

Translation and Equivalences between Languages and Cultures:

Portuguese and Japanese Proverbs

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1. Common proverbs and equivalences

The debate over whether a translation can represent the totality or essentials of the translated elements is perhaps eternal. The famous Italian expression *traduttore, traditore* and the given interpretation—(a) translator (is always a) traitor—represent the point of view that defends the impossibility of translation being a perfect and complete equivalence.

Putting the question in this way, one rarely disagrees: it is difficult to guarantee that translations are perfect and complete equivalences between languages and that translating is “only” putting the same content in the words of another language. The classic Sapir-Worff hypothesis and the debates it raises confirm the intuition that, in fact, each language has specificities that, at least in certain contexts, are not easily expressed in another.

Therefore, the question should be placed precisely in this linguistic context perspective. There are easier and less easy informational contexts for translation. It seems intuitive that it is easier to translate (between technologically equivalent languages like Portuguese-English-Spanish-Japanese, for example) a page from a math book than from poetry or the description of customs and cultural idiosyncrasies of a community. Therefore, the problem of equivalence of translations has to take into account the type of speech to be translated. The more idiosyncratic, the more culturally specific the linguistic discourse, the more difficult it will be to achieve perfect translations between different languages.

In fact, proverbs are linguistic expressions that carry within them centuries of cultural experiences of a given community. They are more or less crystallized uses and, to be understood in their essence, we need to know the cultural contexts and experiences in which they are (or were) used. They always refer to a specific way of life of which they are the synthesis made by tradition and transmitted to us.

There seems to be, however, a contradiction between this reality and another: the frequency and ease with which translations of proverbs are published. We can find countless works dedicated to the translation and equivalence between proverbs, not just between two languages, but between dozens of languages! And not just among a few proverbs, but among thousands! Just as an example, this is supported by collections such as the *Dictionary of European Proverbs* (Strauss 1994), in three thick volumes with more than 2,000 pages, and more than 50,000 proverbs in 70 European languages. Or even between very different cultures, as seen in the collection of Gyula Paczolay *European Proverbs in 55 Languages with Equivalents in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese* (Paczolay 1997).

These collections do not always show translations, but often equivalences, because translating just the words of a proverb can result in expressions that are difficult to understand in a different culture. And this equivalence is the intentionality of the cultural principle that the proverb defends: it can be “We must not be too ambitious” (Portuguese proverb “Quem tudo quer tudo perde”, Whoever wants everything, loses everything), “We must be persistent” (Portuguese proverb “Quem espera sempre alcança”, Those who hope always achieve) or “We must accept sharing the good things” (Portuguese proverb “O sol quando nasce é para todos”, The sun when it rises is for everyone).

Principles like these (prudence, persistence, social justice) are easily found in all human societies and so it will not be difficult to find other proverbs that translate them into different languages. Furthermore, many proverbs can hardly be identified with a language or nationality, as they are common to neighboring languages, as is the case with Portuguese, Galician and Spanish-Castilian proverbs. The same seems

to be true of many Japanese and Chinese proverbs: they share a common cultural substrate in various domains, and it is sometimes difficult to know the direction of the proverb's journey.

The very way in which proverbs appear demonstrates the uncertainty of their origin and the language in which they were born. Naturally, a proverb always had to have a first use, an initial appearance in a given linguistic utterance, but that fact is usually lost in the past. And this is one of the main aspects of the proverbs: they appear to us as something adopted, used and coming from a specific community.

The exponential increase in communication enabled by the internet, allowing, in a very short time, exchanges of information that, in the past, required centuries allows us to account for processes that make possible to glimpse the birth of proverbs.

Love your neighbor as yourself; but don't take down the fence is a sentence written by Carl Sandburg¹. But it also appears on the internet attributed to Benjamin Franklin; in other places, slightly altered, it is identified as an American proverb; also as a German proverb and on other sites as a Portuguese proverb. The process of crystallizing proverbs was, of course, similar to this: someone fixed a phrase or sentence that seemed easy to memorize, that defended a point of view he wanted to convey and later, with some formal changes, it was used and shared among communities in contact. Therefore, it is not surprising that the same proverb can be identified with more than one group or language, especially when it translates deeply accepted behavioral principles, such as prudence, persistence, social justice or other equivalents.

2. Specificities and differences

Despite the many possible common aspects to be found between proverbs from different languages, it is also easily understandable that many proverbs imply

1 Carl August Sandburg, American writer (1878–1967).

very particular elements of the community, not always easy to translate into something identical in other languages.

Starting with the form itself, there is the morphological structure of the proverb. There are languages (such as, globally, the European languages) in which rhyme is a structuring component of many proverbs, while in others (Asian languages) rhyme plays only a much less important role. In Portuguese, for example, the use of the proverb usually implies the complete sentence, the assertion integrated in the speech. But in Japanese it's not always like this. Often, only the first part of the proverb is quoted, and the speaker knows that the interlocutor interprets the complete proverb.

But the difficulty of finding perfect equivalents generally results from linguistic, conceptual and contextual specificities of the proverb. See the following:

犬も歩けば棒に当たる [inu mo aruke ba bō ni ataru]²

which appears translated in Portuguese as *É andando que cachorro acha osso* (*It is by walking that a dog finds a bone.*)

It is interpreted, therefore, that the proverb translates the idea that in order to achieve the intended goals, it is necessary not to remain passive, but to seek a solution until it has been found. If we wanted Portuguese proverbs with the same principle of praising work, planning, the need for pro-activity, we could present

Quem não trabuca não manduca. (Those who don't work don't eat.)

A quem muito madruga, Deus ajuda. (Whoever wakes up early, God helps.)

De manhã começa o dia. (In the morning the day begins.)

Não deixes para amanhã o que podes fazer hoje. (Do not leave for tomorrow what you can do today.)

However, either of these equivalences of *É andando que cachorro acha osso* (*It is*

2 This paper was only made possible by the fundamental collaboration, on contents related to Japanese language and culture, of Professor Hiroaki Kawabata, Professor at Aichi Prefectural University (Aichi, Japan).

by walking that a dog finds a bone) translates very imperfectly the essence of the Japanese proverb.

First of all, the word *osso* (bone) does not appear in it. The literal translation of the lexical elements is:

inu	mo	aruke	ba	bō	ni	ataru
dog	particle (subject)	to walk	particle (conditional)	stick	particle (indirect object)	be hit

Google Translate presents the translation *If the dog walks, it hits the stick*. A true translation of the meaning is *When walking, a dog can be beaten with a stick*. This correspondence doesn't also make the proverb very transparent for those who don't deeply know Japanese culture. In fact, the proverb does not just refer to only one basic idea, as it happens with any of the proposed European equivalences. In fact, the proverb also has the referred meaning: whoever works, is active, seeks, risks, it is likely that he will be able to achieve his goals, even when not expected to. But (and this is the other part of its meaning) there is a good chance that, along the way, those looking for solutions may also suffer undesirable consequences, may encounter problems, suffer attacks. No known translation, with a European proverb, can match all these values in Japanese. It can, of course, translate a part, but not the whole essence of positive and negative ambivalence.

3. Portuguese and Japanese proverbs: some differences between individualistic and collectivist cultures

It is not difficult to see the prestige enjoyed, even in Europe, by (true or supposed) Eastern proverbs. And this prestige stems from, in many cases, Eastern proverbs being much more philosophical. The Portuguese proverbs are, to a large extent, linked to pragmatic situations related to work, meteorology or agriculture, that is, they have a dimension of concrete applicability, often physical (the days to sow the fields or harvest food). In a slightly different way, Eastern proverbs tend to be more collectivist, applicable to society as a whole and not just to a particular

situation. They tend to be more abstract and philosophical. This will result from coming from the more collectivist oriental cultures, where above the individual's particular interest is the interest of the group, of the collectivity. Eastern societies rest on the principle that society organizes itself not to favor the individual's success, but for the common well-being.

This difference in social organization is explained by the most recent genetic studies. Sapolsky (2018) defends the interaction between genetic constitution and cultural experiences: one conditions the other, being the human being the result of both. In other words, genes do not completely determine neither the way of life, nor the culture of an individual, and culture, by itself, does not alter the genetic makeup either. But the way one lives (the cultural context) can favor the prevalence or reinforcement of a certain gene among the population. This is seen in the example of dopamine and DRD4, the gene for the D4 receptor. There is a variant of this gene (called 7R, linked to the functioning of dopamine in the cortex) that favors the search for novelty, extraversion and impulsiveness. This variant is present in 23% of Europeans and North Americans of European origin, but only in 1% of East Asians (Sapolsky 2018, p. 348). According to Sapolsky, the "impulsive" variant facilitates the tendencies of an individualistic society and, in turn, an individualistic society tends to favor the "impulsive" variant. And the way one lives, the culture, is the result of this interaction.

What reasons led to this genetic and cultural differentiation between Westerners and Easterners, individualists and collectivists? For Sapolsky, in addition to the historical facts of emigration (those who emigrate are the most individualistic individuals who don't mind taking risks) the main reason is linked to the way in which societies organized their way of working. In the East, the cultivation of rice, for 10,000 years, has involved continuous collective work, from the original work to transform the ecosystem for rice cultivation (earthwork, irrigation) to what is needed every year to plant and harvest, work which requires collective collaboration.

Evidence supporting this explanation is provided by a study by Talhelm (2014) in the journal *Science*: in some parts of Northern China, as it is difficult to grow rice, peasants have been cultivating wheat for millennia, which implies individual rather than collective agriculture. In fact, according to the standard tests for comparing individualist and collectivist cultures, these individuals look like Westerners. Still other indicators of individualism appear compared to rice-growing areas: higher divorce and inventiveness rates and patent registrations. Thus, the paper concludes that individualism, which accompanies wheat cultivation, is much more visible in Northern China.

This differentiation between individualist and collectivist cultures cannot be seen as an absolute opposition. All societies seek to reconcile individual and collective interests. Of course, the degree of appreciation of each of these parts can be different. However, if the individual-collective opposition cannot be exaggerated, one cannot deny the appreciation of the collective, rather than the individual, in Eastern societies. And in the difference between Portuguese and Japanese proverbs this differentiation can also be seen.

It is the part of the stake that sticks out (stands up) that is hammered. It is a good example of this overlapping of the collective over the individual:

出る杭は打たれる [deru kui wa utareru]

deru	kui	wa	utareru
to stand out	stake	particle (subject)	be hammered

The proverb refers not only to humility, but the advantage, for the individual, of not wanting to stand out among the group. Wanting to get distinction, to be seen as better (even if the person is really good) is negative in Eastern cultures³.

It is not easy to find an equivalent Portuguese proverb. There is *Quanto mais*

3 This aspect can be observed in classroom. Eastern students (our experience is with Chinese university students) avoid answering questions posed to the whole class. For the student, to show to the whole class that he knows the answer may offend others who do not know it: he will be “the stake that stands out”.

alto se sobe, maior é o trambolhão (The higher you climb, the bigger the tumble), but it doesn't refer to the same thing. It applies to those who stand out, especially without merit, and who later fall out of favor. It does not say that no one should stand out or that it is reprehensible to want to show oneself to be better than others, an attitude considered positive in an individualistic culture like that of Portuguese.

This cultural vision, the prevalence of the collective over the individual, leads to the emphasis on the deletion of the individual and the valorization of the group. The greatness of the person is to show yourself to be humble and the wiser you are, the more humble you should show yourself to be. The following proverb magnificently translates this principle:

The more fruit there is, the more the ear of rice bows its head.

実るほど頭を垂れる稲穂かな [minoru hodo kōbe wo tareru inaho kana]

minoru	hodo	kōbe	wo	tareru	inaho	kana
bear fruit	more	head	particle (direct object)	to bow	ear of rice	particle (exclamation)

It's a truly admirable proverb at conceptual metaphor level, for several reasons. First, because it metaphorizes the prototypical ideal of person through the prototypical food for that culture, the rice. And it is a metaphor of great cognitive power, since it is based on a metaphorical equivalence of universal tendency, present in many languages: KNOWLEDGE/ IDEAS/ WISDOM ARE FOOD. When we say

The book gave me food for thought;

He gave us some brain food;

That idea was half-baked;

I've been ruminating on that topic for a while;

I need some time to digest that information.

We are using the conceptual metaphor IDEAS ARE FOOD. Cognitively, we imagine knowledge and ideas as if they were food, as things that we put inside us

and that are essential for us to live. And this metaphor works very well because if the rice plant represents the person, the ear of grains, as food, metaphorize ideas, knowledge, wisdom and therefore create the image that the more an ear is full of grain, the more it bows, symbolizing inclination, by metonymy, reverence, the sign of respect for others. Thus, the proverb uses a reality of nature known to all (the weight of the grains bending the ear) to show how, in another dimension, each one must also behave.

The cereal corresponding to rice, in traditional Portuguese culture, is wheat. However, in Portuguese, the proverbs related to this cereal are essentially pragmatic and much less philosophical. As an example with those that appear in the first great Portuguese dictionary, the *Vocabulário Bluteau* (in the year 1712), most of these examples are related to agriculture, dates and forms of cultivation and difficulties that can prevent a good harvest. They also refer to the importance of wheat in food (*Everything is nothing but wheat and barley; God give me father and mother in the village, and wheat and flour at home*) and the behavioral aspects related to these proverbs are clearly individualized. The importance of wheat “for me” is highlighted (the defense of individualism): *Better cleaning from my threshing floor than wheat from someone else’s bin.*

The more social proverbs refer to wheat cleaning as a metaphor for social cleanliness (*With the wind they clean the wheat, and vices with punishment*) and the weeds that appear in wheat as a metaphor for social obstacles to friendship (*Neither grass in wheat nor suspicion on the friend*).

4. Linguistic and cultural differences and idiosyncrasies

Another difficulty in finding a perfect equivalence between proverbs from very different languages and cultures lies in the linguistic and cultural particularities of the respective languages.

One of the Japanese proverbs that appear in several sites on the net is, precisely, the aforementioned sentence by Carl Sandburg, *Love your neighbor as*

yourself; but don't take down the fence. As Europeans usually don't know Japanese, sometimes they think that this sentence translates the Japanese characters that are next to it, that is, these are the words of the Japanese proverb. However, the proverb in question is

親しき中にも礼儀あり [shitashiki naka ni mo reigi ari]

shitashiki	naka	ni	mo	reigi	ari
intimate/ close	relationship/ friendship	in	also	reverence/ respect	might have

and it has nothing to do with neighbors and fences and should be translated as *There should be respect even in an intimate relationship.*

This translation is not as poetic, for European culture, as the ones that usually appear (*Love your neighbor but don't tear down your fence./ Friends friends, business aside./ A hedge between keeps friendship green*). Google Translate indicates *There is courtesy even while familiar*. But in fact, in order to understand the essence of the proverb, a translation must be retrieved with rigor, since the Japanese proverb does not refer to neighbors, nor family members, nor fences, nor businesses. It is based on the concept of “reigi”, reverence, respect, very important to Japanese culture. This concept of “reigi” does not refer to family relationships (as the Google translation indicates), but only relationships between very intimate non-family members, in which each has full trust in the other. “Reigi” implies that, even in relationships like these, it is intolerable to abuse friendship, and that respect for the other is the condition for the friendship itself not to be broken.

Another proverb where one can note the importance of cultural idiosyncrasies between different languages and cultures might be

花は桜木 人は武士 [hana wa sakuragi hito wa bushi]

hana	wa	sakuragi	hito	wa	bushi
flower	particle (subject)	cherry tree	man/ person	particle (subject)	warrior/samurai, knight/noble

Among the translations of this so-quoted proverb that we can find (many incorrect), a reasonably correct one might be *Among all flowers, the cherry blossom and among all men, the warrior*. In other words, the cherry blossom is the prototype, the most representative, the ideal of flowers; among men, the prototype, the ideal is the warrior/samurai.

The popular and mythical character that the flowering season of garden cherry trees (*sakuragi*) has had in Japan is well known since very ancient times. Therefore, this proverb is often interpreted in the West as the valorization of man as a warrior, corresponding to the ideal of life as a fight, for Japanese culture. It is, however, a rather superficial and misleading interpretation.

The term *bushi* (*shi: man; bu: fight, battle*) appears translated as *samurai* or *warrior* in Western languages, but this translation corresponds to a simplification that can be misleading. In Japanese culture, the term *bushi* rarely highlights the role of participation in warfare, but almost always the warrior's noble personality, his virtues that must be exemplary. In fact, in the Tokugawa era, in the last centuries of Japan's history⁴, there were no wars and therefore the role of the warrior/samurai in society changed a great deal. Much more than the symbol of the man who fights and kills, he becomes the symbol of the gentleman, the noble man, the perfect man.

Thus, in Japanese culture, the visible ideal of beauty (*sakura*, cherry blossoms) also represents the ideal for Man: the beauty, the brevity of the life of these flowers (they are in bloom for about two weeks) symbolizes the ideal of perfection of a life, they also mean death in youth, without the decline that the end of human life entails. Because of the strength of this symbolism, it was not difficult for Japanese imperial culture in World War II to transform a symbol of beauty and life into a symbol of sacrifice and death: many Japanese pilots had cherry blossoms painted on the sides of planes where they would die quite young and Japanese girls said goodbye to *kamikaze* pilots waving cherry blossom branches (Abe 2019).

4 The Tokugawa Era is also known as the Age of Uninterrupted Peace and runs from 1603 to 1868.

There is, in addition, a whole mythical dimension that reinforces the symbolism of beauty associating the flower and the brevity of life⁵: that it was the blood of young warriors, buried under the cherry trees, that gave sakura their special color.

Usually the symbolism and associations of the cherry blossom stop here and the deeper question is not asked: why did the Japanese tradition choose this flower and not another, bigger, more imposing one? Precisely, we think, this is because of its fragility and insignificance as an individual thing. A cherry blossom alone is irrelevant, it is worthless: together with all the others, occupying its place in the group, organized in millions of flowers, it is part of an incomparable beauty, of the phenomenon of nature that most beautifully represents the ideal of life, according to Japanese tradition. In other words, the basic cognitive trait that supports all metaphorical association is that of collectivism. Life and the most beautiful way of living must be based on the collective: an isolated life is like an isolated cherry blossom, it is irrelevant. It is the whole, the totality that makes beauty and gives it meaning.

It seems to us that this is the real basis on which the entire cultural and symbolic tradition of the *sakura* rests and which allows it the metaphorical associations it still has today. An individualistic culture would hardly give such a small flower the symbolic power that collective Japanese culture has given and continues to give to it. We can understand many of these values just by translating the words of the proverb (*Of flowers, it is the cherry tree, of men, it is the warrior*). But it is not the simple translation of words that allows us to understand their main values and dimensions. The scheme in Figure 1 seeks to represent the symbolic and metaphorical associations of the cherry blossom, which metaphorizes the ideal of life much more than the ideal of person/Man that the simple translation of the words seems to indicate.

5 Myths and belief universes are important mechanisms in the process of linguistic meaning and categorization (Lakoff 1987).

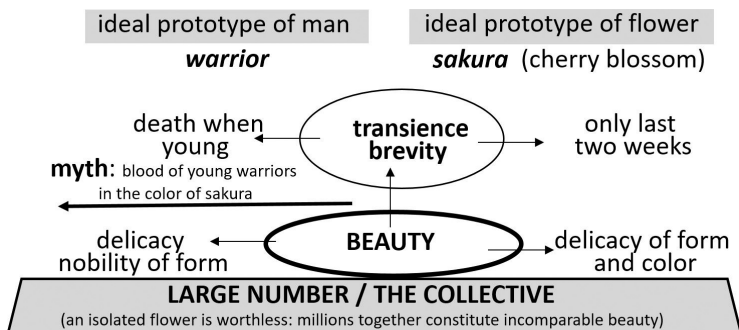


Figure 1: Symbolic associations of the metaphor WARRIOR IS SAKURA

5. Possible equivalences

If, as we have tried to show so far, the idea that any proverb is easily translatable is incorrect, so is the idea that every translation is unworthy of the original.

It is perhaps quite complex to make proverb equivalences between different languages. In some cases this may be feasible, but in others, although the proverbs may have a common theme, it is only outwardly that they have the same values. However, in a large number of cases, we understand the essence of the translated proverb, especially if one is careful to opt for a translation which is as faithful as possible. In fact, if proverbs try to convey the great principles that experience has deposited in a community, many of those principles are very equivalent, because, after all, we are all human.

A frog in a well cannot imagine what the ocean is.

井の中の蛙、大海を知らず [i no naka no kawazu taikai wo shira zu]

i	no	naka	no	kawazu	taikai	wo	shira	zu
well	preposition (of)	inside	preposition (in)	frog	ocean	particle (obj. direct object)	know/ imagine ar	no

A proverb like this does not present great difficulties of translation between cultures that know what frogs and oceans are, as happens with Portuguese and Japanese

cultures. And its meaning is also essentially the same: those who live only in their own world, in a small world and do not know other horizons, cannot guess the beauty and breadth of more complex realities.

In Portuguese, the translation appears with the word *sapo* for the Japanese word *kawazu*. However, unlike some cultures (as seems to be the case of Japanese and English) in Portuguese, *sapo* (*toad*) and *rã* (*green frog*) are very distinct. Although scientifically there is no distinction, in Portuguese culture, at a symbolic level, toads are seen as “very different” from green frogs. For the toad (*sapo*), there is a very negative view: dark brown, ugly, moves about at night, is thought to be repellent and poisonous. For the green frog (*rã*), the vision is not so negative: it chirps (“sings”) a lot, lives in water and has a nice color (is green).

Thus, it would be more logical to place at the bottom of a well, living in the water, a green frog and not a toad. However, because the proverb wants an animal representing a negative element, the Portuguese translation prefers the toad to the more likely Japanese green frog. As it turns out, even in apparently unambiguous translations, there may be cultural elements valued differently by the languages of the translations carried out.

But in many cases, especially in proverbs referring to situations shared by the two languages, the equivalences can be evident.

Sake shows the true inner spirit (of the person).

酒は本心を表す [sake wa hon shin wo arawasu]

sake	wa	hon	shin	wo	arawasu
alcoholic beverage	particle (subj)	true	interior/heart/ thought/feeling	particle (direct obj.)	to show

Since the Latin *In vino, veritas* (*In wine, the truth [is revealed]*), several languages refer to the behavioral changes that alcohol can cause in humans. But what for the West is wine, for Japanese culture it is sake, an alcoholic drink made from rice. For centuries, Portuguese proverbs (citing only those of Bluteau, 1712) also refer to the

changes that wine causes. One that could be equivalent to the Japanese mentioned above would be *Who washes himself with wine, becomes a child* (*Quem se lava com vinho, torna-se menino*), that is, whoever drinks a lot of wine becomes like a child, has no control over himself, says everything that he thinks and, without social restrictions, cannot hide what he truly is, “shows his true interior”, as the proverb about sake says. *Wealthy wine, diminished reason* (*De vinho abastado, de razão minguido*) and *Who is a friend of wine, of himself is an enemy* (*Quem é amigo do vinho, de si mesmo é inimigo*) are other examples of the theme of wine that can be paired with the Japanese proverb, as they also refer to the danger that wine can have for revealing things which the drunk person, in his normal state, would not reveal.

Even proverbs that imply different experiential situations between languages can be perfectly understood and allow for reasonable equivalences.

If you don't enter the tiger's lair, you don't catch his cub.

虎穴に入らずんば虎子を得ず [koketsu ni irazunba koji wo ezu]

koketsu	ni	irazunba	koji	wo	ezu
<i>tiger's lair</i>	preposition (in)	not enter	tiger's cub	particle (diret obj.)	not catch

It is easy to understand that the proverb says that, in order to achieve the intended goals, we need to take risks. Portuguese proverbs *Those who don't take risks, don't snack* (*Quem não arrisca, não petisca*) and *You don't fish trouts with dry underwear* (*Não se pescam trutas a bragas enxutas*) are very close equivalents.

Topics such as resilience and perseverance are also often shared. *Fall seven times, but get up eight* is one of the best known and most quoted Japanese proverbs:

七転び八起き [nana korobi ya oki]

nana	korobi	ya	oki
seven	to fall	eight	to get up

To want is to can (*Querer é poder*) and *Learn to fall before you learn to fly* (*Aprende a cair antes de aprenderes a voar*), although they don't use the same words, are

equivalences that portray similar beliefs.

Just as, except in zoos, there are no tigers in Portugal, there are also no monkeys; but Portuguese understand the proverb *Even the monkeys fall from the trees* (*Até os macacos caem das árvores*):

猿も木から落ちる [saru mo ki kara ochiru]

saru	mo	ki	kara	ochiru
monkeys	particle (subj.)	tree	preposition (from)	fall

We understand that it means that even specialists can be mistaken, even those who are safe may have a mishap, and corresponds to the frequent Portuguese proverbs *To err is human* (*Errar é humano*) or *In the best cloth the stain falls* (*No melhor pano cai a nódoa*).

Sometimes, it can be more complex, at first glance, to realize that some proverbs have equivalents in our culture:

It turns red when it crosses the vermilion.

朱に交われば赤くなる [shu ni majiwareba akaku naru]

shu	ni	majiwareba	akaku	naru
vermilion	preposition (in/whith)	majiware: connect whith ba: particle (conditional)	red (ku: con- junctive form)	turn

We understand that the proverb says that a person is influenced by everything around him. However, influences can be both positive and negative. Only by knowing the usage of the proverb it is possible to know which way interpretations tend. In this case, the proverb refers only to negative companionships. In Portuguese, one could, perhaps, give as equivalent *Who leans on iron, rusts* (*Quem se encosta ao ferro, enferruja-se*, perhaps which provides greater equivalence), *Who with dogs lies down, with fleas gets up* (*Quem com cães se deita com pulgas se levanta*, meaning bad companionship brings consequences) or *Who walks in the rain, gets wet* (*Quem anda à chuva, molha-se*, those who get into a problematic

situation will be in trouble). Sayings of “positive companionship” such as *Who a good tree leans against, a good shade welcomes* (*Quem a boa árvore se encosta, boa sombra o acolhe*), although they are part of the same theme (influences of companionships), would not be suitable for equivalence because it refers to positive companionships.

6. Conclusion: the truth that must come out

The essence of the question of equivalences between proverbs is, therefore, to understand what the fundamental conveyed assertion of the proverb is. Cultural elements can be different: rice in some languages is wheat in others and sake can mean the same thing as wine. But the essential purpose of every proverb is that of assertion, the affirmation of a principle, what proverbs are usually said to convey, “truths”⁶ accepted by the community. And if, between two languages, we find proverbs that translate the same assertion, then we find acceptable equivalences and it is this “truth” that, as the Portuguese proverb says, must come to the fore⁷. Therefore, if translating proverbs and trying to find equivalents in another language is not always a simple task, it is also not always an impossible or inglorious task. Complex, yes, but rewarding, because it helps to show diversity, what is common and what is different between the various human cultures.

Comparing and contrasting proverbs from different cultures is also trying to see the richness of other cultures in addition to the richness of our own. As the Japanese proverb advises, we must not be satisfied with the horizons of the frog that does not come out of its well. The cultural experiences of Portuguese and Japanese people have been meeting for over four centuries. The cultural wealth of the Orient was presented to us by the Portuguese navigators of the 16th century who can even

6 More than eternal “truths”, proverbs convey points of view, ideological marks that can change over time. For example, the countless old proverbs that, in Portuguese culture (and beyond) minimized women cannot be understood today as “truths”, but only as points of view of a given past period.

7 *Truth is like olive oil, it always comes to the fore* (Portuguese proverb).

be accused of being greedy, violent, colonizers, reckless, hungry for wealth and exploiters. But despite everything, they brought into contact two cultures, so far apart, through their incredible journeys across the dangerous ocean that everyone was afraid of. Therefore, the Portuguese navigators cannot be accused of being frogs that were content to remain in their well. Trying to see, in proverbs or any other cultural achievement of another people, what we can learn from this is to continue the effort of not wanting to be just like the frog in the well.

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言語と文化の中にある翻訳と互換性

——ポルトガル語と日本語の格言から——

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要 旨

翻訳におけるいくつかの過程に関して、最も頻繁に提起される問題の1つは、翻訳がどの程度まで、翻訳された言語の元来の価値を示すことができるのかである。通常1つの言語の発話を他の言語に翻訳することは困難ではないとしても、同様のことが用語法、とりわけ慣用表現や格言において当てはまるとは限らない。日本語とポルトガル語の格言における等価の観点から、本稿は以下の問いに答えようとするものである。

1. 異なる言語の格言における「翻訳」と等価は可能か？
2. あらゆる格言は翻訳あるいは他の言語に等価を見ようとする際、同じ難しさを示すのか。
3. 翻訳にとっての最大の難しさは、どのような局面に現れるのか。