

## TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL ITEMS IN *VIDAS SECAS/BARREN LIVES*: A PRODUCT-ORIENTED ANALYSIS

### TRADUÇÃO DE ITENS CULTURAIS EM *VIDAS SECAS/BARREN LIVES*: UMA ANÁLISE DO PRODUTO



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**Abstract:** Drawing on Descriptive Translation Studies and the concept of norms proposed by Toury (1995/2012), this study aims to analyze the translation of cultural items in the Brazilian novel *Vidas Secas* (1938), by Graciliano Ramos, and translated into English, *Barren Lives* (1999), by Ralph Edward Dimmick. More specifically, the study aims at a) identifying the predominant group of translation strategies - syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic - (Chesterman, 1997/2016) used to translate cultural items (Newmark, 1988); b) examining which strategy is the most predominant in the translation of cultural items and c) analyzing if the most predominantly strategy used is related to Toury's notion of norms. Data collection consisted of four steps: 1) source text reading; 2) identification of cultural items in the source text followed by their insertion in an Excel spreadsheet; 3) target text reading; and 4) selection of the translation given to each cultural item followed by their insertion in the spreadsheet. Data analysis was carried out quantitatively and qualitatively. Results have shown that most strategies used by the translator belong to the pragmatic group. As for the most frequent type of strategy employed to translate the cultural items, the analysis has shown that most of them were translated through the use of Cultural filtering, which means the translator has adapted most of the items to functional or cultural equivalents in the target language. Using Cultural filtering (pragmatic strategy) indicates that the translator was influenced by norms of the target culture, based on ideas, values, and knowledge shared by an English-speaking community.

**Keywords:** Translation strategies. Descriptive Translation Studies. Norms. Translation Product. Graciliano Ramos.

**Resumo:** Ancorado nos Estudos Descritivos da Tradução e no conceito de normas proposto por Toury (1995/2012), este estudo objetiva analisar a tradução de itens culturais no romance brasileiro *Vidas Secas* (1938) de Graciliano Ramos e em sua tradução para o inglês *Barren lives* (1999) por Ralph Edward Dimmick. Mais especificamente, objetivamos a) identificar o grupo predominante de estratégias de tradução - sintáticas, semânticas ou pragmáticas - (Chesterman, 1997/2016) utilizadas para traduzir itens culturais (Newmark, 1988); b) examinar qual estratégia predominou na tradução dos itens culturais e c) analisar se a estratégia predominante está relacionada ao conceito de normas proposto por Toury. A coleta de dados é composta por quatro passos: 1) leitura do texto fonte; 2) identificação dos itens culturais no texto fonte seguido de sua inserção em planilha Excel; 3) leitura do texto alvo; e 4) seleção da tradução de cada item cultural seguido de sua inserção na planilha. A análise dos dados foi realizada quantitativamente e qualitativamente. Os resultados mostram que a maioria das estratégias utilizadas pelos tradutores pertence ao grupo pragmático. Em relação ao tipo de estratégia utilizado mais frequentemente para traduzir os itens culturais, a análise revelou que a maioria deles foi traduzida



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por meio do Filtro Cultural, o que evidencia que o tradutor adaptou a maioria dos itens com o uso de equivalentes culturais ou funcionais na língua de chegada. A utilização do Filtro Cultural (estratégia pragmática) sugere que o tradutor foi influenciado pelas normas da cultura de chegada, baseando-se em ideias, valores e conhecimentos compartilhados pela comunidade falante de língua inglesa.

**Palavras-chave:** Estratégias de tradução. Estudos Descritivos da Tradução. Normas. Produto. Graciliano Ramos.

Translation<sup>1</sup> has been considered a secondary activity, and it was not recognized as an independent discipline until 1972 when James Holmes used the term “Translation Studies” in his paper entitled “The name and nature of translation studies”, which also helped to structure the discipline. The scholar described the discipline as being concerned with “the complex of problems clustered round the phenomenon of translating and translations” (Holmes, 1972 p. 173).

Translators face different kinds of challenges when translating certain texts, as in the case of literary texts, for example. Guerra (2012) mentions that in literary translation, translators may struggle with terms to which there is no direct translation into the target culture. That would be the case of idioms, regionalisms, and cultural items.

2

Cultural items<sup>2</sup> is the term suggested by Peter Newmark (1988) to words related to a specific language and culture, usually unknown by individuals from other cultures and speakers of other languages. Newmark divides cultural items into five categories: ecology; material culture; social culture; organizations, customs, activities, procedures, and concepts; gestures and habits (see the next section for a more detailed explanation).

Due to their cultural and linguistic differences, cultural items are words that might not be literally translated. Aixela (1996) considers them as “elements of the text that are connected to certain concepts in the foreign culture (history, art, literature) which might be unknown to the readers of the TT” (as cited in Hashemian, 2016, p. 172). Additionally, cultural differences are considered by Zare-Behtash and Firoozkoobi (2010) as one of the most substantial challenges in translating literary texts. Because of that, translators might have to resort to different translation strategies in order to make the text understandable and acceptable for the target audience.

Taking into account translation as a cultural phenomenon, this paper draws on Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) to investigate the translation of cultural items (Newmark, 1988) in the dramatic Brazilian literary work *Vidas Secas*, which was translated into English as *Barren Lives*. More specifically, the paper aims at: a) identifying the

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predominant group of translation strategies - syntactic, semantic or pragmatic - (Chesterman, 1997/2016) used by Ralph Edward Dimmick to translate cultural items (Newmark, 1988); b) examining which strategy is most frequent in the translation of cultural items; and c) analyzing if the most predominantly used strategy could be related to Toury's (1995/2012) notion of norms.

Since a Descriptivist approach is adopted, the purpose of this study is to describe and explain the strategies used by the translator, not judging the translation of cultural items as adequate or inadequate. Therefore, the focus is on the product when emerged in its target culture system.

For that purpose, this paper is divided into an introduction, three sections, and final remarks, as follows: firstly, the introduction to the main topics used in the research; then Section 1 presents the theoretical framework with an overview of key concepts used in the analysis; Section 2 brings an explanation of the methodology used to collect and analyze data; Section 3 provides the analysis and discussion of the data collected; and finally, the final remarks.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws on the Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), the concept of Norms proposed by Toury (1995/2012), the different types of Translation Strategies proposed by Andrew Chesterman (1997/2016), and the categories of cultural items suggested by Peter Newmark (1988), which are described in the following subsections.

### ***Descriptivism and Translation Norms***

The Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) branch was originally developed by James Holmes (1972) and consecrated by Gideon Toury after his book entitled *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* was published in 1995 and revised in 2012. Toury (1995/2012) believes that in order to understand a translation, it is necessary to analyze the reasons that justify the translator's choices by focusing on the target context of reception and its cultural background. The reason for this is that the translator's decisions are usually guided by the cultural, social, and historical norms of the receiving system. According to Toury, the concept of norms is defined as:

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the translation of general values or ideas shared by a community - as to what would count as right or wrong, adequate and inadequate - into performance ‘instructions’ appropriate for and applicable to concrete situations. These ‘instructions’ specify what is prescribed and forbidden, as well as what is tolerated and permitted in a certain behavioral dimension. (Toury, 1995/2012, p. 63)

Translation norms are interconnected with other systems and may often cause the establishment of certain patterns and regular tendencies. Toury (1995/2012) divides translation norms into two categories, namely: Preliminary norms (related to translation policies and level of tolerance in the target culture regarding choices of literary works, authors, and mediating languages); and Operational norms (the translator’s decisions during the translation process, as what is supposed to be changed or maintained from the source text).

According to the perspective of DTS, when translating a text, translators generally take into account the interests of the target audience by making use of some strategies. Chesterman (1997/2016) explains and categorizes different types of Translation Strategies. His categories are a key source to our analysis and will be explained in the next subsection.

4

### ***Translation Strategies***

Chesterman (1997/2016) considers translation strategies as types of Memes,<sup>3</sup> since they encompass kinds of knowledge learned by translators and passed on from generation to generation, and as a result, some of them become norms and standard conceptual tools. The author categorizes three *groups of translation strategies*: syntactic, semantic and pragmatic and affirms that those strategies overlap to some extent, which means that different types of strategies can often co-occur. Chesterman (1997/2016) also describes ten *types of strategies* for each different group, which will be explained hereafter.

**Syntactic/Grammatical Strategies.** Syntactic strategies change and manipulate the form of the text in the syntactic level, i.e the structural order words are combined and related to each other in sentences. This group consists of the following strategies: Literal translation (similar grammatical structure), Loan/Calque (borrowing of items), Transposition (change of the word class), Unit shift (source text unit translated as a different unit in the target text), Phrase structure change (changes at the level of the phrase), Clause structure change (changes in the structure of the clause in terms of its constituent phrases), Sentence structure change

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(changes that affect the structure of the sentence-unit), Cohesion change (intra-textual reference, ellipsis, substitution, pronominalization and repetition, or the use of connectors of various kinds), Level shift (influences on the mode of expression of a specific item, which shifts from one level to another), and Scheme change (kinds of changes that translators use in the translation of rhetorical schemes).

**Semantic Strategies.** This group of strategies refers to changes that manipulate the meaning of the text. They are divided into: Synonymy (use of synonyms or near-synonyms), Antonymy (the use of an antonym combined with a negation element), Hyponymy (shifts within the hyponymy relation), Converses (pairs of verbal structures expressing the same meaning, but with opposing viewpoints), Abstraction change (moves from abstract to more concrete level, or from concrete to more abstract), Distribution change (changes in the distribution of the ‘same’ semantic components over more or fewer items), Emphasis change (emphasis or the focus given is reduced or altered for some reason), Paraphrase (the use of different words with same meaning), Trope change (translation of rhetorical tropes), and Other semantic changes.

**Pragmatic Strategies.** This group makes reference to the selection of information in the translated text, and it manipulates the message itself. There are ten strategies in this group: Cultural filtering (translation into cultural or functional equivalents), Explicitness change (explicitness of components in the target text that are only implicit in the source text), Information change (addition or omission of information), Interpersonal change (changes in the relationship between text/author and reader), Illocutionary change (changes in the speech act), Coherence change (logical arrangement of information in the text at the ideational level), Partial change (summary translation, transcription, translation of the sounds only, or any other type of partial translation), Visibility change (change in the status of the authorial presence), Transediting (radical re-editing that translators have to do on badly written original source texts) and Other pragmatic changes.

In order to analyze the strategies used in the translation of words culturally related in the novel *Vidas Secas*, the categories of cultural items proposed by Peter Newmark (1988) are followed, as explained in the following subsection.

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### *Cultural Items in Translation*

Different scholars from diverse fields and disciplines (e.g. Sociology, Anthropology, Philosophy, Linguistics, Literary Studies) have tried to conceptualize culture. Peter Newmark (1988), for example, defined culture as a set of manifestations and ways of life particular to every different community by the use of a specific language as a means of expression. The scholar also advocates that translation is often used as an instrument to transmit culture. According to Newmark (1988, p. 95), “most 'cultural' words are easy to detect, since they are associated with a particular language and cannot be literally translated”, because depending on the word, the “literal translation would distort the meaning”.

Although Newmark considers cultural words easily recognizable, there is controversy regarding the definition of what is and what is not a cultural word. As stated by Aixela (1997) “in a language everything is culturally produced, beginning with language itself” (Aixela, 1997, p. 57, as cited in Brasiené, 2013, p. 4).

6 Some scholars such as Aixela (1996) have studied and divided cultural related words into different categories and labeled them as ‘Culture Specific Items’, Cultural terms or Cultural items. Although Newmark (1988) uses the term Cultural items, he also refers to them as “cultural words”, and categorizes them into five groups, as follows: Ecology (flora and fauna, winds, plains and hills); Material culture (artefacts that can be used to provide local color); Social culture (words related to individuals' social life as work and leisure); Organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts (political, administrative, religious, and artistic); and Gesture and habits (regular behavior and movement such as body language and signs particular to a culture).

Clifford E. Landers (2001, pp. 79-80) points out that “a text elaborated in another language and culture makes reference to people, objects and institutions that are not easily recognized by the target language” (as cited in Hatje-Faggion, 2011, p. 73). Nevertheless, the belief of always being difficult to translate texts elaborated in another language and culture might be challenged when actual translations are analyzed. When texts are looked at empirically, it is possible to observe that they “tend to be easier to translate when source and target cultures are in close cultural contact or share a similar cultural history, when source and target languages are related, when the source text is already oriented towards the target readership” (Chesterman, 1997/2016, pp. 7-8).

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## Methodology

The following section brings an overview about the author's life and a contextualization of *Vidas Secas*. In addition, there is a subsection dedicated to the translator's background (Edward Dimmick) and the translation of the novel itself. It is followed by a subsection which details how data were collected and analyzed.

### *Graciliano Ramos and Vidas Secas*

Graciliano Ramos de Oliveira was born in Quebrangulo, a small town in the Northeastern state of Alagoas, in Brazil, in 1892. Some years later, he moved to Buíque in Pernambuco, also in the Northeast of the country, where he lived until 1899. In his earliest years of life, Ramos underwent some experiences that strongly influenced the writing of his books, including *Vidas Secas*, published in 1938. Its plot represents a Brazilian cultural situation from the Northeast of Brazil in the 1930s and tells the story of a migrant family who faces a hardship of life due to climate and social conditions. According to Kerecuk (2016, p. 4):

a key central multifaceted theme, eternal recurrence, is contained in the novel: cycles of droughts, of death and rebirth in nature, of social economy, of psychological fear of uncertainty, of poverty and hunger, as well as a mythical facet – trials and tribulations, which need to be overcome for the hero to reach his/her ultimate goals, recurrent in all literatures since time immemorial, have a marked presence in this novel.

The book is divided into thirteen chapters, and each chapter brings a different focus through the perspective of the main characters: Fabiano (the father), Sinhá Vitória (the mother), the two kids (the older boy and the younger boy) and Baleia (the dog). The chapters are relatively independent from each other, i.e. “the order could be altered in various ways without detriment to the whole.” (Dimmick, 1965, p. xxiv). This is because they were firstly written as short stories and published separately in different newspapers and magazines over a period of approximately two years.

In *Vidas Secas*, Ramos represented the geographical, cultural and linguistic characteristics of the Northeast of Brazil in its deepest sense. The feeling of intimacy with a Brazilian significant essence in most of his works made Graciliano Ramos an internationally

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known author. *Vidas Secas* was translated into different languages, including English by Ralph Edward Dimmick, as detailed in the next subsection.

### ***Ralph Edward Dimmick and the Translation of Vidas Secas***

Ralph Edward Dimmick translated *Vidas Secas* into English in 1965 by the University of Texas Press. Dimmick was from Ohio, but after he attended the University of Harvard, he moved to Brazil, where he lived from 1943 to 1946. After that, he went back to the University of Harvard to teach Portuguese and Brazilian literature. In 1951, Edward Dimmick became a member of The Organization of the American States (OAS), worked as a book editor with focus on Latin American studies as well as worked as a translator.

Translations of Latin American literature into English were not frequent before the second half of the twentieth century. However, after the 1940s, there was an increase in the number of publishing houses translating books from foreign languages into American English in the period of collapse between the Great Depression and the end of World War II. As stated by Eliza Morinaka, (2018, p. 205) “the texts of the Brazilian canon, whose aesthetic and social meanings were directed to the Brazilian context, were introduced into the American system through a foreign relations strategy to discover the culture of Latin American countries through their literature.”

Regarding the translation of *Vidas Secas* by Dimmick, Amorim affirms that:

the comparative study of its translation is, therefore, an important activity to linguistic and cultural perception. It is interesting to observe how the aspects inserted in the theme of a classic of Brazilian literature were transposed to another cultural context. The fact that the translated work was awarded, in the United States, with the William Faulkner Prize for Foreign Literature (1962) shows the importance of the translator as a promoter and instigator of a process of reflection on issues that go beyond geographical and socio-cultural aspects of its people and its own language.<sup>4</sup> (Amorim, 2002, pp. 33-34, as cited in Costa, 2012, p. 86)

Since the object of our analysis has been briefly presented, the next subsection will bring an explanation on the steps taken to both collect and analyze the data.

## Data Collection and Analysis

The process of data collection consisted of four steps: 1) reading of the source text; 2) identification of cultural items in the source text followed by their insertion in an Excel spreadsheet; 3) reading of the target text; and 4) selection of the translation to each cultural item followed by their insertion in the spreadsheet. The five categories of cultural items (as detailed in subsection *Cultural Items in Translation*) proposed by Newmark (1988) were followed as a criterion to define which cultural items would be selected for the analysis. Both data collection and analysis included all cultural items identified in each category.

During the selection of the cultural items, bilingual and monolingual online dictionaries (e.g. Aurelio Dictionary, Aulete, Priberam, Michaelis, Cambridge Dictionary, Oxford Learners Dictionary, The Free Dictionary, Collins Dictionary) were used as support to understand the meaning of the words in both Brazilian Portuguese and English languages. The aforementioned steps are illustrated in the following table:

Table 1 - Organization of the data collected

Item ( <i>Vidas Secas</i> ) PT-BR	Meaning	Translation	Meaning	Cultural category
(...) acendeu as raízes da macambira (...) (p.15)	<b>Macambira:</b> Planta bromeliácea ( <i>Bromelia laciniosa</i> ) de folhas rígidas e espinhosas, muito dispersa nas regiões secas nordestinas (...) (Aurélio Dictionary)	(...) set fire to <b>the roots</b> he had gathered (p.11)	<b>Root:</b> the part of a plant that grows down into the earth to get water and food and hold the plant firm in the ground. (Cambridge Dictionary)	Ecology (flora)
“(...) decidiu beber uma pinga” (p.27)	<b>Pinga:</b> Bebida alcoólica, sobretudo aguardente. (Aurélio Dictionary)	(...) he decided to have a <b>drink</b> . (p.24)	<b>Drink:</b> (an amount of) liquid that is taken into the body through the mouth. (Cambridge Dictionary)	Material Culture (artefact)

Source: elaborated by the authors

It is worth mentioning that cultural items which were given different translations were repeated in the spreadsheet because the translator used different strategies to translate the same cultural item in different contexts. It is the case of *macambira*, which in English had the occurrence of three different translations: roots, *macambira* and bushes.

After data were collected, they were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively based on the categories of translation strategies proposed by Chesterman (1997/2016) and the concept of norms provided by Toury (1995/2012). The results and their discussion are detailed in the following section.

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## Analysis and Discussion

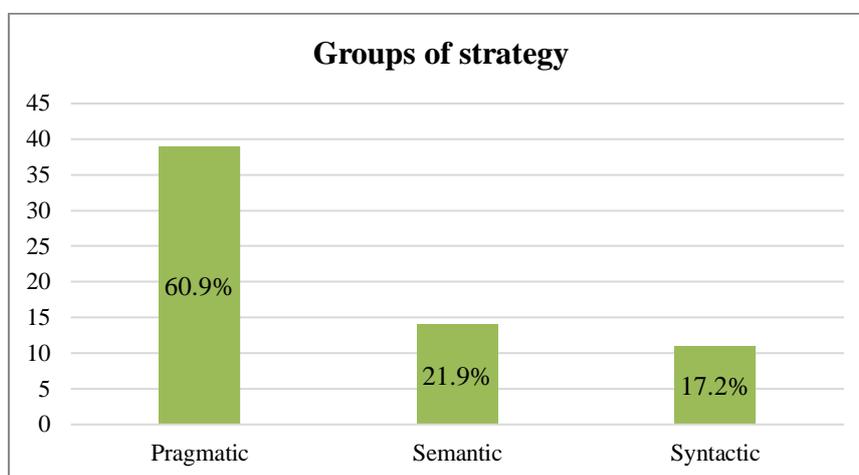
This study aimed to identify the predominant group of translation strategies and type of strategy used by the translator of the Brazilian novel *Vidas Secas* into English when translating cultural items. It was also intended to discuss the relationship between the strategies employed and Toury's (1995/2012) concept of norms.

Even though Chesterman (1997/2016) affirms that strategies of different types can often co-occur, it is important to mention that only one translation strategy per item was attributed to during the analysis, i.e., the one that seemed to be more relevant according to the context. A justification about identifying which strategy was used in each case is provided by Chesterman (1997/2016, pp. 90-91): "if the strategies provide useful conceptual tools for talking about translation, for focusing on particular things that translators seem to do, and for improving translation skills, then that is justification enough." So, his justification to identify the strategies used by the translator of *Vidas Secas* was followed.

In order to identify the predominant group of strategies used for translating the 64 cultural items found in the novel, Figure 1 presents the number of strategies used in each group: syntactic, semantic and pragmatic.

10

**Figure 1 - Percentage of Strategies in each group**



Source: elaborated by the authors

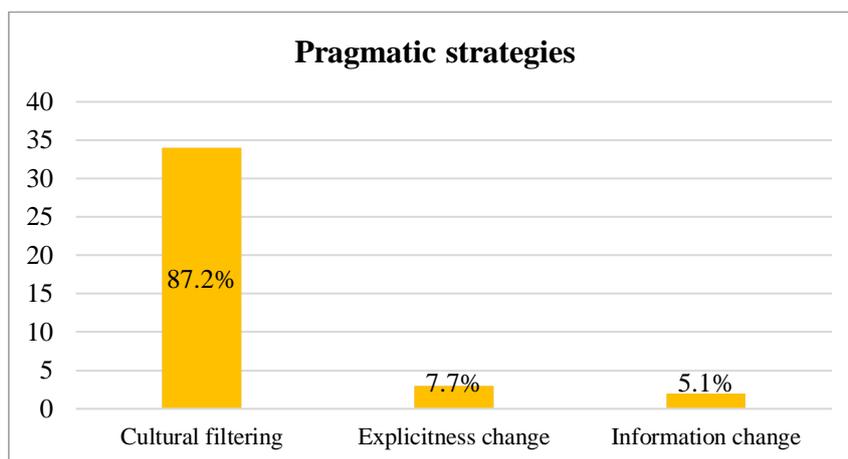
As can be seen in Figure 1, the predominant group of translation strategies was the pragmatic group (60.9%) followed by the semantic one (21.9%). The syntactic group resulted in a percentage of 17.2%. Results have shown that the translator resorted to strategies that helped him consider the context of reception most of the time, by using words with appropriate

meaning to the target audience, conforming to conventions that dictate the norms, which are considered acceptable.

According to Chesterman, pragmatic strategies “primarily have to do with the selection of information in the TT, a selection that is governed by the translator’s knowledge of the prospective readership of the translation” (Chesterman, 1997/2016, p. 104) and they “can be said to manipulate the message itself”. In the novel, it seems the translator has chosen to manipulate the message in order to get the most appropriate translation possible of the items that were unknown to the target audience.

Thirty-nine (39) out of sixty-four (64) cultural items found in the novel were translated through the use of pragmatic strategies, which consisted of only three types of strategies of this group: Cultural filtering, Explicitness change and Information change, as shown in Figure 2:

**Figure 2 - Types of Strategies in the Pragmatic Group**



Source: elaborated by the authors

Figure 2 shows that Cultural filtering was the predominant type of strategy (87.2% of the total of occurrences) in the pragmatic group. The second most used type of strategy from this group was Explicitness change, representing 7.7% out of the total, and it was followed by Information change (5.1%).

In order to explain and understand these quantitative results, let us now have a look at some qualitative data by examining the translation of one cultural item. The strategy Cultural filtering, for example, was employed to translate the cultural item *caatinga*.

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- *Vidas Secas*: “A **caatinga** estendia-se, de um vermelho indeciso salpicado de manchas brancas que eram ossadas.” (2017, p. 10)

- *Barren lives*: “The **brushland** stretched in every direction, its vaguely reddish hue broken only by white heaps of dry bones.” (1999, p. 4)

This cultural item refers to the most typical biome of the Northeast of Brazil, which consists of small trees, being most of them spiny, including different types of cacti. It also presents a dry and hot climate, with shortage of rain and water. Categorized as ecology, this item, which was often used in the novel, received three different translations in the plot (brushland, brush, and range), all of them identified as translations through Cultural filtering.

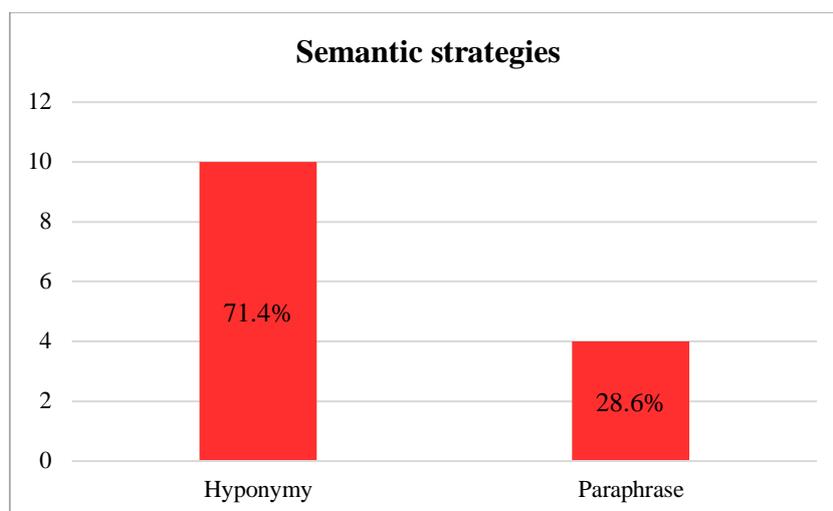
The translator adapted this item into a word that represents an area of land characterized by patchy shrubs and bushes, a similar characteristic of the typical biome of Brazil. The same strategy was used to translate words of strong meaning to the Northeast culture of Brazil, such as *vaquejada* (social culture), *rapadura* (material culture), *facheiro* (ecology), *gibão* (material culture).

12

The number of occurrences of Cultural filtering seems to indicate that it is a key translation strategy for cultural items. It seems also to illustrate the challenge to express cultural items that do not exist in the target system of reception, and to which there are no established words with identical meaning. Translating by means of a target language (TL) cultural or functional equivalent that produced a similar effect to the target readership seemed to be the most appropriate choice for the translator in most cases. Chesterman (1997/2016) himself affirms that this strategy is commonly used in the translation of cultural items in order to fit in the TL norms.

As previously shown in Figure 1, the second most frequent group of strategies was the semantic. Among the ten types of semantic strategies categorized by Chesterman (1997/2016), only two of them have been used in *Barren Lives*, namely: Hyponymy and Paraphrase.

Figure 3 - Types of Strategies in the Semantic Group



Source: elaborated by the authors

As can be seen in Figure 3, Hyponymy resulted in 71.4% of the items translated in the semantic group. It was followed by the use of Paraphrase, which corresponds to 28.6%. Hyponymy has been used to translate the word *mandacaru*, as illustrated in the following example:

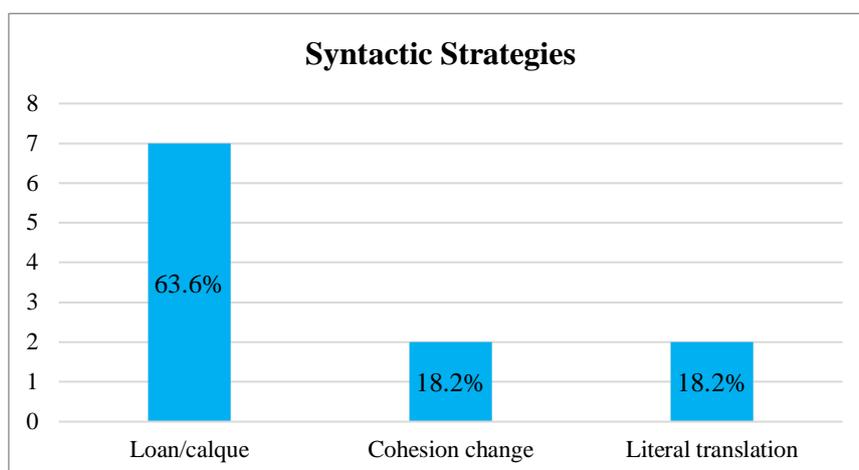
*Vidas Secas*: “A aragem morna sacudia os xiquexiques e os **mandacarus**” (2017, p. 15)  
*Barren lives*: “(...) a warm breeze stirred **the cactus**”. (1999, p. 11)

Also known as *cardeiro*, *mandacaru* is a kind of spiny cactus with big thorns, native to semiarid regions of Brazil, especially common in the Northeast. It can grow up to 9 meters and is used to feed the cattle in periods of drought. This item was frequently mentioned in the plot, and three different translations were given to it. In some cases, as shown in the example, the translator decided to use a Hyponymy, meaning that he changed the specific nomenclature to the more general word “cactus”, clearly known by the target audience.

In this case, he also substituted the item *xiquexique*, another kind of cactus, similar to *mandacaru*, by compressing both into only one word, without specifying what kind of cactus he referred to. The translator also used this strategy to translate items such as *catingueira*, *chapéu de couro*, and *pinga*, among others.

Following this example, Figure 4 shows the types of strategies used by the translator of *Vidas Secas* in the syntactic group.

Figure 4 - Types of Strategies in the Syntactic Group



Source: elaborated by the authors

The most frequent syntactic strategy was Loan/Calque resulting in 63.6% of occurrences. Secondly, both the strategies Cohesion change and Literal translation were used two times each (18.2% each type). Although the syntactic group was the one with less occurrences, the strategy of Loan/Calque was the third most used to the translation of cultural items in *Vidas Secas*, when considering the strategies from the groups altogether. The following example illustrates its use.

14

*Vidas Secas*: “(...) moitas e capões de mato, impenetráveis bancos de **macambira** (...)” (2017, p.58)

*Barren Lives*: “(...) isolated clumps of trees, and its impenetrable tickets of **macambira** (...)” (1999, p.58)

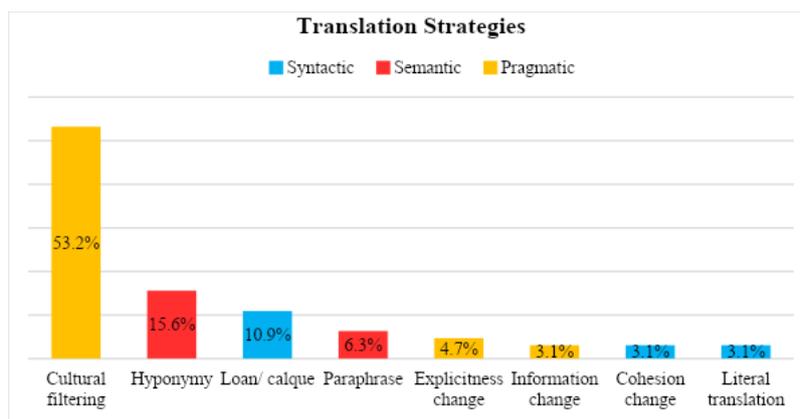
*Macambira* is a plant of the bromeliad family, a thorny shrub with long and slender leaves. Besides medical use, its roots are commonly used by people to feed the cattle during periods of drought, an action that is mentioned in the plot of *Vidas Secas*. Even though the word *macambira* received a different translation in other parts of the novel, the aforementioned example shows that the translator decided to maintain the original term given to the Brazilian item. The same strategy has been employed with words such as *mandacaru*, *baraúna*, *sucupira*, *imburana*, and *quixabeira*, all of them categorized as ecology.

In *Memes of Translation*, Chesterman (1997/2016) mentions a variant for the strategy of Loan, called “Double Presentation”. It consists of presenting both source language (SL) and TL versions in the target text, so that the one which is known by the target audience can act as a gloss of the other. However, in *Vidas Secas*, the translator did not use any variant and did not

give any explanation on the meaning of such items in order to help the target reader of the translated book to understand them.

To provide an overview of strategies used when translating the cultural items identified in the Brazilian book *Vidas Secas*, Figure 5 presents the distribution of occurrences of all strategies from the three groups.

**Figure 5 - Overview of Translation Strategies in Each Category**



Source: elaborated by the authors

Cultural filtering, a pragmatic strategy, represents 53.2% of the total of occurrences. Hyponymy, a semantic strategy, was the second most frequently used with a total of 15.6% and, thirdly, the syntactic strategy Loan/Calque represents 10.9% of the total of occurrences. It shows that the pragmatic group prevailed due to the frequent use of Cultural filtering, since the second and the third most used strategies are categorized as semantic and syntactic groups respectively.

Shuttleworth and Cowie agree that cultural translation is commonly sensitive to social and linguistic factors, and that

such sensitivity might take the form either of presenting TL recipients with a transparent text which informs them about elements of the source culture, or of finding target items which may in some way be considered to be culturally ‘equivalent’ to the ST items they are translating. (Shuttleworth & Cowie, 1997, p. 35, as cited in Zare-Behtash & Firoozkoobi, 2010).

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This panorama helps us understand and explain the translator's choice in employing Cultural filtering by means of functional and cultural equivalents to the translation of most cultural items present in *Vidas Secas*.

Similar results confirming the need of making adaptations to the translation of cultural items in literary texts were found by Hashemian (2016) in an analysis of the translation of the novel *By the Pen*, written by Jalal Al-Ahmad. Hashemian used the concept of translation strategies defined by Newmark (1988), who separated the strategies of cultural and functional equivalents as two different strategies, to perform his analysis of cultural items. On the one hand, Hashemian's study shows that, among the fifteen strategies identified, the category 'functional equivalent' (a pragmatic strategy) was the predominant strategy (23.36% out of the total).

On the other hand, results of this study contrast with the ones found by Pezzini (2005) who analyzed technical translations of a hundred abstracts. The author found out that the predominant strategies used in that context were Phrase structure change (G5), followed by the strategy Literal translation (G1), both from the syntactic/grammatical group.

16 The aforementioned results found in literary and technical texts can be associated with norms that dictate the most appropriate choices for the translator to make according to the text type to be translated and the cultural context of reception. As previously mentioned, one of the objectives here is to understand this relationship between the predominant strategies used to translate cultural items in *Vidas Secas* and the norms that might have influenced the translator to make some decisions in detriment of others, when translating the novel into the North American context.

According to Chesterman (2000, p. 6), norms are "constraints on the translator's freedom of choice, but they are also reminders that translators belong to a professional community governed by agreements on how we should behave" (as cited in Pezzini, 2005). These agreements reflect upon the steps taken before and during the process of translating, which are categorized by Toury (1995/2012) as preliminary and operational norms.

The preliminary norms, which regard the existing translation policies in a certain culture, dictate the level of tolerance and acceptance given to specific text types, authors, source languages, etc. Regarding the translation of Brazilian literature into English, it is possible to observe that it was not very usual in earliest centuries and even nowadays it is "still considered "minor" in the scheme of world literatures" (Morinaka, 2018), particularly when compared to American productions.

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According to Melo (2017), an aspect that should be considered when examining translated Brazilian literature is that foreign translators usually face challenges to translate Brazilian literary pieces due to their strong regional influences. This fact creates “difficulties in terms of promoting the literature among English-speaking readers” (Melo, 2017, p. 11). In the case of *Vidas Secas*, the preliminary norms that provided acceptance to Graciliano Ramos’ novels in the USA, during the 1960s, was an increase in academic and aesthetic interest in cultural productions from other countries – including Brazil - during the second half of the twentieth century, with an appeal to local color, a strong characteristic of *Vidas Secas*.

The translator’s primary decision in giving preference to following the norms of the source context or the ones of the target culture of reception, can also be explained in *Vidas Secas* through an analysis of the strategies chosen during the process of translation (operational norms). As shown in the results here, the majority of translation strategies belonged to the pragmatic group, especially with use of Cultural filtering. The less used strategy was Literal Translation, which is one of the closest strategies to the SL form. It means that, in the translation of most cultural items, the translator resorted to strategies that helped him consider the target context of culture and language, by manipulating the message from one context to the other, adapting most of the items. In other words, neither did the translator adhere to the norms of the source culture, nor to an adequacy to the source text. He followed a level of acceptability, in order to conform to the expectancy norms of the target-language community, one of the motivations behind a translator’s choices of strategy (Chesterman, 1997/2016).

The fact that the translator decided to follow a certain level of acceptability in the target language and culture is represented not only in the translation of items in which he used Cultural filtering as a strategy. Other examples such as the use of Hyponymy to translate *xiquexique e mandacaru* as “the cactus” demonstrate that the translator omitted the specific kinds of cactus the writer was referring to - the ones native to Brazil. Such examples indicate that some information of the source text was excluded, so the readers of the translated text are not encouraged to look up the meaning of some cultural items from the Brazilian context in which the book was originally written.

To conclude, results have suggested that the strategies used by the translator of *Vidas Secas* to translate cultural items are linked to the norms of the reception context, with a focus on the level of acceptability. This outcome is noticeable in the translation strategies employed by the translator, i.e., his choices help the target audience understand the text by making

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adaptations, omitting and generalizing most cultural items, instead of maintaining the original meaning of the items in the source text.

### **Final Remarks**

Drawing on Descriptive Translation Studies and the concept of norms proposed by Gideon Toury (1995/2012), this paper aimed to analyze the translation of cultural items in the Brazilian novel *Vidas Secas* written by Graciliano Ramos and translated into English by Ralph Edward Dimmick. Consistent with a descriptivist approach, the objective was to analyze the translation product by investigating which strategies were used by the translator and to understand the norms that guided his decision-making, not judging and labeling the translation as good or bad.

Results have shown that the majority of the strategies used by the translator belonged to the pragmatic group, which means that in most cases (39 out of 64 occurrences) he manipulated the message to conform it to the knowledge of the target readership.

The analysis has also shown that most of the strategies used to translate cultural items were Cultural filtering, also known as naturalization, domestication and adaptation. The category of Cultural filtering represented 87.2% of the translations given to cultural items within the pragmatic group and 53.1% of the total of occurrences in the analysis. It means that the translator adapted most of the items to functional or cultural equivalents in the target language.

The fact that the translator has frequently resorted to Cultural filtering (pragmatic strategy) indicates that he took into consideration the readers of the target language by adapting and manipulating the message of the Brazilian Portuguese version. In other words, the translator was influenced by the norms of the target culture, based on the ideas, values and knowledge shared by an English-speaking community, i.e., the North American culture.

This study intends to contribute to Translation Studies since it presents a descriptive analysis of translation strategies used in a novel of remarkable importance to the Brazilian culture. The quantitative approach used also brings contribution to the area, because it shows possible tendencies of translation instead of only presenting qualitative data. This study can also help us understand, in practice, how the position of the translated literature could define the norms and strategies used in its translations. Since *Vidas Secas* and Brazilian literature in general are placed in North America in a position of minority when compared to other world literatures, the translator resorted to strategies that would benefit the North American reader,

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by following the norms of the target context. Most of his decisions excluded the idea of adequacy to the source text, by making invisible the meaning and cultural background in which the plot takes place in Brazil.

However, since the analysis was conditioned by space constraints, it is suggested a more thorough study for future investigation on this field, having *Vidas Secas* as object of analysis. In other words, it is recommended using software with corpora identification in order to cover all the occurrences of cultural items in order to get more accurate results that might partly or fully explain and describe the translator's choices.

To conclude, we hope this study serves as a guide for further research on the translation of cultural aspects as well as for studies on translation strategies used by translators of literary texts, especially those with strong cultural influence. In addition, we expect it helps literary translators to understand the influence and importance of norms of target contexts of reception on the decisions taken during the process of translation of texts such as the ones from Brazilian Portuguese into American English.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on the study conducted for the undergraduate thesis entitled *Cultural items in Vidas Secas/ Barren Lives: an analysis of translation strategies*, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Although Newmark uses both the terms “cultural items” and “cultural words”, this paper uses only “cultural items” in order to maintain terminological consistency.

<sup>3</sup> According to Chesterman, a Meme of Translation is a unit or entity, which is transmitted from one brain to another through imitation and language use. The idea was borrowed from Dawkin’s concept of Genes (1976).

<sup>4</sup> Our translation for: “(...) o estudo comparativo da tradução é, portanto, um importante exercício de percepção linguística e cultural. É interessante observar como foram transpostos para um outro contexto cultural, os aspectos inseridos na temática de um clássico da literatura brasileira. O fato de a obra traduzida ter sido agraciada, nos Estados Unidos da América, com o prêmio William Faulkner de Literatura Estrangeira (1962) deixa patente a importância do tradutor como fomentador e instaurador de um processo de reflexão sobre questões que ultrapassam os limites geográficos e socioculturais de sua gente e de sua própria língua.”