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‘Life Is Baseball’ vs. ‘A Vida É Futebol’: the Translation of Sport-Specific Metaphors from English to European and Brazilian Portuguese

‘Life is baseball’ vs. ‘A vida é futebol’: la traducción de metáforas deportivas del inglés al portugués de Portugal y al portugués de Brasil

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ABSTRACT

Soccer is the most popular sport in Brazil and Portugal, while in the United States (US) it is baseball. An incredible number of metaphors and idioms are generated in the languages where these sports are played. Due to their cultural specificity, such expressions are particularly difficult to translate, and thus constitute a significant challenge for both machine and human translators (HTs). This paper explores the different possibilities available for the translation of metaphorical baseball expressions from English to Portuguese.

The study is based on the TV Corpus, plus a corpus previously compiled by the author. The translations produced by three freely available online MT systems (Google, DeepL and Systran) will be compared with HTs used in the subtitles of TV-series, including both Brazilian and European Portuguese subtitles. The results of the analysis show that sports-related metaphorical and idiomatic expressions remain a blind spot for English-Portuguese MT systems.

Keywords: translation English-Portuguese, machine translation (MT), sport-specific metaphors and idioms, Internet TV-series, subtitling

RESUMEN

El fútbol es el deporte más popular en Brasil y Portugal, mientras que en los Estados Unidos el deporte rey es el béisbol. Los deportes son una extraordinaria fuente de metáforas y expresiones idiomáticas para las lenguas donde se practican. Dichas expresiones constituyen un gran reto tanto para los sistemas de traducción automatizada (TA) como para la traducción humana (TH), debido a su especificidad cultural.

Este trabajo estudia las diferentes posibilidades de traducción del inglés al portugués de expresiones metafóricas relacionadas con el béisbol. El estudio se basa en el TV Corpus, así como en un corpus propio. Las traducciones de tres sistemas de TA en línea de libre acceso (Google, DeepL y Systran) se compararán con las TH de los subtítulos de series de televisión. El análisis tendrá en cuenta tanto la variante de portugués de Portugal como la de Brasil. Los resultados del análisis muestran que las expresiones metafóricas e idiomáticas relacionadas con el deporte siguen siendo un punto ciego para los sistemas de TA inglés-portugués.

Palabras clave: traducción inglés-portugués, traducción automática (TA), metáforas y expresiones idiomáticas del deporte, series de TV, subtitulación

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1. Introduction. The impact of baseball and soccer in everyday language

Sports have a prominent position in many of today's societies and as such constitute a source for the creation of all kinds of metaphors used in everyday life. Countries or regions tend to have at least one dominant or major sport, from which a large number of these expressions emerge. In Brazil and Portugal, the sport par excellence is soccer. In the case of Brazil, the social prominence of soccer is extraordinary, not least because the national team is the most successful in the history of the World Cup, having won the title five times. Within the framework of the conceptual metaphor (Lakoff, 1980, 1993) we might say that in these countries "life is soccer". Taking this conceptual metaphor as a starting point, we can find multiple metaphorical and idiomatic expressions, such as "*não dar bola (para alguém ou alguma coisa)*" (don't give the ball to something or someone) "*show de bola*" (ball show), "*pisar na bola*" (to step on the ball), "*aos 45 do segundo tempo*" (45 minutes into the second half), "*pendurar as chuteiras*" (hang up the boots), "*bola para frente*" (move the ball forward), "*ser camisa 10*" – (to be jersey number 10), etc. Literal translations of those expressions sometimes makes only limited sense in English, and their figurative meaning is often difficult (or impossible) to deduce from the literal one. For these reasons the translation of many such expressions would be difficult in countries where soccer enjoys only a minority presence. This is the case in the US, where one of the most popular sports is baseball, and which is, in turn, the source of a large number of metaphors and idiomatic expressions of everyday life.

As the narrator of Ken Burns' documentary "The Official History of Baseball" (Volume 1, 1994) states, baseball is "just a game, as simple as a ball and bat, and yet as complex as the American spirit it symbolizes. It is a sport, a business, sometimes almost even religion". According to this definition, and indeed to innumerable other sources, including press articles, books and websites, baseball is more than just a sport. Despite the popularity of other sports like American football and basketball, baseball hold a special place in the culture of the US. It has been called "a game for America", which suggests an identity or identification mark. Indeed, it is often considered to be America's national sport, although in some ways it seems to be even more than this. It is an American way of life, a family tradition (many families spend afternoons with their children at baseball parks) and one of the most emblematic national pastime.

For all these reasons, a possible conceptual metaphor in the US would be "life is baseball". In a similar way as in the above case of soccer, the translation of this metaphor and the corresponding metaphorical and idiomatic expressions from English into the languages of places where baseball is not so popular is a great challenge. The present study will focus on the translation of such expressions from English into Portuguese, considering the two variants here, the one spoken in Portugal, referred to as European Portuguese (Pt) by the producers of the TV series under study, and the variant spoken in Brazil, referred to as Brazilian Portuguese (Br).

Drawing on a TV Corpus, plus my own dataset extracted from 20 drama and crime series produced by the two streaming giants Netflix and Amazon, the paper will consider the metaphorical dimension of metaphorical and idiomatic expressions in original TV series in English and their translation into Portuguese in the form of subtitles. The goal is to analyze the translations performed by MT (machine translation) systems and by human translators, this as

a means of exploring differences here in terms of a metaphorical and idiomatic perspective between the original dialogues and the subtitles as translated both automatically and by humans. The study will focus on a selection of expressions relating to the semantic field of the most popular US sport, baseball. The reasons for choosing this sports are, on the one hand, that due to its great popularity it has been a source for the creation of idioms which have proliferated over the years, and are still frequently used in informal English; and on the other hand, because baseball does not enjoy a comparable popularity in Brazil or Portugal, and thus comparable idiomatic expressions do not exist there.

The goals of this research are:

- To compare the translations of the three MT systems with each other, and to discuss the differences in terms of accuracy, precision and quality.
- To analyze the differences and similarities between the translation of the same idiomatic expressions by human translators and the MT systems.
- To study the differences between the original dialogues and the translated subtitles from a metaphorical and idiomatic perspective.

The article is structured into four further sections. Section 2, below, provides an overview of sport idioms and the challenges of translating them. Section 3 then describes the corpus to be used in the research, plus the methodology employed in the analysis. Section 4 sets out the detailed analysis of the data, including the presentation of various translations in context. Finally a discussion and interpretation of the findings, plus conclusions, are provided in Section 5.

2. Sport idioms or idiomatic expressions

In previous studies (Labarta Postigo, 2021, 2022) I have noted the frequent use of idioms in fictional dialogues of TV series. Such forms appear in practically all film genres and subgenres, provide great expressiveness to fictional dialogues, and are often essential in understanding the work in question. I have also observed the great number of definitions of idioms that are available; this is an example: “A pure idiom is a non-literal set expression whose meaning is not a compositional function of its syntactic constituents but which always has a homonymous literal counterpart” (Fernando & Flavell 1981: 48). Idiomaticity refers, according to Díaz Ferrero and Monteiro-Plantin (2020: 106), to the opposition between the transparency and opacity of an expression, in view of its semantic compositionality. In other words, idioms are set expressions whose overall meaning cannot be deduced from their composition or the sum of their constituent parts. In addition to their figurative meaning, idioms have a homonymous literal counterpart. Like other phraseological units, they are rhetorical figures of speech that go beyond the literal meaning of the words from which they are formed.

Most idioms are metaphorical and have a figurative meaning, as we will see in what follows. Let us consider one of the above examples. Within the soccer lexicon, “*ser camisa 10*” has the literal meaning of “to be” or “wear jersey number 10”. In turn, it is an idiomatic expression of colloquial Portuguese, with the figurative meaning “to be the best at something”. Furthermore, there is a metonymy motivating this idiomatic expression that deserves to be mentioned: the clothing (jersey 10) is used to refer to the person, the best soccer player. There

are historical motivations for this, in that the world's best players have often worn jersey number 10; for example, the Brazilian Pelé and the Argentinian Diego Maradona both wore this number in the past, as do Lionel Messi and Neymar today.

Idiomatic expressions are often culturally specific to a region or linguistic community. This sometimes makes them very difficult to translate adequately, especially for MT systems. However, as Fuentes-Luque and Santamaria (2020: 66) note, MT systems and computer-assisted translation have evolved and improved in recent years, and are clearly an instance of the way in which technology has increasingly come to play a part in the day-to-day work of translators.

Turning to the issue of idioms at the grammatical level, it is the case that idioms have a lower degree of fixation than other phraseological units such as sayings or proverbs. To take the above example, one could think of the following variations of the idiom “*não dar bola...*” with grammatical changes of verb tense, verb person, or noun number: “*ela passou a tarde sem me dar bola / ela não me deu bola a tarde toda*” (Lit: she didn't give me a ball all afternoon. Meaning: she didn't give a thought/damn about me all afternoon / she didn't pay attention to me during the whole evening), “*eu não vou dar mais bola para ele*” (Lit: I won't give him any more ball. Meaning: I will not care about him anymore). As we see in this example, idioms can undergo grammatical changes. According to Corpas (1997: 93-94) these changes can involve gender, number, verb person, direct and/or indirect object and semantics. This particularity of idioms contributes to the difficulties inherent in their translation from one language to another, especially in MT systems, as the analysis below will seek to show.

3. Corpus and methodology

The theoretical framework of this research draws on Lakoff & Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980), Lakoff (1993); on Gibbs' work on metaphors and culture (Gibbs, 1996, 1997, 2001) and on the idiomatic and literal meaning of idioms, (Gibbs, 1989, 1990); on various approaches to different types and aims of translation (Newmark, 1988; Baker, 1992; Corpas 2000; Trim, 2007; Díaz Cintas & Anderman, 2009; Conca & Guia 2014); on works that look at the issue of subtitling (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2014, 2020; Dwyer 2017), as well as the analytical methodology developed and described by the author in previous studies (Labarta Postigo, 2020, 2021, 2022).

The present analysis is based on a selection of idiomatic or metaphorical sports expressions that appear frequently in TV series. The results of a previous study (Labarta Postigo, 2021) on the translation of English idioms in films suggested the need to develop a larger corpus, this as a means of conducting more exhaustive analysis. In the present paper, the reference corpus is indeed substantially larger, and is based on the TV Corpus, currently one of the largest available corpora of informal English. The reason for choosing this corpus is indeed its size. According to the data in its description, it is about 33 times larger than the conversational part of the BNC, containing around 325 million words drawn from 75,000 television episodes from the 1950s to the present. To this data I will add my own corpus, the result of several previous studies on subtitled TV series from 2000 to 2022.

The analysis will focus on English-Portuguese translation. Five idiomatic expressions have been selected, these with a combined total of 2,474 occurrences in the TV Corpus. One of the

selection criteria was that they were related to baseball. The other criteria were their frequency of use in TV series (the selected expressions appear between 144 and 1,074 times in the TV Corpus), and their availability in two subtitled versions of Brazilian and European Portuguese.

For the contrastive analysis of the translations we have chosen MT Systems based on different approaches. According to Poibeau (Poibeau, 2017), a number of different approaches and techniques have historically been used for MT, and these can be grouped into three categories: direct translation systems, transfer systems, and systems based on an interlingua. One example for the first category is Systran, founded 1968. Poibeau also describes a revolution in the domain since the early 1990s due to the development of greater computational capacity and to the internet, both of which led to the emergence of new approaches: «Most current industrial machine translation systems and specially the most popular ones (Google translation, Bing translation) are based on a statistical approach». Furthermore, since the mid-2010s a new approach deriving from the field of computational linguistics and based on deep learning has begun to revolutionize the field of MT, DeepL Translator being an example this.

So, for the purposes of the present study contrastive analysis will be conducted using, on the one hand, the output of the following online MT systems: (1) Google translation, (2) DeepL, and (3) Systran; and on the other hand, translations from human translators, these latter represented by the Portuguese subtitles used in the corresponding Netflix or Amazon Prime series.

In order to perform a detailed and accurate analysis, and to provide sufficient information for the MT systems, the extended context in which the expression appears was considered for the analysis. This may vary in length depending on the example, since in each case a snippet of the dialogue/text was selected that was sufficiently broad to allow for its comprehension and the identification of its figurative meaning.

4. Analysis

The analysis of each idiomatic expression will begin with an introduction to the idiom. First, the origin of the expression and its terminological meaning in the specific field of sports will be established, followed by a description of its figurative meaning as an idiomatic expression, that is, its meaning in speech and in language usage. To obtain this information we have used the following sources: the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the Cambridge Dictionary, the Collins Dictionary, the idioms section of the Grammarist website, and the Baseball Rules Academy website. Finally, data on the frequency of occurrence of these idioms in the corpus will be provided.

Following this, the contrastive analysis itself will be presented. For an optimal visualization, we will present a comparative table for each of the idioms in question. Each table will include the idiomatic expression in English with the necessary context for its interpretation. This text is labeled “English subtitles”, and also serves as the text entered into each of the three MT systems for translation. These translations will be shown in the left-hand columns of each table, whereas on the right will be the versions seen as subtitles of the series in Brazilian and European Portuguese on the streaming platforms (that is, the HTs). For reasons of space, the output of the translations has been reduced in the tables, focusing on the idiomatic expression

itself. The complete translation with the context, including material in brackets, is available on request to the author.

For a better understanding of the following analysis, examples will be introduced with the screenshot corresponding to the use of the idiom in the respective series and the English and Portuguese subtitles.

4.1. To touch base

4.1.1. Introduction

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, this phrase may be related to baseball, a game in which both runners and fielders have to “touch the base” in order to be safe or to eliminate the player, respectively. That is, in baseball a member of the batting side is “out” if he is not stepping on a base when a defensive player touches him with the ball, or if he is moving toward a base and a defensive player has the ball and steps on that base first. In terms of figurative usage, both the Cambridge and Merriam-Webster dictionaries agree that “to touch base” means to establish contact or communicate with someone, to find out how a person is doing or what he/she thinks about something. The Collins Dictionary, by turn, notes that it is used especially when communicating with someone you haven’t communicated with recently.

The corpus contains a total of 144 occurrences of this expression, some 122 examples of “touch base”, plus a further 22 of “touching base”.

4.1.2. Contrastive Analysis

Table 1. Serie *Gilmore girls*, Netflix, S6, E4. *Always a Godmother, never a God*. Time: -8.43

DeepL	Google	Systran	HT (Pt)	HT (Br)
<p>English subtitles: [- Wonderful. Right this way. So, I always like to take a few minutes before my baptisms to get to know the godparents a little bit.] Of course, I already know you two, but I just want to touch base and make sure you understand the obligations of what you’re getting into here today.</p>				
- Claro, eu já conheço vocês dois, mas quero apenas tocar a base e ter certeza de que vocês entendam as obrigações do que vocês estão se metendo aqui hoje.	- Claro, eu já conheço vocês dois, mas eu só quero entrar em contato e ter certeza que vocês entendem as obrigações do que vocês estão se metendo aqui hoje.	- Claro que já vos conheço, mas quero apenas tocar na base e certificar-me de que compreendem as obrigações do que se estão a meter aqui hoje.	- É claro que já vos conheço. Mas queria falar convosco para garantir que entendem as obrigações que estão a assumir hoje.	- Claro, já conheço as duas. Mas eu gostaria de conversar e ver se vocês entendem a obrigação que estão assumindo aqui hoje.

In this case DeepL and Systran offer a literal translation of the idiomatic expression: “*quero apenas tocar a/na base*”, which doesn’t make sense in this context. Google, on the other hand, translates the explicit meaning of the expression, offering an adequate translation, but without any metaphorical connotation.

Figure 1. Idiom “touch base”: subtitles in English, Pt and Br

The human translators avoid the idiom in both versions of the subtitles, providing the translations shown in Figure 1. The corresponding English translations of these would be as follows: “but I wanted to talk to you to make sure you understand” (European Portuguese) and “but I would like to talk and see if you understand” (Brazilian Portuguese).

4.2. To step up to the plate

4.2.1. Introduction

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary this idiom has its origins in baseball, in which it indicates that a player has “to move into position next to home plate in order to bat”. It is often used figuratively in American English “to refer to showing readiness to meet a challenge (as by increased effort or improved performance)”. According to this dictionary, its first recorded use in this figurative sense dates from 1968.

The corpus contains a total of 166 occurrences of this expression, including 134 examples of “step out of the plate”, and a further 22 of “stepping up to the plate”.

4.2.2. Contrastive Analysis

Table 2. Series *House of Cards*, S1, E5. *Rotten Tomatoes*. Time: -11.56

DeepL	Google	Systran	TH (Pt)	TH (Br)
<p>English Subtitles: REPORTER: Several dozen union sympathizers, led by labor lobbyist, Martin Spinella, attempted to disrupt the gala. MARTIN SPINELLA: They need to step up to the plate and take care of our teachers and our children. [The protest dissipated when fundraiser attendees offer food and drink to picketers. FRAN-CIS: Doesn't matter what side you're on, everybody's got ta eat. Turn it off.]</p>				
<p>REPÓRTER: - Várias dezenas de simpatizantes sindicais, liderados pelo lobista trabalhista, Martin Spinella, tentaram interromper a gala. MS: - Eles precisam subir até o prato e cuidar de nossos professores e de nossas crianças.</p>	<p>REPÓRTER: - Várias dezenas de simpatizantes sindicais, liderados pelo lobista trabalhista Martin Spinella, tentaram atrapalhar a gala. MS: - Eles precisam dar um passo à frente e cuidar de nossos professores e nossos filhos.</p>	<p>REPÓRTER: - Várias dezenas de simpatizantes do sindicato, liderados pelo lobista trabalhista, Martin Spinella, tentaram interromper a festa de gala. MS: - Eles precisam subir ao prato e cuidar de nossos professores e nossos filhos.</p>	<p>REPÓRTER: - Dúzias de simpatizantes do sindicato, liderados por Martin Spinella, o lobista, tentaram boicotar a gala. MS: - Eles têm de agir e proteger os professores e as crianças.</p>	<p>REPÓRTER: - Dezenas de simpatizantes sindicalistas liderados pelo lobista Martin Spinella tentaram perturbar o jantar da gala. MS: - Eles precisam agir e cuidar de nossos professores e crianças.</p>

DeepL and Systran offer literal translations of the expression, resulting in absurd sentences, in that the word “*prato*” denotes the kind of plate used for serving food: “*Eles precisam subir ao / até o prato*”. Google translates the English expression as “*dar um passo à frente*” (to step forwards), which is not the exact meaning, but is understandable in this context.

Figure 2. Idiom “step up to the plate”, subtitles in English, Br (left) and Pt (right)



Both versions of the HT offer an interpretation of the figurative meaning of the idiom through the verb “*agir*” which means to act or to do something. Although “*agir*” does provide intelligible meaning to the phrase, it falls short of the real meaning of the English expression and does not reflect its metaphorical sense at all.

4.3. To cover all the bases / to cover (all) my/your/his/her/our/their bases

4.3.1. Introduction

According to the Grammarist website “to cover all the bases” arose in the early to middle 20th century in America and is related to baseball. It means “(1) to prepare for every possibility, (2) to give attention to every aspect of a situation or problem, or (3) to inform (someone) of all matters at hand.”

There are a total of 199 occurrences of this expression in the data, involving the following 28 variations: Cover all the bases (26), covering all the bases (22), covering all bases (6), cover all bases (10), covering my bases (9), Covering all my bases (7) cover my bases (21), cover all my bases (11), covering your bases (0), covering all your bases (1), cover your bases (3), cover all your bases (5), covering his bases (4), covering all his bases (4) cover his bases, cover all his bases (4), covering her bases (1), covering all her bases (0) cover her bases (0), cover all her bases (0), covering our bases (11), covering all our bases (4), cover our bases (25) cover all our bases (11), covering their bases (6), covering all their bases (3) cover their bases (4), cover all their bases (1).

4.3.2. Contrastive Analysis

Table 3. Series *Dead to Me*, Netflix, S2, E9. *It's Not You, It's Me*. Time: -20.42

English Subtitles:				
[- Can I come with you?				
- Uh, no you may not. You are gonna finish your breakfast, and when you're done eating, you're gonna take your bowl to the dishwasher for once in your life.]				
- I'm on your side. Why are you mad at me?				
- I'm not, I'm just covering my bases.				
DeepL	Google	Systran	HT (Pt)	HT (Br)
- Estarei do teu lado. Porque estás zangado comigo?	- Estou no seu lado. Porque é que estás zangado comigo?	- Estou do seu lado. Por que você está bravo comigo?	- Eu estou do teu lado. Porque ralhas comigo?	- Eu estou do seu lado. Por que está brava?
- Não estou, estou apenas a cobrir as minhas bases.	- Não estou, só estou cobrindo minhas bases.	- Não estou, só estou cobrindo minhas bases.	- Não estou! Estou só a prevenir-me.	- Nada. Só para garantir.

All the MT systems translate the idiom literally. The expression is not a widespread idiom in any internationally accepted conceptual sense, and hence the renderings here, “*cobrindo as minhas bases*”, have no metaphorical meaning in either European or Brazilian Portuguese. The three MT translations, then, are incorrect.

Figure 3. Idiom “cover all the bases”, subtitles in English, Pt and Br



The subtitles in both European Portuguese (above right) and Brazilian Portuguese (below right) provide the figurative meaning of the idiom: “I am just preventing / Just to make sure”. However, neither version in fact reflects the metaphorical meaning of the expression.

4.4. To be out of one’s league / To be out of my/your/his/her/our/their league

4.4.1. Introduction

“To be out of one’s league” is probably related to baseball, a sport which is divided into leagues relating to different levels of skill and professionalism. According to the Grammarist website, one of the earliest versions of the idiom was “batting out of one’s league”, which clearly relates to baseball, as the only mainstream American sport to involve a bat and ball. However, the idiom itself might have been related to any other sports which have league systems. The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as pointing to something or someone being too good or expensive for someone. Merriam-Webster offers a similar meaning: “not at a level

where one is as good as someone else at something”. That is, the metaphorical expression is used to describe a situation in which one attempts to attach oneself to or compete with people who are smarter, better looking, or better qualified than you. It is also used to describe a situation in which someone does not measure up to a challenge or situation (a job for example) or cannot afford to buy something expensive.

There are a total of 891 occurrences of this expression in the data reflecting the following variations: out of my league (336); out of your league (368); out of his league (108); out of her league (20); out of our league (44) and out of their league (15).

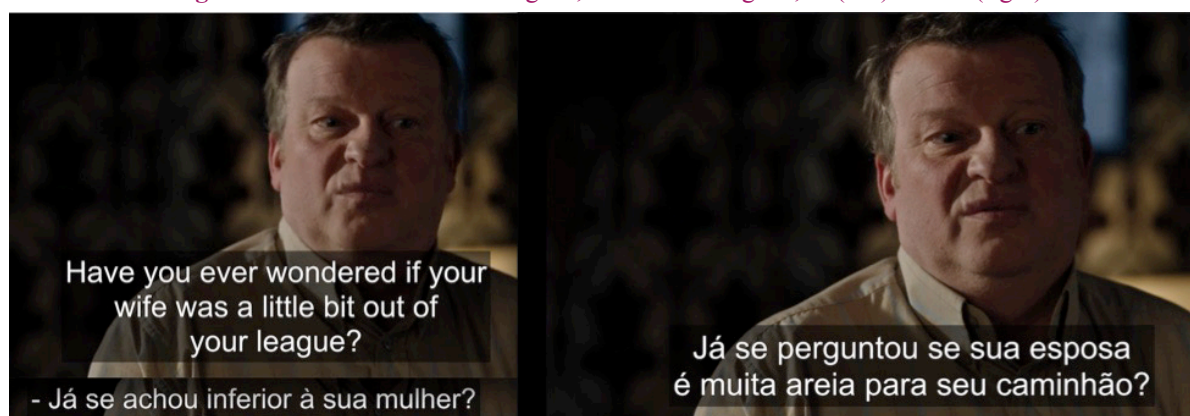
4.4.2. Contrastive Analysis

Table 4. Serie *Sherlock*, Amazon Prime, S4, E1, *The Six Thatchers*. Time: +26.47

English Subtitles:				
[I've withheld this information from you until now, Mr Kingsley, but I think it's time you knew the truth.]				
What do you mean? Have you ever wondered if your wife was a little bit out of your league? - Well...				
- You thought she was having an affair. I'm afraid it's far worse than that - your wife is a spy.				
DeepL	Google	Systran	HT (Pt)	HT (Br)
- O que você quer dizer?	- O que você quer dizer?	- O que quer dizer?	- Como assim?	- Como assim?
- Você já se perguntou se sua esposa estava um pouco fora de seu alcance?	- Alguma vez você já se perguntou se sua esposa estava um pouco fora do seu alcance?	- Alguma vez te perguntaste se a tua mulher estava um pouco fora da tua liga?	- Já se achou inferior à sua mulher?	- Já se perguntou se sua esposa é muita areia para seu caminhão?
- Bem...	- Bem...	- Bem...	Ou achou que ela estava a ter um caso. Receio que seja pior que isso.	Se ela estava tendo um caso?
- Você pensou que ela estava tendo um caso. Receio que seja muito pior do que isso - sua esposa é uma espiã.	- Você pensou que ela estava tendo um caso. Receio que seja muito pior do que isso - sua esposa é uma espiã.	- Você pensou que ela estava tendo um caso. Receio que seja muito pior do que isso. A sua mulher é uma espiã.	Ela é espiã	É pior que isso. Sua esposa é uma espiã.

None of the MT systems provides an accurate translation here. On the one hand Systran offers a literal translation of the expression, “*Alguma vez te perguntaste se a tua mulher estava um pouco fora da tua liga?*”, which is incorrect and makes it difficult to understand the dialogue in the context. The other two systems translate “out of your league” as “*fora do seu alcance*”, which could be an interpretation of the figurative meaning of the English idiom, but also misses the figurative meaning of the idiom.

Figure 4. Idiom “out of one’s league”, subtitles in English, Pt (left) and Br (right)



The HT in the European Portuguese subtitles, “*Já se achou inferior a sua mulher?*” (Have you ever felt inferior to your wife?), could be an approximation of the explicit meaning of the expression, but it is not completely correct, nor does it reflect the metaphorical meaning of the expression. However, in the Brazilian Portuguese subtitles we find an idiomatic expression. This is from another semantic field, and as such is a partial equivalence: “*muita areia para seu caminhão*” (a lot of sand for your truck). This translation not only expresses the meaning of the original idiom, but also transfers to Portuguese the figurative sense with a humorous connotation.

4.5. Rain check

4.5.1. Introduction

The idiomatic expression “rain check” or “to take a rain check” has its origins in 19th century baseball games. If it rained and a game was postponed, the owner of the ticket had the option of a “rain check”, a kind of credit which could be used as a ticket for a future game. Such idioms are specific to a given culture or society. They belong to the conventionalized knowledge of a particular culture, and thus are difficult to translate or indeed are untranslatable as metaphors (Labarta Postigo, 2022). The meaning here is the act of delaying or postponing a meeting or appointment. Nowadays the idiom is often used as a way of rejecting an appointment, or, when used informally and with a touch of humor, to ask that something be postponed for another time.

“Rain check” is one of the most frequently-occurring idioms in the corpus, with a total of 1,015 examples, plus a further 59 instances in which the two main words are written together (“raincheck”), thus yielding a total of 1,074 examples. The majority, some 1,003, are from series screened after the year 2000. In the author’s own corpus there are also multiple examples of “rain check”, and the example that follows is one of these.

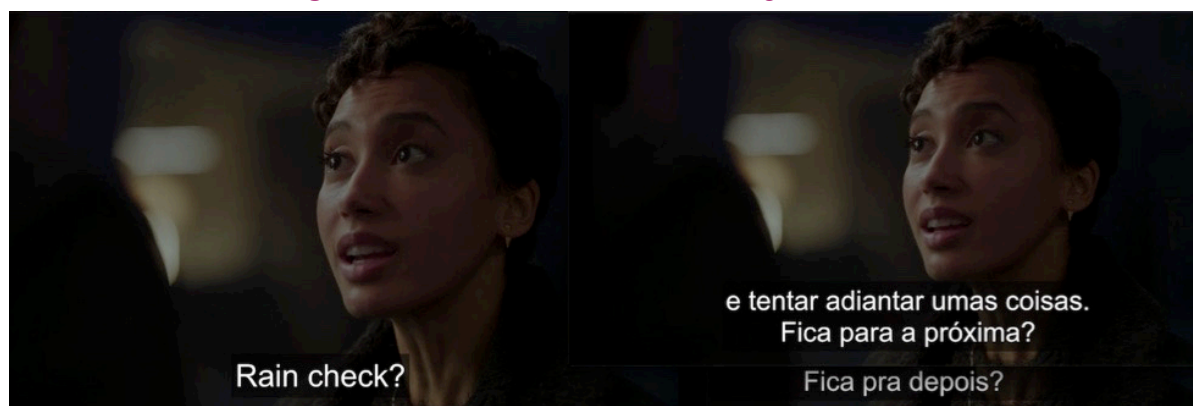
4.5.2. Contrastive Analysis

Table 5. Series *Upload*, Amazon Prime, T1, E6 *The Sleepover*. Time: -10:18.

English Subtitles:				
- Would you like to get out of here and go back to my place?				
- I'm so behind on work stuff, so I think I'm gonna stay here and just try to get through some of it. Rain check?				
- Okay.				
DeepL	Google	Systran	HT (Pt)	HT (Br)
- Você gostaria de sair daqui e voltar para minha casa?	- Você gostaria de sair daqui e voltar para minha casa?	- Você gostaria de sair daqui e voltar para a minha casa?	- Queres ir para minha casa?	- Quer sair daqui e ir para minha casa?
- Estou tão atrasado nas coisas do trabalho, então acho que vou ficar aqui e tentar passar por algumas delas. Fica para a próxima?	- Estou tão atrasada com as coisas do trabalho, então acho que vou ficar aqui e tentar passar por algumas delas. Verificação de chuva?	- Estou tão atrasado em coisas de trabalho, então acho que vou ficar aqui e apenas tentar passar por algumas delas. Cheque de chuva?	- Acabei de me aperceber que tenho trabalho a fazer. Acho que vou ficar aqui e tentar adiantar algumas coisas. Fica para a próxima?	- Na verdade acabei de perceber que tenho que pôr o trabalho em dia. Então, acho que ficarei aqui para tentar trabalhar um pouco. Fica para depois?
- Está bem	- OK.	- Ok.	- Está bem.	- Certo

Google and Systran both provide literal translations of the idiom: “Rain check”. Only DeepL captures the figurative meaning right, since the principal idea here is that of postponing the appointment: *Fica para a próxima?* (Shall we leave it for next time?).

Figure 5. Idiom “rain check”, subtitles in English, Pt and Br



The subtitles in European Portuguese, “*Fica para a próxima*” (shall we leave it for next time) and in Brazilian Portuguese “*Fica para depois*” (shall we leave it for later/another time), both provide the figurative meaning of “rain check”. Indeed, in this case we have a match with one of the MT Systems: the DeepL translation coincides exactly with that of the European Portuguese translator.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The results of the analyses confirm how difficult it is to find appropriate translations into Portuguese of English metaphorical and idiomatic baseball expressions. By and large, the translations offered by MT systems are literal and incorrect. As for the HT of these subtitles into Portuguese, there is a general tendency towards the reduction of idiomatic and metaphorical expressions, in both European and Brazilian Portuguese renderings. However, there are differences between the two variants of Portuguese, with the Brazilian versions sometimes being more idiomatic than the Portuguese ones, as in example 4.4, discussed below.

One of the surprising findings here, in comparing the MTs with the HTs, was that the differences in the quality, precision and accuracy of the analyzed translations do not always correspond to the standard HT vs. MT dichotomy. Rather, there is sometimes a greater similarity between the HT and one of the MT systems than between the three MT systems. This is the case with the example in section 4.1. The translation of “rain check” by the DeepL system, “*fica para a próxima*”, is correct and adequate in the context. Moreover, it is exactly the same translation used by the HT in European Portuguese, and also very similar to the Brazilian version, “*fica para depois*”; both of these provide an explicit meaning similar to that of the original idiomatic expression. In this case, the other two MT systems produced merely literal translations of the expression (“*Verificação de chuva?*” and “*Cheque the chuva?*”), which, in being incorrect, leads to the text in question being incomprehensible.

The most frequent scenario in the analysis is that two MT systems translate literally and the other correctly captures the figurative meaning. To our surprise, it is not always the same system that is successful in providing the correct translation of the meaning of the expression.

In section 4.2. the phrase “They need to step up to the plate and take care of our teachers...” is translated by DeepL and Systran literally, “*Eles precisam subir ao/ até o prato e cuidar de nossos professores.....*”, which makes no sense at all in the context. Google, on the other hand, offers a far more accurate translation: “*Eles precisam dar um passo à frente e cuidar de nossos professores*”. The HTs in this case opt for an explicit meaning: “*agir...*”. Something similar happens in section 4.1, where “I just want to touch base” is translated literally as “*quero apenas tocar a/na base*” by DeepL and Systran, translations which make little or no sense in the context. Google’s translation, by contrast, does offer a figurative meaning of the expression: “*eu só quero entrar em contato*”. Meanwhile, both HTs choose to avoid completely the metaphor in their renderings. Thus, in Brazilian Portuguese we have “*Mas eu gostaria de conversar*” (Eng: but I would like to talk) and in European Portuguese “*Mas queria falar convosco*” (Eng.: But I wanted to talk to you).

In sum, it is sometimes DeepL and sometimes Google that offers a translation of the figurative meaning that makes sense, where as sometimes neither of them do. By contrast, the most consistent in its output is Systran, which systematically offers literal (and hence unsatisfactory) translations of the meanings. Such differences in translations between the systems, in terms of accuracy, correction and adequacy, may be related to the different types of approach on which each system is based. Since exact information on how these systems are programmed is not available, such an explanation remains speculative, based as it is on Poibeau’s discussion of the topic, as reviewed in section 3. Further research is required to verify the exact situation here.

Finally, we have two examples in which none of the MT systems provides a correct, adequate or accurate translation, as seen in Tables 3 and 4. One possible explanation for additional difficulties faced by the MT systems here is that in both cases a larger number of idiomatic variations are possible. As noted in section 2, idiomatic expressions are subject of grammatical changes. Taking the example in table 4, “to be out of one’s league”, we found 28 different variations of this idiom in the corpus, with changes relating to the personal and possessive pronouns in the corresponding expressions.

If we consider the HTs in Figure 4 (Have you ever wondered if your wife was a little bit out of your league?), the Brazilian Portuguese subtitles are surprisingly creative (Have you ever wondered if your wife was a lot of sand for your truck). Not only do they hit the nail on the head with the figurative meaning of the idiom, but they also use an idiomatic expression in the target language. Although the Brazilian Portuguese idiom used is not from the semantic field of sports, it does successfully reflect the metaphorical sense of the original expression. This example serves as an illustration that at least sometimes it is possible to translate the figurative meaning of idiomatic expressions, and that this depends on the particular translator. As we can see, the translation of the same idiom into European Portuguese lacks idiomaticity (Have you ever felt inferior to your wife?)

In conclude, then, we can claim that the analysis of metaphorical and idiomatic expressions of baseball reported here has led to the identification of a blind spot in MT. This may be partly because of the cultural specificity of the material being translated, as well as involving grammatical issues, as discussed above. An interesting line of future research would be to explore exactly how human translators carry out their translations, in particular the extent to which they rely on MT. Whether or not this is the case, the findings of the present analysis of

baseball idioms show that a high-quality, satisfactory translation continues to depend on the human factor, either through post-editing or direct human translation, and that machines still lack the human touch.

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