Portuñol Salvaje

Border cultures and multilingual literature

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Résumé : Ce texte présente brièvement le portunhol salvaje comme une construction linguistique au service d'une œuvre littéraire novatrice. Utilisant le portugais, l'espagnol et le guarani paraguayen, le portunhol salvaje donne naissance à des pratiques littéraires multilingues qui cherchent à exprimer les sensibilités culturelles et identitaires sur la longue frontière du Brésil avec ses voisins sud-américains.

Mots-clés : Littérature multilingue ; portunhol salvaje ; frontières ; contacts linguistiques ; Amérique du Sud

Multilingual literature gives visibility to territories of human experience that have always existed, or that have existed for a long time, since most societies are multilingual and plurilingualism integrates the individual history of most people, in one way or another.

However, by showing these old and at the same time new territories, multilingual authors traverse the established literary norms, in the form of stabilized historical languages, with their book markets, publishers, reviewers and libraries, while at the same time founding new traditions, which may have a long-term, far-reaching future or, on the other hand, remain restricted to specific niches of sensibility, integrating the pluricentric repertoire of a country's or region's system of literary norms (Oliveira, 2021).

Border regions between languages are natural candidates for the awakening of multilingual or interlingual literature, given the linguistic and cultural frictions produced in this area of contact and instability, the negativity often attributed to confines and their inhabitants by institutions and inhabitants of the core land of the countries in-

volved, and the demands for borderlines to "decide" on one side or the other. Brazil's border with its neighbours is a concrete example of these relationships.

Brazil maintains 15,735 km of land borders with ten countries – Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana. It is the third country globally in border extension and, equally, third in the number of neighbouring countries, just behind Russia and China. At the same time, it is the longest land border between two languages, Portuguese and Spanish. Within the border strip, defined as 150 km from the dividing line, there are 588 municipalities in 11 Brazilian states, cities where approximately 10 million inhabitants live. More than 60% of the Brazilian population lives less than 60 km from the coast (about 125 million) and 26.6% directly in coastal cities (about 56 million) and, therefore, very far from the borders. Moreover, environmental zones such as the Amazon Forest or the Mato Grosso's Wetland have traditionally functioned as a barrier to transit and approximation in a context of precarious and incomplete infrastructure and incipient economic integration with most neighbours.

Nevertheless, Portuguese and Spanish contact in the border's southern arc has given rise to specific linguistic varieties, usually called *portunhol* (Sturza, 2019). Migratory flows from Portuguese speakers to Spanish-speaking spaces were/are also crucial for *portunhol*. The massive contingent of Brazilians in Paraguay, which exceeds 340,000 people, is the most notorious case. Borders are a factor and contingency of the existence of National States and, before them, with less precision, of different types of social orders, from tribes to multi-ethnic empires. They mark the reach of power, make it possible to measure the capacity to impose legitimate violence, and define the inside and the outside; they are the thermometer for changes in the balance of hegemony. Finally, they represent an essential magnitude for human existence: territory (Oliveira, 2016).

Recently a group of poets and literati, among whom Douglas Diegues stands out, began to use this linguistic practice, portunhol, with the name *Portunhol Salvaje*, as a language of literary creation, in the interface between Portuguese, Spanish, and the Paraguayan Guarani, as we can see in the excerpt below from the text *El Arte de Olvidar* (Blog *Portunholselvagem* on September 9, 2013). This literary movement thus demonstrates the vitality of portunhol, on the one hand, and, on the other, its multiple possibilities in terms of identity appropriation.

> *El arte de olvidar*
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> *Non sei direito quem era la garota, nem seu nome, nem si era de família rica e importante, y tudo lo que sei es que los três alunos idiotas musculosos le dieron duro a aquella yiyi hermosa, la ayudante de professores de 27 anos, alli mesmo, nel gym del liceum, mientras los outros três alunos también idiotas y musculosos assistíam al show porno y um deles filmaba. Yo nunca había estudiado nessa droga de colégio.* (Diegues, 2013)
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> The art of forgetting
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> I don't know who the girl was, not even her name, nor if she was from a rich and important family, and all I know is that the three muscular idiots

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> hit that beautiful yiyi hard, the 27-year-old teaching assistant, exactly there in the gym of the lyceum, while the other three students, also idiots and muscular, attended the porn show and one of them filmed them. I had never studied in this shit high school. (Diegues, 2013)

Considered by critics as one of the greatest Brazilian poets of recent generations, Douglas Diegues produces unusual poetic works. In his understanding:

> "The mestizo language with which I write is visceral. The border portunhol has an enchanting grace that fascinates me. I find it ugly, in bad taste, bizarre, rocky, but it has an elegance that seduces me, impacts me before and after my tastes, the tastes of my acculturated brain" (Bonvicino, 2009).

Although Douglas Diegues coined the term *Portunhol Salvaje* to show that there are many Portunhols, it is considered that the founding work of this movement to value the linguistic and cultural practices of this long South American border is the novel *Mar Paraguayo* (1992), by Wilson Bueno (1949-2010).

The first edition of the book was published in 1992 through a partnership between Iluminuras and the Paraná State Secretariat for Culture. In 2001, the book was published in Chile by Intemperie, in 2005 in Argentine by Tsé-Tsé and, in the following year, the work was published in Mexico by Bonobos. The version that comes out in the United States in 2021 was translated by Canadian poet Erín Moure into "francinglish", a mixture of French and English, while Guarani was translated into the Inuit language, spoken by the Inuit people in the north of Canada, formerly known as Eskimo.

Santos (2021) comments on Esteves' understanding of the work:

> Wilson Bueno did not write *Mar paraguayo* in Portuguese, nor Spanish, nor Guarani. Portunhol as a language does not exist despite being very present, says Unesp's researcher, Antonio R. Esteves. According to him, Bueno's book presents a mixture of Portuguese with the Spanish spoken by any Portuguese speaker in a Hispanic environment or vice versa. Esteves emphasizes that this language is not fixed but floats like a mixture: "There are no set norms. They change according to the need for communication."

The Argentinian anthropologist and literate Nestór Perlongher provides us with another image of the poetics of portunhol in the preface of Bueno's novel:

> The effect of portunhol is immediately poetic. Between the two languages, there is an uncertainty, a tension, a permanent oscillation: one is the "error" of the other, its possible, uncertain, improbable becoming. A singular fascination comes from this intertwining of "deviations" (as a law-enforced linguist would say). There is no law: there is grammar, but it is a lawless grammar; there is a particular spelling, but it is an erratic

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spelling: *chuva* (rain) and *lluvia* (rains) (spelled both ways) can coexist in the same paragraph, to mention one of the unavoidable examples.

Thus, Portunhol Salvaje is one of the literary languages that identifies multilingualism as the foundation for the border reality and imposes the territorial redesign of the region as a radiating centre of a new sensibility, attentive to the dignity of those who have found themselves on the margins of the historical identities of their respective States.

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