

# Brazil and the Quality of its Cultural Dissemination Material

## A Corpus-Based Study of Translation Strategies for Cultural References<sup>1</sup>

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### 1 Introduction

This paper is a description of research developed in the Masters Program in Applied Linguistics at University of Brasília, which aimed to raise awareness among teachers, students, translators and the translation market regarding the specificities of cultural dissemination/tourism texts and regarding the peculiarities of translating them and the possible image these translations export of Brazil. As observed by Kussmaul (1995: 32) the translator acquires self-confidence through awareness. Furthermore, through awareness, the market, which includes not only those who commission a translation, but everyone who benefits from it in some way, will be better equipped to obtain a translation that will better fulfill its needs. This research was a tentative contribution to minimizing a dilemma raised by Cronin (1998: 107) in the First On-Line Colloquium on Translation: if Translation Studies are an interdisciplinary discipline, why do other disciplines not benefit from the knowledge developed in Translation Theory?

Corpus Linguistics resources (WordSmith Tools and Multiconcord) were used to analyze a Portuguese-English parallel corpus organized from texts from the public and private sectors in the field of cultural dissemination. In particular, the analyses involved cultural references, words or expressions typical of Brazilian culture. The data shows that a pattern cannot be observed, but there is a tendency to use the transfer strategy. The study indicates a need for planning in the cultural dissemination sector.

### 2 Culture, image and translation

For the purpose of this paper, culture will be regarded “as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and (...) it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.” (UNESCO, 2001: 12) The definition of culture is closely intertwined with translation. “Translation has a crucial role to play in aiding understanding of an increasingly fragmentary world” (Bassnett, 2004: 1). The work of a translator is not only to transfer a text from one language to another. Nowadays, it is recognized that a translator is a mediator (Katan, 2004) negotiating between cultures and in order to be successful he must be skilled with intercultural abilities that must be based on a positive image of the cultures involved.

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Studies in tourism and cultural politics show that the cultural information conveyed regarding a certain locality is one of the main factors in establishing an image of the place. Through the establishment of a positive and real image you can increase the tourist flow and investments. In reference to Brazil, these studies indicate that Brazil still needs to establish its real image and to find more efficient ways of marketing it. Brazilian culture can and should be used as the basis to increase our relations with other countries and people (Ribeiro, 1989: 17). Unfortunately, cultural policy is not a priority and Brazil's cultural sector is limited to reacting instead of planning (Ribeiro, 1989: 35). There is no general strategy concerning what is representative of Brazilian culture and how it should be disseminated.

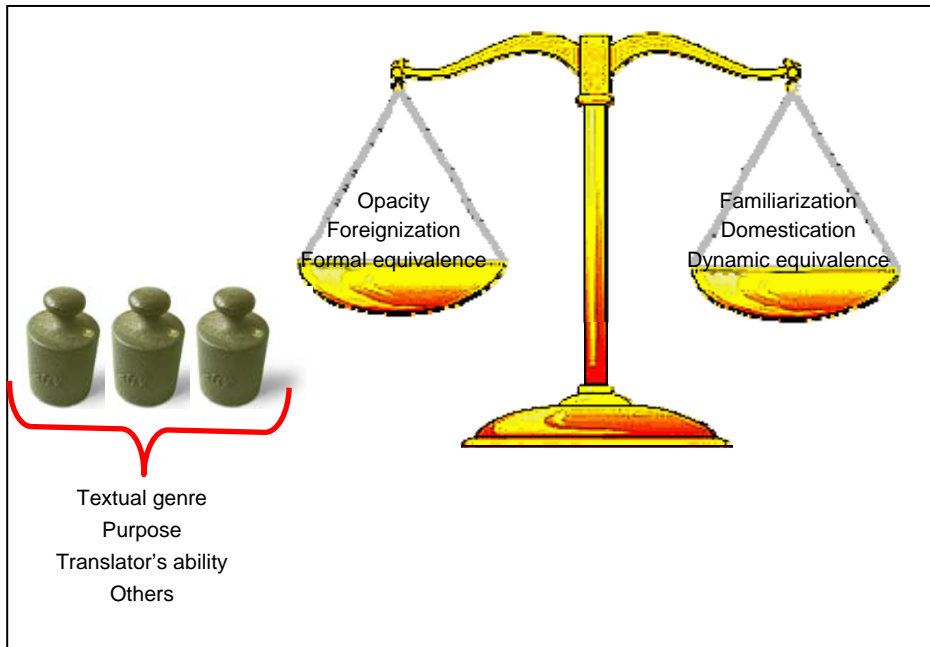
Venuti (1998: 68) reminds us that a translation can alter values and practices, thus the enormous "power" it wields. From these reflections and considering Nida's (2000: 130) observation that "differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure" we are compelled to regard the translator's role. Rodrigues (2005: 331) argues appropriately "that the way in which you translate has consequences and is directly related to the way in which one receives the other, the foreigner, if he is welcomed or received with hostility"<sup>3</sup>. The translator must choose, Newmark suggests (1988: 96), between transferring the cultural aspects of the other or eliminating them to focus on the message.

Nevertheless, when translating Brazilian texts for the purpose of cultural dissemination, the intention cannot be, in theory, to eliminate the cultural aspects, observing domestication strategies alone. How could we, in this manner, transfer the image of a different culture? On the other hand, an entirely foreignizing strategy of the cultural aspects, as many authors remind us (among whom James (2002), Venuti (1998) and Rodrigues (2005)), can lead to the incomprehension of the target reader, which would be an even greater loss of the cultural aspects. It is with this duality that the translator faces his job, much more so in texts for cultural dissemination.

This issue is like a pair of scales (Figure 1). On one side, we have the source text (strategies of formal equivalence, foreignization, opacity). On the other, the target reader's comprehension (strategies of dynamic equivalence, domestication, familiarization). The translator's task is to find a balance between the two dishes, whose weight will vary according to the textual genre, the purpose of the translation, the translator's ability, among others.

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<sup>3</sup> Que a maneira pela qual se faz uma tradução tem conseqüências e relaciona-se diretamente com a maneira pela qual se recebe o outro, o estrangeiro, se ele é acolhido ou é hostilizado.



**Figure 1:** Macro strategy for translation

Cronin (2000: 40-41) discusses the translation of cultural references and how they indicate the limit of translatability, operating as untranslatable symbols in the translation. The reader is transferred into the foreign ambiance by the untranslatability of these terms, and in order not to have any loss in the communication, they should invariably be explained. Snell-Hornby (2000: 23) seems to agree with Cronin and Nida when she says that cultural references “often present notorious problems for bilingual lexicographers and translators”. In her footnote to this sentence, however, Snell-Hornby suggests that frequently they are left untranslated and their basic meaning is conveyed by the immediate co-text or context. Are these the strategies used for translating cultural references? Or does Cronin describe only the most used strategy?

### 3 Research methodology

The research was divided into two stages. The first involved the compilation of a corpus which included texts from the official Embratur website (institution responsible for the promotion of tourism in Brazil), from the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from MultArte website (a private, non-profit website for cultural dissemination) and Ícaro, the on-board magazine for Varig Airlines, from 2001 to 2005.<sup>4</sup> For practical reasons, three subjects were originally chosen: cuisine, popular events and religion. Thus, the texts in the corpus were those referring to these three subjects, plus “general” texts,

<sup>4</sup> Embratur ([http:// www.turismo.gov.br](http://www.turismo.gov.br)); Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<http://www.dc.mre.gov.br/brasil/>); MultArte ([http:// www.multarte.com.br](http://www.multarte.com.br)); Ícaro (<http://www.icarobrasil.com.br>).

i.e. those which might include reference to these subjects, e.g. tourism texts of a certain region or city in Brazil.

Corpus Linguistics was chosen as a methodology in order to provide a more scientific approach to the research. Nevertheless, this implied that all the texts had to be in TXT format, which was a limitation, since important aspects like illustrations, typographical aspects, such as italics or change of colour, could not be observed. We are aware that such aspects are an important resource used by the translator to enhance target readers' comprehension.

Some texts from Ícaro, which were relevant to the research, had to be digitalized, for the on-line magazine is not yet complete. Only the texts in Portuguese which had a correspondent in English were incorporated into the corpus, thus providing a parallel corpus. In total, the MIME corpus, as it was called (an acronym of the first letter of each source), has 470 pairs of texts, with almost 720 thousand tokens (around 356 thousand in Portuguese and 362 thousand in English).

The second stage was divided into two phases. The first was the selection of the terms to be analysed in which the WordSmith Tools Keywords was used. The Keywords tool was used only in the Portuguese texts and only the positive keywords were analysed. Lácio-Ref<sup>5</sup> was the reference corpus. For this phase, other criteria were employed to establish "Brazilianness" and representativity in the corpus. Eighteen cultural references were found in cuisine from a universe of 401 positive keywords, and sixteen in popular events, from 279 positive keywords (see Table 1). Some terms were analysed together due to the correlation between them. The subject religion was eliminated due to lack of representativity in the corpus. In the second phase, we analysed how the terms selected in the first phase were translated into English. For this phase Multiconcord was used.

| <b>Cuisine</b>        | <b>Popular events</b>      |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Acarajé            | 1. Bumba-meu-boi/Boi-bumbá |
| 2. Angu               | 2. Cangaceiro              |
| 3. Bobó de camarão    | 3. Cangaço                 |
| 4. Caju               | 4. Carro alegórico         |
| 5. Cocada             | 5. Cordões                 |
| 6. Dendê              | 6. Escola de samba         |
| 7. Farofa             | 7. Festa Junina            |
| 8. Feijoada           | 8. Folia de Reis           |
| 9. Jabuticaba         | 9. Frevo                   |
| 10. Jenipapo          | 10. Lampião/Maria Bonita   |
| 11. Pamonha           | 11. Marcha/Marchinha       |
| 12. Pirarucu          | 12. Sambódromo             |
| 13. Quitute           | 13. Trio elétrico          |
| 14. Tapioca/Beiju     |                            |
| 15. Tambaqui          |                            |
| 16. Tutu              |                            |
| 17. Vatapá            |                            |
| Pilot study - cachaça |                            |

**Table 1:** Selected terms

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nilc.icmc.usp.br/lacioweb/>

## 4 Results

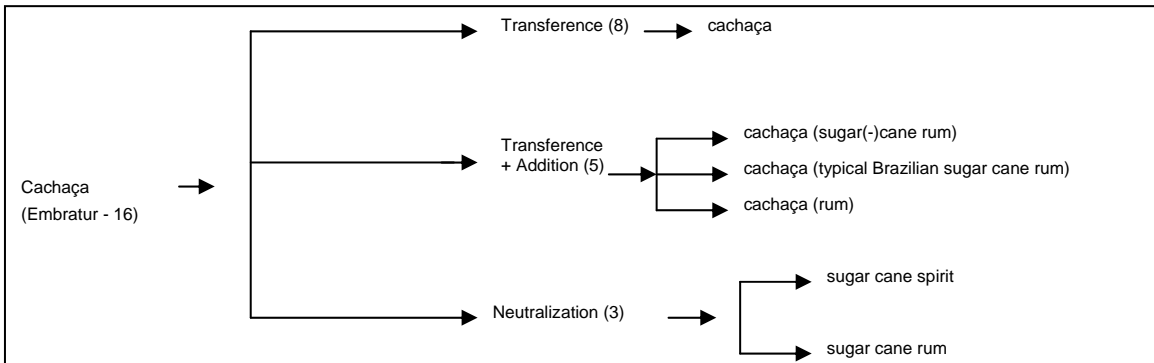
As a resource for organizing the 588 translation results analysed, translation strategies as categorized by Forteza (2005:192-193) in her study of Brazilian cultural references were expanded to fit the results of this study. The categories used were as follows:

- a. Transference, use of the original word;
- b. Naturalization, transference with changes that adapt the original word to the target language in terms of pronunciation, spelling and morphology;
- c. Lexical equivalence, terms of the original language which are already in the target language dictionaries either by transference or naturalization;
- d. Literal translation, a word-for-word translation of an utterance or expression;
- e. Neutralization, an explanation of the cultural reference through its function or external characteristics;
- f. Inclusion of a qualifier or hyperonym, which gives the target reader the specific value of the cultural reference;
- g. Addition of information, through explanations, paraphrases or notes;
- h. Cultural equivalence, using a concept from the target culture approximately similar to the one in the source culture;
- i. Omission.

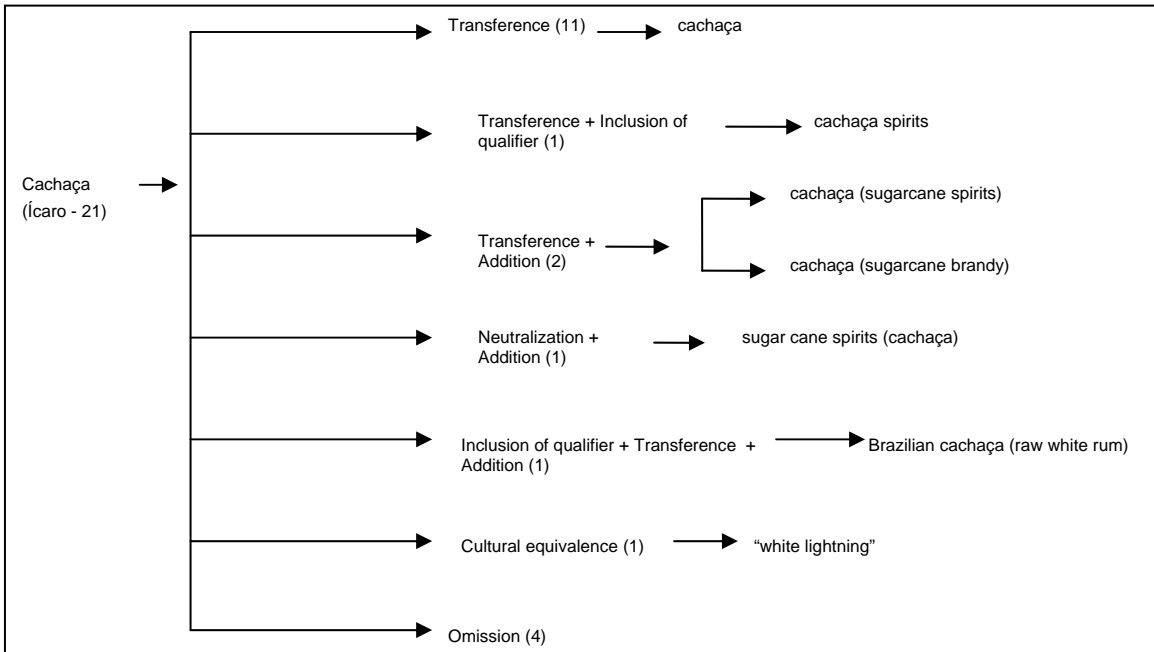
We added to Forteza's categories item "c" because we found the need for a category which referred to isolated terms, instead of expressions as in item "d". In the category addition of information we have also included the possibility of adding the original word, differing from item "a" because this information usually comes as an addition in parentheses. These categories can occur in isolation (with the exception of items "f" and "g"), or combined with other categories (except for item "i").

In order to provide a better overview of the results, we have used diagrams inspired by Campbell's (2000) choice network analysis model of the mental process used by analysing the target text. According to Campbell (2000: 38) these models are theory free, being mere representations of complex systems. As an example of the kind of analysis that was undertaken, we will present below the results obtained for our pilot study with the Brazilian term "cachaça", a typical alcoholic beverage made from sugarcane. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of occurrences.

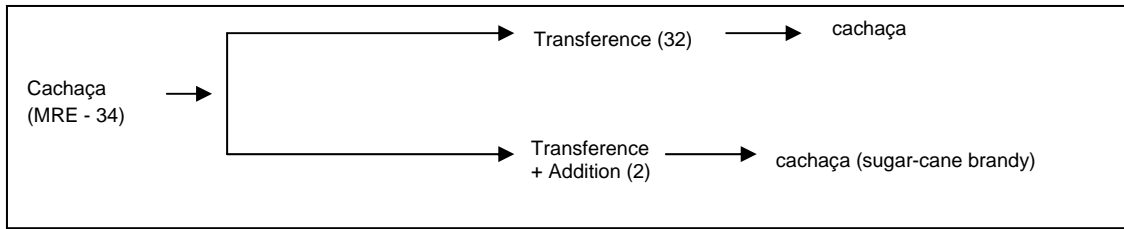
## 4.1 Cachaça



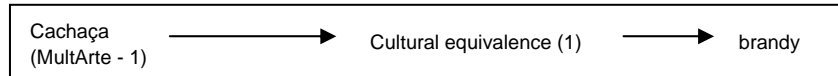
**Figure 1: Results Embratur**



**Figure 2: Results Ícaro**



**Figure 3:** Results Ministry of Foreign Affairs



**Figure 4:** Result MultArte

No pattern was verified, either when comparing the several sources or within the sources for which there was more than one occurrence. However, the strategy most used was transference. In eight of the results which applied this strategy in isolation there was loss of information; in some cases it was not clear what kind of beverage it was; in others failing completely to convey what it was at all. The transference in these cases can be justified by the fact that the lemma “cachaça” has been included in the newer versions of English language dictionaries, e.g. *American Heritage* (since the third edition) and *New Oxford American Dictionary*. In the other cases of transference, they were complemented by the context, e.g. the text from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on cachaça. Nevertheless, even in the results where there is loss of information, its foreign character, the “Brazilianness”, is preserved. Of the 72 results, only nine did not use the original term, four being omissions. All the omissions were found in *Ícaro*, probably due to the need to reduce the English version, since the magazine requires that the English version be ¼ shorter than the Portuguese version due to editorial spacing. The choice of strategy other than transference might be induced by bilingual dictionaries. All the dictionaries consulted (see dictionaries in References) have as their first or only equivalence a neutralization or a cultural equivalence, which suggests a lack of knowledge of the term “cachaça” by English language speakers.<sup>6</sup> *Ícaro* also stands out as the source where the largest number of strategies was used. This fact is even more surprising when we acknowledge that *Ícaro* is the only source that we are absolutely sure to have only one translator. The richness of strategies may, at the same time, motivate the target reader and confuse him/her.

Regarding the addition strategies (considering the inclusion of a qualifier), the information added can be divided in two categories: raw material used (sugarcane, written in several forms) or kind of drink (spirits, brandy and rum). “Spirits” is a generic term; “brandy” would be similar to cachaça by its distillation process, and “rum” by the distillation and fermentation processes and by its raw material which is sugarcane. The use of “sugarcane rum” is a pleonasm. The use of “brandy” or “rum” alone loses some of the information in relation to the specificities of the beverage, the first more than the second. The only addition which does not fit in one of the categories above is the addition

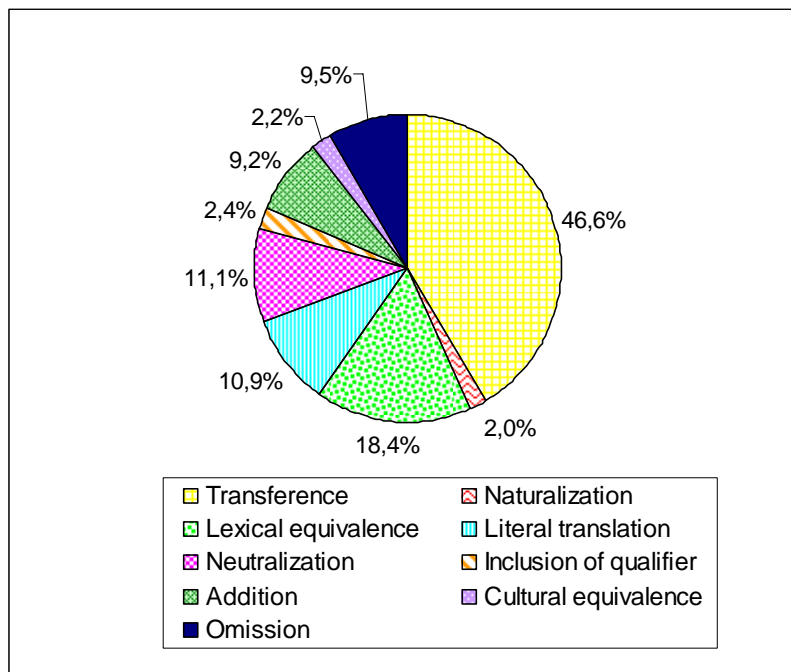
<sup>6</sup> There is no consensus among these dictionaries whether cachaça is a type of rum, brandy, liquor or tafia.

and inclusion of a qualifier (Brazilian cachaça (raw white rum)) used by Ícaro. In this result the translator seemed to want to typify cachaça as an exclusively Brazilian product and at the same time differentiate it from the other drink produced from sugarcane with the addition of caramel in order to obtain the yellowish colour. Also in one of the results from Embratur there was a concern to typify cachaça as a typical Brazilian product.

Concerning the neutralization strategies used by Embratur, they are all contextualized in order to inform that it is produced locally, although they do not inform that it is a typical product of Brazil, information conveyed when the original term is used. The strategy of cultural equivalence used in the MultArte text loses the Brazilian and popular aspects. The cultural equivalence “white lightning” used by Ícaro hinders comprehension. Would the reader understand that it refers to a drink? Or would he associate it with some kind of cooking process like flambé?

## 5 Conclusion

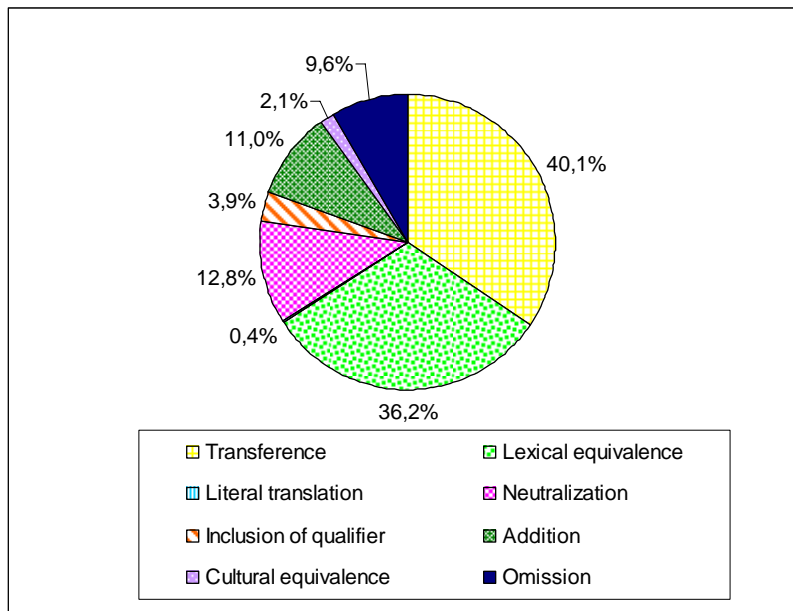
In relation to the strategies used in all the terms analysed, transference was the strategy preferred by the translators, particularly if we consider all the occurrences where transference was used in combination with another strategy (cultural equivalence, literal translation, inclusion of qualifier and, mainly, addition). It represented 46.6 percent of the total translation results (588 analysed). The graphs in Figures 5, 6 and 7 add up to more than 100 percent because of the combined strategies. In total, the combined strategies represented 12 percent of the total translations analysed. The second most used strategy was lexical equivalence (18.4 percent), followed by a virtual tie between neutralization and literal translation. The least used strategy was naturalization used in only one term “sambódromo”.



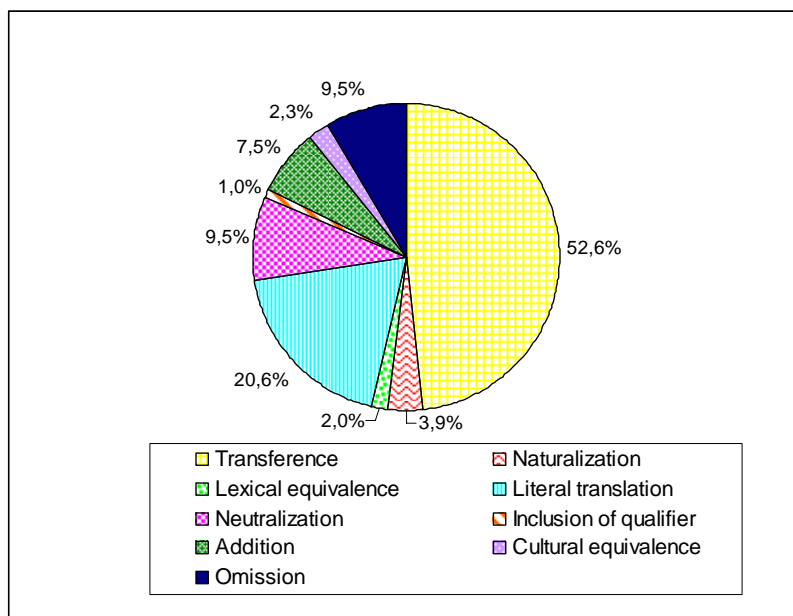
**Figure 5:** General use of strategies



If we analyse the strategies used by subject, differences emerge. Transference is still the most used strategy (40.1 percent in cuisine and 52.6 percent in popular events). However the second most used strategy in cuisine is lexical equivalence, followed by neutralization and then addition. Literal translation was hardly used and naturalization was not used at all. In popular events, the second strategy used was literal translation, neutralization and omission appearing tied in third place. Popular events hardly used the strategies of inclusion of a qualifier and lexical equivalence.



**Figure 6:** Strategies in cuisine



**Figure 7:** Strategies in popular events

Since the tools for Corpus Linguistics are still being developed, in particular the aligners, the scope of inferences was limited. The translator/writer can resort to graphic resources to call attention to a certain word or idea, or to a certain use of strategy. The TXT format limits more thorough analysis. Another limitation was the number of texts that can be analysed with Multiconcord, only ten pairs. Furthermore, for each search you can only see one result at a time, which makes it difficult for comparison as a whole. The translation models were very useful in filling this gap. Despite the limitations it must be acknowledged that without Corpus Linguistics this research would not have been possible. How else could 588 translation results have been selected and analysed?

It is also interesting to observe from the results that the low use of lexical equivalence in popular events suggests that the Brazilian terms in English dictionaries refer mainly to cuisine (e.g. pirarucu, cashew, jaboticaba, among others). The appearance of new Brazilian terms (like feijoada and cachaça) in English dictionaries suggests that Brazilian influence is on the increase.

The results do not corroborate Cronin's theory that cultural references should invariably be explained; neither does it sustain Snell-Hornby's hypotheses that they are explained in the context, for we have seen both cases. Lack of revision, translations which do not convey the idea of the term translated, terms that are not understood by the target reader, all challenge the quality of the dissemination material. Translation stands out as an important transcultural instrument. The goals of translation of this type of material, as in any translation, must always be present. If, as suggested by Venuti, we can mold the image of a country when we translate, when we are translating our own dissemination material, we have all the means to establish a positive image. Robinson (1985: 54) states that "once first impressions are made, they are difficult to change, due to a variety of cognitive biases".

It is not only translators that must be aware of their mediating role, but also the cultural dissemination market, in order to transmit its needs to the translator. The results for the term "cachaça" are an example that we need to worry about the link between market and translator and to reflect on the image we intend to convey. The lack of consensus in translation leads to a loss of the typical characteristic of the term. How will the foreigner understand that it is a cultural reference if each time it is translated in a different way? Another question arises which challenges the efficiency of this material. If this typical product of Brazil is referred to in different manners, how will the foreigner be able to purchase it? Will he be able to walk into a bar, order a brandy or sugarcane spirit and be able to savour our cachaça?

These questions become even more acute if we consider Brazil's commercial foreign policy. As requested by the cachaça producers in Brazil, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been avidly negotiating in the international customs organizations to register cachaça as an alcoholic beverage, differentiated from other beverages produced from sugarcane. The efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs aim at decharacterizing it as rum (a product which is subject to high tariff duties, mainly in the USA, where cachaça can only enter the market if its label includes "Brazilian rum") and at creating a separate category in order for the name cachaça to be well known. Furthermore, there are even requests to grant cachaça the protection of geographical indication, guaranteeing it as an exclusive product of Brazil, as granted to other beverages like Port wine, for example, since there are cachaças being made in other countries like Colombia. However, the

question of geographical indication is a highly controversial issue, on which there is no consensus, not even within the Government of Brazil, much less so internationally.

Another concern that ensues from the results of this research is the real knowledge of the translators of the cultures involved. Is the translator aware of the different effect he will convey to the target reader if he uses “brandy” – a more sophisticated beverage of French origin -, “rum” – a more popular drink associated with the Caribbean -, or “spirits” – a more neutral term? Did the translators who used the pleonasm use it conscientiously?

As a collaboration to improve translations in this field, we suggest that the field of cultural dissemination/tourism be considered a technical area within translation. Due to the specificities that should be observed, the translator is not dealing with general texts but with special purpose texts for which it is necessary to be familiar with the market and to create equivalents that can transfer the “Brazilianness” (multilingual terminology).

In addition, we should develop awareness in future translators at universities and on translator training courses about the specificities of translating cultural dissemination material, considering it a technical field and preparing translators as you would with any other technical area like legal or medical texts. Students should be guided to reference material, and above all, they should be made aware of their responsibility towards the image they are conveying or creating of Brazil.

Only through a concern for better, more efficient cultural dissemination material can we profit from truly transcultural relations, using the perceptions of the foreigner as an input in the development of our international tourism policy and, at the same time, offer him knowledge of our cultural richness and the opportunities afforded for him to enjoy it.

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