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Interview

AN INTERVIEW WITH LUIZ ANGÉLICO DA COSTA: AN EXAMPLE OF ACADEMIC LIFE

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Luiz Angélico da Costa is Professor Emeritus of UFBA. He was *professor catedrático* (of the Chair of English) - nominated to replace retired Prof. Manuel Peixoto from 1969 to 1971, when Luiz Angélico became *professor titular* (1971-1992) after *concurso público*. This public examination included evaluation and approval of personal documents, certificates and diplomas, as well as publications, a written examination, a public lecture on Edward Albee's "The Zoo Story" before a board of five examiners and a thesis defense (an evaluation of the candidate's capacity for logical argumentation in responding to questions raised by the Examining Board concerning his thesis entitled "Tom Sawyer: *realidade e ficção, experiência e imagem*"). Prof. da Costa has a certificate of a Specialization Course in English Teaching from the University of Michigan (1952) and was a visiting professor (a foreign lecturer) in the universities of Yale, Brown, and Arizona in 1973. Luiz Angélico da Costa was the first Head of the former Department of Anglo-Germanic Letters upon its creation in 1969. He also created and coordinated specialization courses in English language, English and American literature and a translation course linked to the Graduate Program of the Institute of Letters (1972-1995). He was the second

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coordinator of our previous Master's Course in Letters (1979-1981), the President of the Post-Graduation Board (1979-1981) and Director of the Institute of Letters at UFBA (1981-1984). At present, although officially retired from UFBA, he is the leader of the research group "Brazilian Literature in Translation and Foreign Literature in Brazilian Portuguese" – duly certified by the Institution in CNPq.

DS: What does it mean to you to be following the development of the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) for about sixty years, since its foundation in 1946?

LAC: Well, actually, I have been "following the development" of the Universidade Federal da Bahia since 1957, when I taught my first English class at the *Faculdade de Filosofia da Bahia* – the providential creation of Isaias Alves de Almeida – in the capacity of *Assistente Voluntário* (i. e., with no remuneration) under the responsibility of Prof. Manuel Peixoto, *Catedrático de Língua e Literatura Inglesa*, who was sitting in the back of the room, together with the first foreign lecturer in the course of *Letras Anglo Germânicas*, the American professor Dr. Joseph Satterwhite, PhD in Modern American Novel. My lecture (some fifty minutes long) was on and about Arthur Miller's then already famous play "Death of a Saleman".

During the course of my talk in English, I wasn't worried at all because I had been a diligent student of Phonetics and Phonemics (a high-level course) at the University of Michigan, when I took my Specialization Course of English as a Second Language in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

As for my methodological performance, then, I'm not so sure now, for I was just beginning my career caught in crossfire, and my students were not so responsive then, and I believe they, too, were feeling they were on trial, just as much as I knew I was.

When the class was over, Prof. Peixoto kindly told me he was proud of his young assistant, and Professor Satterwhite congratulated



me on both my “excellent English” and the passionate way I had spoken of Miller’s “tragedy of modern man.”

But then, curiously, a good many years later, when we unexpectedly met again at a Fulbright Seminar in São Paulo, he confided to me at dinner table, just the two of us sharing our reminiscences of those UFBA years at our *Faculdade de Filosofia*: “You gave an excellent talk that day and raised all the important questions there were to raise about the play, but I never heard any of those students answer any of your questions.” So who was wrong: those first university students of mine, I myself, or our criticizer? Yes, ours, because obviously, he was criticizing me too. And he was right in one important way, although I remember the students telling me in that distant past that they realized their foreign lecturer was a man of great literary knowledge, but not exactly a teacher, for he was a very impatient man, perhaps on account of his having been a victim of war. The final truth is: I believe I learned my lesson. And I keep putting it into practice down to this day. In other words, what I mean is, we just don’t teach anything at all until we can make our students want to learn it. And that can only be done when we are capable of leading the students carefully and kindly up to the door of learning, and then let them in on their own.

Just two more observations concerning factual points raised by your question: one, in 1946 when UFBA was getting started, I was taking my first steps as a secondary teacher of French in the *Instituto de Ponte Nova* in the hinterland of Bahia. This may seem not to have anything to do with your question, but it does. It was in the Institute of Ponte Nova (the school founded by the same American Presbyterian mission that had founded the *Colégio 2 de Julho* in Salvador) that I began to read American literature and to speak English every day. Two, when I came back to live in Salvador in 1948, I entered the course of Anglo-Germanic languages and literatures at our *Faculdade de Filosofia*, graduated in 1950 (B.A. in *Letras Anglo Germânicas*) and got my permission to teach (*Licenciatura*) in 1951.

DS: In 1968, the *Instituto de Letras da UFBA* was officially started, thereby interrupting a tradition that for years had linked linguistic and literary studies to *Faculdade de Filosofia*. How do you evaluate such initiative today?

LAC: Well, to begin with, let me remind you that the important structural change in our former *Curso de Letras* was already under way in 1966. That, incidentally, was the year I wrote *Aspectos do tema e da estrutura de "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"*, a doctoral dissertation which, together with a written examination on the work of Charles Dickens and topics of English syntax, a public lecture and presentation of certificates and diplomas, would make me receive the title of *Docente Livre* and *Doutor em Letras* two years later, in the course of the rash year of 1968. According to Professor Roberto Figueira Santos (Former President of UFBA and former Governor of the State of Bahia), the year 1968 has been equivocally considered the year of the university reform, which, again, in Dr. Santos' words, has nothing to do with the MEC/USAID AGREEMENT. I'd say that the new status of our *Instituto de Letras* after the university reform brought us ampler possibilities than the ones we had within the structure of the former *Faculdade de Filosofia* (sort of a Brazilian counterpart of a School of Liberal Arts). But it also brought us larger responsibilities, such as serving other areas of studies in our capacity of basic institute – a decisive factor of integration with the university spirit – something that still calls for more daring definitions and resolutions. In short, what we need is to amplify our possibilities of real interface with all the other areas of the university and sectors of the local community in which it is or ought to be integrated.

DS: You were the first Head of the Department of Germanic Letters, then called Anglo-Germanic Letters, with a significant performance in the area of language, literature, and translation studies. How was the decision reached of establishing different

language departments instead of a single Department of Modern languages, such as occurred in other universities?

LAC: I guess the decision was paradoxically reached by inertia, meaning that the overweight condition of the new status of our *Curso de Letras* suddenly innovated as an autonomous institution, simply did not leave us sufficient space and energy for further changes at first. So, maintaining the previous organization of the sectors of Anglo-Germanic Languages, Romance Languages, Vernacular Letters, and Classics (languages and literatures of Ancient Rome and Greece) must have seemed the easier way out of the initial puzzle. Gradually, however, things were accommodated in a more organic and modern fashion – thanks to the development of linguistic studies and the studies of theory of literature, with a special mention to the pioneering philological studies of Professor Vasco da Gama's group and the phonetic studies of Prof. Rossi's Group.

What is now the Department of Germanic Letters is the result of long and continuous apprenticeship with the contribution of many of my former students of American literature and English language at various levels of regular courses for graduation. We also organized two outstanding specialization courses of English language, English and American literatures (in the 70's and 80's) and the Specialization Course in Translation (in the 90's) as a culmination of the teaching of translation disciplines in the undergraduate course.

As a regular practitioner of the craft and art of translation ever since my academic days, I believe I have been able to put a spell in my teaching of the subject, which I know has been efficaciously contagious (paradox or no paradox) for the two last decades in our Institute of Letters.

To sum up, when I look backwards, I feel I have accomplished what I had always dreamed of: an extraordinary number of former students, now colleagues, who made their way through emulation and personal competence, thereby realizing what to me is the ideal goal of education – our best students reaching farther than their

teachers did: colleagues like you, Denise, outstanding teacher of German and devoted researcher in the field of Applied Linguistics.

DTC: You have taught and you still have been teaching different generations of English teachers and translators. Throughout your career, you have witnessed the rise and fall of different methods and approaches. What would you say about the link between fashion and science, i. e., about the relationship between trends and linguistic research and translation theory, when methods become fashionable or outdated according to the day's novelty? In what ways have our university studies changed in order to adapt to these trends?

LAC: Well, Décio, as I have just told Denise I believe my career was (you say it still is) an emulating factor in the life of many of my students (and I say it without false modesty or silly pride). It is true that I have witnessed the rise and fall of different methods and approaches. Yet I must say I have equally influenced and been influenced in several and diverse ways. And that's what really counts in the long run. One of the things frequently said by one of my former students that has mostly pleased me is her saying to me, "what we most admired in you as a teacher was the fact that you never told us directly that we were wrong, if or when we were wrong; you always found something to praise in our participation." And I say participation is in itself something to be praised, first of all. Then, as I heartily believe and feel, nothing in the teaching-learning process should be discarded. On the contrary, just for an example, what would be the linguistic achievements and research advances today if classic grammar had never existed? On the other hand, another truthful point is that if theory finds one end of the thread in practice, practice for its turn always derives from some kind of innate unexpressed theoretical understanding. So if theories outdate it is precisely because practices do change, in accordance with times, latitudes, customs in general, or, in one word, culture. Thus, if language is culture, same as culture is language, there is no other

way but continuous change, meaning always a new process to reach a product which, in turn and times, will start a new process, and so on and on. Summing up, then, mutability – with a purposeful need – is the spice of life, not merely variety, Shakespeare forgive us. Yes, Décio, I did witness the rise and fall of methods and approaches – from my days of teaching in high schools and language centers, when the all-powerful audiolingual method disdained all the other linguistic approaches to my latest days of translation teaching in college courses, always trying to call a truce between the now rancid (thanks God!) meaningless (mostly terminological) dispute between logocentric and deconstructive approaches. I have just made a parenthetical observation about terminology. What I mean is (consciously naive fashion): what difference does it make between calling the text to be translated “original” or any other way? Anyway, naming is the beginning of knowledge, but reducing knowledge to naming is certainly retrograding. Just for illustration, Derrida’s fine philosophical concept of deconstruction has sometimes been misread by students eager for “the day’s novelty” (which, incidentally, is no longer any novelty. So that’s when the teacher ought to take up his post to make the necessary route corrections. For example, at a lecture delivered here in our Institute, Professor Kanavillil Rajagopalan advised the students not to misunderstand “deconstruction as destruction for further construction” – which was and is a fine piece of advice. I’d like to add (even without his competence in the particular field of studies) that deconstruction is from the start rather “reconstruction” – in the sense of a rereading and rewriting of a previous text in another context. Linguistic and cultural researches in university studies today have been adequately preparing us to follow the new trends. Anthony Pym’s *Epistemological Problems in Translation and Its Teaching* (159 pp 1993), Edwin Gentzler’s *Contemporary Translation Theories* (240 pp 2001), Laurence Venuti’s *The Scandals of Translation* (256 pp. 1998), Leo Hickey’s *The Pragmatics of Translation* (250 pp. 1998) and Kathleen Davis’s *Deconstruction and Translation* (120 pp. 2001) are some of the texts

I would lately consider indispensable to students of theory and practice of translation.

DTC: Your life has been dedicated to teaching and translating, and your name is a major reference in translation studies in Brazil. You have organized translation seminars and specialization courses at UFBA, which became famous nationwide, and you have also written some books and articles equally famous. Moreover, you have been guiding different graduate students in their theses and dissertations. Tell us about your experience as a teacher, as an advisor, as an author, and as a translator.

LAC: Yes, my life has been dedicated to teaching and translating ever since I stepped into a classroom for the first time as an eighteen-year-old teacher of French, but saying that my name “is a major reference in translation studies in Brazil” is generous of you, I’m aware of it. Now what you say next about my having organized translation seminars and specialization courses at UFBA is absolutely true, same as it is true that those seminars and courses brought to UFBA and into our Institute classrooms teachers and authors whose names had been familiar to our students from their book covers. And so the personal contact operated the miracle of closer integration. No wonder, therefore, that a good many of those earlier students have become translation instructors and researchers at our Institute and elsewhere. And they are now opening their own way. One way or another, however, they are the scholarly children of intellectual parents as diverse as Rosemary Arrojo, Mário Laranjeira, Francis Aubert, Maria Cândida Bordenave, João Azenha Junior, John Milton, Haroldo de Campos, Boris Schneiderman (national participation) and Clifford Landors (USA), Douglas Robinson (USA), Amelia Hutchinson (UK), Leo Hickey (UK), Roger T. Bell (UK), Laurence Venuti (USA), Serge Bourjea and Michelle Bourjea (France), Luís Maia Varela (Portugal), to name just a few scholars who, besides our UFBA

colleagues, gave their contribution to our specialization courses and translation teaching seminars.

On the subject of translation studies writing, I organized the book *Limites da Traduzibilidade* (Edufba: 1996), with 2 articles of mine: 1) “The Two Deaths of Quincas Wateryell: uma versão em língua inglesa de A morte e a morte de Quincas Berro D’Água”, as part of a group work entitled *Cinco Versões Estrangeiras de “A morte e a morte de Quincas Berro D’Água”* The authors of the other four articles are: Celeste Aída Galeão (on the German translation), Maria Eunice Victal e Castro (on the Spanish translation, Mônica de Sousa Almeida (on the French translation) and Mauro Porru (on two different Italian translations). 2) Os conceitos de “tradução literal” e “tradução livre” no processo de ensino aprendizagem (a text originated from my participation in a panel discussion on the teaching-learning process with Prof. Francis Aubert and Prof. Rosemary Arrojo during the *I Seminário de Ensino-Aprendizagem de Tradução* at UFBA in 1991). “Tradução ou traduções?” (*Exu*, 16/17. p. 12-15), “Manuel Bandeira tradutor de Emily Dickinson” (*Estudos: Lingüísticos e Literários*, 9, p. 173-182), “João Ubaldo Ribeiro tradutor de si mesmo” (*Anais do V Encontro Nacional de Tradutores: São Paulo, ABRAPT, 1996*, p. 181-190) are three of my published articles that best reflect my views of the practice of translation.

As an adviser of dissertations and theses, I have particularly induced students to research and write about the problem of the translation of tropes or of cultural and linguistic equivalence. As an author, I have been trying to restore some of the time employed in classroom work or in bureaucratic service to use it in creative activities such as writing poetry and drama. As for the latter, “A teia das palavras” (The Word Web”, in English) is a recent rewriting of my dramatic monologue “2001... ligações perigosas” (registered in SBAT in 1995). But most of all, I have been compulsively translating poetry (both English into Portuguese and Portuguese into English). It is the utmost aesthetic pleasure of my retirement days. As a consequence, I hope to have two books published in 2006: *Solilóquios*

do Hamlet: o processo de recriação em uma tradução anotada and *Geopoemas / Geopoems*: a thematic bilingual anthology of poets from Bahia who have had some kind of connection with UFBA, to be published in 2006 – the year of UFBA's 60th anniversary. Professor Fred Ellison (U. of Texas) and Prof. George Monteiro (Brown University) will translate a number of poems and have also accepted to read some of my translations at my request. There may be some other translators from abroad.

DTC: What differences have you felt in your students' *Weltanschauung*, their perception of the world when you started teaching and now? Have their values, interests, and dreams changed? If so, how? What pieces of advice would you give to the new generations?

LAC: Giving an objective answer to your first question in this block would be as difficult as answering Machado's famous fictional-rhetoric-poetic question "Mudaria o Natal ou mudei eu?" Besides, it's much easier to remark that your second question in the block – "Have their values, interests, and dreams changed?" – is a much better answer to your own first question than any that I or anyone else might produce. In other words, I know you do know that certain questions are the best answers. But still, how could their values, interests, and dreams have *not* changed since we are now living in this "brave new world?" Now they have values which are hardly of their own, their interests are the interests of our entirely mediatic society, and their dreams are... what dreams? We're not even allowed to dream any more. It's all there now – frustratingly ready-made and blurring amidst the clouds. But, anyway, this is an interview; so I ought not to leave any questions unanswered. My advice to the ones that are coming after us is: Be yourselves, first, but then, always look both backwards and onwards: there can be someone to give you a hand, someone who learned from someone else and did his

part and did his best, and so surpassed the one who came before: someone like you, Décio, someone like you, Denise. And I mean it and am glad of it. Thank you, both of you.