

## The Case of *laugh*: a Parallel Corpus-based Research

Josimeire Cristina Martins\*

**Abstract:** *Through a contrastive analysis of a parallel corpus, it is possible to verify the interlingual relations from an original to a translated text. This paper shows the results of a study using parallel corpora to identify how the word laugh is translated into Portuguese and to analyze these relations.*

**Keywords:** *parallel corpora; corpus linguistics; translation.*

**Resumo:** *Com a análise contrastiva de um corpus paralelo, podemos verificar as relações interlinguais de um texto original para um texto traduzido. O presente artigo mostra os resultados de um estudo utilizando corpora paralelos para identificar as traduções da palavra laugh para o português e analisar essas relações.*

**Palavras-chave:** *corpora paralelos; lingüística de corpus; tradução.*

### Introduction

The aim of this article is to report the results of a study using parallel *corpora* constituted of original and translated English and Portuguese texts. Our purpose is to identify how the word *laugh* is translated into Portuguese and try to build the interlingual relations through a bi-directional research, from an original text to its translation equivalent.

---

\* Mestranda do Programa de Estudos Lingüísticos e Literários em Inglês da FFLCH/USP.

MARTINS, Josimeire Cristina. *The Case of laugh: a Parallel Corpus-based Research*.

For this research we used COMPARA, an electronic parallel corpus, constituted of original texts in Portuguese and English and its translations into these same languages. This corpus is freely accessed through the Web and can be used to investigate the process of translation, helping not only researchers, but also translators, learners or anyone who works with these languages.

Besides COMPARA, we also made a research in the British National Corpus (BNC), a corpus constituted of original texts in British English. This kind of research is important since it lets us identify and analyze translations and their problems and difficulties, as well as the preference translators have for certain words.

We based our research on the word *laugh* and its translations into Portuguese. The method used is based on the contrastive analysis of Schmieid (2000) and Váradi (2001).

## Methodology

According to Baker “translated language on the whole (within a particular historical and social context) may have certain features that distinguish it from original language” (1999: 291).

Our question is whether the variety of words occurs mainly in the original or the translated text. Baker says that

“the choice of a suitable equivalent will always depend not only on the linguistic system or systems being handled by the translator, but also on the way both the writer of the source text and the producer of the target text, i.e. the translator, choose to manipulate the linguistic systems in question.” (Baker, 1992:18)

We hypothesize that the author tends to use a greater variety of equivalents since he is dealing with his own language, while the translator would tend to avoid such variety, using the same lexical item more frequently.

The following keys were used in the process: OE – original English; TE – translated English; OP – original Portuguese and TP – translated Portuguese.

COMPARA lets us choose the variety of English and Portuguese we want to investigate in our search. We used Brazilian Portuguese and American and British English. We began our search with the word *laugh* used as a noun, in both singular and plural forms and its translations into Portuguese. Then, we made another search, with all the words found in the translation, this time

*Crop*, 10, 2004

using the original Portuguese corpus, looking for the results in English. Figure 1 shows the procedure.



Figure 1 – The structure of the search

Through this methodology we could verify the number of occurrences in original and translated English and Portuguese and analyze the words that were used most.

Besides these searches, we also looked the words up in monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, in a thesaurus as well as in the BNC corpus.

laugh [la:f; læf]  
n 1 riso, risada. 2 escárnio. 3 piada, coisa engraçada. •vt+vi 1 rir, gargalhar. 2 escarnecer. to have the last laugh rir por último. to laugh at rir-se de.  
Source: Michaelis online dictionary

Main Entry: <sup>2</sup>laugh  
Function: *nom*  
1 : the act of laughing  
2 a : a cause for derision or merriment : JOKE b : an expression of scorn or mockery : JEER  
3 plural : DIVERSION, SPORT <play baseball just for laugh>  
Source: Thesaurus online dictionary

**risada**  
[De *riso* + *-ada*.]  
S. f.  
1. **Riso (1).**  
2. **Riso franco e estrepitoso; gargalhada.**  
3. **Riso conjunto de muitas pessoas**

**gargalhada**  
[De *gargalhar* + *-ada*.]  
S. f.  
1. **Risada franca e mais ou menos ruidosa e prolongada; casquinada, gaitada.**

**riso**  
[Do lat. *risu*.]  
S. m.  
1. **Ato ou efeito de rir; risada.**  
2. **Alegria, contentamento, satisfação.**  
3. **Coisa ridícula.** [Cf. *riço*, do v. *riçar*.]

**Riso amarelo.** 1. Riso forçado, contrafeito; sorriso amarelo.  
**Riso sardônico.** 1. Med. Expressão facial indicativa de forma de arrebato espasmódico ou tetânico de dentes ou riso involuntário. 2. P. ext. Riso forçado, ou sarcástico, que lembra essa expressão.  
**Perdido de riso.** 1. Que não pode conter o riso.

Source: Houaiss online dictionary

Figure 2: Some examples of the words *laugh*, *riso*, *risada* and *gargalhada* as nouns in mono and bilingual dictionaries

We started our search with the word *laugh*, from original English texts into translated Portuguese. We got 6 examples as a noun out of the 11 found in COMPARA.

EBDLIT2 (104):	She gave a brief, barking <b>laugh</b> , which unsettled me.	Ela deu uma <b>risada</b> curta, como um latido, que me deixou apreensivo.
EBDLIT2 (1107):	It was a resonant, full-bodied <b>laugh</b> , rather a surprise given her petite figure and general style of poised professional career woman; and when she laughed she threw back her head and shook it from side to side, making her hair fan out.	Era uma <b>risada</b> risonante, cheia de vontade, um pouco fora do comum, dada sua forma <i>petite</i> e seu estilo geral de mulher profissional de carreira; e quando ela ria, jogava a cabeça para trás balançava-a de um lado para o outro, fazendo seus cabelos se abrirem como um abano.
EBDLIT2 (1673):	That's always bad news: some idiot with a very loud, inane <b>laugh</b> , who goes on baying or cackling or shrieking at something long after everybody else has stopped, or starts up when nobody else is laughing, in the lull between two gags.	Isso é sempre má notícia: uma idiota qualquer (por alguma razão, é quase sempre uma mulher) com uma <b>risada</b> alta, num ritmo monótono, que começa com uma espécie de balido ou cacarejado ou grito, rindo de algo que todos já riram há muito tempo, ou começa a rir quando ninguém está rindo, naquele vão entre as linhas engraçadas.

Figure 3: Some examples of the search in COMPARA

From the 6 examples, 4 were translated as *risada*, 1 as *fazer mais engraçado* and 1 as *cair na gargalhada*. The next step was to search for the head words we got in original Portuguese texts and compare the words used in the translation into English. The noun *risada(s)* returned 9 examples:

PBAA2(233):	E soltou uma <b>risada</b> .	and she broke into <b>giggles</b> .
PBCB1(213):	Recrudescem as <b>risadas</b> .	The <b>laughter</b> grows louder.
PBMAA1 (186):	Cada frase que proferia era interrompida com uma <b>risada</b> prolongada e sonora, e com um certo caído de cabeça para trás, talvez gracioso se não tivesse muito de afetado.	Every sentence she uttered was punctuated with a long, sonorous <b>giggle</b> and a certain backward toss of her head that would perhaps have been characterful if it had not been so highly affected.
PBMAA1 (212):	-- Qual... respondeu Vidinha acompanhando este <i>qual</i> da sua costumada <b>risada</b> ; estou já tão cansada... que nem posso!	«Aww,» Vidinha replied, accompanying that «aww» with her customary <b>giggle</b> . «I'm so tired now... that I just can't.»

Figure 5: Search results for *risada(s)* in COMPARA

PBAA2 (1264):	As senhoras espantaram-se, mas abriram logo em <b>gargalhadas</b> .	The ladies, startled at first, immediately broke into giggles.
PBAA2 (1613):	E, após uma <b>gargalhada</b> seca, voltou-se para Raimundo e ofereceu-lhe com ar pretensioso «um talher na sua parca mesa».	And after a dry chuckle, he turned toward Raimundo and pretentiously offered him 'a place at my humble table.'
PBAD1(5):	Se fosse Tuim por exemplo, João tinha dado uma boa <b>gargalhada</b> .	If it'd been Tuim, for example, João would have laughed outright.
PBMA2(207):	A figura soltou uma <b>gargalhada</b> , que produziu em torno de nós o efeito de um tufão; as plantas torceram-se e um longo gemido quebrou a mudez das coisas externas.	The figure let out a guffaw, which produced the effect of a typhoon around us; plants twisted and a long moan broke the silence of external things.

Figure 6: Some examples of the search results for *gargalhada(s)* in the COMPARA

We also looked up the same words in the BNC corpus to verify the number of occurrences and then analyzed the results.

## Results

The process mentioned in the Methodology section was applied to all the words found. Table 1 shows the results from this process and Table 2 shows the occurrences found in the BNC corpus:

Original Texts	Word	Occurrences	Translated texts	Words found and occurrences
OE	laugh(s)	06 (as nouns) (out of 11)	TP	risada (04) fazer mais engraçado (01) cair na gargalhada (1)
OP	risada(s)	09 (03 sing. e 06 plural)	TE	giggle(s) (3) giggle (v) (1) laugh (1) laughter (4)
OE	giggle(s)	-	TP	-
OE	laughter	06	TP	risada(s) (4) rir (v) (2) gargalhada (1)
OP	gargalhada(s)	14	TE	giggles (2) chuckle (1) laugh (v) (7) guffaw (1) laughter (1) laughing (n) (1) chuckles of laughter (1) laugh (n) (1)
OE	guffaw(s)	-	-	-

Table 1: Occurrences of the words laugh, laughter, giggle, guffaw and chuckle (original texts) and their translations.

Word	Results	Occurrences
laugh (n)	50	891
laughs (n)	50	148
giggle (n)	50	130
giggles (n)	50	119
guffaw (n)	26	26
guffaws (n)	20	20
laughter	50	2065
chuckle (n)	50	139
chuckles (n)	21	21

Table 2: Examples found in the BNC (British National Corpus)

Looking at the results in Table 1, we can notice that the noun *laugh* was translated as *risada* 66% of the time and as *gargalhada* 16%. The same did not occur when we got the results translated into English. The noun *laugh* occurred only in 11% of the examples, while *giggle* (as a noun) occurred 33% and *laughter* 44%, showing that the noun *laugh* was not the main choice in translations.

Analyzing all the returns we got from the original English texts, we noticed that there was a greater variety of equivalents chosen by the translators, not by authors, as the nouns *giggle*, *guffaw* and *chuckle* did not occur in original English. On the other hand, we did not have great differences from original and translated Portuguese texts on the variety of equivalents, although we found more occurrences of *gargalhada* (14 occurrences) in original Portuguese than in translated texts.

The BNC results showed a considerable difference from the number of occurrences between the noun *laugh* (1039) that represented only 11% of the occurrences in translated English texts and *giggle(s)* (249) that occurred 33%, reinforcing the numbers that show the preference translators have for equivalents.

## Conclusion

Toury says that “in translation, textual relations obtaining in the original are often modified, sometimes to the point of being totally ignored, in favour of more habitual options offered by a target repertoire” (Toury *apud* Baker:

*Crop*, 10, 2004

289), that is, translations avoid innovations, something that would not happen to the author, who tends to use a greater variety of words, as a stylistics resource or because the language itself offers these varieties.

This was not what we found in our research, which showed a greater variety of words in the translated English texts, not in the original ones, although it is important to bear in mind the limitation of the corpus.

However, we hope this paper demonstrated some of the researchs that can be done using a parallel corpus in the investigation of the translation process and word choice.

## References

- BAKER, Mona. *In Other Words. A coursebook on translation*. Routledge, London, 1992
- BAKER, Mona. The role of corpora in investigating the linguistic behaviour of professional translators. In: *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 1999, vol. 4, pp. 281-298
- SCHMIED, Josef and FINK, Barbara. Corpus-based contrastive lexicology: the case of English with and its German translation equivalents. In: Botley, McEnery & Wilson. 2000, p. 157-176.
- SCHMIED, Josef. Translation corpora in contrastive research, translation and language learning. In: *TradTerm 10 (Revista do Centro Interdepartamental de Tradução e Terminologia FFLCH/USP)*. 2004, São Paulo: Humanitas, p. 83-115)
- VÁRADI T.; KISS, G. *Equivalence and Non-equivalence in Parallel Corpora*. In: *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*. 2002, vol. 6, pp. 167-177)
- VARANTOLA, Krista. Disposable corpora as intelligent tools in translation. In: *Cadernos de Tradução*. 2002, n. 9, pp. 171-189)

## Electronic references

On-line Dictionaries (pages accessed on August 5, 2004)

[www.thesaurus.com](http://www.thesaurus.com)

<http://www.m-w.com/home.htm>

<http://houaiss.uol.com.br/busca.jhtm?>

[http://cf6.uol.com.br/michaelis/dicionar.cfm?dicion\\_id=8](http://cf6.uol.com.br/michaelis/dicionar.cfm?dicion_id=8)