Linguistic interference in translated academic texts:
A case study of Portuguese interference in abstracts translated into English

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Abstract

This study deals with linguistic interference in abstracts of scientific papers translated from Portuguese into English collected from the online scientific database SciELO. The aim of this study is to analyze linguistic interference phenomena in 50 abstracts from the field of humanities, history, social sciences, technology and natural sciences. The types of interference discussed are syntactic/grammatical, lexical/semantic and pragmatic interference. This study is mainly qualitative. Therefore, the qualitative method was used, in order to find out what kinds of interference phenomena occur in the abstracts, analyze the possible reasons for their occurrence and present some suggestions to avoid the problems discussed. Besides, a quantitative analysis was carried out to interpret the results (figures and percentages) of the study. The analysis is aimed at providing some guidance for future translations. This study concluded that translations from a Romance language (in this case Portuguese) into a Germanic language (English) tend to be more objective and/or sometimes lose original meanings attributed in the source text. Another important finding was that abstracts from the humanities, history and social sciences present more cases of interference phenomena than the ones belonging to technology and natural sciences. These findings imply that many abstracts within these areas have high probability to be subject to the phenomena discussed and, consequently, have parts of their original meaning lost or misinterpreted in the target texts.

Keywords: abstracts, bilingualism, cross-linguistic influence, linguistic interference, linguistic transfer, non-native speakers of English, Portuguese-English interference, source text, target text, translation.
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1 Introduction

As a teacher and translator, I have found that the contact between a native language and a foreign language may result in many deviations in the latter, such as syntactic/grammatical interference, lexical/semantic interference and pragmatic interference. Such deviations or interference cases are often caused by transfer from the mother tongue (henceforth L1) to the foreign language (henceforth L2). Transfer may be either positive or negative transfer. Positive transfer facilitates the communication in the target language, whereas negative transfer may lead to error in the L2 (Benson, 2002: 68ff).

These deviations resulting from the contact of L1 with L2 are commonly discussed in terms of linguistic interference or interference phenomena (Oksaar, 1963:1ff). Linguistic interference may be discussed in terms of concepts and categories. According to Cruse (2004:125ff), different languages may have different mental concepts and categories, such as the way different cultures may interpret girlfriend and boyfriend in terms of commitment or lack of commitment. For instance, boyfriend or girlfriend in Sweden is a steady partner one may live with (Swedish – “sambo”–) as if one were married, and someone one might have children with, whereas in Brazil, these terms do not imply much commitment, until one is engaged and married. Thus, different perceptions about the world facilitate positive or negative transfer between L1 and L2.

These linguistic phenomena usually happen amongst bilingual or multilingual people. According to Thorberg (1970:2), there are no bilinguals who have a complete command of two languages and possess the ability to switch from one language to another according to the changes that occur in the speech situation, such as interlocutors, topics etc. On the other hand, Bloomfield (1933:56) argues, using a very narrow definition, that bilinguals have a “native-like control of two languages.” Diebold (1961:111) argues that bilinguals are actually people who have “contact with different models in a second language” and “the ability to use these in the environment of the native language”. Another definition of bilingualism is when “two languages are employed as a necessary means of daily contact between people” (Florander, 1960:51ff). Looking up at a dictionary, multilinguals (also called polyglots) are considered to be able to use or speak several languages with some facility (Dictionary.com [www]). Furthermore, if the ideas presented by Florander (ibid, 51ff) are taken to define multilinguals, then, the latter must use more than one language daily as a means of instruction or communication.
1.2 Aim

The purpose of this study is to investigate phenomena of interference between Portuguese and English in abstracts. Furthermore, this study also aims at improving the comprehensibility of a number of academic abstracts translated into English, as well as to enlighten the readers of abstracts written by Portuguese native speakers concerning the possible interference cases discussed in Section 4. These cases seem to corrupt the full understanding of the abstracts and make them sound unnatural in English.

These abstracts seem to be subject to interference phenomena and are, therefore, worthy of attention and deeper study, since there may be specific interferences from the Portuguese language in the English language.

When analyzing the abstracts, the following questions are addressed:

1. What kinds of interference phenomena, if any, are frequently found in the source data?
2. What are the possible reasons for the occurrence of these interference phenomena in the abstracts?
3. How can the occurrences of these interference phenomena be avoided?

1.2 Scope

This study is limited to abstracts of 50 academic papers from different fields: humanities, history, social sciences, natural sciences and technology. The chosen abstracts were published in SciELO, Scientific Electronic Library Online, an online database which comprises abstracts and journals from different fields and languages.

The choice to collect and analyze formal written texts was made due to the easiness of handling written sources and because it seems to be more useful for academic readers, either to avoid occurrences of these interference phenomena or to improve the comprehensibility of abstracts originally written by Portuguese native speakers. Thus, interferences in speech, such as phonetic interferences, are not dealt with, since the analysis below focuses only on written abstracts. Furthermore, it is also important to notice that the abstracts studied might have already undergone reviews by the authors and other academics, who may have eliminated some interference, depending on their proficiency in English. Therefore, this research is limited to interference phenomena that still persist and which have escaped the attention of reviewers.
2 Previous research

There is plenty of research on translation and linguistic interference. According to France (2009:1ff), “there has been translation theory as long as there has been translation, since Cicero.” In Western Europe, “the translation of the Bible was to be the battleground of conflicting ideologies” (Munday, 2008:7). Another perspective, according to Kleberg (2001), is the analogy between translators and actors performing in a theater. Linguistic interference and linguistic transfer, however, are usually discussed by teachers as foreign or second languages, in order to detect the phenomena and improve the acquisition of the foreign language (e.g. Benson, 2002). However, there is also research on linguistic interference in bilingualism (e.g. Moniri, 2006), as well as in translation studies (e.g. Kuhiwczak et al, 2007).

2.1 Linguistic interference

Linguistic interference, as defined previously, consists of deviations or different world perceptions that result from the contact between L1, L2 or L1 and n languages. Furthermore, linguistic interference may result in positive or negative transfer, as explained above.

Some researchers dedicate themselves to analyzing the separation of processing stages in lexical interference (e.g. Abel et al, 2008). Yet, when the research expands to more languages, the number of variables and constants to be taken into consideration when analyzing the phenomena might make it more complicated to obtain a precise result.

Schwartz et al (2008:95ff) carried out research on how linguistic context influences the nature of bilingual lexical activation, in order to obtain a result about the effects of context and lexical relationship between Spanish and English. According to this study, both languages are active in bilinguals and influence language processing. Thus, they concluded that processing time in the brain is reduced when bilinguals are presented with cognates, i.e. words that have the same meaning and highly similar form across languages. However, it could happen that the processing time is delayed when bilinguals are presented with false cognates, i.e. words that have different meaning and different form across languages.

Beyond visual word recognition, it seems that auditory processing (Pallier et al, 2001), speech production (Hermans et al, 1998) and sentence comprehension (Altarriba et al, 1996; Schwartz et al, 2006) may be important factors related to linguistic interference phenomena.
Lexical competition in the bilingual brain across languages has been assessed by many researchers (e.g. Costa et al, 2008). According to Hermans et al (1998:1ff), lexical competition is considered to be the main cause of linguistic interference. Such lexical competition may facilitate the occurrence of cross-linguistic transfer between two or more languages, as Keiko et al (2008:1ff) observed in their research on L2 acquisition and reading. They concluded that the more educated the bilinguals are, the more possible it is for them to transfer knowledge and concepts into whichever L2.

According to Benson (2002:69), transfer or cross-linguistic influence may occur consciously, where there is a gap in the knowledge of L2 learners; and unconsciously, where the correct form has not been learned or automatized. Furthermore, she argues that the possible reasons for the occurrence of these phenomena are that “interlanguage (the learner’s interim (e.g. mental) grammar of the L2) is as not fixed and rigid as the L1 but ‘permeable’ (ibid.)” She also adds that it is possible that there is not enough previous knowledge of other languages, fear of loss of identity if L2 is learned too well, besides the feeling that L2 lacks prestige (ibid.)

Concerning the making of errors in the English language by non-native speakers in academic articles, Marina et al (2005:1ff) have published a study to identify language misuse, according to the “laws of interference”, i.e. linguistic features of the source text copied into the target text, either positively or negatively (Munday (2008:114), of the native language of the learners and the theory of linguistic relativity. In their study, Marina et al (2005:1ff), discuss the lack of clarity as the most frequent criticism on English texts produced my non-native speakers of English. They also claim that both native and non-native speakers produced flawed essays. However, the nature of the problems encountered is different, as the following quote explains and corroborates:

The interference of the native language implies that it prevents the speakers of a particular language from using a foreign language correctly by transferring the rules and standards of their native language to that foreign language. […] The theory of linguistic relativity, in its turn, can explain why the interference of the native language takes place.[…] Therefore, nationally-specific and international patterns of nomination exist, with the former presenting the main difficulties to speakers of other languages, causing mistakes and misunderstanding (Marina et al, 2005:2).

According to the quote above, Marina et al (2005:2) argues that the solid rules and patterns of one’s native language seem to be the main cause for the interference phenomena between L1
and L2. In other words, “nationally-specific” (cultural and sociological factors) and “international patterns of nomination” (concepts that are common internationally or at least between L1 and L2) are the main factors that may result in mistakes and misunderstanding when trying to communicate a thought in L2.

2.2 Interference in translation

Interference in translation may occur when translating a text with its source language (henceforth SL) into the target language (henceforth TL). There are different types of interference in translation. These transfers may occur on all levels: phonology (foreign accent), syntax (“word-for-word” or “literal translation” (e.g. Munday (2008:19ff)), lexis (such as false cognates), pragmatics (e.g. over-formality or under-formality) and morphology, which appears to be less affected than the others (Benson, 2002:69).

Translation theories have been discussed and elaborated throughout the centuries, from Descartes, who proposed a rationalist theory of translation that assumed a universal similarity among all human languages, to the contemporary thought that “truth, aesthetic values and cultural differences go beyond the scope of translation theory” (Oz-Salzberger, 2003). In other words, personal values and beliefs may influence the way translations are performed, such as keeping cultural information in source texts (henceforth STs) when translating to the target texts (henceforth TTs) or translating every single word into the approximate concept in the L2.

According to Munday (2008:10ff), some examples of translation theories are:

- “product-oriented descriptive translation studies”, where there is an analysis of a single ST-TT pair or a comparative analysis of several TTs of the same ST (into one or more TLs);
- “function-oriented descriptive translation studies”, where a study of contexts is carried out “rather than texts”; and
- “process-oriented descriptive translation studies”, when trying to “find out what happens in the mind of the translator.”

To keep or not to keep cultural information depends on the translator’s “conceptual orientation” and, therefore, lexical fidelity to the ST may not be shared, especially in sacred and literary texts (Munday, 2008:5). An example of this is the various translations of the Bible and the great number of religions that were created due to different interpretations and translations of Bible books and passages (Religioustolerance [www].)
According to Munday (2008:5), the translation process between two different written languages involves “some change in the ST, in the SL, into a TT, in a different TL.” This is what he calls “interlingual translation.” In other words, the ST and the SL are subject to some change when translated into a TT and, consequently, a different TL. He also argues that, for this interlingual translation to reach the same or approximate meaning in the TT, there must be an “equivalence in meaning” (Munday, 2008:37). As a consequence, there may be some “difference in the structure and terminology of languages” (ibid, 38). It means that the word lagom in Swedish, for instance, may not be fully translated into English or Portuguese using only one word because these two languages seem to lack a term that carries the same concept. However, that does not stop free translation, translation of content irrespective of form (Munday, 2008:19ff). However multiple interpretations or ways of rephrasing such a term could lead to linguistic interference. Another option is to adopt the same ST word into the TT, as ombudsman (a kind of representative in English (Lexin [www]), borrowed from Swedish to Portuguese, maybe for lack of a word that conveys all its meanings.

Whether to adopt terms from the ST to the TT or to adapt the ST to the cultural reality of the L2 in the TT is an endless question. According to Van de Vijver (2007:1ff), adoption is a close translation of an instrument in a target language, that is, the translated term is closer to the ST term. On the other hand, adaptation is a “close translation of some stimuli that are assumed to be adequate in the target culture or to a change of other stimuli”. In this case, a close translation could lead to “linguistically, culturally or psychometrically inappropriate measurement” (ibid, 1ff).

Whether adapting or adopting, lexical borrowing due to translation has also influenced many languages, such as Portuguese, Russian, Italian, Greek and Finnish (Oz-Salzberger, 2003). By adapting and adopting, new ideas and literary standards has influenced the TTs throughout the centuries by means of positive and/or negative transfers. In other words, there could be some “valorization of the foreign language” (SL), “since the ST meaning is couched in language that is very culture-bound and to which the TL can never fully correspond” (Schleiermacher in Munday, 2008:28) or even “devaluation of the translation” (as the TT may not reach the heights of the ST), making the TTs more accessible to cultures with less foreign terminology (Munday, 2008:29ff).

According to Munday (2008:124ff), cultural and ideological turns are important factors that influence the course of translations. In order to try to decrease these biases of personal beliefs in translation, as well as the costs and the delivery of projects within a shorter time, translation methods were created (Roy, 2006:1ff). As a consequence, incoherence may occur
when the STs are divided between groups of translators. Such incoherence processes and use of different writing styles could be due to regional variation, personal writing style or even different interpretations of the ST. As a consequence, the understanding of the TT may be corrupted.

Munday (2008:126ff) discusses the main problems that interfere on the final translation “product.” He explains that there is an ideological component (conventions and beliefs), an economic component (payments) and a status component (such as having to conform to the patron’s expectations.) This shows that the issue of “ideological power” (e.g. ability to influence the TT with one’s own ideas and beliefs) is involved in translation (ibid, 136). In other words, this power may lead to a choice between domestication and foreignization of the final product (ibid, 144ff). It may even happen that the translation product is localized (tailored to a specific target culture) or globalized (adapted to the global economy) (ibid, 191ff).

Negative interference may also occur in literal translation. Newmark (1988:45ff) claims that the word-order of ST is usually kept intact in the TT and the words are usually translated out of context into the TT in literal translations.

To sum up, translation is a powerful process that may corrupt or improve the understanding between nations or add new concepts and ideas, depending on how strong, negative or positive the interference phenomena are. Moreover, education seems to be an important factor that has changed the course of this powerful process in past, present and future translations, as the following quotation explains:

> It is clear that teachers can only harm their students if they persist in limiting students’ understanding of translation through a rigid pedagogy. Instead, teachers should be clear about the limitations of their premises about and frameworks for translation, if only so that students will be prepared for a future that will inevitably entail changes in translation canons, translation strategies, and translation technologies as the definition of translation is increasingly elaborated (Tymoczko, 2005:1095 in Munday, 2008:199).

3. Material and method

The data for this study were obtained from SciELO (Scientific Electronic Library Online). SciELO started in Brazil and has spread throughout many countries in South America and
Europe. Consequently, it is a rich database with many articles and abstracts published in many languages.

In this study, an analysis of Portuguese-English interference was done in 50 abstracts published in the database SciELO. 30 of the abstracts belong to humanities, history and social sciences and 20 to natural sciences and technology. The analysis aimed at finding the types of interference processes from and to formal language in both Portuguese and English.

This database gathers articles and abstracts originally written in many languages. Therefore, a search was carried out to find the abstracts published and originally written in Portuguese. After this search, 50 abstracts originally written in Portuguese were chosen randomly. Their length ranges from 91 up to 440 words and the target abstracts (translated into English) from 95 up to 372 words. This study is mainly qualitative. Therefore, the qualitative method is used, defined as “a research method that intends to reach depth in the analysis” (ESRC Society Today [www]) and “not involving measurement and statistics” (Boeree, 2005.) Besides, some quantitative analysis is carried out only to interpret the results (numbers and percentages) of the study.

Thus, an analysis was carried out and the result is presented in terms of occurrences of syntactic/grammatical, lexical/semantic and pragmatic interference phenomena more frequently encountered. In case the occurrences of such phenomena are higher than three times in the abstracts, the phenomena are taken into consideration in this paper. Later, a comparative analysis was done to attempt to explain the interference phenomena in depth. Furthermore, when comparing TTs with the STs, formal Portuguese language internationally accepted nowadays was taken into account.

3.1 Problems encountered during the analysis

The main problem encountered in this study was to detect the most representative examples in the selected abstracts. There was an enormous quantity of abstracts published in the database and lack of information concerning the translators of these abstracts.

The selected abstracts could have been sent to translation companies and translated by Portuguese native speakers. They could also have been translated by native English speakers who were not so accurate when performing the translation, and, consequently, subject to interference phenomena from the SL, such as producing/transferring typical Portuguese syntactic structures in(to) English. Such syntactic/grammatical interference from the SL could
be due to problems with deadlines, lack of possibility to review the translation and the high speed of translation, when translating unfamiliar texts.

Word-by-word translation, that is, literal translation, turned out to be a big problem, especially when the translator was not able to contextualize or translate different experiences into target cultures or cultural data into TT, such as new phrases, slang, clichés and proverbs. Besides, it is also possible that the authors may have translated their abstracts or parts using translation sites or software, which are not accurate, since it is neither possible for such software to contextualize everything, nor possible to translate all cultural phenomena into target realities.

A good translation with almost no linguistic interference or bias also depends on the kind of approach taken when translating and a good perception to recognize new ideas and meanings. Translators tend to have different approaches, as mentioned above (see Section 2.2), such as adoption or adaptation, and they follow certain translation theories or none (for lack of knowledge in translation studies) to preserve the original meaning or translate into the ST into the target culture in another way.

In the author’s experience, there is an attempt to make translation an objective process but it is quite subjective because translation depends on, for instance, cultural factors, world knowledge and the translator’s fluency in L1 and L2. In other words, there are some automatic translations which do not demand much time from the translator to think of, such as fixed phrases in both the SL and the TL – very useful for technical translators to speed up the translation of their TT. On the other hand, depending on the type of ST, these automatic translations may not transfer the message of the ST into the TT but only translation units – of a microscopic nature, if compared with the whole text structure.

Translators also need to reason as mentioned above, in order to move from one culture to another, in order to be able to perform a satisfactory work. Therefore, this study attempts to enlighten this ability of moving satisfactorily and, hopefully, to add new ideas for future translations and papers.

4 Results and discussion

In this section, the types of interferences encountered in the abstracts are discussed, as well as some possible reasons for the occurrence of such interference phenomena. In addition, some suggestions to avoid the interference phenomena are given.
The types of interference are divided into syntactic/grammatical interference, lexical/semantic interference and pragmatic interference. The reason for dividing into these subsections is to facilitate the discussion of the interference phenomena. Notwithstanding, these subsections do not limit the discussion of other relevant phenomena.

4.1 Syntactic/grammatical interference between ST and TT

This subsection discusses syntactic/grammatical interference between the ST and the TT. In other words, the position of the clause elements of the STs and the TTs, e.g. phrases, complements and subjects are taken into account within the analysis, as well as the presence of the clause elements of the STs in the TTs.

4.1.1 Identical syntactic structure in ST and TT

The first phenomenon was found in an abstract about education and was originally published in the *Brazilian Education Magazine*. The Portuguese language usually has ambiguous phrases intercalated in the sentences (Maia et al, 2003), e.g. flexible adverbial clauses and long restrictive clauses that sometimes make sentences unclear, ambiguous and that makes it hard to identify which clause it completes, describes or restricts. Due to this limitation (or sentence length), it is no surprise that the translator of this abstract had difficulties translating it.

(1) No contexto das reformas educativas iniciadas em Portugal nos anos de 1980, a formação contínua de professores teve forte incremento, associado a financiamentos avultados da União Européia e a uma lógica de oferta e procura induzida por um enquadramento legal que estabeleceu uma ligação entre a formação e a progressão na carreira.

In the context of the educational reforms initiated in Portugal in the 1980s, the in-service training of teachers experienced a significant increase, associated both with strong financial backing from the European Union and a logic of supply and demand induced by a legal framework which established a link between training and career progression.

In example (1) above, it is easy to notice that both passages have the same syntactic format in both the Portuguese ST and the English TT. In order words, *In the context of the educational reforms initiated in Portugal in the 1980s and No contexto das reformas educativas iniciadas*
em Portugal nos anos de 1980 are both adverbial phrases and occupy the same syntactic position in the sentence in TT.

The problem with identical syntactic positions in ST and TT occurs when the TT becomes unclear or with unnatural L2 sentence syntactic characteristics. The excess of information within the same sentence not related to the subject, such as which established a link between training and career progression is a characteristic of Portuguese (Maia, 2003: 18). Such information is out of the scope of the main sentence and could be split into another sentence when translating into English, e.g. The latter established a link between training and career progression.

Identical syntactic positions can be seen in example (2) below extracted from the same abstract:

(2) Em seguida, abordam-se concepções alternativas, considerando a formação continua numa perspectiva de educação de adultos e pressupondo, assim, outro tipo de relação dos professores com a formação.

Later, alternative conceptions [sic] of training are dealt with, considering in-service teacher training in [sic] a [sic] perspective of adult education and presupposing, in this way, a different relationship between teachers and training.

In example (2) Later and em seguida occupy the same syntactic position, as well as considering in-service teacher training in [sic] a [sic] perspective of adult education and presupposing and considering a formação continua numa perspectiva de educação de adultos e pressupondo; and in this way and assim etc. The translator of example (2) translated the whole sentence in parallel. In other words, the sentence subject, adverbial phrase and relative clauses and complements in the ST were placed in the same position in the TT. By translating sentences in parallel, translators may transfer sentence lengths and characteristics of L1 into L2, making the translation obscure or unnatural.

4.1.2 Use of articles

The use of definite articles also seems to be an area of interference, as seen in example (3) below:
(3) O crescente questionamento das idéias evolucionistas e das grandes narrativas que serviram de suporte, desde os clássicos, aos estudos nas áreas das ciências sociais tem desencadeado reações diversas no âmbito acadêmico.

The increasing questioning of the [sic] evolutionist ideas and the [sic] great narratives, the classics that served as support to the [sic] studies in the field of social sciences, has led to many different reactions within the academic context.

The English translation of this passage seems to be very obscure. Although it might make sense in English, it neither conveys the same meaning, nor does it approximate meaning in the TT. Analyzing the first syntactic position of the TT *The increasing questioning of the [sic] evolutionist ideas and the great narratives, the classics that served as support to the [sic] studies in the field of social sciences, has led to many different reactions within the academic context.*

Interestingly, when the TT is compared to the ST, there also seems to be a contradiction when the translator translates *O crescente questionamento das idéias evolucionistas e das grandes narrativas que serviram de suporte, desde os clássicos, (…)* into *The increasing questioning of the evolutionist ideas and the great narratives, the classics that served (…).* Here, the translator specifies which classics are included *that served as support to the studies in the field of social sciences,* which is not compatible with the information presented in the ST. The information presented in the ST just adds a reference to what is said about the increasing questioning of ideas and the great narratives. Such reference may be removed without causing comprehension problems for the readers. *Desde os clássicos* is presented in the ST as an adverbial phrase of time *since the oldest scholars* [suggestion], whereas it is part of the subject or noun phrase of the relative clause in the TT.

So far, the translator lost track and mixed the phrases and syntactic functions of the ST. Yet if further analysis is carried out, we realize that the ST is also ambiguous to a certain extent. Thus, by going back to the ST, in the first syntactic position *O crescente questionamento das idéias evolucionistas e das grandes narrativas* is the subject but *que serviram de suporte* is ambiguous because it is not sure that it refers to *das grandes narrativas* or *das idéias evolucionistas e das grandes narrativas.* Yet not knowing for sure, the translator may infer that both phrases may support the study of social sciences.

Besides the problem presented above, the translator misuses the article *the* in *the evolutionist ideas, the great narratives and the studies,* since it seems to be a generic reference to such ideas developed by *the old scholars* (my translation suggestion to *desde os clássicos*).
A few conclusions can be drawn of the examples presented about syntactic/grammatical interference:

1) One factor that may affect syntactic/grammatical interference is the interpretation of the ST. Such interpretation may be affected by a poor ST construction;

2) Long sentences might affect the TT. There is a transfer of sentence structure typical of L1 into L2, since Portuguese has more flexible word order and sentence lengths (Maia et al, 2003), whereas English usually adopts a direct or more strict order of phrases compared to L1 (Hawkins, 2004). This transfer might be problematic.

A suggestion is to divide the sentence in small ones when translating into English, as in (4) below:

(4) O crescente questionamento das idéias evolucionistas e das grandes narrativas que serviram de suporte, desde os clássicos, aos estudos nas áreas das ciências sociais tem desencadeado reações diversas no âmbito acadêmico.

The increasing questioning of evolutionist ideas and great narratives has led to many different reactions within the academic context. They also served as a support to studies in the field of social sciences, as well as for the oldest scholars.

4.2 Lexical/semantic interference between ST and TT

In this subsection, lexical/semantic interference phenomena between the STs and TTs will be discussed. Here the relation between words and meanings conveyed in the STs and translated into the TTs are relevant and, therefore, will be taken into account.

4.2.1 Sign interference

For Saussure (1983), *linguistic sign* was a mental entity with two components. Sign is the relation between a signified (concept) and a signifier (mental impression of the sound). In this study, sign interference is understood as linguistic interference caused by false cognates, as illustrated in (5) below:
(5) O mogno (*Swietenia macrophylla* King), pelo elevado valor comercial da sua madeira, é uma das espécies mais exploradas na Amazônia, sendo ameaçada de extinção por não haver renovação dos estoques através de reflorestamento com a espécie.

Due to the high value of mahogany woods (*Swietenia macrophylla* King), this specie [sic] is one of the most explored [sic] in the Amazon region. That explains the reason why [sic] mahogany is almost extinct.

According to Dictionary.com [www], *specie* means *coined money; in the same kind; in a similar manner; in kind; which is not what the authors refer to. Here, the abstract author refers to *species* in L2. Both *specie* and *species* come from the same word in Latin *speciēs* (ibid). Yet *espécies* is the plural form of *espécie* in L1.

This type of interference could also be interpreted as grammatical interference if one refers to the idea of plural and singular (in this case, lack of –s). However we choose to interpret it as sign interference because the translator could have been influenced by reading the sign *espécie* in L1 first. In other words, the form of the word (sign) in L1 could have caused him to infer that the L2 form was *specie*. Consequently, the translator might have thought that *species* is a plural form, but it is actually an exception in English because *species*, as explained above, has a Latin origin.

The main problem in this translation is due to change of meaning when translating. If the translator reasoned about the clause elements of the ST (e.g. subject, complement), he would have had no problem transferring the information into English, if compared to the original clause *é uma das espécies mais exploradas na Amazônia*, which has the plural form as it should be. Later on, the translator also writes *cultived* to mean *grown* (*cultivado*) and *explored* to mean *exploited* (false cognates.) The same lexical/semantic interference happens in (2), where the translator writes *conceptions* instead of *concepts* to mean *concepções*.

Abandonment of “one-to-one notions of correspondence” and “destabilization of the notion of an original message with a fixed identity are considered to be “laws of interference (Munday, 2008:115). An explanation for the occurrence of this phenomenon could be lack of knowledge of the term in the TT, resulting in cross-linguistic interference or lexical competition (e.g. Hermans et al, 1998). This lexical competition makes the processing time of the word be reduced in the brain when bilinguals are presented with cognates (Schwartz et al, 2008:95ff). According to Benson (2002:69), this type of cross-linguistic interference could be interpreted as a “conscious process”, since there seems to be a lack of knowledge of the term in the TT. In other words, the translator believes that the TT word is a correct translation.
Another possible explanation would be simply the misspelling of the word – i.e. a typo. However, as the ST word looks very similar to the TT word, there is a tendency to think that the TT word was caused by interference, since the fact that the translator did not use the correct word may have been caused by reading the ST word and transferring its form into the TT.

Furthermore, there is also a syntactic/grammatical interference in (5). The first syntactic position *O mogno (Swietenia macrophylla King)* is the subject of the sentence and *pelo elevado valor commercial da sua madeira* an adverbial clause of cause.

The adverbial clause is movable if it still carries the original idea. Yet when attempting to do so, the translator mixes the adverbial clause with the subject, which causes difficulty for him/her when trying to translate the next clause. He ends up mixing the order of the ST, where he could have said that **mahogany (Swietenia macrophylla King) is one of the most exploited wood species in the Amazon, due to its high trade value** or **Due to its high trade value, mahogany (Swietenia macrophylla King) is one of the most exploited wood species in the Amazon**.

(6) *O mogno (Swietenia macrophylla King)*, pelo elevado valor commercial da sua madeira, é uma das espécies mais exploradas na Amazônia [...]  

4.2.2 Redundancy

Another problem with the translation (TT) in example (5) is the use of the phrase the reason why due to influence of a Portuguese common phrase. The translator probably thought of *razão pela qual or razão a qual*, where *razão* means reason in the context of (5) and *pela qual or a qual* are relative pronouns, usually equivalent to *which, who, with whom, that*.

By using the reason why, the translator tried to introduce another sentence not related to the original passage, in order to attempt to split the long paragraph into two and reconstruct the ST into the TT. Notwithstanding, a loss of meaning occurred, such as in *sendo ameaçada de extinção por não haver renovação dos estoques através de reflorestamento com a espécie*. The translator just mentions that mahogany is almost extinct. There is no information about reforestation. A suggestion would be to translate, e.g. *...subject to extinction, due to the lack of reforestation*. 

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4.3 Pragmatic interference between ST and TT

In this subsection, pragmatic interference between the ST and the TT is discussed. In other words, changes in meaning of the ST into TT and implications of using a different modal verb in the TT is analyzed, such as the transfer of the modal meaning of possibility into ability within sentences.

4.3.1 Modal interference

Another interference phenomenon found was switch in the meaning of some modals, such as in *can* and *may*. Thus, *can* is used many times instead of *may* or *might* to indicate the possibility of doing something, instead of ability or permission, as seen in (7) below:

(7) Em torno dos sete anos de idade a grande maioria das crianças adquiriu a Teoria da Mente, embora esta aquisição possa se estender além desta.

Generally, children around 7 years have already acquired the Theory of Mind, however this acquisition can [sic] take longer and occur at other ages.

The original word in Portuguese, *pode*, verb *poder*, means *to be able to, possibility, authorization for (…)* [My translation] (Dicionário Eletrônico Aurélio). Therefore, the verb *poder* includes both the idea of *may, might* and *can*. Thus, example (7) does not imply certainty related to the acquisition of the *Theory of Mind* but a possibility for it to take longer and to occur at other ages in most children. By using *can*, there is a risk of interpreting the TT as a statement that indicates certainty. In other words, the communicative equivalent or “pragmatic equivalence” (Munday, 2008:47) of the verb *poder* (in this case conjugated: *possa*) has *may* or *might* as equivalent, not *can*.

4.4 Discussion

4.4.1 Syntactic positions

The first phenomenon presented (identical syntactic structure in ST and TT) seems to make the TT obscure and with unnatural L2 constructions. It occurred more often in 22 abstracts
from the humanities, social sciences and history. This frequency could be due to the lack of
need for argumentation in abstracts belonging to natural sciences or technology, where
numbers seem to be more relevant than world perceptions and analysis based on theories of
different scholars about the matter in question.

Writers belonging to linguistics, for instance, did not present these types of translations
in the selected abstracts. This is possibly due to the fact that linguists usually pay more
attention to sentence construction and meaning and, thus, review their papers more
thoroughly.

As discussed above, lack of understanding of the ST could be a serious problem (e.g.
Altarriba et al, 1996; Schwartz et al, 2006.) It was also argued that such interpretation might
be caused by a poor ST sentence construction (such as long and wordy sentences). Thus,
confusion would occur when transferring the phrases from ST into TT, since Portuguese has
more flexible phrase structure, while English usually has a direct or a strict word order
(Hawkins, 2004) compared to Portuguese. The suggestion presented above in (4) was to
divide the long sentences into smaller ones.

4.4.2 Syntactic/grammatical interference (articles)

The perception of articles in L1 and L2 is shown to be different in a few aspects, which may
cause the interference phenomena discussed. Whereas in L1 the use of definite articles seems
to occur more often before a noun, definite articles are deleted in L2 many times when the
nouns are, for instance, unique and first recognized by people or when they have a generic
rather than specific meaning (e.g Celce-Murcia et al, 1999:271ff). However, the use of
definite articles before company names in L1 is common, even if there is no other phrase
connected to it to expand meaning, as below:

(8) A Petrobras - Petróleo Brasileiro S/A é
uma brasileira. (Wikipedia [www]).

Petrobras – Petróleo Brasileiro S/A is a Brazilian
company [my translation].

There is, however, a tendency, to delete articles before company names in Brazilian
newspapers, e.g. in headings, among other things, as in (9) below:

(9) Petrobras divulga volume de óleo e gás em
campo na Bacia de Santos (Folha Online
[www])

Petrobras informs oil and gas volumes of a field in
Santos Bay [my translation]
Such a tendency probably comes from L2, yet it seems that journalists very often write in the old way in L1 newspapers and so do inhabitants of the city of Rio de Janeiro. The inhabitants of the city of Rio de Janeiro, cariocas, usually use the definite article to refer to a third person, whereas inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro state usually do not use the definite article often, as in the example below:

(10) Onde está a Gabriela? Where is Gabriela? [My translation]
(Diariodeumainfância [www])

To sum up, the use of articles was a very common interference phenomenon present in the articles analyzed. Besides, it seems that the cause of this phenomenon is due to different perceptions of the use of articles in L1 and L2.

4.4.3 Lexical/semantic interference (false cognates)

L1 → L2 false cognates within the abstracts showed to occur mainly in words from Latin added to the L2 lexicon, which changed semantically diachronically. The main example presented above was espécie vs. species in (5), where their Latin equivalent speciē in both languages but specialized in English to refer to different mental categories, as money and class of individuals (Dictionary.com [www]).

The main reason that seems to make false cognates occur in the STs might be due to the sign interference, as discussed above. The main example discussed was concepções and conceptions in example (2).

A suggestion to avoid false cognates is thorough research to verify whether the linguistic transfer occurs. According to Benson (2002:69), such lexis transfer could happen if it is assumed that the meaning of X terms in the L2 is the same as in the L1. Therefore, lack of knowledge seems to be the main cause of such interference phenomena.

4.4.4 Lexical/semantic interference (redundancy)

The redundancy example (5) found in the abstracts was due to the lack of understanding of the ST (e.g. Altarriba et al, 1996; Schwartz et al, 2006) and level of fluency between ST and TT. The lack of understanding made the translator split the long sentence into smaller ones,
yet not all information from the ST was translated into the TT (“laws of interference” in Munday, 2008:115) and there was a literal translation of an ST word and relative pronoun.

This phenomenon can be avoided by improving the level of fluency and the ability to switch from L1 into L2 without losing L1’s meanings, besides reviewing and comparing the TT with the ST. However, obscure STs were also found to be the main reason for the occurrence of negative transfer into the TTs.

4.4.5 Pragmatic interference (modals)

As discussed above, the verb poder was translated into can in (7), instead of may or might to indicate only possibility or forecast. Such a phenomenon occurs with the change in meaning of the ST into the TT (Benson, 2002:69) and it is probably due to the possible use of poder in the L1 as may or might, not necessarily showing ability or power, as in (7). Therefore, we conclude that, as seen in example (7), there is an expansion of meaning in L1 connected to the same verb and a specification in L2, where there are other possibilities of choice of modal verbs with different implications.

This phenomenon can be avoided depending on the level of fluency in the L1 and L2, besides sentence comprehension (Altarriba et al, 1996; Schwartz et al, 2006.) Sentence comprehension is, therefore, the main factor that may influence the final translation.

4.4.6 Final discussion

Out of the 50 abstracts selected, 28 were found to contain the types of interference discussed in this paper. The academic areas with more translation interference phenomena were the humanities, social sciences and history (22 abstracts). However, it is quite possible that the abstracts in technology and natural sciences were found to have less interference (only 6 abstracts) because they presented more precise data, such as numbers, than arguments.

Lack of clarity or understanding from the L1 to L2 has shown to be one of the main problems in the translation of these abstracts. Although the syntactic structure of the sentences is important but not so relevant as the information to be conveyed, partial transfer of information was noticed in most of the abstracts analyzed.

Syntactic/grammatical interference seemed to be the most frequent cause of the interference phenomena in these abstracts. From such an interference phenomenon, changes in ST meanings occurred as a chain process. In other words, it seems that the translators
ended up trying to translate the STs literally, not paying too much attention to the whole understanding of the abstracts. Understanding the sentence clauses could have helped to achieve a better quality in the TTs.

Table 1. Statistics of linguistic interference phenomena encountered in the 50 abstracts selected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total No. Abstracts</th>
<th>No. abstracts subject to interference</th>
<th>% interference in 50 abstracts</th>
<th>% interference in the fields</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total No. Abstracts</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities/Social sciences/History</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Sciences/Technology</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 1, it was found that 56% of 50 abstracts were subject to the interference phenomena analyzed in this paper. In other words, 44% represented the interference phenomena in humanities, social sciences and history and 12% in natural sciences and technology, compared to the total number of abstracts.

Concerning interference within the fields, approximately 73% were found to be interference phenomena encountered within humanities, social sciences and history (30 abstracts) and 3% within natural sciences and technology (20 abstracts).

5 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to present the most frequent interference phenomena from Portuguese into English encountered in 50 abstracts selected. Besides, there was an attempt to improve the comprehensibility of the selected abstracts and enlighten the readers of abstracts written by Portuguese native speakers, concerning the cases of syntactic/grammatical, lexical/semantic and pragmatic interference. These cases were discussed in Sections 4 and 5.

Furthermore, the kinds of interference phenomena, the possible reasons for their occurrence, as well as how the occurrences of these phenomena could be avoided (e.g suggestions (4) and (6)), were identified and discussed in Sections 4 and 5.

A relevant finding in this research, as discussed above, was that Portuguese abstracts were found to be wordier than their subsequent translations. This finding is also proved by the
number of words of the source abstracts and the target abstracts chosen. It was shown that the average number of words of the 50 abstracts selected was higher than the translations into the L2. The results of this study could also be interpreted as Portuguese having a characteristic of being wordier than English or the former having more stylistic ways of conveying meaning in the STs, whereas the TTs shows a more objective translation.

As Portuguese (Romance language) usually has the characteristic of a more flexible word order and sentence lengths, as discussed above, translators may have difficulties when translating into the L2 (Germanic language.) Therefore, it seems that translators have to understand the wordiness of the ST and transform it into another format, which usually has a shorter sentence length.

In addition, another very important finding was that the interference phenomena discussed seemed to be more frequent in humanities, social sciences and history. Although technology and natural sciences were also subject to these phenomena, it could be that humanities, social sciences and history present wordier abstracts and tend to be much more subjective than the former ones. In other words, it seemed that figures were generally more important than words and arguments in the areas of technology and natural sciences.

These findings may help translators improve their translations within this language pair and also avoid or reflect about these interference phenomena in future papers. This study may also contribute to future studies in the area of interference between Romance languages and Germanic languages, as well as help researchers reflect on translations or linguistic transfer. This study may also help programmers or the area of computational linguistics improve future translation software related to this language pair.

A suggestion for future research could be to investigate abstracts of other fields, as well as several academic papers in the same field or the same author and make a comparative analysis of the interference phenomena between L1 and L2.
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Accessed on 7 April, 2009.

phonology on lexical access: Exemplar-based versus abstract lexical entries.  


List of abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>mother tongue, first language, source language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>foreign language, second language, target language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL</td>
<td>source language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TL</td>
<td>target language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>source text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TT</td>
<td>target text</td>
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