

## Let's Do the *Frequência* Before the *Ponte* but After the *Feriado*: The Words We Don't Translate

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I would firstly like to state how pleased I am to be taking part in **contrapor2006**, the first Portuguese Language Translation Conference, organised by **ATeLP – Associação de Tradução em Língua Portuguesa**. It is also doubly pleasing to be taking part in a conference hosted by my own university, especially as this year we are embarking on a new degree course in Translation (or perhaps should I say, a first cycle Bologna course <sup>1</sup>), in the **Departamento de Línguas, Literaturas e Culturas Modernas** of the **Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas** <sup>2</sup>.

The title of the talk: "Let's do the *frequência* before the *ponte* but after the *feriado* – the words we don't translate", hopefully indicates the general theme. It is felt that looking at what is not translated in a certain situation may help us to consider what happens when we *do* translate, and in particular remind us of complications lying in wait for even the most apparently simple educational terminology. The paper finishes with some considerations as we try and construct a higher educational Tower of Bologna, hopefully avoiding the pitfalls of the Tower of Babel.

The main situation to be considered here is speakers of (at least) one mother tongue language working in a country which uses another language, namely a group of English teachers operating in a university environment in Portugal. We are a group with our own idiolects but share many common features of essentially modern British English. We also in particular share pedagogic metalanguage due to our training in the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages Methodology. We have lived in Portugal for many years and are used to functioning in Portuguese and English in this country <sup>3</sup>. Our daily work involves

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<sup>1</sup> A description of the course (in Portuguese) can be found a <http://www.fcsh.unl.pt/english/Docs/Bolonha/traducao1ciclo.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Or should that be the Department of Languages, Literature and Culture of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences?

<sup>3</sup> There is of course the issue here of English language *tainting*, as our English is modified with the passing of years – which can involve features other than just lexical nonstandard variation. This tainting is different from "the foreign language tainting of our mother tongue" referred to by Paul Woods

us teaching courses relating to English language, culture, translation and methodology. We speak in English with each other (and also in Portuguese during situations such as Departmental meetings) and of course have varying patterns of interaction in English and Portuguese (and other languages) in our familial and social lives. In our professional discourse we often resort to Portuguese terminology. The aim of this short paper is to try and provide an initial analysis of why this is the case.

## Some words

Needless to say, given the time, this is not meant to be an exhaustive, but rather, illustrative, list. Let us start with a word from the title.

### **Frequência**

Used by one native English speaker to another as in "I am going to write the *frequência* next week" (actually, for better or worse, invariably used in the plural to allow for the various versions needed). Or from teacher to students: "your *frequência* is on the 25<sup>th</sup>".

#### **Why is it used?**

Alongside **exame**, to refer to testing "moments" which take place as part of our students' evaluation. There are of course the words test and exam in English, but neither captures the precise meaning of *frequência*, a testing element used at the end of *frequenting* a course. This focuses in on a key aspect of use – the ability to state exactly what is being referred to by using the original word, rather than using a less specific lexical item or glossing the meaning. In essence, this is similar in case to the use of an English word or lexical phrase when speaking Portuguese – a neologism – in order to succinctly convey meaning.

Furthermore, university teachers have to be very conscious of the legal rights of students and in some ways the use of these Portuguese words avoids any possible sign of not seeming to respect these.

*Exame* is used particularly with the phrase *exame de recurso*, similar to the English "resit", where a student has a second chance to pass an examination. This is also linked to the word:

### **Melhoria**

As in "You can always do a *melhoria*", said by a teacher to a student e.g. if the student feels they are not going to get the desired end of course mark. This is an examination which allows students the chance to improve their grade. It is not exactly a resit, but a chance for mark improvement.

#### **Why is it used?**

Example of the difference between a **melhoria** and an **exame (de recurso)**.

A student in Portugal gets a mark out of twenty for an individual subject. If the mark is less than 10 it is a fail mark. The student can resit (do an *exame de recurso*). In my faculty the student does this and receives a new mark (out of 20). The two are then averaged to give a "final" new mark. In the case of a student with 10 or more and less than 20 wishing to improve the mark, the student does the exam and receives a new mark (out of 20). If it is less than the original mark, the student keeps the original mark; if more, the new mark becomes the student's mark. You may wish to read this again and consider the mathematical information encoded in the choice of one of these two words.

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([http://www.ptreasuredsl.clara.net/linguist\\_2\\_2003/books.htm](http://www.ptreasuredsl.clara.net/linguist_2_2003/books.htm)) in reviewing, Wagner, E. Bech, S. & Martínez J. (2002). *Translating for the European Union Institutions*, St Jerome Publishing: Manchester.

In other words, it is useful for us to distinguish between *exames*, *frequências* and *melhorias*, in order to give the correct mark to students. Each of the words used in Portuguese has a propositional meaning shared by our teaching and learning community and therefore pragmatically applied.

### **Are these words ever translated?**

The paper is arguing that we find it useful not to translate these terms, but of course they exist in written form. The gradual Europeanisation of the faculty meant that a decision was taken during the 2005-6 academic year to make the 1147 subject courses (*cadeiras*) offered in my faculty, available online in both Portuguese and English, rather than just the former. As part of this process the translation of various terms was standardised and *frequência* was translated as **final (written) test**.

### Other words not translated

**Aula(s)**. "Have you finished your *aulas* (taught classes) today?" Whilst classes is pretty straightforward in many ways, *aulas* specifically refers to an event in a classroom and is employed in this way.

**Faltas**. "Excuse me. How many *faltas* do I have?"<sup>4</sup> asked by a student to a teacher. Many courses taken by students require them to attend classes for a certain number of classes (but see the following term). The term "absences" or "missed classes" could be employed but once again the Portuguese term refers to a discrete concept for which there is not ambiguity.

**Leitor**. As in "Difficult times to be a *Leitor*". A *Leitor* is a contractual category within the Portuguese University Higher Educational System which essentially refers to a University Language Teacher. There is no standard translation, but I personally like "Teaching Fellow", a solution adopted in some British universities to distinguish these modern language teaching individuals from other academic members of staff. It is often not translated as the term is used to discretely describe a group of staff who have particular contractual circumstances.

**Assistente**. As in "She is an *assistente*" is sometimes used though not as much as *Leitor*. This is not just because there are increasingly few of them in my faculty, but also, I feel, because there are some assonances with the French word "*assistant*" which tends to be used to describe a student native speaker of a foreign language visiting e.g. the UK, who is giving conversation classes to modern language students in an academic context, but who is not a fully fledged teacher.

**Ficha** (student form). "If you haven't given me a *ficha*, I can't record your marks!" (We are quite Kafkaesque when given a chance). The form containing student information including a photograph, which has to be legally kept, with annotated marks, for a period of five years. Again, perhaps not translated due to the formality with which it is employed.

**Pauta** (list of students). "I'm going to put up the *pauta* tomorrow". Typically used to describe the paper with the list of students names used to publish end of course marks. A much desired piece of bureaucracy on the part of the students.

**Tolerância**. Extra period of time in a test – but see below: "A two hour *frequência* with fifteen minutes *tolerância*". Although I think I have thought my way through most of the cultural aspects of working in Portuguese Higher Education, I must admit this one still intellectually rankles. The idea is that a test has a certain period, but, if you have not finished

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<sup>4</sup> Sometimes transliterated by students to render the rather poetic "How many faults do I have?"

it, you can have a bit longer. It has of course crossed my mind to wonder why not just include it in the time in the first place, but there must be some explanation somewhere <sup>5</sup>.

**Cábula** (crib sheet). As in "She tried to use a *cábula* in the test". A piece of paper with notes on to cheat in a test <sup>6</sup>.

To finish this section, other words could also have been itemised. These include **atestado médico** (medical note – again, a legal concept), **reitoria** (rectory? central administration services? Student Office?) and many more.

Some words and phrases are used both in English and Portuguese – exactly why one or the other is preferred is perhaps the most interesting feature of this subgroup.

**Prazo** (Period of time/deadline). As in "The *prazo* lasts until next week". I must admit that I tend to use this for bureaucratic *prazos* and use period of time or deadline for others. Again, the original keeps either the legal or bureaucratic urgency.

**Trabalhador-estudante**. "Oh, he's a *trabalhador-estudante*." A worker-student, who has legal rights in terms of not having to come to classes (read: can have *faltas* ...). This compound noun is not uniquely used and worker-student is also employed. The alternation may be due to length or perhaps because worker-student is also rather self-explanatory.

**Greve** (strike). "There's a *greve* by FENPROF next week". Strike and *greve* are used alternatively, and my personal interpretation is the English is used in a neutral way <sup>7</sup> but *greve* emphasises the inclusive nature of the strike, perhaps.

**Efectivo** (tenured). As in "He is trying to become *efectivo* in his job". Used in employment in general to have the meaning of a permanent job. American academics are frequently referred to as being on "tenure-track", publishing away to achieve a level of publication deemed worthy to be given tenure.

There are also words which are not translated to avoid ambiguity which, in my opinion, are rather examples of transliteration which are not always correct and therefore perhaps end up tainting the English used.

**Director** (Head of Faculty). "The *Director* has called a meeting for next week". Here the person is referred to as a *Director*, rather than the Head of Faculty (Dean?) particularly in communications such as staff emails in English which involve Portuguese and English native speakers. It uniquely identifies a person and hence reduces ambiguity, but I am not sure it is linguistically acceptable.

**Seminar** (actually from *seminário*). "You can choose from three *seminars*". A *seminário* is a postgraduate course. An *aula prática* is literally a "practical class" or a seminar, hence a potentially ambiguous use of the term. A work-around is to call a *seminário* a postgraduate seminar. Some would consider reserving the word seminar for just this type of course, but that could then seem to be a kind of cultural transliteration.

Finally, there is of course the danger of just being wrong. The classic example is when I am called a "*professor*" every day of my professional life, which to someone from a British educational background who at best has a post equivalent to a Junior Lecturer is the equivalent to receiving a major promotion on a daily basis.

## More on transliteration and a British example

In fact, some words seem to lend themselves to apparently simple translation. Take the case of *semestre*. Semester of course. But if you are a Portuguese student wanting to do an

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<sup>5</sup> Wonderfully translated by my colleague Prof. Dr. David Cranmer as "fifteen minutes' *grace*" – one of my all time favourite and elegant solutions to what had seemingly appeared to be an insurmountable semantic gap.

<sup>6</sup> Given that this is a paper about cultural aspects of translation, I cannot avoid noting in passing that if I were gradually to lose all my cultural roots, and adopt those of the country I live in, perhaps the last feature to go would be my attitude to cheating by students.

<sup>7</sup> Presupposing ANY comment on a strike can be value-free.

Erasmus exchange in a UK university in the second semester, when do you go when you see:

### **Sessional dates 2006/07**

#### **Terms**

Autumn Term: 25 September 2006 - 15 December 2006

Spring Term: 8 January 2007 - 30 March 2007

Summer Term: 16 April 2007 - 25 May 2007

Well actually, you carry on reading and find:

#### **Semesters**

Semester 1: 25 September 2006 - 19 January 2007

Semester 2: 22 January 2007 - 25 May 2007<sup>8</sup>

Now, why does the university claim to have two academic years – presumably to accommodate globalisation and students who wish to attend the university on a termly or semesterly basis. To my way of thinking, this is the inverse of "not translating" I referred to above, in that this is an attempt to transform reality into a form manipulable by another culture – cultural translation. But returning back to Portugal we find:

Come and study at *Nova*!

Well, not just a plug but also another example of what is not translated. This is not just a case of not translating the name of the university – are we in the *Universidade Nova de Lisboa* or at the New University of Lisbon (see below) – will we one day be giving papers at the New University of Amsterdam (no, I cannot translate it<sup>9</sup>). Say "*the Católica*" to a Portuguese attendee of this conference and that person will know exactly which university you are referring to<sup>10</sup>. The point here is that it can be uniquely, adjectivally, identified. And this identification brings a perlocutionary force with it. The Communication and International Office of this University<sup>11</sup> has come to the conclusion that it wishes to use a similar adjectival classification as a marketing device<sup>12</sup>, in order to try and bring some kind of educational "corporate" identity to a university which tends to be identified at the Faculty level<sup>13</sup>.

More translation difficulties with the lexis of higher education – institutional problems (literally)

In fact, it is not strictly true to state "at the Faculty level". Within the UK, you can take your degree at an institution labelled a School, an Institute, a Faculty, etc. There is no standard nomenclature as such. This university has the following "institutions" and we can use this as our first example of a translation problem (if we decide to translate)<sup>14</sup>:

<sup>8</sup> Bradford University's 2006-7 sessional dates: <http://www.brad.ac.uk/external/geninfo/dates.php#6>

<sup>9</sup> But according to <http://www.chem.yale.edu/~chem125/125/Chem3D/vanderWaals.html> it did until 1887 have the wonderful title of the Amsterdam Athanaeum.

<sup>10</sup> The Universidade Católica Portuguesa is a semi-statal / private university (depending on how it is defined) existing in Portugal due to a concordat between the Vatican and the Portuguese State.

<sup>11</sup> Personal communication(s).

<sup>12</sup> Another interesting adjectival case of identification in Portugal which is often not translated is "I studied at the *Técnico*" meaning the *Instituto Superior Técnico*, but which is **part** of the *Universidade Técnica de Lisboa* (though knowledge of that situation is not particularly widespread). I am not sure how many people are aware of all the academic institutions which belong to it.

<sup>13</sup> I would be interested to hear whether this or the alternative "Come and study at the *Nova*!", with the definite article inserted, is preferred.

<sup>14</sup> In Portuguese, *unidade organica* - for the present, rather deliberately left vague.

[Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas](#)  
[Faculdade de Economia](#)  
[Faculdade de Ciências Médicas](#)  
[Faculdade de Direito](#)  
[Instituto Superior de Estatística e Gestão de Informação](#)  
[Instituto de Tecnologia Química e Biológica](#)  
[Instituto de Higiene e Medicina Tropical](#)  
[Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública](#)

To gloss, five Faculties, one *Institute Superior* (Institute of Higher Education), two Institutes, and one National School. The Faculty of Economics English pages have an introductory section distinguishing the School and the Faculty (the members of staff)<sup>15</sup>. As mentioned above, each of these terms can be used as a name for a place of study in a British University. Keeping the original helps dispel confusion. When translating other issues can arise. If the best Economics "faculty" in the UK is the London School of Economics and the *Faculdade de Economia* in this university is also considered the best in Portugal, it might seem tempting to call it a School of Economics to get this expressed meaning<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, if the University has different institutional names for its academic bodies, does any translation of (some or all of) these have to respect this differentiation?<sup>17</sup>

### Something new and something classic

Returning to universities as a whole, this university's adjectival "newness" in the New University of Lisbon/*Universidade Nova de Lisboa* does not allow it the potential choice offered to its older academic colleague in Lisbon, namely Lisbon University or the University of Lisbon?

Using London as a comparison and searching in Google<sup>18</sup>:

"London University" site:ac.uk gives 314,000 hits

"University of London" site:ac.uk gives 8,910,000 hits

In other words, the postmodifying prepositional phrase construction is considerably more frequently used.

Checking another university to avoid any special case features for the capital:

"Leeds University" site:ac.uk gives 283,000 hits

"University of Leeds" 2,730,000<sup>19</sup>

Reference to the university in the capital of Portugal at higher educational sites in the UK shows:

"Lisbon University" site:ac.uk 184 hits

"University of Lisbon" site:ac.uk 13,200

The latter of course includes "New University of Lisbon" so taking this out

<sup>15</sup> [http://portal.fe.unl.pt/portal/page?\\_pageid=114,47891&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://portal.fe.unl.pt/portal/page?_pageid=114,47891&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL) last accessed July 17 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Cf Baker, M. (1992/2002), *In Other Words, A Coursebook on Translation*, London & New York: Routledge, esp. Chapter 2, Equivalence at Word Level.

<sup>17</sup> A similar problem awaits the translator of "research units" within an academic institution – which can be *centros, institutos, núcleos, gabinetes de investigação, pólos de investigação*, etc. There is no clear logic to their nomenclature, so what logic should be followed if these are translated. In fairness, a similar logic cannot be discerned in the naming of academic units within the United Kingdom, and this often depends on the history and age of the academic body in question.

<sup>18</sup> The use of Google here is crude and simply used for broad numerical comparisons.

<sup>19</sup> The two forms appear in the hits for each other form, and space does not permit a more detailed analysis of the noun phrases formed here – see Biber, D. et al (1999), *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, Longman:Harlow, Chapter 8, "The Complex Noun Phrase", esp. 8.1 Overview and 8.6, Major structural types of postmodification.

"University of Lisbon" site:ac.uk –new 13,100

"New University of Lisbon" site:ac.uk 198 hits

In other words, the postmodified phrase is much more frequent.

In fact, this is in keeping with the Faculty of, the School of, the Institute of ... labelling mentioned above <sup>20</sup>.

Finally, returning to the theme of the paper, and a familiar issue, is whether a university's name is to be translated or not. We saw that the search for "New University of Lisbon" gives 198 hits from UK academic institutions. Universidade Nova de Lisboa returns 650. The University of Lisbon (without New) has 13,100 hits, "Universidade de Lisboa" has 515 <sup>21</sup>. Further analysis is needed to discover the potential reasons for translating the universities' names, or not. What is certain, though, is that a simple prescription to translate, or not, cannot suffice.

## Conclusion

The English speaking group described in this paper uses Portuguese words and phrases in its English speech mainly for pragmatic convenience and disambiguation. In particular, such lexis enables the bureaucratic and legal baggage contained in the words to be transmitted in situations where this is important. The paper also points out some of the difficulties in translating seemingly straightforward educational terminology, and further issues regarding when (not) to translate. It is felt that the group concerned does not engage in linguistic wrestling to put the Portuguese University animus into English lexical bodies. As Bologna truly takes hold in the European academic world, it will be interesting to see its further effects on the linguistic spaces it occupies, and the implications this will have for translators.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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<sup>20</sup> All literally having millions of hits in "x of ..." site:ac.uk in Google.

<sup>21</sup> Search terms: "New University of Lisbon " site:ac.uk, "Universidade Nova de Lisboa " site:ac.uk "University of Lisbon" site:ac.uk –new, "Universidade de Lisboa " site:ac.uk.