

PORTUGUESE TRANSLATIONS OF ECONOMIC TEXTS IN LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AND EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

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1. The Enlightenment context

The period covered in this presentation, which basically corresponds to the moment of the emergence and development of political economy as an autonomous field of scientific inquiry, is particularly relevant for the study of the history of translation of economic texts. Indeed, throughout the end of the eighteenth century and early beginnings of the nineteenth century there was an explosion of translations of economic literature which corresponds both to the euphoria of translation as a rewarding and useful endeavor, and to the growing relevance of political economy as a subject that had reached and captured the public sphere.

In most European countries, by mid-eighteenth century, translations into Latin were no longer needed for international readership and Latin lost its role in scholarly writing, as well as in fiction and poetry. The Enlightenment had offered the opportunity for cosmopolitan conversation without a common or universal language, though French gained the statute of lingua franca. However, to be a lingua franca did not mean to achieve exclusivity or uniqueness and the common acceptance of French as a language of universal communication implied a wider process of translations from and into French of texts aiming at widespread diffusion.

The translation was sometimes a process of creation of new words and of a new technical language. Thus, national cultures and national languages were somehow challenged and modified by means of translations.

In late eighteenth and early nineteenth century there was no legal control over the contents of translation. There were no copyright assignments and translators could take their liberties with style and argument, without respecting the original message of the text (see Forget 2010, 655). Substantial differences may therefore be found whenever translators acknowledge the disclaimer of a “free translation”, even when they claim the attempt to be faithful to the central message of the author.

Translators tended to serve their readers and show loyalty to them, addressing their interests of comprehension, without caring too much about the authors being translated or quoted. In a certain way one can refer to this biased approach as a market oriented strategy of publishing.

Traduttore becomes traditore. The purpose of being faithful notwithstanding, there are difficulties of expression in a different language that originate involuntary misunderstandings. But sometimes, the translators themselves express their disagreement with ideas spelt out and thus delete full passages that sound inappropriate or insert footnotes explaining their opposition to the author’s ideas.

Original texts are transformed either to attract readers or to create an audience better prepared to be aware of the contents of the message translated. However, by introducing notes and amendments to the texts, translators produce changes of meaning to the original, for the benefit of new audiences for which the transformed message seems to fit much better.

By the end of the eighteenth-century, political economy was one of the main subjects that participated in the enlargement of the market for translations. The main purpose was to reach a broader audience interested in topics concerning the public administration, the role of government and the functioning of markets and economic life in general. Political economy was conceived to explain the process of betterment and improvement of individuals and society.

This new science of the market and of the modern institutions that serve the dynamics of the emerging industrial capitalism is also a science that is placed at the service of the legislator, with added responsibility in the design and implementation of the new functions granted to the state. It was therefore crucial to spread the good news concerning the interpretation and monitoring of economic life. Translations became an important vehicle of

diffusion and popularization of the new science of political economy and therefore a means for its appropriation in national contexts.

Translators of essays and tracts on political economy were also interested in keeping in conversation and critically discussing the claims and arguments put forward by the authors translated. Thus, the process of translation was also a means to increase public debate and to reveal the role of the translator as someone who is entitled with authorship attributes.

2. A few examples from Portuguese translations

Enlightenment thinkers produced different theories of translation, explaining whether they should be literal rendering, free rendering or paraphrase, free adaptation or thoughtful imitation. Many of the types and strategies of translation referred to in the previous section may be elucidated with a few examples taken from the prefaces or introductions to Portuguese translations of economic texts.

The present section of the paper is merely illustrative. It is an attempt to prove how the theory and practice of translation serve to explain the processes of knowledge diffusion and appropriation.

Example 1: The incomplete and unpublished translation of Genovesi's *Lezione di Commercio, o sia Economia Civile*

The importance of teaching the science of commerce

Ribeiro dos Santos (professor at the Univ Coimbra) proposed to Raimundo Nogueira the translation of Genovesi's *Lezioni*, a task which has been but partially accomplished. In fact, Nogueira's translation covers only chapters I to VIII and X of Part I of the *Lezioni*. The incomplete translation never enjoyed any public visibility and still remains available only in manuscript form in the Lisbon National Library (Nogueira 1788?). Furthermore, the project of creating a new *Aula* of *economia civile* has not moved forward and the *Aula de Comércio* remained as the only public institution where some notions of the commercial sciences could be presented.

Example 2: Portuguese translation (1794) of M. de la Porte, *La Science des Negocians et Teneurs de Livres* (1763).

The translator explains the utility of the book for accountancy practices and justifies the reason for using examples of commercial transactions closer to the experience of Portuguese merchants. It offers a good example of a useful adaptation of the translated text.

Example 3: Portuguese translation (1766) of Forbonnais, *Éléments du commerce* (1754).

The translator does not recognize the authorship of the original text (assigning it to Montesquieu), dedicates the translation to the Marquis of Pombal and gives his excuses for the free rendering or paraphrase style that he decided to follow.

Example 4: Portuguese translation of Campomanes (1778)

The relevance of the model of the "Sociedades Económicas" as a means to foster economic development in both agriculture and industry. Translation as a means of emulation

Examples 5 and 6: The Arco do Cego printing house (1800-1803), under the patronage of D. Rodrigo Sousa Coutinho.

Translation as technical instruments of spreading and transmission of knowledge. Cultivation of potatoes and poor relief institutions

Example 7: Portuguese translation of Gentz (1803) on public debt and public finance administration.

A new way of looking at the science of the legislator.

Example 8 : Portuguese translation (1812) of Edmund Burke, *Selections of Political Writings*.

The translator was an important Portuguese born in Brazil political economist (José da Silva Lisboa) and explains in the preface the political motivation for the diffusion of a work that would prevent the political evils of the French Revolution.

Example 9: Portuguese translation (1810-11) of Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (1776).

The translator begins his preface with a general overview of the economic policy measures in Brazil that would justify the dissemination of Smith's ideas and the importance of the translation for a better understanding of the profound changes that were taking place in that part of the Portuguese empire. The translator acknowledges the relevance of the political and economic context to explain the need for using the doctrine of *laissez faire* and economic liberalism.

This was not a translation of the whole *Wealth of Nations*. The translator omits Book V and all detailed digressions on the history of England. In the preface he informs the reader about this thoughtful abbreviation.

It is also worth noting that the translator is aware of the language transformation process associated to the translation. He does provide a careful explanation of the introduction of new words that were being used for the first time in Portuguese language.

Example 10: Portuguese translation (1822) of Jean-Baptiste Say, *Catéchisme d'économie politique* (1815).

The main concern of the translator's prologue is to explain why he had sacrificed beauty and style to the advantages of being faithful to the author by offering a literal rendering of the translated text. A few years later the same original by J.-B. Say would serve the purpose of teaching political economy, by means of a free translation by the author of the first textbook used at the University of Coimbra, A. Forjaz Sampaio.

Example 11: French translation (1822) of Thomas R. Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy* (1820).

The first French translations of Ricardo's *Principles* and Malthus's *Principles* were authored by the Portuguese Francisco Solano Constâncio. In the preface to the translation of Malthus's he claims the existence of theoretical disagreements that would justify the inclusion of footnotes to clarify arguments. This is a case where the translation becomes a pretext for scientific conversation.

“Tout en rendant justice au mérite de l'ouvrage [de Ricardo] et aux vues souvent profondes de son auteur, j'étais loin de partager toutes ses opinions, et j'aurais ajouté quelques notes à ma version, si mon estimable et savant ami, M. J.B. Say, n'avait pas eu la complaisance de se charger de ce soin.

M. Malthus (...) est le premier écrivain anglais qui ait entrepris de réfuter les doctrines de M. Ricardo. C'est ce qui m'a principalement décidé à traduire ces nouveaux *Principes d'Économie Politique*, qui d'ailleurs renferment des discussions très intéressantes sur les points les plus importants de cette science. (...)

Il y a cependant dans ce traité, un certain nombre de propositions qui me paraissent susceptibles d'être contestées (...). Je me suis donc décidé à ajouter un petit nombre de notes au chapitre VII, dans lesquelles j'ai essayé de prouver que M. Malthus a fait des assertions contraires à tous les faits, et qui ne reposent sur aucun raisonnement solide” (p. i-ii).