TRANSLATION OF IDIOMS: AN ANALYSIS OF OFFICIAL SUBTITLES IN THE TV SERIES BATES MOTEL

TRADUÇÃO DE EXPRESSÕES IDIOMÁTICAS: UMA ANÁLISE DAS LEGENDAS OFICIAIS NA SÉRIE DE TV BATES MOTEL



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Abstract: This study investigates how six idioms from the TV Series *Bates Motel*, Season 01, Episode 06 (BMS01E06) are translated from English into Brazilian Portuguese (BP) in the official subtitles following one of Baker's (1992) idioms translation suggestions: paraphrase. Specifically, it analyzes the meaning of such idioms in the English context compared to their meaning rendered in the BP context. The results point out that: i) the idioms may highlight the inexistence of English-Portuguese one-to-one idioms; ii) the figurativeness of the English idioms is found in different lexical items in BP paraphrases; iii) the subtitling technical constraints of time, space and presentation have been fulfilled in all cases analyzed. The conclusion reached is that culture-specific idioms can be translated in a particular context and subtitling translation may link different peoples and cultures.

Keywords: Idioms translation. Official subtitling. TV Series Bates Motel.

Resumo: Este artigo investiga como seis expressões idiomáticas (EIs) da Série de TV *Bates Motel*, Temporada 01, Episódio 06 (BMT01E06) são traduzidas da Língua Inglesa (LI) para o Português Brasileiro (PB) nas legendas oficiais seguindo uma das sugestões de tradução de EIs de Baker (1992), paráfrase. Especificamente, analisa-se o sentido dessas EIs no contexto de LI comparando com as paráfrases no contexto do PB. Os resultados apontam que: i) as EIs sinalizam a possível inexistência de expressões similares entre LI e PB; ii) o sentido figurativo das EIs em LI é encontrado em diferentes itens lexicais nas paráfrases em PB; iii) os aspectos técnicos de legendagem (tempo, espaço, apresentação) são seguidos nos casos analisados. Conclui-se que EIs culturais podem ser traduzidas em contexto particular e que a tradução de legendas pode conectar diferentes povos e culturas.

Palavras-chave: Tradução de expressões idiomáticas. Legendagem oficial. Série de tevê Bates Motel.

1. Initial remarks towards the translation of idioms

dioms are culture-specific expressions which also allow little or no syntactical variation, posing a great challenge to the translator (ADELNIA; DASTJERDI, 2011; BAKER, 1992; GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2009; STRAKŠIENE, 2009). However, it might be possible to translate them from a source language (SL) into a target language (TL). Hence, Baker (1992) proposes four different ways to translate them: i) using an idiom similar

in form and meaning in the TL; ii) translating an idiom in a different form in the TL, but with a similar meaning; iii) paraphrasing an idiom in the TL; and iv) omitting an idiom in the TL.

Considering these points, this paper uses parts of the findings from an undergraduate thesis (Silva, 2015), which focused on the translation of idioms from the English language (EL) into Brazilian Portuguese (BP) in the official subtitles of the American TV Series *Bates Motel*, Season 01, Episode 06 (BMS01E06). The results found therein illustrate that, except for 02 idioms not translated from 60 idioms selected from BMS01E06, 58 have been rendered into BP following Baker's (1992) three different suggestions of idioms translation, namely: i) similar in form and meaning (07); ii) different form but similar meaning (04); iii) paraphrase $(50)^3$.

From some of the findings discussed in the original work, this paper investigates how six idioms from BMS01E06 have been paraphrased into BP official subtitles, attempting to analyze their meaning in the TV Series EL context compared to the BP context.

2. Cultural translation of idioms in the subtitling context

To begin with, idioms are non-compositional. They cannot be understood based on the attribution of isolated meanings to each of their components (ADELNIA; DASTJERDI, 2011; BAKER, 1992; GRANT; BAUER, 2004; LEAH, 2012; MOON, 1998; RIVA; CAMACHO, 2010; STRAKŠIENE, 2009). Furthermore, falling under the concept of institutionalization, which concerns the degree a certain community is able to recognize a particular phrase (GRANT; BAUER, 2004; MOON, 1998; RIVA; CAMACHO, 2010), idioms are institutionalized because the more they have been constantly spoken by a considerable amount of people from linguistic communities over a determined period of time, the more they wind up being widely committed to the collective memory of speakers. Lastly, idioms allow "[...] neither permutation nor paradigmatic replacement nor addition or deletion of elements" (GRANT; BAUER, 2004, p. 44). However, Moon (1998) states that idioms can

allow for syntactical variation without change in meaning, such as in verb variation ("set/start the ball rolling", p. 125) and in the particle level ("a bolt from/out of the blue"; "go a/round in circles", p. 129).

Riva and Camacho (2010) and Moon (1998) argue that an essential feature of idioms is their connotative meaning. A speaker contextually uses an idiom when s/he desires to be comic, ironic, persuasive, exaggerative, or when s/he wants to express a full range of emotions such as happiness or anger (RIVA; CAMACHO, 2010). Moreover, idioms "include actions, situations, emotions in their meaning" (STRAKŠIENE, 2009, p. 14). For Leah (2012) idioms also describe events, people and things. One type of idiom is phrasal verbs (Moon, 1998), believed to be the most commonly used idiomatic expression (LEAH, 2012). They are basically defined as "[...] the combination of a verb and a preposition, a verb and an adverb, or a verb with both an adverb and a preposition" (ADELNIA; DASTJERDI, 2011, p. 880).

Furthermore, idioms are regarded as culture-specific, allowing little or no syntactical variation and thus posing a great challenge to the subtitles translator (ADELNIA; DASTJERDI, 2011; BAKER, 1992, GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2009; STRAKŠIENE, 2009). In the translation realm, the translator wished for in these current times is the cultural mediator, whose role is to interpret "expressions, intentions, perceptions, and expectations of each cultural group to the other" so as to establish and balance communication between them (TAFT, 1981 apud KATAN, 1999, p. 12). Moreover, if the translator works both on language and culture, the meaning to be conveyed "[...] is not semantic (or idealized) meaning but culture-bound meaning, or meaning in the context of culture" (KATAN, 1999, p. 72-73). In other words, the latter author calls attention to the need for more culturally directed and contextualized meanings that will be transmitted across languages through different texts.

Despite the challenge to translate culture-specific idioms, Baker (1992) proposes four different ways to deal with that. The first one is to use an idiom of similar form and meaning. It "involves using an idiom in the target language which conveys roughly the same meaning as that of the source-language idiom and, in addition, consists of equivalent lexical items" (BAKER, 1992, p. 73).

In addition, the second one concerns the use of an idiom similar in meaning but dissimilar in form. It refers to finding "[...] an idiom or fixed expression in the target language which has a meaning similar to that of the source idiom or expression, but which consists of different lexical items" (BAKER, 1992, p. 74).

The translation through paraphrase is the most common way of translating idioms. It can be used when there is no similar idiom between the SL and the TL or when it is not adequate to use an idiomatic expression in the target text due to stylistic differences between the source and target languages (BAKER, 1992).

The last way suggested to translate idioms is called omission and is used when no idiom has been found in the TL and when none of the foregoing suggestions has been able to be followed (BAKER, 1992).

In this paper, the analysis will focus on how some idioms have been subtitled and technically displayed on the bottom of the screen. Among other rules, subtitles need to abide by space, time and presentation features (GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2009). As readability of the text is germane, subtitles should have up to two lines of two seconds each, ranging from 32 to 40 characters in a 35-mm film (mostly used on TV) or 24 to 27 in a 16-mm audiovisual text (DÍAZ CINTAS; REMAEL, 2007; LUYKEN et al., 1991). The amount of time left for the subtitles depends on three factors: i) the amount of text; ii) the reading speed of the viewers (from 150 to 180 words per minute); iii) the intervals between a subtitle and the next one (1/2 second) (LUYKEN et al., 1991). Lastly, subtitles cannot take up more than 20% of screen space because legibility factors need to be obeyed, such as "[...] the size of the characters, their position on screen [...], technology used for the projection of subtitles in the cinema (DTS or Dolby), TV broadcast, DVD emulation, etc. [...]" (GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2009, p. 22).

3. Designing the study on idioms translation in the TV Series Bates Motel

This session presents an overview of the TV Series and Episode 06 on which this study has been based, as well as the methodological concepts and procedures adopted here.

3.1. Overview of the TV Series Bates Motel and Episode 06, The Truth

Bates Motel is an American TV Series created by Carlton Cuse, Kerry Ehrin and Anthony Cipriano, and produced by Universal Television for A&E cable television. The first season consists of 10 episodes from 40 to 47 minutes each and aired from March 18th, 2013 to May 20th, 2013. Based on Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* movie, this TV Series portrays the intricate relationship between Norma (overprotective mom) and Norman Bates (emotional, mysterious boy who experiences blackouts and has auditory and visual hallucinations). Following the death of Norman's father, they both move out to Wine Pine Bay and buy a motel, naming it Bates Motel. In this new town, Norma and Norman Bates undergo onerous situations.

In Episode 06, *The truth*, some of the events portrayed are featured as follows: i) Norma is astonished to discover that Deputy Zack Shelby, her love affair, leads a secret sex slavery business and has drugged and forced Asian sex slave Jiao to have sex with him; ii) Dylan (Norma's oldest son) and Norman find and then dispose of Keith Summer's belt, the evidence which could incriminate Norma in Summer's murder; iii) Shelby discovers that Norma, Norman and Dylan have known about his business and attempts to kill all of them in Norma's house; iv) Norma tells Dylan that Norman killed his own father after he blacked out for seeing her being beaten up.

3.2. Identifying idioms and their translations

Moreira's and Caleffe's (2008) interpretative paradigm, descriptive methodology and qualitative research typology have been followed. This paradigm will be drawn on as a way to be involved with the data by trying to both interpret and analyze them based on perspectives toward the translation of idioms, as well as on a specific theoretical background comprising such areas as Linguistics (idioms) and Translation Studies (translating idioms for the context of subtiling). Furthermore, based on the descriptive methodology, idioms will be analyzed considering their contexts of use, and for that reason their meanings must be investigated and their contexts of use described. Lastly, the qualitative research typology will be employed through the selection of the idioms from BMS01E06 and the observation of their translations along with the explanation of the contexts in which these idioms have been applied.

*Bandicam*⁴ program (version 2.1.1.731) has been used to select video excerpts and static images which show the occurrences of some idioms being spoken by some characters and paraphrased into the BP official subtitles displayed on the bottom of the screen.

Building upon the theories and methodological aspects mentioned, the procedures to achieve the objectives of this paper are presented next:

- 1) Selection of seven figures in which the idioms paraphrased in the subtitles are spotted;
- Analyses of six idioms focusing on these idioms' meanings in English and Brazilian Portuguese, considering the:
 - a. (non-)compositionality of the idioms in context (EL);
 - b. translations of the idioms in context (BP paraphrases and subtitles).

4. Idioms translation in the TV Series Bates Motel's official subtitles

4.1. "take care of", "cracked up to be"

Norman, Norma and Emma leave Norma's house and are walking toward Emma's car parked in Bates Motel's parking lot. Norma asks if Emma wants her to call her mom, but she says she has not seen her for a while. Then, she unburdens herself: "I guess taking care of a kid with CF⁵ isn't the... the good time it's cracked up to be." In this context, the first idiom means "to oversee and protect someone or something; to care for someone or something" (SPEARS, 2005, p. 671), while the second one refers to something/someone that is "alleged or understood to be something" (SPEARS, 2005, p. 126).

Drawing on the context of the scene, both idioms should be understood pragmatically as they refer to two facts. First and foremost, Emma initially focuses on the action of one overseeing/protecting a kid with CF (LEAH, 2012; STRAKŠIENE, 2009). Then, she ends her turn by referring to the negative situation ("isn't the good time...") in which one person finds herself/himself while dealing with a kid with CF. Therefore, overseeing/protecting a kid with that disease is not what one thought it was (positively) alleged to be. Particularly in Emma's situation, both idioms refer to how frustrated Emma's mother felt after her daughter was diagnosed with CF, and also to how disappointed Emma became as she had expected that her mother could have supported her, and not vanished (LEAH, 2012; MOON, 1998; RIVA, CAMACHO, 2010; STRAKŠIENE, 2009).

This contextual background has been considered by the cultural mediator (KATAN, 1999; TAFT, 1981 apud KATAN, 1999) to convey the figurative meanings of both idioms through paraphrase (BAKER, 1992), since similar idioms between BP and English have not been found. The idiom "take care of" has been rendered as a verb followed by a preposition in the subtitle "*Acho que cuidar de uma criança com FC*..." (Figure 1), whose back-translation⁶ could be found in 'I think taking care of a kid with CF...'. Furthermore, the paraphrase of "cracked up to be", modified by the noun phrase "the good time", came as the last inflected verb in the subtitle "... *não é tão divertido quanto esperam*." (Figure 2). A back-translation of this could be '... it is not as much fun as you could expect'.

The Portuguese translation of "take care of" sheds light on the thoughtful, considerate action of a mother who could give love to a daughter who had just been diagnosed with CF. But to the daughter's surprise, this affection was not provided to her. She might have even expected that her mother would find the task of looking after her a pleasurable one, but judging by the severity and the work that the disease would bring along, abandoning the child was the best choice. Therefore, the frustration of a mother to have found out that her daughter had a more serious disease than expected, as well as the daughter's disappointment to have been abandoned for her clinical condition could be retrieved in the BP translation of the idiom "cracked up to be".

Figure 1. Emma starts making her point about how one would feel if s/he took care of a kid with CF (00:11:26)



BATES MOTEL. Developed by: Anthony Cipriano, Carlton Cuse, Kerry Ehrin. [S.I.]: Carlton Cuse Productions; Kerry Ehrin Productions; Universal Television, 2013.



Figure 2. Emma finally says that taking care of a kid with CF is not what it was (positively) alleged to be (00:11:30)

BATES MOTEL. Developed by: Anthony Cipriano, Carlton Cuse, Kerry Ehrin. [S.I.]: Carlton Cuse Productions; Kerry Ehrin Productions; Universal Television, 2013.

The idiom "take care of", appearing in the first line of the two-line subtitle shown in Figure 1, has featured for 04 seconds on air. While the first line has 13 characters, the second one contains 20 characters. "Cracked up to be" has come in Figure 2's two-line subtitle, remaining for 03 seconds on air. As the first line contains 16 characters, the next one presents 14 characters. On the whole, both subtitles obey subtitling technical rules of time, space and presentation (DÍAZ CINTAS; REMAEL, 2007; GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2009; LUYKEN et al., 1991).

4.2. "let go", "bring down"

The scene started by Dylan saying he had put down first and last months on his new place. One of the reasons why Dylan is moving out is to live a tranquil life. He invites Norman to come along as he believes Norma is a bad influence on him. When Norman asks him about what will happen to his mom, Dylan says: i) "You gotta let her go"; ii) "She's just gonna bring you down with her". Whereas the former idiom means "to stop holding someone" (THE FREE DICTIONARY.COM, 2015b), the latter means "to cause something to fail" (THE FREE DICTIONARY.COM, 2015a).

In the TV Series context, both idioms are rather related. In that scene, "let go" is figurative in the sense that Norman is not exactly holding Norma with his hands or handcuffs. Actually, what Dylan has argued about is that both his brother and Norma are too close. Building upon the fact that Norma will cause Norman to fail if this closeness between them both continues, Dylan seems to persuade the brother to let his mother go (LEAH, 2012; MOON, 1998; RIVA; CAMACHO, 2010; STRAKŠIENE, 2009). Particularly through the idiom "bring down", Dylan has implied that Norma will cause Norman to be unsuccessful the rest of his life. If she fails, she will take Norman along with her as well.

This TV Series background has been analyzed by the cultural mediator (KATAN, 1999; TAFT, 1981 apud KATAN, 1999) in order to share with the Brazilian public approximate translations. Because English-Portuguese idioms have not been found, paraphrases have suited this subtitling context (BAKER, 1992). The idiom "let go" is detected as a verb in the subtitle "*Precisa se desapegar dela*." (Figure 3), back-translated as 'You need to let go of her'. Likewise, the phrasal verb "bring down" (ADELNIA; DASTJERDI, 2011; LEAH, 2012; MOON, 1998) has been rendered in a verb in "*Ela só vai te afundar com ela*." (Figure 4), back-translated as 'She is only going to bring you down with her'.

Looking upon the first translation, two points ought to be mentioned. First and foremost, the translation of the modal verb "should" implies that leaving Norma is a necessary task rather than a suggestion that Norman may follow. In addition, this idea is strengthened by the translation of the idiom itself, which makes clear that Dylan is persuading his brother to leave his mom. Dylan continues his argument by exposing Norma as an unsuccessful woman who negatively controls the lives of others, especially of her youngest son, as highlighted in the second translation. Even though the BP translation literally means "to sink" (LONGMAN, 2009, p. 433), it connotatively labels Norma as an imminent failure who would make anybody's life a nightmare. The last point to mention about both idioms and their translations

regards Dylan's grudge of Norma. Since very young he has been disregarded and overlooked by her. When she was young, she was repeatedly raped by her brother, Caleb. Out of one of these problematic childhood experiences, Dylan was conceived from incest. As Norma has always hated Caleb, she also hates her oldest son, although their relationship impressively changes later on in Season 01 and in other seasons.

Figure 3. Dylan suggests that Norman leave his mom and move into a new place with him (00:15:22)



BATES MOTEL. Developed by: Anthony Cipriano, Carlton Cuse, Kerry Ehrin. [S.I.]: Carlton Cuse Productions; Kerry Ehrin Productions; Universal Television, 2013.



Figure 4. Dylan says Norma will bring Norman down with her (00:15:27)

BATES MOTEL. Developed by: Anthony Cipriano, Carlton Cuse, Kerry Ehrin. [S.I.]: Carlton Cuse Productions; Kerry Ehrin Productions; Universal Television, 2013.

Concerning the subtitle of Figure 3, it has displayed the paraphrase during 02 seconds and presented 01 line, consisting of 23 characters. As observed on the bottom of Figure 4, the one-line subtitle, which has featured for 02 seconds on air, contains 24 characters. In all of these cases the implementation of subtitling technical norms of time, space and presentation is detected (DÍAZ CINTAS; REMAEL, 2007; GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2009; LUYKEN et al., 1991).

4.3. "shut up", "get in(to) trouble"

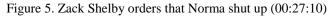
Shelby discovers that Norma, Norman and Dylan have known about the Asian sex slavery business he had been running in the city and is angry with them. In a particular moment of the scene, he yelled at Norma after she beseeched him not to harm anyone: "Stop! Just... just shut up!". The idiom "shut up" means "to silence someone" (SPEARS, 2005, p. 604). In BMS01E06, when Shelby said so, he was flustered with all the characters, specifically with Norma. By uttering the idiom, not only did he order that Norma silent herself, but also showed his anger and fury (LEAH, 2012; MOON, 1998; RIVA; CAMACHO, 2010; STRAKŠIENE, 2009).

Later on in the scene, Shelby seemed angry at Norman and kept on yelling at him. Sometime in his turn, he said: i) "That is how you get into trouble"; ii) "Now you've gotten in trouble". Considering the idiom "get in(to) trouble", which has presented verb and preposition variation without changes in meaning (MOON, 1998), and how it has been uttered, it refers to when one is "in danger; in difficulty; due for punishment" (SPEARS, 2005, p. 245). The idea of getting in(to) trouble is figurative in the sense that Norman was facing a problem and was in a dangerous situation, but not that he was in a physical place (LEAH, 2012; MOON, 1998; RIVA; CAMACHO, 2010; STRAKŠIENE, 2009).

Such contextual information has been drawn on by the cultural mediator (KATAN, 1999; TAFT, 1981 apud KATAN, 1999) so as to convey similar meanings of the English idioms in BP through paraphrases (BAKER, 1992). The idiom "shut up" appears in the subtitle "*Pare, cale a boca!*", back-translated as 'Stop, shut your mouth!'. The two occurrences of "get in(to) trouble" have been paraphrased into Portuguese verbs: i) "*Assim você se encrenca.*", back-translated as 'You get in(to) trouble like this'; ii) "*Agora você se encrencou.*", back-translated as 'Now you are in(to) trouble'.

The translation of the idiom "shut up" highlights that Shelby was furious with Norma for figuring out that she had known about his business for a long time and also for finding himself in a dilemma: 'who should I kill?' The colloquial meaning of the two occurrences of "get in(to) trouble" reinforces the two different usages of the expression. The first use, "get into trouble", conveys the meaning that Norman was bound to be in trouble. Although the situation in which he found himself was already problematic, what Shelby has mostly referred to is that Norman was on the verge of being in a worse situation as he held the gun to the boy's head. Later on, as Shelby got more furious, he pulled back the hammer and said that Norman had "gotten in trouble". The cultural mediator was able to make such differences

clear, by pointing out that, in the former situation, Norman was not to be shot yet because the gun was not loaded, and in the latter, Shelby was really keen on murdering the boy in front of Norma.





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"Shut up" has been paraphrased in the second line. Figure 5's two-line subtitle, displayed for 02 seconds on air, shows 21 characters in the first line and 15 characters in the second line, thus fulfilling subtitling norms of time, space and presentation (DÍAZ CINTAS; REMAEL, 2007; GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2009; LUYKEN et al., 1991).

Figure 6. Zack Shelby implies that Norman is bound to be in trouble (00:27:52)



BATES MOTEL. Developed by: Anthony Cipriano, Carlton Cuse, Kerry Ehrin. [S.I.]: Carlton Cuse Productions; Kerry Ehrin Productions; Universal Television, 2013.

Figure 7. Zack Shelby assures that Norman is in trouble (00:27:54)



BATES MOTEL. Developed by: Anthony Cipriano, Carlton Cuse, Kerry Ehrin. [S.I.]: Carlton Cuse Productions; Kerry Ehrin Productions; Universal Television, 2013.

As seen in both Figures (6, 7), the subtitles have come in two lines, although only the second ones translate Shelby's speech, while the first lines refer to part of what Norma was saying in those moments. Regarding Figure 6's first subtitle, the lines have spent 03 minutes on air, displaying the first line consisting of 12 characters, and the second line comprising 21 characters. The subtitle in Figure 7 has remained 02 seconds on air, showing its first line with 07 characters and the second line with 22 characters. On the whole, both figures' subtitles show the implementation of the subtitling norms of time, space and presentation (DÍAZ CINTAS; REMAEL, 2007; GEORGAKOPOULOU, 2009; LUYKEN et al., 1991).

5. Idioms in the subtitling Brazilian context: final remarks

Regarding the subtitling translation of idioms in the official subtitles of *Bates Motel*:

- the recurring suggestion of translating idioms, paraphrase, underscores the inexistence of one-to-one idioms between English and Portuguese. However, if there are idioms in BP similar to the English expressions, they may have not been used for stylistic purposes or for not technically fitting in the subtitles;
- the figurative meanings of the English idioms have been retrieved in the subtitles through verbs and verb phrases, mostly signaling actions and events and highlighting characters' emotions;
- the subtitling technical constraints of time, space and presentation have been fulfilled in all cases analyzed;
- the cultural mediator, by being aware of subtitling technical constraints, idioms as culture-specific and (un)translatable, as well as understanding and being part of the American and Brazilian cultures at the same time, has interpreted intentions and

perceptions between such cultural groups and shared the culture-bound meanings of the English idioms through paraphrases appropriate for a particular multimedia translation context: subtitling in the TV Series realm.

In view of the aforementioned points, this study has provided another look upon the issue of idioms in the subtitling realm, shedding light on such facts as the possibility of translating culture-specific idioms in a particular context and subtitling translation as an efficient tool to link different peoples and cultures.

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³ Calculating these different amounts of idioms will sum more than 60 expressions. This is justified by the fact that some idioms have been translated in BMS01E06 through more than one way following Baker (1992).

⁴ Retrieved July 01 2014 from http://www.bandicam.com

⁵ CF is when one's lungs create thick mucus that makes the person have difficulties breathing.

⁶ Following Baker (1992, p. 8), we draw on the term "back-translation" to refer to "translating the target text back into the source language from which it was originally translated." Therefore, we have back-translated the Portuguese subtitles which had been originated from the English audio of the TV Series into English.