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On grande sertao: veredas in catalan
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Catalan Review, Vol. IX, number 1, (1995), p. 11-20

ON GRANDE SERTÃO: VEREDAS IN CATALAN

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*No res. Els trets que vostè ha sentit no eren
pas de gent lluitant, Déu nos en guard.
Gran Sertão: riberes, p. II.*

Theoreticians such as Mallafré (1991:60) have commented on the translation problems posed by literary works that are endowed with a unique stylistic dimension through the exploration of linguistic innovations. This article analyzes the treatment of some such problems in *Gran Sertão: riberes*, the Catalan translation by Xavier Pàmies of the Brazilian novel *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (henceforth GSV), by João Grimaldino Rosa.¹

The illusion of orality, a remarkable feature sustained throughout the novel, is generated by a creative manipulation of language comparable to that found in works like James Joyce's *Ulysses* or Anthony Burgess's *Clockwork Orange*. In GSV syntactic devices weave together typically oral constructions, colloquial idioms, archaisms surviving in rural dialects, novel metaphors, proverbs, and a luxuriant regional lexicon. In order to form an idea of the complexity of the task of rendering GSV in another language, we will examine a few examples from categories such as the lexicon, morphological variation, terms of address, idioms, and syntax.

Structurally, GSV is organized as a continuous narrative, reminiscent of the *causos* or yarns typical of Brazilian oral folk tradition. This story is told during a three-day period (27) by its own protagonist, a retired gunfighter named Riobaldo, to a silent interlocutor, an educated man he addresses as *doutor*, whose queries must be inferred from Riobaldo's own words. The locale of the story is the *sertão*, a sparsely populated wilderness that stretches over the northern region of the state of Minas Gerais, extending into the states of Goiás to the west and Bahia to the north. Textual references allow us to place the action sometime in the first quarter of this century, during the narrator's youth.

¹ I thank Professors Dru Dougherty and Carol A. Hess, as well as my research assistant Jaime Linehan, for their valuable comments on an earlier version of this article, which is based on a paper given at the Catalan Language and culture session of the 1994 MLA meeting.

Despite its rural setting and rustic characters, *GSV* is not a work of regional literature in the usual sense of the term. Rather, the *sertão* appears as the backdrop of a drama intended to probe into universal issues such as the meaning of life and the confrontation of good and evil.² Such a vast perspective pivots on the triple image of the *sertão* as a specific locale, a place that could be anywhere, and a metaphor for the world: *O sertão é do tomanho do mundo* (74) «the *sertão* is as big as the world».

Although the characters are men and women of a specific region, the protagonist-narrator's voice blends dialectal speech with the standard diction with which educated Brazilian readers are familiar. Such combination of regional talk, essential to create credible reported speech, and a colloquial, semi-educated diction, contributes effectively to the illusion of orality. As the story unfolds in this novel that is best appreciated when read aloud, the reader is invited to assume the existence of a spoken medium in which intonation, rhythm, and pauses play a essential role. The fact that the narrator-protagonist received some education before becoming a gunfighter³ lends plausibility to his articulate reasoning and validates his elaborate style and abundant vocabulary.

The lexicon includes a profusion of regional nouns referring to plants, animals, place names, and human types that are likely to pose a major obstacle to readers unfamiliar with the environment and culture of the *sertão*. The Catalan translation opts for the balanced solution of keeping some nouns in the original while rendering others by generic terms that contribute to narrative agility, as may be appreciated in the following examples:⁴ Plants: *canela-de-ema* (33) → *canela-de-ema* (27) → *capim-marmalada* (29) → *capim-marmelada* (29) → *herba de pastura* (24), *capim-grama* (48) → *herba* (37), *capim-redondo* (49) → *herba* (37), *crondeúbas* (512) «ulmaceous trees» → *arbres dels camps* (355). Animals: *tigre preta* (28) → *pantera negra* (23); *surucuíú* (33) → *anaconda* (27). Human types: *agunço* (27) → *bandoler* (23), *capiau* (69) → *camperol* (27); *catrumanos* (379) → *terrassans* (263). Objects: *a quincé* (109) «small knife» → *la daga* (78); *o nagā* (288), «a kind of revolver» (from the trademark Nagan) → *la pistola* (201). In some passages a sequence of near-equivalent Catalan terms is used, as in *as rezvezadas do capim... mimoso, sempre-verde, marmelada, agrestes e grama-de-burro* (366) → *les menes d'herba... margall, llistó, fenàs, ripoll i agram*

² See Guimarães Rosa's own statement in Lorenz 1965.

³ This detail is established early in the novel on p. 16, and reiterated on p. 113-114.

⁴ In the examples an arrow indicates the direction of translation, Portuguese → Catalan, and page numbers are given in parentheses.

(254), while elsewhere the juxtaposition of Brazilian and Catalan nouns creates the stylistic effect that may be appreciated in the following passage, which lists names of birds (emphasis added):

E tinha o xenxém... o sací-do-brejo, a doidinha, a gangorrinha, o tempo-quente, a rôla-vaqueira... e o ben-te-vi... e araras enrouquecidas... Assovios que fechavam o dia: o papa-banana, o azuléjo, a garricha-do-brejo, o suirirí, o sabiá-ponga, o grunhatá-do-coqueiro... Tirirí, graúna, a fariscadeira, juriti-dopeito-branco ou a pomba-vermelha-do-manto-virgem (29-34).

I hi havia el xenxém... el cacut, la doidinha, la gangorrinha, el sací, el colomí de bosc... I el bem-te-vi... I guacamais enroquits. I la piuladissa que tancava el dia: els lloros, els papagais, el cargolet, el suirirí, el tord, el grunhatá-do-coqueiro... el tirirí, la braúna —la furgaire—, el jrití de pit blanc o el colom vermell de bosc (25-27).

Vernacular items formed through morphological modification of standard items are translated by standard Catalan equivalents, as in *fogo-fá*, st. *fogo-fáuto*, «will» or «the wisp» (75) → *focs follets* (55); *aravia*, st. *algaravia*, «gibberish» (115) → *algaravia* (83); *croa*, st. *coroa*, «sand bank in a river» (367) → *mitjana* (254). This process also affects proper names, creating vernacular variants that remain unchanged in the translation: *Quelemém*, from *Quelemente*, st. *Clemente* (14); *Sesfrêdo*, st. *Sesefredo*, (66); *Zé-Zim*, from *Zezinho*, diminutive of *Zé*, short for *José* (43); *Cardéque*, st. [Allan] *Kardec* (17); *Andalécio*, st. *Indalécio* (166); *Fulorêncio*, st. *Florêncio* (160).

There are also nicknames which, while semantically meaningful, could not be translated without loss of their sociocultural connotations. The decision to keep such nicknames in the original judiciously preserves a modicum of exoticism, while avoiding the awkwardness that might result from the literal translation of items such as, for example, *Mijafogo* «piss-fire» (343) or *Mão-de-Lixa* «sandpaper hand» (353).⁵ The same comment is valid for names modified by an appositive noun or adjective, such as *João Vaqueiro* «cowboy», *Joaquim Beijú* «wafer roll», Cat. «neula», *Freitas Macho* «male», *Preto Mangaba* «fruit», *Hancornia speciosa*, *Jóe Bexiguento* «pockmarked» or *Rodrigues Peludo* «hairy». The same solution applies to lexicalized names such as those of rivers (*riu das Velhas*, *riu São Francisco*), ranches (*Limãozinho* «little lemon», *Boi-Preto* «back ox», *Caramujo* «snail») and regional toponyms like *Serra do Deus-Me-Livre* «God-help-me-range», *Chapada do Sumi-*

⁵ See Plard 1985 on the translatableness of names

douro «sinkhole plain», *Córrego do Poldro* «colt creek», *Olho-d'Águas-Outras* «spring of the others», *Furado-do-Meio*, «hole-in-the middle», *Passagem da Limeira*, «lime tree pass», or *Chapada do Covão*, «big pit plain». While this solution may slow down some readers, it may also encourage the more patient ones to make an effort to sense the alien landscape, thus avoiding literal translations that might create an unintended humorous effect.

The survival of archaic terms constitutes a salient lexical feature of rural speech. As it would be unproductive to seek old-fashioned equivalents in Catalan, the translation preserves a colloquial diction, neither too informal nor too literary, by adhering to standard contemporary usage. This approach creates a plausible tone, compatible with the general tenor of narrative, as illustrated by the following examples: *carecer* (cf. standard *precisar*) «to nedd»: *Meu pai disse que eu careço de ser diferente* (109-110) → *El meu pare diu que haig de ser different, molt different* (79); *tença e imêndio* (cf. standard Ptg. *pensão e despesas* «pension and expenditures») (114) → *la pensió i la dispensa* (82).

Although Grimalões Rosa's use of morphology, particularly as regards word formation, is one of the most strikingly innovative features of GSV, it is nevertheless language-specific, and consequently, this aspect of the novel is somewhat simplified and normativized in the translation, as may be appreciated in the following examples (emphasis added):

- (1) (a) *O senhor imaginalmente percebe?* (50) → *Vostè s'ho pot imaginar?* (38)
- (b) *Podria ser? Imposivelmente.* (575) → *L'hi podia haver dit? Impossible.* (399)
- (c) ...*arrecadar munição que se queria, total toda.* (31) → ...*arreplegar la munició que ens calia, que era tota.* (368)
- (d) *uma Izina Calanga... ouvi que reza também com grandes meremerências.* (18; duplication of *mere-* [*merecer* «to merit»] + *-ência*) → ...*he sentit que resa amb molta gràcia I favor* (17).
- (e) *chovedor* (110; cf. standard *chuvisco*) → *plujós* (81)

Even so, lexical and morphosyntactic similarity between the two languages also allows a few parallel creations:

- (2) (a) *bala beija-florou* (576; cf. *beija-flor* «humming bird») (399) → *les bales colibrejaven* (cf. *colibrí* «humming bird»)
- (b) *os soldados aiando gritos* (69; cf. *ai* interjection) → *els soldats aiejaven xiulant* (51; cf. *ai* interjection)

A feature of rural speech that is difficult to render in translation, is

the use of proverbs and aphorisms (Man 1985: 47-49). In GSV translation is complicated by the fact that proverbs are not necessarily used in their traditional wording, but are rather rephrased with a new twist. The translation succeeds in paralleling the meaning and intent of the original, as seen in the following examples:

- (3) (a) *Couro ruim é que chama ferrão de ponta.* (29) → *La mala pell demana una punta esmolada.* (19)
- (b) *Moço, toda saudade é uma espécie de velhice.* (41) → *Noi, tota enyorança és una mena de vellesa.* (42)
- (c) *Deus come escondido, e o diabo sai por toda parte lambendo o prato.* (57) → *Déu menja d'amagat, i el diable surt pertot arreu a llepar el plat.* (43)

Forms of address provide ample scope for cross-language comparison. In Brazilian Portuguese the informal/intimate pronoun *você* (pl. *vocês*) has largely replaced the order form *tu*,⁶ which survives in the south (states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina) and a few areas in the north. Formal/non-intimate address, in turn, requires the lexicalized noun phrase *o senhor*⁷ (fem. *a senhora*, pl. *os senhores/as senhoras*). Catalan uses informal/intimate *tu*, formal *vostè*, and non-intimate (but less formal than *vostè*) *vós*, a form still used in rural areas, thought obsolescent in spontaneous urban speech despite efforts to recover it. Following the original closely, the translator makes the narrator address his silent interlocutor formally as *vostè* for *senhor*: *O senhor ri certas risadas* (9) → *Vostè riu d'una manera* (11).

At different points in the novel, when a popular variant of an archaic form of address, such as *Vossa Senhoira* «your worship» adds an old-fashioned touch to reported speech, the translation makes the necessary adjustment: *Caso se Ossa Seoria se concorde...* (356) → *En cas que Vostra Senyoria s'hi avingui...* (247). Furthermore, the Portuguese second person plural pronoun *vós*, tough obsolete in spontaneous speech, appears sporadically, as do its possessive forms *vosso/vossa*, in rural Brazilian speech. Instances of Port. *vós* are accurately translated as informal *vosaltres* when the referent is plural, as in (4a), but as a formal third person form (correlated to *vostè*) when the referent is singular, as in (4b);

⁶ While *tu* comes directly from Latin *TU*, *você* derives from *vossa mercê* «your mercy», first recorded in the late fourteenth century (Cintra 1967:56). Cat. *vostè* and Sp. *usted* have a parallel origin.

⁷ *O senhor* and its morphological variants *a senhora*, *os senhores/as senhoras* are fully lexicalized and lack the overformal connotations of Cat. *el senyor/la senyora* or Sp. *el señor/la señora*.

- (4) (a) Pois... eu saio do meio de vós, pra todo o nunca. (39) → Dons... em separo de vosaltres per sempre més. (31)
 (b) E chefe será... esperamos vossas ordens... (90) → I capitā serà... esperem les seves ordres... (66)

In example (4b), co-occurrence of the second-person possessive *vossas* with the third-person verb from *será* illustrates a widespread feature of Brazilian Portuguese labeled, somewhat inaccurately, pronoun mixture. Even in areas where *tu* is not used, the corresponding object pronoun *te* and the possessive *teu* co-occur with *você*, which is morphologically third-person, as in examples (5). When *tu* is used, it usually takes the third person verb from correspondint to *você* in standard Portuguese, as in example (6). In all such cases, the translation aptly keeps the dialog in the informal standard register of *tu*:

- (5) *Te acerta, mocinho. Aqui você está livre e salvo.* (88) → *Calma't, mossicot. Aquí tu estàs sa i lliure.* (64)
 (6) *Mas, você é o outro homem, você revira o sertão... Tu é terrível, que nem um urutú branco...* (430) → *Però tu ets tot un altre home; tu capgiraràs el sertão... Tu ets terrible, com un urutú blanc...* (298)

Choice of pronouns can signal variations in the intimacy/solidarity dimension (Brown and Gilman 1960). In a conversation between Riabaldo and his closest buddy, a gunfighter named Diadorim, the latter switches from informal *você* to formal *o senhor* for the purpose of admonishing Riabaldo. Here the translator chose the pronoun *vós*, thus creating a contrast with intimate *tu* and capturing the intention in increase the distance between the speakers:

- (7) *Diadorim se pôs pra trás... —O senhor não fala sério!— ele rompeu e disse, se desprazendo. «O senhor» —que ele disse.* (564) → *En Diadorim va recular... —No deuen parlar de debò!— va esclatar, amb desplaer. De vós —em va tractar.* (391)

As the lexicalized noun phrase *a gente* usually has a first person plural referent, it is aptly translated as *nosaltres*. It may also denote an indeterminate semantic agent, in which case it corresponds in contemporary Catalan usage to the pronoun *tu/te*, used with an intended indeterminate referent:

- (8) (a) *Muita vez a gente cumpria por picadas no mato...* (33) → *Moltes vegades travessavem per draceres dins el bosc...* (27)
 (b) *...mutucas ferroando a gente* (33) → *mutuques senyalant-te* (27)

As expected, features of vernacular Brazilian Portuguese that lack a formal counterpart in Catalan disappear in the translation. This is the case of the nonstandard use of a subject pronoun as a direct object, as in *Meu padrinho mandou eu ir lá dentro* (116) (standard *mandou-me*) → *El meu padri em va fer anar cap a dins* (83). Another high frequency feature characteristic of Brazilian vernacular, which is inevitably lost in translation, is the lack of agreement between a reflexive pronoun and the corresponding person of the verb, as in the examples of (9):

- (9) (a) *Se despedimos* (70; cf. standard *nos despedimos*) → *Vam despedir-nos.* (52)
- (b) *A gente vamo-s'embora* (487; cf. standard *a gente vai-se embora*) → *Hem decidit... que ens en anem* (337)

Idioms are particularly problematic to translate, but when the source language and the target language are genetically closely related⁸ equivalent idioms may be found which underscore the common cultural background, as in the examples of (10):

- (10) (a) *Vamos embora da jugançagem, que já é o depois-de-véspera.* (368) → *Deixem el bandidatge! Ja som l'endemà de la vetlla.* (256)
- (b) *Tôda a hora eu esperava um tiro e um grito de alto-lá-orei!* (365) *En qualsevol moment m'esperava un tret i un crit d'alto al rei!* (253)

Even two closely related languages will contrast, however, since each will exhibit a specific core of idioms originating in distinctive sociocultural circumstances. In such cases, equivalency is at best contextual, as the following examples illustrate:

- (11) *Tudo viva!* (592) → *Vaja, vaja!* (411); *Estrumes!* (576) → *Tifas!* (398); *Nuncas* (496) → *ai per mai* (344); *Sol em glória.* (497) → *El sol a plom.* (344); *De melhor em bom* (497) → *De bones a millors* (345); *Safa! Safas!* (591) → *Cony de cony!* (410).

Finally, there are parallel expressions that convey a similar notion through different lexical items, as in the examples of (12):

- (12) (a) *Tinha mãos e ações, que davam para lavar meus trajes.* (491) → *Tenia mans i maneres, per ventar-me les mosques tot sol.* (341)

⁸ «Un element que afavoreix la traducció... és el marc cultural comú que ens forneix molts elements compartits, compatibles i traduïbles.» (Mallafre 1991:51)

- (b) *Os meus homens... me vinham com lelê disso* (513) → *els meus homes... sempre em venien amb la mateixa cançó* (355).
- (c) *Assim neblim-neblim... que um fantasma?* (529) → *Tot emboirinat... com un fantasma?* (367)
- (d) *Mas o homem... esborrau vez, demorão* (488) → *Però aquell home... es va quedar una estona parat, com si fes temps* (488).
- (e) *Isso, de arrevés, eu li com bagá.* (368) → *Se'm va fer ben estrany, aquell refús.* (255)
- (f) *Noves e nada eu não dissesse.* (363) *No vaig dir ni ase ni bestia.* (252)

Reinforcing the illusion of orality, spelling is sometimes modified to create an impression of gibberish, as in example (13), or vernacular pronunciation, as in example (14). In such cases, the translation, while colloquial, remains much closer to the standard language than is the case with the original:

- (13) *Ossenhор utúrje, mestre, a gente vinhemos, no graminhá...*
Ossenhор utúrje... (379) → Vostè perdoni'ns senyor; anem en to de pau... Vostè perdoni'ns (263)
- (14) *Dou de comer à mea mul'é e tréis fi'o'* (438) → *Sóc joc, el qui dóna el pa a la dona i tres fills* (303)

Other resources for mimicking orality include the use of short, clipped phrases, an effect that may be achieved by leaving out the article, as in the examples of (15). Since this articles dropping rule is not operative in Catalan, the translation employs the article, maintaining readability without capturing the oral flavor of the original in its entirety:

- (15) (a) *Mulato pulou para trás.* (109) → *El mulato va saltar enriere.* (78)
- (b) *Quicé que corta.* (109) → *Sí que talla, la daga.* (78)
- (c) *Tôda a vida gostei demais de estrangeiro.* (115) → *Tota la vida m'han agradat molt els estrangers.* (82)
- (d) *Tem ótimo reconditório.* (117) → *Hi ha un amagatall perfecte...* (84)
- (e) *Couro raspa em couro...* (118) → *El cuiro frega en el cuiro...* (84)

Another frequent feature of popular speech is topicalization, which consists of placing a communicatively more relevant element, which would be the rheme in Prague school terms (Firbas 1966), at the

beginning rather than in its more usual position towards the end of the sentence. The translation takes advantage of the availability of this ordering in spoken Catalan, as shown in example (16), even though there are instances in which non-topicalized word order is used in the translation, as in example (17):

- (16) *Aqui também dêle foi, a maior de tôdas.* (112) → *La d'aquí també era seva, la més gran de totes.* (80)
 (17) *Com os rapazinhos da minha idade, arranjei companheirice.*
 (114) → *Vaig fer amistat amb els noiets de la meva edat.* (82)

Taken as a whole, *Gran Sertão: riberes* is a very competently executed translation. Imperfections are few and involve minor details, such as *cap gros* (85) for *cabeça-chata* (117), a derogatory designation for someone from northeastern Brazil that might have been better rendered as *un vaquer del Nord-est*. The name *Sô* [sic] *Candelário* (49). The construction *els vaquers... dubten de fer comerç anant vestits tots de cuiro...* (23) does not quite translate *os vaqueiros duvidam de vir no comércio vestidos de roupa inteira de couro...* (27), since *no comércio* is a locative designating a settlement, such as a village, where business is transacted, rather than the transaction itself.⁹ The noun *comadre* is translated as either *amic* (*comadre meu Quelemém* (24) → *El meu amic Quelemém* (21)) or *company* (*comadre Joca Ramiro* (264) → *company Joca Ramiro* (185)) although the noun *compare* might capture more closely the implied relationship of *comadrio*. On occasion, a term appears to have been mistaken for a cognate, as when *guerreiro* «battle» is translated as *guerrer* «warrior»: *Chefe nosso... nunca perdia guerreio* «never lost a fight» (32) → *El nostre cap... mai perdia ni un guerrer* «never lost a fighter» (26). When one considers the complexity of Guimarães Rosa's prose, such relatively nonessential points —*coisas de nonada*— hardly detract from Pàmies's capable work, which captures remarkably well the meaning of the original while maintaining throughout its narrative fluency and rhythmic fluidity.

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⁹ Cf. Aurélio Buarque de Holanda Ferreira, *Novo Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa*, 1st edition. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira.

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