

Using a translation corpus to teach English to native speakers of Portuguese¹

Ana Frankenberg-Garcia

Instituto Superior de Línguas e Administração, Lisbon

Working with Portuguese learners of English has brought to my attention a considerable number of errors of English which have to do with my students' prior knowledge of Portuguese. Identifying those errors and interpreting them in the light of contrastive linguistics can help indicating ways in which a Portuguese-English translation corpus can be harnessed to prepare English as a second language teaching materials for native speakers of Portuguese. This paper reports on a few typical examples of Portuguese-English crosslinguistic influence and explains how they can be used as a key to extracting from a Portuguese-English translation corpus comparable facts of linguistic performance which are particularly relevant to Portuguese learners of English.

1. Introduction

An area which has much to gain from computerized analyses of translation corpora is that of second language instruction for learners who share a single first language background. Although the idea of developing second language materials specially designed for specific groups of learners is not novel (Lado, 1957), it has remained unpopular among those who feel languages should be acquired rather than learnt (Krashen and Terrel, 1983) and impracticable in classes where learners have different native languages, as is normally the case in English as a foreign language classes conducted in Britain and the USA. Since it is also from these two countries that the majority of EFL teaching materials originate, it is not surprising that most of such materials have been conceived for language learners in general rather than for learners of a single first language background in particular.

Anyone working with monolingual classes, however, will have noticed that students who share the same native language experience quite a significant number of second language problems that can be traced back to the influence of their first language. In these cases, feedback on the second language problems that the students have in common can have an especially important role. Tomasello and Herron (1988, 1989) demonstrated that students learned more when the influence of the native language upon the target language was openly discussed in class than when instruction focused only on the target language. Frankenberg-Garcia (ongoing research) has collected data in support of the claim that native and target language contrastive grammar exercises that focus on problems of crosslinguistic influence promote second language learning.

In view of these findings, it would be a waste for second language teachers working with monolingual classes to limit themselves to the use of general, all-embracing second language teaching materials conceived for multilingual classes. In addition to the excellent multilingual materials currently available in the market, second language teachers working with monolingual classes should not close their eyes to the opportunity of using their students' first language as a supplementary tool for teaching the second language (see Atkinson, 1993 and Frankenberg-Garcia 1999). It is through this prism that translation corpora become especially important to second language

instruction. Because computerized translation corpora enable us to carry out detailed and systematic comparisons between languages, they can be a very useful source of raw materials for exercises that will help learners become aware of areas in which they tend to get the first and the second language mixed up.

Before pursuing this issue any further, however, a word or two of caution need be said. To begin with, it is extremely important not to forget that second language learners experience a considerable amount of developmental problems which do not bear any relationship with the first language, many of which cannot be understood within the framework of first and second language contrasts nor can they be mapped onto a translation corpus. The second point that must be clarified is that not all differences between languages are relevant to second language learners (Ellis, 1986; Odlin, 1989). There is no point in sifting through a translation corpus to make second language learners focus on language differences that do not affect their learning². So I cannot overly stress that it only makes sense to resort to translation corpora in the second language classroom when addressing issues that have to do with the influence of the first language³. Having said this, in order to determine which comparisons between languages might be useful to the language learner – bearing in mind that translation corpora enable us to access so many comparable facts of linguistic performance that it is very easy to lose sight of the kind of information that really matters - one must first find out, through observation, which parts of the first and the second language do indeed get mixed up.

2. From Crosslinguistic Influence...

Working with Portuguese learners of English has enabled me to identify a number of ways in which my students' English is influenced by their knowledge of Portuguese (Frankenberg-Garcia & Pina, 1997)⁴. This is especially true for areas in which Portuguese and English seem to be similar but are not⁵. An example of this is the way prepositions are used in the two languages, especially when it comes to their use in complementation of certain verbs and adjectives. A typical error by a Portuguese learner of English is to say

[1]*She is married with a Frenchman⁶.

instead of

[1a] She is married to a Frenchman.

This seems to occur because, in Portuguese, you say *casar com*, i.e., you get married ***with** someone instead of **to** someone. Or, to put it differently, because in most situations the meaning of accompaniment expressed by the Portuguese preposition **com** is equivalent to that of the English preposition **with**, Portuguese learners of English tend to think that whenever they have to use **com** in complementation of Portuguese verbs and adjectives, they can use **with** in complementation of semantically similar English forms. Examples [2] and [3] and their literal translations into Portuguese (in italics) illustrate this point further:

[2] *We were surprised **with** the news
*Nós ficámos surpresos **com** a notícia*

[3] *I am worried **with** my brother
*Eu estou preocupado **com** o meu irmão*

There are many other uses of prepositions which Portuguese learners of English find confusing. Examples [4] to [6] show how learners tend to think that whenever they use **em** in complementation of Portuguese verbs or adjectives they can use **in** in complementation of corresponding English word forms.

[4] *I'm going to vote **in** the socialists
*Eu vou votar **nos** [**em** + os] socialistas*

[5] *I'm good **in** Maths
*Eu sou bom **em** matemática*

[6] *I insisted **in** staying
*Eu insisti **em** ficar*

The above seems to occur because the Portuguese preposition **em** is very often, but not always, semantically equivalent to the English preposition **in**. Not only that, but in this particular case it is also worth noting that the two prepositions are also phonetically rather similar.

Examples [7] to [9] below are typical of yet another problem with prepositions:

[7] *Have you read that book **of** Saramago?
*Já leste aquele livro **do** [**de** + o] Saramago.*

[8] *Where is the key **of** that door?
*Onde está a chave **daquela** [**de** + aquela] porta?*

[9] *He depends **of** me
*Ele depende **de** mim*

The above errors can be explained by the fact that the unmarked equivalent of the Portuguese preposition **de** is the English preposition **of**. Portuguese learners of English therefore tend to think that whenever they have to use **de** in Portuguese, they can use **of** in English.

A rather different problem of English that is very common among native speakers of Portuguese is that they tend to use too many nouns when they are writing in English. This often makes their prose sound stilted. For example, it is not uncommon to see them write a sentence like “**Technology makes the dissemination of information easier**” instead of the far more digestible “**Technology enables information to be more easily disseminated**”. This probably occurs because written Portuguese seems to require a greater proportion of nouns than written English, where verb, adverb and adjective forms are often preferred. Examples of this stilted, “artificially nominalized” English together with their perfectly plausible literal translations into Portuguese (in italics) are given in [10] to [11] below:

[10] Although she had a photography course, her framing was uneven.

Apesar de ter um curso de fotografia, os seus enquadramentos eram irregulares.

[11] The company did not have capacity to recycle aluminium.

A empresa não tinha capacidade para reciclar alumínio.

There is no room in this short paper for an exhaustive description of the hundreds of other problems of English that are common among native speakers of Portuguese, and it is not my objective to give one. The few examples of Portuguese-English crosslinguistic influence that have just been presented, however, should serve to indicate how this kind of data can be used as a key to extracting from a translation corpus of Portuguese and English, information which can be particularly relevant to Portuguese learners of English.

3. ... to using translation corpora to produce second language teaching materials

Based on an analysis of the English problems presented the previous section, it is possible to predict that:

- a. Portuguese learners of English tend to find it confusing when the Portuguese preposition **com** is not equivalent to the English **with** (c.f. errors [1] to [3]). A translation corpus can thus help locate numerous sentences in which **com** is equivalent to a preposition other than **with**, for example ⁷:

Esta foi uma breve panorâmica de uma análise muito completa com cerca de 600 páginas.	This has been a brief overview of some 600 pages of thorough analysis.
- Parece-me que não estou a compreender o que é que o senhor deputado quer dizer com "mudança de critérios".	- I am not sure I understand what the honourable Member means by "changing the approach".
Por isso, estamos muito animados com o que o Governo búlgaro está a fazer, que é louvável sob muitos aspectos.	So we are very much encouraged by what the Bulgarian Government is doing which is laudable in many respects.

- b. Portuguese learners of English tend to make mistakes when the Portuguese preposition **em** is not equivalent to the English **in** (c.f. errors [4] to [6]). A translation corpus can thus help locate cases in which **em** is equivalent to a preposition other than **in**, for example:

Em conjugação com este relatório espero que o Parlamento apoie o meu pedido de realização de estudos sobre sistemas de gestão regional, como questão prioritária, com vista à implementação dos mesmos numa (em+uma) escala mais alargada nas (em+as) regiões da Comunidade.	In tandem with this report I would hope that Parliament would support my call for studies on existing regional management systems as a matter of priority, with a view to implementing them on a wider scale within Community regions.
O seu empenhamento no (em+o) ideal europeu continua vivo neste relatório apresentado ao Parlamento.	His commitment to the European ideal lives on in this report to Parliament.
Se pensarem nas (em+as) redes de malha quadrada que poderiam resolver o problema da conservação em muitas regiões, verão que já estamos na (em+a) via da uma política de regionalização.	If you think of the square mesh which could solve the problem of conservation in many areas, you will see that we are already on the road to a regionalisation policy.

- c. Portuguese learners of English tend to go wrong when the Portuguese preposition **de** is not equivalent to the English **of** (c.f. errors [7] to [9]). A translation corpus

can thus help locate all cases in which **de** is equivalent to a preposition other than **of**, for example:

Não estamos a falar da (de+a) posição geral da Europa;	We are not talking about Europe's general position;
O senhor presidente leva em conta que os agricultores das (de+as) regiões periféricas da Europa - Irlanda, Grécia, Espanha e outros países - não podem vir até cá?	Do you take into account farmers on the periphery of Europe – Ireland, Greece, Spain or wherever - who cannot get here?
O próprio funcionamento de uma União Europeia alargada irá depender das (de+as) respostas dadas às questões levantadas neste relatório.	The very functioning of an enlarged European Union will depend on the answers brought to the questions raised in this report.
A acção no domínio da liberdade, da segurança e da justiça deve ser acompanhada das (de+as) necessárias garantias democráticas e judiciais.	Action in the field of freedom, security and justice must be accompanied by the necessary democratic and judicial guarantees.
Mas aí tudo está dependente de a PESC passar ou não a ser, finalmente, uma verdadeira política externa e de segurança comum.	But there everything depends on whether the CFSP finally becomes a real common foreign and security policy.

d. Portuguese learners of English tend to use too many nouns when writing in English (c.f. examples [10] and [11]). A translation corpus can thus help locate cases in which **Portuguese nouns** have been transposed to **English verbs, adverbs or adjectives**, for example:

Em conjugação com este relatório espero que o Parlamento apoie o meu pedido de realização de estudos sobre sistemas de gestão regional, como questão prioritária, com vista à implementação (N) dos mesmos numa escala mais alargada nas regiões da Comunidade.	In tandem with this report I would hope that Parliament would support my call for studies on existing regional management systems as a matter of priority, with a view to implementing (V) them on a wider scale within Community regions.
Espero que todos os deputados desta assembleia aceitem o facto de que nem eu nem os meus colegas do sector dos transportes descuraríamos essas questões aquando da preparação (N) de propostas.	I hope that everyone in the House will accept that neither I nor my colleagues in the transport sector would neglect such issues when preparing (V) proposals.
É com satisfação (N) que vejo serem incluídos no programa os países candidatos à adesão, juntamente com Malta e Chipre.	I am pleased (Adj.) also to see the inclusion of the applicant countries, together with Malta and Cyprus.
O relatório que estamos a debater é o seguimento (N) lógico do relatório Fraga, que debatemos em Novembro.	The report we are discussing follows (V) logically on from the Fraga report which we discussed in November.
Registei com toda a atenção (N) as palavras do senhor Comissário relativamente à Eslováquia - e falo na qualidade de segundo vice-presidente da comissão parlamentar mista.	I noted very carefully (Adv.) the words of the Commissioner in relation to Slovakia - and I speak as the second vice-president of the joint parliamentary committee.

The above information from a translation corpus can then be used to prepare specific exercises for Portuguese learners of English that will help them become aware of problems that have to do with their prior knowledge of Portuguese. Appendix I and II contain two different worksheets for Portuguese learners of English that were prepared out using the above corpus. The first one focuses on the discrepancies between the prepositions **com** and **with**, while the second one deals with Portuguese nouns that have been transposed to other word forms in English⁸.

5. Conclusion

I hope to have been able to demonstrate how crosslinguistic influence can be used as a key to extracting from translation corpora second language teaching materials that are particularly suited to monolingual classes. By observing how language learners who share the same native language get the language they are learning and their native

language mixed up, one can use this information to sieve through a translation corpus so as to locate an enormous quantity of parallel texts containing language contrasts that are likely to be confusing to these learners. Those very same texts can then be adapted into exercises that will force the learners in question to focus on their own, native-language specific second language difficulties. As Granger and Tribble (1998:203) put it,

“Exercises of this type should be particularly motivating for learners as they have to do not just with any old grammatical or lexical problem but with their own attested difficulties”

Notes

1. A translation corpus is understood here as being a bilingual collection of texts held in machine-readable form such that each original text is aligned with its respective translation for automatic processing by text-retrieval software programs .
2. The fact that not all differences between languages are problematic to second language learners is one of the major reasons for the downfall of contrastive analyses in the seventies (Ellis, 1986).
3. This does not mean to say that second language problems that do not bear any relation to the first language cannot gain from the recent advances in corpus linguistics. In fact, as the COBUILD and other projects in the area prove it, quite the opposite is true.
4. The analysis in Frankenberg-Garcia and Pina (1997) is based on classroom observation.
5. Several studies indicate that transfer is more likely to occur when there is some degree of similarity between languages. For example, see Kellerman (1987).
6. This and all other examples of crosslinguistic influence presented in this paper were obtained among Portuguese university students pursuing a degree in translation.
7. The present corpus is based on the translation into Portuguese of the English part of a random selection of debates held in the European Parliament. The texts were processed with the help of the Lingua Multilingual Concordancer.
8. Exercises like the ones presented here are based on the principle of data-driven learning. For a discussion and further examples, see the Virtual DDL Library maintained by Tim Johns at: http://sun1.bham.ac.uk/johnstf/ddl_lib.htm.

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Appendix I

Apesar de a preposição portuguesa **com** ser na maior parte das vezes equivalente à preposição inglesa **with**, isso nem sempre se verifica. Observe os textos abaixo (debates do parlamento europeu) e sublinhe, nas traduções inglesas, as preposições correspondentes a **com**.

Se conseguir tomar decisões, serão decisões lentas, cheias de dificuldades e com base no menor denominador comum.	If it can take decisions, they will be slow, cumbersome and on the basis of the lowest common denominator.
O que eu defendo é que se a União Europeia admite a entrada de nacionais de países terceiros com o propósito de servir as necessidades específicas de determinados Estados-Membros que têm escassez de mão-de-obra, seria repugnante adoptar uma "política de porta giratória", renovando constantemente essa mão-de-obra e não assumindo a responsabilidade pelo contributo económico palpável que é dado pelos trabalhadores de países terceiros.	I would argue that if the European Union admits third country nationals for the purpose of servicing the specific needs of individual Member States' labour shortages then it would be repulsive to adopt a "revolving door" policy by taking no responsibility for the tangible economic input of workers from third countries.
Precisamente porque a Irlanda atravessa neste momento um período de desenvolvimento económico sem precedentes, não devemos esquecer os nossos deveres de carácter humanitário para com os outros.	The very fact that Ireland is currently experiencing an unprecedented economic boom must mean that we do not forget our humanitarian duty to others.
Esta era a única maneira de ser justo, de ser visivelmente justo para com todos os países.	This was the only way to be fair, and to be seen to be fair, to all countries.
Esta nova situação também vem possibilitar a perspectiva da abertura de negociações, com a condição de se confirmar o funcionamento normal, estável e democrático das instituições.	This new situation also allows for the prospect of opening negotiations on condition that the regular, stable and democratic functioning of institutions is confirmed.
Esta foi uma breve panorâmica de uma análise muito completa com cerca de 600 páginas.	This has been a brief overview of some 600 pages of thorough analysis.
- Parece-me que não estou a compreender o que é que o senhor deputado quer dizer com "mudança de critérios".	- I am not sure I understand what the honourable Member means by "changing the approach".
Por isso, estamos muito animados com o que o Governo búlgaro está a fazer, que é louvável sob muitos aspectos.	So we are very much encouraged by what the Bulgarian Government is doing which is laudable in many respects.
É claro que há, de certo modo, uma zona cinzenta, se se disser o seguinte: estou muito bem impressionado com as melhorias significativas que se efectuaram, mas se analisar a interacção entre, por um lado, os parâmetros económicos do requisito relativo à economia de mercado e, por outro, a competitividade, quero mais provas concretas para ter a certeza de que os requisitos estão, de facto, a ser cumpridos.	There is of course a certain grey zone if you say: I am very impressed by the significant improvements which have been made but if I look at the interaction between the economic parameters of the market economy requirement on the one hand and competitiveness on the other, I want more track record to be sure that these requirements are really being met.

Deixámos inteiramente claro que, no que respeita às datas de encerramento, contamos com o encerramento dessas centrais na base dos acordos de segurança nuclear que já tinham sido estabelecidos.	We have made it perfectly clear that as far as closing dates are concerned, we count on the closure of these plants on the basis of the nuclear safety agreements entered into earlier.
Concordo com o relator que grande parte do problema se prende com o fosso existente entre as condições de mercado livre de que actualmente desfrutamos e a falta de harmonização das normas relativas às condições de trabalho.	I agree with the rapporteur that much of the problem is linked to the gap between free market conditions we now enjoy and the lack of harmonisation of rules on working conditions.
Há umas horas atrás, John Prescott, vice-Primeiro-Ministro britânico, estava a falar neste edifício com os deputados trabalhistas britânicos.	Earlier tonight Mr John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister, was speaking in this building to the British Labour members.
Por último, gostaria de referir também o facto de que a Comissão deverá emitir orientações em 1999, a fim de ajudar os Estados-Membros na preparação dos seus futuros programas que vão ser cofinanciados com verbas dos fundos estruturais.	Finally, I should like to mention also the fact that the Commission should issue guidelines in 1999 to help Member States in the preparation of their future programmes to be co-financed by the structural funds.

Agora faça um glossário, com base nos exemplos acima, de expressões portuguesas que levam **com** e expressões inglesas equivalentes que exigem preposições diferentes de **with**.

Com base em... → On the basis of

Appendix II

Sabe-se que o português é uma língua mais nominal do que o inglês. Isso significa que na língua portuguesa há uma tendência para se utilizar uma maior proporção de substantivos do que na língua inglesa.

1. Observe os exemplos abaixo (traduções de debates do parlamento europeu*) e sublinhe, na versão inglesa, as formas equivalentes aos substantivos em negrito da versão portuguesa.

Mas ainda por cima, o próprio funcionamento da União Europeia pode com toda a facilidade ser paralisado por um único governo que decida fazê-lo.	But on top of that the very functioning of the European Union can so easily be brought to a halt by a single government if it chosed to do so.
De momento - e este é um aspecto que sempre sublinhei com grande insistência no nosso hemisiciclo - continua a não se conseguir incorporar Schengen no primeiro pilar.	For the time being - and this is a point I have always emphasised very strongly in this hemicycle - there is the continuing failure to incorporate Schengen into the first pillar.
- Não preciso de recordar ao senhor Presidente em exercício do Conselho como é essencial o cumprimento do calendário, não apenas para garantir a necessária legitimidade democrática para o pacote de medidas Agenda 2000 mas também para permitir que os programas e as políticas sejam executados em tempo útil e com eficácia .	- I do not need to remind the President-in-Office of how essential it is to meet the timetable, not only to secure the necessary democratic legitimacy for the Agenda 2000 package but also to allow programmes and policies to be implemented in a timely and effective manner.
Nos pareceres do ano passado, a Comissão concluiu que todos os países candidatos, com excepção da Eslováquia, cumpriam, em termos gerais, o critério político para a adesão.	In last year's opinions the Commission concluded that all the candidate countries, except Slovakia, broadly met the political criterion for membership.
Registei com toda a atenção as palavras do senhor Comissário relativamente à Eslováquia - e falo na qualidade de segundo vice-presidente da comissão parlamentar mista.	I noted very carefully the words of the Commissioner in relation to Slovakia - and I speak as the second vice-president of the joint parliamentary committee.
Aguardo com grande expectativa que o Primeiro-Ministro da Eslováquia nos diga claramente quais são os seus planos a este respeito.	I expect very much that the Prime Minister of Slovakia will make clear what his plans are in this respect.
Estamos a trabalhar em estreita colaboração com as autoridades daquele país, e inclusivamente com as instituições financeiras internacionais, para tentar que a máquina das reformas volte a funcionar a toda a velocidade.	We are working very closely together with the authorities there, including the international financial institutions, to try to get the engine running at full speed again.
É essa a situação no que se refere à Letónia, com excepção de um certo número de pontos concretos que mencionámos no relatório e nos quais gostaríamos que fossem introduzidas mais melhorias.	That is the situation with Latvia, except for a number of concrete points that we have referred to in the report where we would like to see some further improvement.
Como afirmei com toda a franqueza , até agora a nossa conclusão é que esta não é uma prioridade política suficientemente importante no âmbito das políticas dos países em questão.	As I said quite frankly, so far our conclusion is that it is not enough of a political priority in the policies of the countries concerned.

Precisamos dessas acções e precisamos de calendários, e é com grande satisfação que oiço dizer que está a avançar o trabalho de desenvolvimento de indicadores.	We need these actions and we need timetables and I am very pleased to hear that the work on developing indicators is going ahead.
Também partimos do princípio de que todos os medicamentos homeopáticos só são utilizados quando controlados por profissionais com qualificações reconhecidas.	We would also assume that all homeopathic remedies are used only on the basis that they are handled by qualified practitioners.
Este Parlamento, por um lado, disse, com razão , que precisamos de apoiar muitos projectos e operadores pequenos, porque os vemos actuar no terreno.	This Parliament, on the one hand, rightly said that we need to support many small projects and operators because we see those on the ground.
Portanto, o que a deputada Nana Mouskouri tentou alcançar, e a razão por que obteve o apoio da nossa comissão, foi desenvolver os programas ARIANE, RAFAEL e CALEIDOSCÓPIO e o que de melhor eles têm, mas também reflectir as opiniões da Comissão com a criação de uma perspectiva horizontal que leva em conta a mesma proposta feita pela Comissão para conseguir a criação de redes, projectos interdisciplinares e grandes projectos simbólicos.	So what Nana Mouskouri attempted to achieve, and why she won support in our committee, was to build on Ariane, Raphael and Kaleidoscope and the best of that, but also to reflect the views of the Commission in creating a horizontal perspective which takes into account the same proposal the Commission has made to achieve the creation of networks, inter-disciplinary projects and big symbolic projects.
- Senhora Presidente, votei a favor deste relatório mas fi-lo com extrema relutância .	- Madam President, I voted in favour of this report but extremely reluctantly.

2. Complete o quadro abaixo:

Versão portuguesa	Versão inglesa
Facilidade (N)	<i>easily (Adv)</i>
Insistência (N)	<i>strongly (Adv)</i>
Cumprimento (N)	<i>to meet (V)</i>
Eficácia (N)	
Excepção (N)	
Atenção (N)	
Expectativa (N)	
Colaboração (N)	
Execução (N)	
Franqueza (N)	
Satisfação (N)	
Qualificações (N)	
Razão (N)	
Criação (N)	
Relutância (N)	

3. Concluindo:

Muitas vezes, ao traduzir de português para inglês, precisamos de transformar substantivos em.....; e ao traduzir de inglês para português, é comum termos de transformar..... em