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Editorial

The present number of BABEL contains three articles on problems of literary translation.

“Der Humor ist keine Gabe des Geistes, er ist eine Gabe des Herzens” (Humour is not a gift of the mind, it is a gift of the heart) — said a German writer, LUDWIG BÖRNE in his memoir of another German writer, JEAN PAUL Humour in the source text ought also to appear in the target text as a gift of the heart.

Can this be done?

MURIEL VASCONCELLOS tries to explain that it can be done, and in what way. In her opinion “humour calls attention to expectations shared between the framer of a message and the addressee”. Her method is structuralist and, by way of demonstration, she draws on a corpus of texts in Brazilian Portuguese, published translations of which are available in English.

A special case of humour, but this time rather “a gift of the mind” is a word-play or pun.

From time to time, every translator of *belles lettres* has to render a pun or a word-play of the source text in the target language. To do this adequately can be almost impossible, since word-plays are based on the special individual character and potentialities of a language, but to render them with similar effect is not impossible and depends mostly on the translator’s skill. The solution of this task belongs to those elements which make translation an art, since no general rule can be stated for it; but two forms of that task can be distinguished: (1) if the word-play(s) serves to characterize a person, then the translator can attain the adequate effect by using a similar word-play in the target language in a different place to that where it occurs in the source text; (2) if the word-play is bound to a situation, then, of course, the above method cannot be used and the translator has to choose some other device or, if the worst comes to the worst, he has to admit defeat and give up the task. The article by W. TERRENCE GORDON, who treats this problem with concrete examples from English–French and French–English translation is an instructive study with practical hints for all literary translators.

The third article in this number presents a chapter of the history of translation in Europe. GEORG TRÜBNER has already several times, introduced BABEL readers to German translators of the past, especially those who in the 18th century made English literature known to the German public. This time he sketches the life and work of J. J. CH. BODE (1730–93), translator of English and French literature.

György Radó

A Functional Model of Translation: Humor as the Case in Point

Muriel Vasconcellos

1. *Ground*

Translation stands to gain valuable perspective from a functional model of language in which different systems account for the phenomena of syntax, semantics, and the organization of discourse. In such a model each system is defined by the function that it serves. The discourse component is important for translation because its systems specify not only the overall organization of a text but also the structure of the individual message. The present paper claims that the functioning of discursal systems is elucidated especially through the study of humor. This is so because humor calls attention to expectations shared between the framer of a message and the addressee. These expectations arise from what the interlocutors intuitively know about how discourse works. In studying the expectations, we uncover the basic structure of messages and we come to understand the principles involved in reproducing these messages in another language as part of the larger text and context.

Perhaps the most useful functional model for this purpose is that of M.A.K. HALLIDAY (1967, updated in 1977) which provided the inspiration for the framework presented here. This model has a *textual component*, or "grammar of messages" (HALLIDAY 1974: 50), which specifies the choices that speakers and writers make when they introduce structures into discourse—choices that result in establishment of a point of departure for organization of the message and in regulation of the delivery of information, including the assignment of relative salience to a specific element.

HALLIDAY's textual component has two systems that are necessarily realized in all messages: *thematization* and *information*.¹ Thematization is the means by which a message is initiated. Its function is to introduce the first element of the message into discourse. It results in emplacement of a *theme*. The information system, for its part, provides the mechanism by which new information—the ultimate purpose for which the message was conceived—can be attached to a node in the existing knowledge base of the addressee (CLARK & HAVILAND 1977). In a successful message there is a build-up to the presentation of a *focus of newest information*. Both the theme and the focus are essential to realization of the message, and the assumption made here is that it is the effect of the two systems working together which gives identity to the message as a discrete unit.²

The theme and information systems may be thought to represent the respective voices of the two partners in discourse—the sender ('I') and the addressee ('you'). The theme is the voice of the first person. Information, in turn, is geared to the second person. The framer of the message co-operates³ by speaking in a voice that is meaningful to the

¹ HALLIDAY considers that thematization and information are independently variable, a position which differs from that held by the more traditional functionalists (MATHESIUS 1937, FIRBAS 1966 etc.), whose model of *theme-rheme* encompasses the two as different aspects of a single phenomenon of *functional sentence perspective*.

² On the message unit, see VASCONCELLOS 1985, chs. 4 and 7.

³ On co-operation between interlocutors, see GRICE 1975.

addressee—a voice within that embodies all those previous voices which have contributed over time to the accumulation of expectations about his or her particular linguistic and social group. Any message is the composite effect of the two systems: on the one hand, a bridging between the thought in the speaker's or writer's mind and its expression in text, and, on the other, the delivery of new information.

This view of discourse transcends the distinction between spoken and written text: the two systems, or voices, are essential to any message and are therefore expressed in both modes (HALLIDAY & HASAN 1976: 325; QUIRK et al. 1972: 937–938; VASCONCELLOS 1985, chs. 1, 5–7). What appears to be the case is that speech is more intensively informational and writing is more intensively thematic. In oral discourse speakers tend to regulate the delivery of new information with particular attention to expected and actual responses from their partner(s)—the more so as they come closer to a one-on-one speech situation. As a result, newness is apt to be recursive, with adjustments and corrections in course as the speaker responds to feedback (real or only perceived) and builds up the structure on which his “point” is to be attached. In written text, on the other hand, with the interlocutor absent, authors are probably recursive more in terms of their themes, introducing secondary ones that are triggered by tangential thoughts of their own, with embeddings as a result, before they focus on that part of the message which introduces new information and, with it, the perspective of the addressee. It is possible, in fact, that CHAFFE'S (1982) continua of integration-fragmentation and detachment-involvement can be accounted for as differences between the thematic and the informational viewpoint.

2. *Humor and the Information Structure*

The distinction between *old* and *new* information is crucial to survival itself. If creatures are to defend themselves, they must be able to discriminate between repeating tokens that are familiar to them and new sensory input to which they may be required to react.⁴ How can they recognize what is new? Only by comparing it against something that is not new. It is this principle that underlies the development of an alternating balance of old and new information in the communication process between human beings, and the alternation of old and new is what ultimately regulates the structure of discourse.

In building a message, speakers and writers start with a piece of knowledge which they presume is shared with the addressee and to which the new information—the information they intend to deliver—can be attached. Their assumptions are based on accumulated knowledge of the world as well as previous experience with members of the speech community. When communication is successful, the speaker or writer's expectations are in alignment with the perceptions of the addressee, and the focus of newest information effectively conveys a point.

There are also shared expectations about the pattern in which information is distributed. In the typical “unmarked” situation the position of newest information is at the end of the message. Listeners and readers expect it to be there, while speakers and writers are aware of this expectation and plan their messages according to the established pattern, whether consciously or not.

⁴ For a historical theory of old vs. new information in communication, see GIVÓN 1979: 345–351.

The countering of such expectations produces a surprise. The surprise may be planned by the speaker or writer precisely in the knowledge that the listener or reader is anticipating something else. The knowledge is shared by both parties and creates a bond of understanding—a conspiracy. Each takes comfort from the fact that the other has understood and agreed to play the game.

The expectations can be both about the world external to the discourse and about the internal structure of the text itself, in particular its position in the message: the “point” is delivered as the focus of newest information either in final position or nonfinally when it is understood to be purposely “marked”. In a translation, it is important to be able to reproduce the “point” in its same final position in the output structure.

The present paper draws on a corpus of texts written originally in Brazilian Portuguese⁵ for which published translations are available in English.

*

The first example shows a gently humorous twist that has been derived from exploitation of what the author knows to be the reader’s expectations:

| (1-P) —depois, felizes e meio aéreos, passamos a outras ruas e
CONSIDERAÇÕES. (ÉRICO VERÍSSIMO 1957)

|| (1-E) —and then, happy and light-hearted, we pass on to other streets and
CONSIDERATIONS.

The element in focal position takes the reader by surprise because it is an abstraction that has been purposely misconjoined to the concrete notion ‘streets’. The reader knows that his expectations have been played upon, and he enjoys the game. If we look at the capture of this effect in translation, we see that the challenge here is rather easily met: since there is no pressure for syntactic reordering, all that is needed is to find a verb that can be appropriately used with both concepts.

*

More difficult for the translator is the situation in which syntactic differences between the two languages create a pressure to present the “news” in a different order. A frequent cause for this problem in the corpus under study was Portuguese use of the verb in the initial position of the message.⁶ Most often such a verb was impersonalized by the particle *se*, but it was also followed by a fully specified noun phrase, or so-called “postposed subject”.⁷ And frequently the postposed NP was the focus of the message. As such, it is the element that will be exploited in the event of humorous intention:

| (2-P) A falta de objetivo me sofocava. Implorei Deus com fé um caminho, uma
causa. Vieram-me OS BOTÕES. (OTTO LARA RESENDE 1963)

⁵ See description of the corpus in VASCONCELLOS 1985: 250–273.

⁶ Verb-initial themes of all types represented 46.2 per cent of the working units (1,767 of 3,826 units) in the corpus of 54,070 words.

⁷ Regarding such constructions in Spanish, MARGARITA SUÑER (1982: 126) has concluded that the verb presents to the hearer “an ‘object’ for consideration; . . . it is like the tray on which the delicacy is presented.”

- || (2 G) # the lack of objective me suffocated # # I-pleaded to God with faith (for) a path, a cause # # came-to-me THE BUTTONS # #⁸

The humor results from the fact that society has expectations about the kind of path or cause that God will indicate — certainly something more serious and lofty than ‘buttons’. The buttons, as they must be, are in the position of newest information, where the addressee is expecting to find the brunt of the message. Everything in the preceding discourse suggests that the new information coming up will be of weighty significance. To the reader’s surprise, it is not.

The difficulty for translation is that the inverted construction which placed ‘buttons’ in the position of focus is not available in English. Despite this handicap, however, the translator of the published version was in fact quite resourceful in preserving the focal information in its natural position:

- || (2 E) A lack of objective was suffocating me. I prayed to God for an aim in life. And what I got was **BUTTONS**.

A mere syntactic transfer would have been humorless and awkward:

- || (2-E) A lack of objective was suffocating me. I prayed to God for an aim in life. **BUTTONS** came to me.

Verb-initial constructions pose a major problem for translators from Portuguese (as well as Spanish and French) into English (VASCONCELLOS 1986a). If the theme and the information structure are to be retained, the translator is obliged to find solutions that depart from direct syntactic correspondence. In example 2, for instance, the verb-plus-clitic-pronoun *vieram-me* ‘came-to-me’ was replaced by the identifying nominal clause ‘what I got’, which meets the English requirement for a syntactic subject in that position.

*

In example 3 the fronted verb was actually preserved in the published translation, at the expense of introducing an unusual construction in English:

- || (3-P) Com o tempo veio **UM FENÔMENO INTERESSANTE**. (MACHADO DE ASSIS 1900)

- || (3-E) With time came **AN INTERESTING PHENOMENON**.

The fact that the inversion is unusual in English means also that it is more “marked”⁹ and the marking lends special emphasis as well as adding an ironic tone to the announcement.

⁸ Glosses are given for those examples whose word order presents constraints for translation; when the order is the same and the translation is relatively parallel in terms of syntax, semantics, and information structure, no gloss is given. The boundaries of message units are marked by a pound sign at the beginning and at the end. Constituents that correspond to the focus of information, when they are the subject of discussion, are presented in all capital letters. Themes, when they are being discussed, are underlined.

⁹ For HALLIDAY (1967), “marked” refers to an option that requires organizational effort on the part of the speaker and which usually does not occur frequently.

The irony is enhanced by the formality of the lexical choice in an otherwise informal register. With standard order, on the other hand, the focus is flattened:

|| (3-E') With time AN INTERESTING PHENOMENON developed.

*

In example 4 the translator is challenged by another type of constraint that can have repercussions for the information structure — namely a lexical gap in English which blocks a one-on-one translation of the word *calva* and therefore raises the possibility of a paraphrase with syntactic rearrangement:

|| (4 P) A cabeleira cobria-lhe uma extensa e nobre calva adquirida nAS
COGITAÇÕES QUOTIDIANAS DA CIÊNCIA. (MACHADO DE ASSIS
1881 1882)

|| (4 G) # the wig covered-(for)-him an extensive and noble bald-head acquired in-
THE COGITATIONS DAILY OF-THE SCIENCE #

It can be seen that *calva* 'bald-head' is treated in Portuguese as a body part, whereas in English we only have the quality 'baldness' and the adjective 'bald'. The problem arises for information structure because the focus of the message corresponds to the phrase that postmodifies *calva*. It carries an ironic reference to the effort expended by the psychiatrist in his cerebrations. For the irony to be captured most effectively, the constituent 'cogitations . . . science' should remain in final focal position. Yet the lexical gap prevents attachment of the body part *calva* to the participle *adquirida* 'acquired', since in English a body part cannot be 'acquired'.

The needed flexibility is gained by abstracting or redistributing the semantic components of the problem lexeme. One possibility would be to use the quality 'baldness' to refer to the head in a form of synecdoche:

|| (4-E') A wig covered his extensive and noble baldness, acquired as a result of HIS
DAILY COGITATIONS ABOUT SCIENCE.

Alternatively, the concept could be broken up into two components with one of them redistributed:

|| (4 E'') A wig covered his extensive and noble pate, rendered bald as a result of HIS
DAILY COGITATIONS ABOUT SCIENCE.

The notion of 'head' remains as a place-holder and 'baldness' is introduced in the predicate position following the verb 'rendered', making it possible to keep the focus in final position.

*

Sometimes the constraints under which the translator works are artificial. For example, translators into English are frequently influenced by the call for brevity and conciseness which is a prescriptive "given" in journalistic writing. Obeisance to brevity for

its own sake, regardless of whether or not it is motivated within the textual systems, can result in the loss of focal information, the forcing of nonfocal information into prominence, and worse still, the attachment of elements to the wrong antecedents. A particular problem is the stacking of premodifiers in front of head nouns without regard for the information structure. The following example shows how the humor, and the meaning itself, depends on saving for final position the information contained in the modifiers that follow *dias de ternura* ‘days of tenderness’:

|| (5 P) Dona Flor . . . era bonita, agradável de ver-se; pequena e reconchuda, de uma gordura sem banhas. . . . Apetitosa, como costumava classificá-la o próprio Vadinho em seus dias de ternura, raros porém INESQUECÍVEIS. (JORGE AMADO 1966)¹⁰

|| (5 E) Dona Flor . . . was pretty, pleasant to look at: small and plump, but not fat. . . . A tasty morsel, as Vadinho himself was in the habit of calling her in his moments of tenderness, which were rare but for that very reason UNFORGETTABLE.

A translation with the modifiers to the left of the head noun changes the meaning by focusing on ‘tenderness’ rather than the rarity of such moments, whose memory had taken on added value now that Vadinho was dead:

|| (5-E’) . . . A tasty morsel, as Vadinho himself was in the habit of calling her in his rare but UNFORGETTABLE moments of tenderness.

*

The foregoing examples illustrate typical ways in which the system of information is associated with the realization of humor. In each instance there was a playful manipulation of the set of normal expectations that underlie the relationship between the speaker/writer, on the one hand, and the addressee, on the other: the expectation that the newest information typically occupies final position in the message; that this information, unless “marked” for some reason, will be couched in the phonological and syntactic patterns of their shared language; that it will be expressed in the same register as the rest of the discourse; that it will be semantically consistent with the proposition contained in the message; and that it will be in keeping with the world view of the society in which they live. Any thwarting of these expectations—which in the case of contrastive stress, phonology, syntax, register, and semantics amounts to the “marking” of a linguistic form—produces a surprise of some kind which is felt by the listener as irony, revelation, shock, disappointment, etc. When the surprise is gentle and playful, and when the reader feels secure as a party to the conspiracy, the effect is humor.

¹⁰ The original Portuguese text included the adverb *talvez* ‘perhaps’: *seus dias de ternura, raros talvez porém inesquecíveis*. It was omitted from the example in order to show two possible alternative noun phrases.

3. *Humor and the Theme*

It will be remembered that information is not the only textual system that operates at the level of discourse. The theme, too, has an important role in structuring the message (VASCONCELLOS 1985: 432-498, 499-529). And as with information, the study of humor reveals the way in which it functions.

The theme was defined earlier as the bridge between the object of thought in the speaker's mind and its expression in speech or writing. It is always the initiation of the message. It may be a single word or a larger constituent; it is often a nominal, standing for a particular referent in the previous discourse, in the speech situation, or in the knowledge that is shared between the speaker/writer and the addressee. But it can also be a verb; an adverbial phrase of time, place, or manner; a discourse adverbial; a conjunction; or a grammatical particle which serves to signal that the entire message is marked for presupposition.¹¹ In each case there is a rationale for claiming that the first element in the message is indeed an expression of the relationship to what is uppermost in the speaker's mind.¹²

Humor that is based on the theme spotlights the linking relationship itself. The shared assumption between the interlocutors is that the link is important. As a nominal, the theme can fully repeat an antecedent in the discourse, it can stand for the concept pronominally or through a more generic term, it can *infer* an antecedent, and of course it can refer to the participants and the setting in the speech situation itself. As a verb, on the other hand, it sets the stage for the upcoming semantic argument(s) by spotlighting the particular relationship that the speaker/writer wishes to present them in. If the verb forms part of a dependent constituent (e.g. condition, participial clause), the dependency is paramount. The information contained in such a constituent is to be regarded as ancillary or preliminary to the main message.

*

When there is a tight chaining of focus and subsequent theme, the effect is highly cohesive. It is as if, of all possible themes, the link itself between the two units is what is foremost of the speaker or writer's mind. In example 6, the major theme of the second unit echoes the focus of the previous one. It is preceded by the conjunction *mas* 'but', which indicates that the speaker intends to counter the previous message with an adversative statement of some kind. The direct repetition calls special attention to the chaining together of the two units, and the two themes in combination announce, in effect, a reversal of the expectations that had been established in the previous unit:

- I (6-P) Ainda nesse mesmo dia Martim ficara de pé na sacada procurando, com inútil obediência, não perder nada DO QUE SE PASSAVA. *Mas o que se passava* não era muito. (CLARICE LISPECTOR 1961)
- II (6-G) #still on-that same day Martim stayed on foot on-the balcony trying, with useless obedience, not to-lose nothing of-the WHAT *se* WAS-HAPPENING # #*but what se was-happening* not was much #

¹¹ On the presuppositionality of the different grammatical modes, see GIVÓN 1979: 54-55.

¹² See TRÁVNÍČEK; also further elaboration in VASCONCELLOS 1985: 432-498 and in VASCONCELLOS 1986b.

To capture the humor, the translation must have the same theme:

- || (6-E) Yet on that very day Martim had been standing on the balcony watching, with useless obedience, so as not to miss ANYTHING THAT WAS GOING ON. *But what was going on* was not much.

A less marked and more standard syntactic rendition in English reads like a misfire:

- (6-E') Yet on that very day Martim had been standing on the balcony watching, with useless obedience, so as not to miss anything that WAS GOING ON. *But* not very much WAS GOING ON.

The latter version not only loses the clever chaining of focus and subsequent theme but it also has two identical end-focus elements in succession—two identical “newests”—which are confusing to listeners and readers (Vasconcellos 1985: 419).

*

Often the humor that is associated with the theme involves some kind of inferencing. The inference can be, for example, that the theme is summing up a portion of the previous discourse, or that it is a part or quality of a more componentially complex antecedent that has been introduced earlier. It can also imply a conclusion that the speaker or writer expects the addressee to draw on the basis of their shared knowledge. The role of inferencing can be seen in the following example:

- | (7-P) Conta-se que um rapaz português, vindo do Reino, casara-se com uma menina, filha do Velho, chamada Margarida. Um dia—quem de repente chega a Pitangui? A esposa portuguesa do genro do patriarca. *Os casos de bigamia* parece que foram freqüentes em regiões como a das minas, ... (GILBERTO FREYRE 1936)
- || (7-G) # it is told that a young-man Portuguese, come from the Kingdom, married a young-girl, daughter of-the Old Man, named Margarida. # # One day—who of sudden arrives in Pitangui? # # the wife Portuguese of-the son-in-law of the patriarch # # *the cases of bigamy* (it) seems that they-were frequent in regions like that of-the mines #

It will be noted that ‘bigamy’ was not expressly mentioned in the preceding discourse. The theme in this case serves multiple purposes: it sums up the events thus far in the narrative, it implies added meaning, and it provides the opportunity to introduce an evaluation through the attachment of a semantically loaded label. But the passage owes its wry tone specifically to the fact that the writer is counting on knowledge shared with the reader and expecting him to draw a rather complicated inference—namely that the son-in-law, because he had two wives, had committed the crime of bigamy.

Here the translator is operating under a constraint because the topicalized construction, already a marked pattern in Portuguese which is marked precisely for the purpose of calling attention to the theme, is not acceptable in formal registers in English.

But the problem is not insuperable. The thematic structure is easily matched in the following translation:

- (7-E) They tell the story that a young Portuguese who had come to Brazil married one of the old man's daughters, name of Margarida. One day, who should unexpectedly show up in Pitangui but the Portuguese wife of the patriarch's son-in-law. *Cases of bigamy*, it seems, were not at all uncommon in regions like Minas...

A syntactic translation might have been:

- (7-E') ...One day, who should unexpectedly show up in Pitangui but the Portuguese wife of the patriarch's son-in-law. It seems that *cases of bigamy* were not at all uncommon in regions like Minas.

In 7-E' the theme is embedded—downgraded and buried deep in the middle of the message, the position which from the textual standpoint carries the least thematic and informational prominence.

*

In example 8 the theme, by being a pronoun, serves to summarize the preceding message unit:

- (8-P) O HOMEM SÓ VAI SER GRANDE NO DIA EM QUE CONQUISTAR AS ESTRELAS. *O que* Atila achou uma bobagem, porque o homem já ia à lua e daqui a pouco estaria nas estrelas e nem por isso seria grande. (IGNÁCIO DE LOYOLA BRANDÃO 1969)
- (8-E) MAN WILL ONLY BE GREAT THE DAY HE CONQUERS THE STARS. *Which* Atila thought was nonsense, because man had already gone to the moon and soon he'd be on the stars and not even that would make him great.

The theme triggers a reinterpretation of the previous information as a case of *broad focus*:¹³ this backtracking entails a review of the information content, which conceivably is being processed by the reader in parallel with the new message.

Example 8 was not difficult to reproduce in translation. The translator was faithful to the thematic structure, to the point of introducing a slightly marked construction in English.

If the second unit is embedded as part of the first, the thematic prominence is reduced and the result is infelicitous:

- (8-E') Man will only be great the day he conquers the stars, *which* Atila thought was nonsense, because man had already gone to the moon and soon he'd be on the stars and not even that would make him great.

¹³ On broad and narrow focus, see LADD 1978.

The fact that the clause is not syntactically independent means that its onset fails to meet the requirements of thematic status (VASCONCELLOS 1985: 483–485, ch. 7).

Alternatively, the object could be placed after the verb:

- || (8–E’’) Man will only be great the day he conquers the stars. Atila thought that *this* was nonsense, because man had already gone to the moon and soon he’d be on the stars and not even that would make him great.

The lack of a direct link between the second unit and the first one breaks up the cohesion. The resulting loss of continuity shows how important the theme is in the meaningful progress of the discourse.

*

It will be remembered that the theme can also be a verb. The irony of a verbal theme is rather subtle. The fronted verb construction was examined above in example 2, where the dethematized subject ended up in focus position. The thematicity of the verb itself was also part of the humor of that message:

- || (2–P) A falta de objetivo me sufocava. Implorei a Deus com fé um caminho, uma causa. *Vieram-me os botões.* (OTTO LARA RESENDE 1963)
- || (2–G) # the lack of objective me suffocated # # I-pleaded to God with faith (for) a path, a cause # # *came-to-me* the buttons # #
- || (2–E) A lack of objective was suffocating me. I prayed to God to give me an aim in life. And *what I got* was buttons.

The theme provides the cohesive link with the preceding unit of message: it summarizes the outcome of the event described in that unit, and it announces the cognitive role of the upcoming semantic argument.

*

The final type of theme that is of interest here is the dependent clause. The dependent status of the entire initial constituent points up its secondary relationship to the main clause. Sometimes these constituents are quite long. The packing of information into such a theme lets the reader know that the writer feels it is relatively unimportant—a perception that he expects the reader to share. For example:

- | (9–P) “Foi breve sua passagem por esse vale de lágrimas”, pronunciou o respeitável professor Epaminondas Souza Pinto afetado e afobado, tentando cumprimentar a viuva, dar-lhe os pésames . . . Dona Gisa, também professora e até certo ponto também respeitável, conteve . . . o riso. *Se em verdade fôra breve a passagem de Vadinho pela vida—vinha de completar trinta e um anos—para ele, dona Gisa bem o sabia, não fôra o mundo vale de lágrimas e, sim, palco de farsas, engodos, embustes e pecados.* (JORGE AMADO 1966)

- || (9-G) # was brief his passage through this vale of tears # # said the respectable Professor Epaminondas Souza Pinto moved and out-of-breath, trying to pay-his-compliments-to-the widow, give-her the condolences # . . . # Dona Gisa, also professor and up-to certain point also respectable, contained . . . the laughter # # *if in fact had-been brief the passage of Vadinho through-the life* # -- # (he) came to complete thirty and one years # -- # for him, dona Gisa well it knew, not was the world vale of tears and, yes, stage of pranks, merrymaking, wiles and transgressions #

The fact of dismissing the brevity of Vadinho's passage through this vale of tears in a dependent clause serves to trivialize the rest of the pompous professor's declaration, preparing the reader for the upcoming contrast. The published translation reflects the same thematic force in the dependent clause:

- || (9 E) "Brief journey through this vale of tears," were the words of the respected Professor Epaminondas Souza Pinto, moved and out of breath as he came forward to pay his compliments to the widow and give her his condolences . . . Dona Gisa, also a teacher and up to a point also respectable, contained . . . her laughter. *If in fact it was true that the journey of Vadinho through life had been brief*--he had managed to live for thirty-one years-- Dona Gisa knew very well that for him the world had not been a vale of tears but rather a stage for mischief, merrymaking, scheming and vice.

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What all the theme types share in common is that they represent ways of expressing what is foremost in the speaker's mind—be it a referent that can be symbolized by a nominal, as is most often the case, or a verbal relation between the arguments in the proposition, a setting characterized by an adverbial phrase, a discourse relation signified by a noncognitive adjunct or a conjunction, a relationship of dependency, or the framing of the speech act itself. Speakers know this about the theme, whether consciously or unconsciously, and so do listeners. Thus here again there is a shared understanding which can be enlisted in the creation of a humorous effect. With the information system there were expectations about the addressee that were shared; with the theme system the understanding that is shared consists instead of assumptions about the speaker or the writer. The theme is cast in such a way that inferences are required of the addressee. Once again it is a matter of cooperation: the first person assumes that the second person will make the necessary connection with what is uppermost in his mind, and that the second person knows he is supposed to do so. When demands for inferencing are made, and when the addressee responds to these demands, the interlocutors are joined in a common understanding—in a pleasant camaraderie that can sometimes lead to a sense of tickling in the funnybone.

4. Conclusion: *The Voices in Concert*

In conclusion, the systems of the textual component have evolved on the basis of a long-term partnership between the speakers and listeners of a particular language. Humor—and communication itself—depends on an accumulation of shared understand-

ings about how people say things in a given culture. In the information system the speaker attunes his message to the voice of the listener as he knows it; in the theme system he asks the listener to make inferences about what is going on in his own mind. In each instance there is an interdependence between the two parties without which the systems could not function.

Humor makes exaggerated claims on the relationship between speaker and listener; it is in fact the larger-than-life essence of that partnership. By marking, and in effect magnifying, the workings of the textual component so that they are clear enough for all to view, it leads us to a keener understanding of discourse. This understanding, in turn, enables us to make statements about the transfer of humor across languages.

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