 páginas montadas em um único volume de 3,8 quilos. A editora é a Objetiva, que apostou 5 milhões de reais nesse seu mais ousado empreendimento.

Quem pensava que “anticonstitucionalissimamente” era a maior palavra da língua portuguesa errou. Ela perdeu para outra ainda mais extensa. Quem ostenta o título agora, diz o artigo, é “penumoultramicroscopicossilicovulcanoconiótico”. São 46 letras que descrevem o estado de quem é acometido de uma doença rara provocada pela aspiração de cinzas vulcânicas. O novo dicionário está cheio de curiosidades, segredos garimpados em centenas de obras consagradas e uma pesquisa histórica profunda que datou a entrada de quase todas as palavras no idioma.

No final da complexa empreitada, o dicionarista-chefe do projeto Houaiss, Mauro Villar, estava à beira de um ataque de nervos, diz Silvio. Não é para menos. Editar o dicionário Houaiss em uma década foi um feito, explica ele. Historicamente, projetos semelhantes levam muito mais tempo. A maior força impulsionadora foi o próprio Antônio Houaiss em pessoa. “A erudição, somada ao conhecimento e à tenacidade de alguém que levou apenas nove meses para traduzir a obra inaugural da modernidade, o Ulysses, do irlandês James Joyce – enquanto sua mãe morria de câncer -, fez de Houaiss o homem talhado para a tarefa monumental”.


O artigo conta com detalhes todas as fascinantes etapas do projeto e termina com reflexões sobre o nosso eterno assunto da expansão da língua, do purismo e dos estrangeirismos. “Tudo o que vem de fora para simplificar permanece. Não adianta espernear”, diz o professor Leodegário de Azevedo Filho, presidente da Academia Brasileira de Filologia e autoridade mundial em Camões. “O avanço do inglês sobre os idiomas”, continua Silvio, “é visto como fato natural entre filólogos e dicionaristas, devido à liderança tecnológica dos Estados Unidos. A tecnologia de ponta trouxe manuais, apostilas, cursos e termos que consagram o inglês a ponto de hoje ele ser falado por 1 bilhão de pessoas, na maioria bilíngües. Antes do inglês, o francês teve status de língua franca no mundo – e atraía sobre si a mesma fúria nacionalista dos defensores dos idiomas pátrios.”

Silvio lembra que “saudade” é talvez a palavra da qual os usuários da língua portuguesa mais se orgulham, por a julgarem intraduzível. E conta que José Saramago, ganhador do Prêmio Nobel de Literatura, acompanhou parte dos trabalhos da equipe do Houaiss e se encantou com a definição de “saudade” apresentada a ele por Mauro Villar: “sentimento mais ou menos melancólico de incompletude”.

Segundo o professor Evanildo Bechara, da Academia Brasileira de Letras, uma das razões pelas quais o novo Houaiss é uma “revolução literária” é o fato de ter abandonado o recurso, usado em outros similares, de definir um verbo pela utilização sucessiva de sinônimos. “Houaiss ensina o significado”, diz o acadêmico. “Se pecado há no novo dicionário, é o de dar mais do que se pede”.

Boas notícias para nós!

Thanks to Harvie Jordan, in Austin, for sending me the VEJA article.

— Tereza Braga 

Introdução – A finalidade desta coluna é informar e servir de mini-fórum para debate e elucidação de termos e expressões jurídicos. O autor não é advogado, embora tenha cursado Direito e trabalhado intensamente na área durante uns bons vinte anos. Fica prometido que quaisquer dúvidas ou sugestões dirigidas ao endereço theodoro@attglobal.net serão aqui atendidas dentro do possível

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Contendas terminológicas e semânticas

Muitos advogados de renome têm casos internacionais.

Sem entrar no mérito da questão, isso não é verdade. Na realidade, são patronos (counsel, attorneys) de “causas” (ou processos) internacionais. Propriamente dita, a palavra “caso” significa “evento”, “eventualidade” ou “hipótese” entre os profissionais do direito.

Num condado relativamente surrealista, o juiz ficou uma vara, saiu do circuito e se declarou incompetente.

Não se trata da novela das nove em certa emissora tupiniquim. Se trata, isso sim, de probleminhas até certo ponto fúteis mas que já foram objeto de discussão em fóruns de tradução.

A vara era um bastão carregado como símbolo de autoridade pelos juizes. Da mesma forma, os magistrados romanos ostentavam um feixe de varas (*fascas*) com uma machadinha inserida entre elas. Uma advertência aos malfeitores: ao desrespeitar a lei seriam açoitados e até decapitados. A expressão “o acusado foi conduzido sob vara” ainda existe no nosso direito – significa que foi levado à justiça a mercê (lei tem pena?) de mandado de prisão.

Hoje em dia, sua acepção mais comum é de “circunscrição ou área judicial” e muita gente, advogados e tradutores americanos principalmente, gosta de verter “vara” como “circuit”. A discussão é fútil, mas na verdade existem muito menos “circuits” numa determinada área geográfica nos EUA do que “varas” no Brasil numa localidade equivalente. Uma palavra mais próxima é “division”. Um mesmo fórum (court house) pode conter dúzias de varas no Brasil, assim como uma Court House nos EUA pode ter sob o mesmo teto diversas Court Divisions (Division I, II, III, etc.). Além disso, às vezes a melhor versão – *latu sensu* – é como “court” mesmo. Por exemplo: Vara de Família (Family Court), Vara Cível (Civil Court), Vara Criminal (Criminal Court), se bem que a 4ª. Vara Cível ficaria, na opinião do autor, melhor vertido como “the 4th Court Division”.

E o “circuit”? Este vai para o português mais ou menos bem como “circunscrição (judicial)”, já que o uso de “vara” poderia dar a entender que o mesmo conceito existiria nos EUA. É a mesma questão implicada na versão de “ilícito civil” como “tort” ou “fiduciário” como “trustee”;

conforme o contexto ou natureza do documento, estas palavras podem causar confusão semântica.

Nada, absolutamente, surrealista em uma autoridade judicial declarar-se incompetente. Diz-se que “the judge recused himself or herself” para a causa (por uma série de motivos em potencial). Incompetência, afinal de contas, nada mais é do que “lack of jurisdiction”. Relativamente falando, no entanto, existe uma nuance surrealista em se traduzir “County” como “Condado” para o vernáculo. Afinal de contas, no Brasil não existe conde e o último de quem lá ainda se fala é o saudoso Conde D’Eu, da época do Império... Mas igualmente consta que inexistente nobreza nos EUA. Aqui temos um caso típico daqueles do “tanto faz como não fez”. Muita gente gosta de traduzir como “comarca”. Na realidade, o problema é que no Brasil não existe “county” como divisão geopolítica. Seria a mesma discussão entre “municipality” ou “city” na hora de verter-se “município”. Tudo isso serve para mostrar que a tradução na área jurídica depende muito mais de contexto, natureza ou finalidade do documento e fatores quetais do que no caso da tradução em qualquer outra área.

“Legal Briefs”

Did you know?

Of the first 42 U.S. presidents, 26 were lawyers.

The U.S. has 5 percent of the world’s population and 70 percent of its lawyers.

Court transquips:


Q: “Are you being selective about what you remember and what you don’t remember as to the details of your previous record?”

A: “I don’t remember.”

* * *

Q: “Doctor, as a result of your examination of the plaintiff, is the young lady pregnant?”

A: “The young lady is pregnant, but not as a result of my examination.”

Editor’s Note: This is the debut of “The Legal Corner”. Enéas Theodoro, Jr. has 20 years of experience in legal translation. He began working as a conference interpreter in 1976 before becoming a translator. He was a partner with several attorneys in a legal translation office in São Paulo for 10 years. He received his training as translator/interpreter at the Alumni Association, in São Paulo, the first translation school in Brazil, where he later became a teachers’ supervisor. Certified by the São Paulo State Government in 1979. Please see his most recent article, “Overview of the U.S. and Brazilian Legal Systems: Concepts and Terminology”, in the last issue of the Chronicle (number 8, August 2001). Thanks, Enéas! 

A Ratty Ribbon on My Wrist, Salvador on My Mind

by Alexandra Russell-Bitting

On my wrist, a blue ribbon is fraying. It reads: *Lembrança do Nosso Senhor do Bonfim*, “Souvenir from the Church of Bonfim.” My new-found translator friend from cyberspace Marcia Bértolo took me and fellow adventurer Marian Greenfield to the popular hilltop sanctuary in Salvador, Bahia. Two rooms in Bonfim overflow with photos, plastic moldings of assorted body parts, silver charms and paintings testifying to the church’s reported miraculous healings.

Vendors hawk the brightly colored ribbons, which you’re supposed to have a friend tie on your wrist with three knots. For each knot, you get a wish, and if you wear the ribbon until it falls off by itself (no cutting or pulling allowed), your wishes will come true. Marian, Marcia and I took turns tying the ribbons on each other, and my now-shredded bracelet keeps reminding me of friendship, faith and a little mystery.

A Faded Tatoo on My Arm

On my arm, the henna tattoo of a hummingbird I got at Barra, one of Salvador’s many sandy beaches, has almost faded away. Across the street from our hotel, we swam in the calm, clear waters of Todos Os Santos Bay. We lounged under a beach umbrella facing the imposing island of Itaparica, sampled a tropical fruit called *pinha*, and laughed to see a man with a watering can sprinkle seawater on the overheated tootsies of sun-bathers in a procedure he referred to as *hidroterapia*.

Marcia drove us to another beach north of Salvador, past the mythical Itapoã, to wind-blown Praia do Catussaba. There we braved the crashing surf and nibbled on fresh cashew nuts, chilled green coconut, acarajé fritters and whole crabs. “This is the life, my friend,” said Marian.

Peeling Blisters on My Feet

On my feet, the blisters have almost healed. I look at the peeling skin and remember the beat of the live drums at the African dance class I attended. Another translator friend we met through Marcia, Susana Rocha, had urged us to go with her. “The instructor’s a *pai de santo*,” she explained, a priest in the local Afro-Brazilian religion called Candomblé. As he led us in pivots, shuffles and slides that looked more like incantations, the drumbeat literally lifted me off my feet.

We could see those African roots everywhere in Salvador, in the Rainbow Coalition of the people, of course; in the Yoruba chants and twang of the berimbau accompanying demonstrations of *capoeira*, an Afro-Brazilian martial art disguised as a dance, on the streets and in theaters; and in the West African folklore that’s blended into the Portuguese colonial heritage. For instance, the light blue color of my Bonfim ribbon represents Iemanjá, the goddess of the sea. Her image of a mermaid is especially popular in the Rio Vermelho neighborhood where devotees throw flower offerings into the sea for her every year.

A Gem on My Finger

On my finger, an emerald ring sparkles. It jumped out of its showcase and leapt onto my hand the day we toured Salvador’s historic Pelourinho district—a real gem itself. Another one of Marcia’s translator contacts, Olga Simões, walked us up and down the narrow cobbled streets to visit such colonial treasures as Igreja São Francisco, with its wall-to-wall gold leaf interior and the catacombs in the Convent of Nosso Senhor do Carmo.

The adjacent Igreja da Ordem Terceira do Carmo houses an incredibly life-like life-size statue of Christ. The 18th century wooden carving, tinted with natural dyes, has droplets of blood made of rubies that look as if they were still trickling. But the Christ’s facial expression is serene, rather than tortured. And why shouldn’t it be? Sculptor Francisco Xavier das Chagas was a slave who was promised and granted his freedom after completing the statue.

The more modest church of Nossa Senhora do Rosário do Pretos across from the Jorge Amado Foundation has been serving the Afro-Brazilian community for 300 years. In the back is a shrine to a blue-eyed slave named Anastasia, said to be an Angolan princess who defied the slaveowners and was shackled, muzzled and thrown in jail, where she died. To this day, a *Escrava Anastasia* has a loyal following of women who worship her for her courage.

Salvador on My Mind

On my tongue, the Portuguese language comes tripping out a little easier now. Marian and I both had plenty of practice translating Portuguese, but very little speaking it. Pale tourists in the off-season, before we even opened our mouths, people would just look at us and say “*Argentinas?*”. When they heard us speak a few words of Portuguese, they were so thrilled that once we even got asked if we were from Portugal—foreigners who talk funny, I guess—, a great boost to a linguist’s ego.

On my mind, the amazement lingers at how just one e-mail from the PLD’s own Bob Feron to Marcia, whom he only knew “virtually” from a translator newsgroup, turned into several outings with different translators in just one week. And every time I look at the ratty ribbon on my wrist, I think about the universal translator connection, the wonders of Bahia, and how glad I am I got to know them.

S. Alexandra Russell-Bitting has been a staff translator-reviser at the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, D.C. for 13 years and has taught translation at Georgetown University and the Université de Paris VIII. She is an active member of the American Translators Association (ATA) and is a regular contributor to The ATA Chronicle.



Naked at the gym

- Stories behind the words we use -

G.I. *How did American soldiers get the nickname "G.I."?*

"G.I." stands for "Government Issue," and the term was originally applied only to those articles which were actually issued by the government. But in army slang it now means practically everything in army life that is standardized, orderly or regimented – including the soldiers themselves.

Goodbye. This word is just a shortening of the phrase, "God be with ye."

Grapevine. *Why do we say a rumor travels via "grapevine"?*

The term is a shortened form of "grapevine telegraph." In 1859 Colonel Bernard Bee constructed a telegraph line between Placerville and Virginia City by attaching the wire to trees. With time the wire – no longer taut – lay on the ground in loops that looked a lot like wild, trailing grapevine. During the Civil War similar lines were used by the troops and since the reports which came in over such "grapevine telegraph" lines were more often than not conflicting, the term "grapevine" was used to refer to widespread rumors which had no definite source and were generally false.

Grocer. *What is the origin of the word "grocer"?*

The word "grocer" originally meant a "wholesaler." The English merchant who dealt in spices, dried fruits, tea, coffee and such foodstuffs in retail amounts was called a "spicer." A wholesale dealer in these articles was called a "spicer en gross"- or a "grosser"- since he sold goods in bulk and by the gross. The word "gross" is from the French *gros* meaning "great" or "large".

Guy. *What is the reason the word "guy" is used to mean a man?*

The English use "guy" to signify a grotesque and ludicrous person – in allusion to Guy Fawkes, a leader of the "Gunpowder Plot" of 1605, and the effigies of him strung up on street corners on November 5th. The American term is derived from the "guy" rope of a circus tent – in such phrases as, "Who's the 'main guy' here?"

Gymnastics. *Where did we get the word "gymnastics"?*

The word comes to us from the Greek *gymnos*, which means "naked". From this the Greeks devised the word *gymnasium* to denote a public place for athletic sports. The athletes of early Greece removed their clothes to compete with one another.

Halloween. *How did "Halloween" come to be so called?*

The old Celtic calendar began on November 1st and, therefore, October 31st was New Year's Eve – the night on which witches and hobgoblins rode about for one last fling. With the introduction of Christianity the old New Year's Day became "All Saints' Day"; and the evening before became "All Saints' Eve" or "All Hallows' E'en." Though the name was changed, the customs – and the belief that witches rode on this night – persisted and have come down to this day.

Handkerchief. *What is the origin of the word "handkerchief"?*

The "ker" of this word comes from the Old French *couvrir*, meaning "to cover." The "chief" comes from *chef*, meaning "head." A "kerchief" was originally a "head covering", especially the bit of cloth used by women to cover their heads when entering a Catholic Church. A "handkerchief" was one carried in the hand.

Hangout. *How did "hangout" come to mean a gathering place?*


"Hangout" originally meant a place of business – for at one time almost all professional men, artisans, and tradespeople hung out signs to indicate their occupation and place of business. The term had its origin in the phrase, "Where do you hang out your sign?"

Hocus-Pocus. *Why do we say "hocus-pocus" when doing a magic trick?*

Because there once was a wizard named Ochus Bochus who did all sorts of tricks; he appears in Scandinavian mythology and "hocus-pocus" is just a corruption of his name.

Honeymoon. *Why do we call the period that immediately follows a wedding a "honeymoon"?*

The "honey" alludes to the sweetness of marriage delights; the "moon" to the rapidity with which they wane.

Compiled by Tereza Braga from "Why do We Say It?" Castle Books, Edison, NJ, 1985. 

Examples of reasons why the English language is so hard to learn

(contributed by Rosana Manço)

- 1) The bandage was wound around the wound.
- 2) The farm was used to produce produce.
- 3) The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.
- 4) The Polish furniture needs some polish.
- 5) A bass was painted on the head of the bass drum.
- 6) When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.
- 7) I did not object to the object on the tabletop.
- 8) The insurance was invalid for the invalid.
- 9) There was a row among the oarsmen about how to row.
- 10) They were too close to the door to close it.
- 11) To help with planting, the farmer taught his sow to sow.
- 12) The wind was too strong to wind the sail.
- 13) After a number of injections, my jaw got number.
- 14) I shed a tear when I saw the tear in the painting.
- 15) I had to subject the subject to a series of tests.
- 16) How can I intimate this to my most intimate friend?



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