

Perception verbs in English and Portuguese

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1 Introduction

The present study – in its original form – was a small step in a larger investigation, reported in Santos (1996), whose aim was to give a survey of the contrasts between the tense and aspect systems of (European) Portuguese and (American) English. This paper provides a reinterpretation in the light of the results of the whole project, thus hopefully providing a more enlightening presentation of the same data.

1.1 Basic assumptions

One crucial premise of the whole study in Santos (1996) was that no a priori universal or common features should be assumed: the study of translation practice (i.e. the actual translation pairs found in a corpus) as well as the insights of translation competence (as taken from translators' manuals and/or bilingual dictionaries) will furnish the clues to the possible similarities or differences between two sets of features under consideration.

A consequence of such a standpoint is that one cannot assume that one is looking at the *same* phenomenon in two different languages (be it syntactic, lexical, semantic, textual or pragmatic), even though this would make things much simpler. The goal of a contrastive study is to find similarities or differences, not to presume them from the start.

This said, it must be acknowledged that to make sense of actual translations for the purposes of linguistic theory is definitely not a trivial matter, for one must take into account such diverse and complex phenomena as translationese, translation style and translation quality, on the one hand, and the grammatical systems of each language in their complex interrelationships, on the other. This is not the place to discuss them, however; see Santos (1996) for a brief survey.

Two general conclusions that have relevance for the present paper are the importance of vagueness for linguistic description – and consequently for the analysis of translation – and the need to look at several different parts of a language system in order to be able to make some sense of any of them.

1.2 Material

Before I take up perception verbs, let me present the material which was analysed.¹ The size of the material is specified in Table 1.

Table 1: Corpus size

	English to Portuguese	Portuguese to English
Number of source language words	26,060	25,174
Number of target language words	23,262	27,972
Number of source language sentences	1,628	1,449
Number of target language sentences	1,861	1,459
Number of translation pairs	1,602	1,446
Number of tensed translations	3,744	3,318

The material analysed was a subset of all translation pairs – namely, all those where a perception verb occurred in either side of the translation process. But – and this is a definite advantage of corpus studies – I could examine other translation pairs to dismiss or confirm an hypothesis; to some degree, and to the extent that the other studies contributed to my understanding of the grammatical devices which were involved in the particular translation pairs, one could say that every translation pair in the corpus contributed an infinitesimal part to the whole analysis. This is still more the case for the present paper, which gave me the opportunity to present an interpretation in the light of the entire study. In other words, what I will say about the particular translation pairs here is not only the result of observing them, but of observing the whole corpus (and more) as regards tense, aspect, and modality.

It may be appropriate to mention that I am aware that – according to some definitions, at least – my empirical material does not constitute a corpus. This is something which I do not see as very relevant, however: It is undeniable that the material allowed for many findings at the level of both individual grammar and cross-linguistic comparison, despite its smallish size and unbalanced constitution; furthermore, I did not bias the material in order to make any point. Rather, I ended up making many points about which I did not have the faintest idea beforehand.

¹ The source of the English to Portuguese examples is *The Pearl*, by John Steinbeck, Bantam Books, 1975 (first edition, 1945), translated into (European) Portuguese by Mário Dionísio as: John Steinbeck, *A Pérola*, Publicações Europa-América, 1977. The source of the Portuguese to English examples is a selection of Portuguese short stories by Jorge de Sena: Jorge de Sena, *Antigas e Novas Andanças do Demónio*, Edições 70, 5^a edição, 1984 (first edition, 1978), translated into (American) English as: Jorge de Sena, *By the Rivers of Babylon and Other Stories*, edited and with a preface by Daphne Patai, Rutgers University Press, 1989.

I consequently see my work as relevant for corpus studies, perhaps because (as others have hinted) in-depth analyses compensate for the lack of statistical representativeness. Nevertheless, I agree that more data is always welcome.

It should also be noted that all studies based on this corpus, with the exception of the present one, concerned grammatical features (whose density in a text is much higher than that of lexical items). The reasons for studying a class of (very few) verbs are therefore interesting in their own right.

1.3 Why study perception verbs?

Given the small size of the material, and that the overall goal of the study was a contrastive study of grammar, it is perhaps not obvious why one would focus on this class in such a context. There is, however, motivation to look more closely at these verbs from several independent sources:

1. While performing clause alignment, I noted that verbs expressing perception were frequently discarded or added by the translator. (Interestingly, this seems to be the case in other language pairs, too, since Øverås (1996: 86) also presents such examples for the pair Norwegian-English.)

2. While studying the translation of Imperfeito into English, a correlation of the English modal *could* with imperfective aspect in connection with perception verbs suggested itself (more precisely, it seemed that Portuguese perception verbs in Imperfeito were translated by *could*, while those in Perfeito tended to be translated by the simple past).

These two observations might not be enough, were it not the case that

3. Perception verbs are rather frequent in the two languages² (thus allowing for more than a handful of examples).

4. Their aspectual classification has been a much discussed puzzle in the tense and aspect literature (and will be shortly taken up below).

5. Perspective is closely related to perception, even though not necessarily explicitly, and perspective is not only one of the major narrative devices of contemporary fiction but is closely related to aspect as well, as e.g. Canepel (1989) has shown.

6. Perception is of great philosophical and linguistic importance, which is a fact hard to overlook. See Miller and Johnson-Laird (1976) for a comprehensive overview.

² According to Hofland & Johansson's (1982) published frequency distributions, *see* + *saw* occur 1,543/683 times in the LOB and the Brown Corpus respectively, *feel* + *felt* 599/573 times, and *hear* + *heard* 387/400 times. Likewise, in the survey of spoken Portuguese conducted in the 70's (PF 1984/1987) resulting in a corpus of 700,000 words, *ver* was the 13th most frequent verb (2,385 occurrences), *sentir* the 41st (441 occurrences), and *ouvir* the 53rd (290 occurrences).

1.4 The structure of this paper

In Section 2, I will briefly present perception verbs in the two languages, discussing some of their properties from a monolingual point of view. In Section 3, I describe the particular studies performed and the results obtained, with reference to a number of translation pairs. Finally, in Section 4 I discuss possible conclusions in the light of the longer investigation.

2 Perception verbs and their properties

The semantic domain of perception is certainly not only semantic. Rather, it constitutes a clear linguistic subsystem, as my monolingual descriptions will show. In addition, approaches as diverse as Schank's conceptual dependency theory (Schank and Rieger 1974), WordNet (Fellbaum 1993), and traditional grammars such as Quirk et al. (1972) have all treated this group as primary.

The label 'perception verbs' is, however, too broad a cover term: In fact, it includes up to 200 lexemes in Fellbaum (1993), and is divided differently by Levin (1993) and Quirk et al. (1972).³ In this case, the best way is simply to list the few verbs I am considering here, leaving aside the task of finding the right and exclusive definition: *see, hear, feel, smell, watch, and listen* in English;⁴ and *ver, ouvir, sentir* in Portuguese (one might trivially add *cheirar*, of which there were no occurrences in the corpus). In some cases I also considered the standard translations of *watch* and *listen*, namely *observar* and *escutar*, in order not to bias the comparison, but it should be noted that these Portuguese verbs have a somewhat different grammatical behaviour.

Very briefly, perception verbs have rather complex properties, some of which will be taken up below: in English, they accept NP objects, VP objects (-ing or bare form),⁵ and objects in the form of *that*-clauses; they do not accept the progressive; their simple past forms are (to some degree) equivalent to *could* + infinitive. They seem to pattern with verbs of thought like *remember* and *recall*, which could be regarded as expressing a sort of delayed perception (to

³ Levin (1993: 185-188) divides English 'verbs of perception' into *See* verbs, *Sight* verbs, *Peer* verbs, and stimulus subject perception verbs. While Quirk et al. (1972) call them 'verbs of inert perception and cognition', a subset of 'stative verbs', Palmer (1965) refers to 'verbs referring to sensations', a subtype of 'private verbs'.

⁴ One might question the choice of this set: why not *look*, for example, as well? Tobin (1993), for example, argues that *look* and *see* form a minimal pair, with the former marked for result. However, *look* does not feature the same grammatical properties as the other members of the group, which is a good argument not to have included it in the first place.

⁵ For my purposes here, it is not relevant whether 'VP objects' is the right syntactic description, or whether these structures should rather be analysed in some other way. I stick to the term 'VP object' as a matter of convenience.

use a computer metaphor, you store things in memory and you fetch them again later). For other syntactic properties, see Rogers (1971).

In Portuguese, perception verbs are also syntactically complex, but most of their properties do not mirror those of the English class. They do not pattern with the corresponding thought verbs in Portuguese; they do not feature any special behaviour with respect to modals; and they are quite at ease in the progressive. They do accept objects in the form of NPs, *que*-clauses, gerund and bare infinitive VPs, and *a*+infinitive VPs.⁶ In fact, we could subscribe to Lipinska-Grzegorek's (1977: 9) observation, in the context of her Polish-English contrastive studies, that 'many similarities within this class [Polish verbs of physical perception] are analogical to the similarities within the class of English verbs of perception, although there is rarely a one-to-one correspondence between these similarities'.

As regards some of the properties of these verbs, there is, in fact, little consensus in the literature. For example, we commonly read that English perception verbs 'are often odd in the progressive, unless they receive a special interpretation' (Levin, 1993: 186). In fact, some writers are categorical: Leech (1971: 20) states that these verbs are 'straightforward cases of verbs inimical to the Progressive Aspect'; others, on the contrary, discuss the phenomenon as if it were a common occurrence. The present study does not bear on this issue, however, since only two examples of the progressive were found in the material, and only in translated English.

More relevant are claims about *could* usage and aspectual character, which are far from settled, as the following overview shows. Leech (1971: 20) says that 'The difference between the variant constructions with and without *could* is that the *could* form denotes a state, whereas the Simple Past form denotes an event'. This is quite at odds with the situation in my own material, as the next section will make clear. A more common statement is expressed by Palmer, who states that '*can* is regularly used with verbs of sensation, without adding anything not implied by the simple verb' (Palmer, 1965: 118). Here too, things are not that simple, as can be seen in Vendler's discussion of seeing. Not only does Vendler explicitly claim that *see* has two different aspectual profiles, namely, "'seeing" [the "spotting" sense of seeing] is an achievement initiating the generic state of seeing' (Vendler, 1967: 118), but also that, **in the stative sense**, *hear* and *can hear* are interchangeable. Later, in his monograph on English modals, Palmer (1979) makes the distinction between *could* expressing 'private perception' and other uses of *could*, explicitly recognizing that 'with

⁶ Of course, this comparison does not establish that perception verbs do behave in fundamentally different ways in the two languages. It might, for example, be argued that it is the behaviour of the modals, and of the progressive, that is quite different in English and Portuguese, not the perception verbs themselves. My standpoint is that the systems as a whole hang together, so that the two languages differ in their entirety. This has consequences for the description of perception in the two languages. It does not make much sense to select a particular grammar module as the responsible one.

neither of these examples is it possible to replace *can see* with *see*; the first indicates ability, the second possibility' (Palmer, 1979: 74). An alternative to basing the description on the polysemy of the modal is to focus rather on the polysemous character of perception verbs themselves, which is pursued by Rogers (1971) in his proposal of three kinds of perception verbs in English (cognitive, active, and descriptive). He contends that 'the cognitive forms are syntactically stative [...] whereas the active forms are non-stative' (Rogers, 1971: 206). Still other ways of looking at this situation are possible: Miller and Johnson-Laird (1976: 606), for example, contend that *could* expresses 'observational success' and that its 'stative quality is borrowed in order to express duration'.

3 The empirical studies

I begin by briefly summarizing the studies described in Chapter 11 of Santos (1996), and then continue by providing a deeper analysis in the light of the knowledge gained from the overall study.

3.1 The translation of Portuguese perception verbs

First, I examined every translation of Portuguese perception verbs in Imperfeito or Perfeito, and investigated whether the rule 'Imperfeito gets translated by *could*, Perfeito by the simple past' stood up to scrutiny. (A possible *a priori* justification for such a rule would be something along the following lines: 'Imperfeito is generally stative in character, and so is *could*, while Perfeito is unmarked with events, like the simple past'.) Table 2 shows the raw results.

Even though at first sight no sign of such can be seen, I managed to salvage (a more specific version of) the hypothesis with two important provisos and a strategic division of data. I proceed by describing how; then, I present a considerably simpler alternative description.

Table 2: The translation of Portuguese perception verbs in the past

ver	37	20 Perfeito	14 simple past, 3 <i>could</i> , 2 present perfect, 1 past participle
		17 Imperfeito	9 simple past, 5 <i>could</i> , 1 <i>in sight</i> , 1 <i>visible</i> , 1 pluperfect
ouvir	19	14 Perfeito	12 simple past, 1 <i>could</i> , 1 present perfect
		5 Imperfeito	3 simple past, 1 <i>could</i> , 1 past progressive
sentir	20	10 Perfeito	9 simple past, 1 present perfect
		10 Imperfeito	9 simple past, 1 <i>could</i>

First, I noted that habitual Imperfeitos never got *could*, as the following examples show:⁷

- (1) receosa dos seus olhos de alma penetrantes que *viam* o fundo das coisas
fearful of his penetrating soulful eyes that *saw* into the depths of things
Lit.: afraid of his penetrating eyes of soul which could see the bottom of things
- (2) todos os escriturários se abstinham de o interromper, quando o *viam*
curvado sobre a secretária
all the clerks avoided interrupting him when they *saw* him bent over his desk.
Lit.: all clerks avoided interrupting him, when they saw him bent over the desk
- (3) Ele, que *via* almas de brâmanes passarem a cães,
He, who *had seen* Brahmins' souls become dogs'
Lit.: He, who saw Brahmins' souls turn to dogs

Second, I made the observation that negation in English reverses markedness, i.e. *couldn't* is less marked than *didn't* because it does not presuppose that there is something to be perceived. Cf. (4) and (5):

- (4) Não *viu* o sujeito
He *couldn't see* the man.
Lit.: He did not see the fellow
- (5) Marco Semprônio não o *viu* sair.
Marcus Sempronius *did not see* him leave.
Lit.: Marco Semprônio did not see him leave

Consequently, negated verbs of perception in Perfeito would get *couldn't* instead of the simple past.

Finally – and crucially –, I separated out the cases of VP objects as subject to different rules. The final rule suggested was that Imperfeito of a single situation should be translated by *could* and Perfeito by the simple past.

Only three examples did not follow this pattern, and they were explained as not featuring a perfect translation:

⁷ In this paper *Lit.* is to be interpreted as follows: a more literal translation in the Portuguese to English examples (examples 1-14 and 50), a back-translation in the English to Portuguese examples (examples 15-49, 51-52). On the problems of making these examples available to non-Portuguese-speaking readers, see Santos (1996: 1.6).

- (6) um silêncio se demorou na biblioteca, durante o qual se *ouviram*, abafados, no crepúsculo que punha sombras pelos cantos, os ruídos domésticos da 'vila'.
in the library there lingered a silence through which *could be heard* [...] the muffled sounds of domestic life in the villa.
Lit.: and a silence lasted in the library, during which were heard, muffled, in the crepuscule which put shadows in all corners, the domestic sounds of the villa

In the case of (6), where Perfeito is translated by *could*, I suggested that there was translation loss because 'Portuguese advances the narrative with the perception of the sounds, while English describes it, erroneously, in my view, as a background property'.

- (7) Já *via* o quarteirão por detrás do qual repousava o Castanheira
now he *saw* the section behind which Castanheira lay
Lit.: He could already see the quarter behind which rested Castanheira
- (8) lançou-se para o portão, que *via* lá ao fundo
raced for the gate which he *saw* at the back
Lit.: he aimed at the gate, which he could see there far away

As regards (7) and (8), where Imperfeito is translated by the simple past, I argued that the English rendering of (7) 'omits, or at most leaves implicit, the fact that the situation continues,' while the English translation of (8) 'allows for the interpretation that the race was a consequence of an achievement of seeing, an interpretation which is not allowed by the original'.

I then examined the cases of VP objects, which were considered a separate case. They always seemed to be translated by the simple past, except when the perception was difficult, as the following examples show:

- (9) Da plataforma, ainda *viu* o sujeito voltar para trás, e, com as malditas flores, perder-se no meio das pessoas
From the platform, he *could* still *see* the fellow turn around and disappear with the damned flowers into the crowd.
Lit.: From the platform, he still saw the fellow go back, and, with the damned flowers, get lost among the crowd
- (10) já só lhe *viu* as plantas dos pés, que, claras, saltavam ao longe, fugindo.
he *could* already just *make out* the light-colored soles of feet leaping in the distance
Lit.: he saw but the foot soles, which, light-coloured, jumped far away, escaping

This was the analysis presented in Chapter 11 of Santos (1996).

Now, if one chooses not to distinguish between the cases by the type of object – a data-driven, but relatively arbitrary, decision – one could arrange the same data and arrive at quite a different set of generalizations. One could claim that when the Portuguese text describes visual (auditory, etc.) properties, and not perception events – the property tense par excellence in Portuguese is Imperfeito –, the proper translation includes *could*:

- (11) Quase se não *viam* um ao outro
They *could* barely *see* each other
Lit.: Almost they did not see each other
- (12) uma noite cerrada em que nada se *via*
an overcast night in which nothing *could be seen*
Lit.: a dark night in which nothing was visible
- (13) nada mais *sentia*
he *could feel* nothing else
Lit.: nothing else he felt
- (14) pelo fogo de que, da sua árvore, ele só *via* o fumo
by the fire of which, from his tree, he *could see* only the smoke
Lit.: by the fire of which, from his tree, he saw only the smoke

Alternatively, the following independent criterion yields adequate coverage of all examples in the corpus: if the Portuguese sentence describes a perception situation under difficult conditions, the English translation emphasizes difficulty by employing *could*. This covers examples (9) and (10), and, interestingly, the cases classified just above, (11)-(14), which describe perception properties, and which also fall under the label of difficult perception.

If these translation norms are correct, one would expect that the property-motivated *could* would correlate with Imperfeito, while the other *could* would correlate with a non-linguistic measure of 'difficulty'.⁸

3.2 The translation of English perception verbs

In parallel, I observed the translation of English perception verbs into Portuguese, to see whether the regularity that *could* would be rendered by

⁸ It should be noted that, while the 'property sense' and 'difficulty' are obviously independent, speakers will most of the time describe properties of situations of perception precisely when perception is difficult, and so, in practice, the two 'reasons' for choosing *could* concur more often than not.

Imperfeito, and the simple past by Perfeito, could be corroborated – and further explained.

Table 3 displays a quantitative survey of the data. Before discussing it in detail, I should note that there is a much higher number of perception verbs (188 versus 80), as well as a higher proportion of VP objects (27,6% versus 17,5%) in the English material as compared with the Portuguese material, which should not be dismissed as simply due to chance.

Table 3: The translation of English perception verbs in the past

see	89	31 <i>could</i>	11 Perfeito, 11 Imperfeito, 3 pôde, 2 Condicional, 1 pudesse, 3 other
		58 <i>saw</i>	40 Perfeito, 10 Imperfeito, 3 Infinitivo, 1 Mais que Perfeito, 4 other
hear	43	11 <i>could</i>	5 Imperfeito, 2 Perfeito, 2 Gerúndio, 1 Imperfeito do Conjuntivo, 1 <i>ficou a ger</i>
		27 <i>heard</i>	12 Imperfeito, 13 Perfeito, 1 <i>começou a ger</i> , 1 Mais que Perfeito
		5 present perfect	5 Perfeito
feel	24	7 <i>could</i>	3 Perfeito, 3 Imperfeito, 1 other
		17 <i>felt</i>	10 Perfeito, 5 Imperfeito, 2 other
smell	5	3 <i>could</i>	2 Perf, 1 Imp
		2 <i>smelled</i>	1 Perf, 1 Imp

A number of observations can be made:

A. There was a small number of cases of unattended (or rather, unavoidable) perception with *could*, which were rendered by Imperfeito as an extended background event:

- (15) He *could hear* the pat of the corn cakes
ouvía o chiar dos bolos de milho
 Lit.: he heard the sizzle of the corn cakes
- (16) And he *could smell* the sharp odor of exposed kelp from the receding tide.
Sentia o cheiro penetrante das algas que a maré vazia deixava na areia.
 Lit.: He felt the sharp smell of seaweed which the low water left on the sand
- (17) She *could feel* his warm breath against her skin
Sentia na pele a quente respiração do filho
 Lit.: She felt in the skin the warm breath of the son

It seems that in these cases *could* indicates that the subject referent might have realized / attended to the perception, but that there was at least a possibility that he/she did not realize this, and thus did not fully perceive. The Portuguese translation is based on the plausible inference that the perception occurred.

B. Physical ability seems, however, to be the most important concern in English when *could* is included, since the vast majority of the examples explicitly describe non-optimal conditions where perception is difficult in one way or another.⁹ (The fact that some examples are rendered in Imperfeito (examples (18)-(21)) and others in Perfeito (examples (22)-(25)) will be discussed under point F below.)

- (18) He *could see* the outline of the watcher, but the sleeping men were below his vision.
Via o perfil da sentinela, mas não os dois homens adormecidos.
Lit.: He saw the sentinel's profile, but not the two men asleep.
- (19) nearly all the brush houses were alike, and all leaked light and air, so that Juana and Kino, sitting in the corner of the brother's house, *could see* the leaping flames through the wall.
Quase todas as cabanas eram iguais. Todas deixavam passar a luz e o vento. Por isso Juana e Kino, sentados a um canto da casa do irmão, *viam*, pelas fendas das paredes, as chamas.
Lit.: Almost all huts were equal. All let through the light and the wind. Thus Juana and Kino, sitting at a corner at the brother's house, saw, through the cracks of the walls, the flames.
- (20) When the trackers came near, Kino *could see* only their legs and only the legs of the horse from under the fallen branch.
Quando os batedores já vinham perto, Kino, debaixo do ramo quebrado, já só lhes *via* as pernas e as pernas do cavalo.
Lit.: When the trackers were already near, Kino, under the broken branch, could already only see their legs and the horse legs
- (21) there where he *could see*, even in the distance, a hint of foliage
Mesmo àquela distância, *via* qualquer coisa de parecido com folhagem.
Lit.: Even at that distance, he saw something similar to foliage
- (22) In a few moments Kino *could see* them clustered in the haze
Dentro de momentos, Kino *distinguiu-os* imersos no nevoeiro
Lit.: In a few moments, Kinos distinguished them immersed in the haze

⁹ A rule of thumb to identify ability is to paraphrase *could* by *was able to*.

- (23) In the moonlight he *could see* the frantic frightened eyes
 Ao luar, *viu* ainda uns olhos inquietos e assustados.
 Lit.: In the moonlight, he saw still some anxious, frightened eyes
- (24) Against the sky in the cave entrance Juana *could see* that Kino was taking off his white clothes
 Joana *viu* Kino, à entrada da gruta, esbatido no céu, a tirar o fato branco
 Lit.: Juana saw Kino, at the entrance of the cave, in relief against the sky, taking off the white clothes
- (25) He peered closely at her and he *could see* her large eyes.
 Ele olhou-a muito de perto e *contemplou*-lhe os grandes olhos.
 Lit.: He looked at her from very near and contemplated her large eyes

C. The same concern with physical ability is present when perception becomes possible after some physical changes. In English, there is no difference between 'perception in spite of' and 'perception at last'. In this latter case, however, translation by the Portuguese modal *poder* in Perfeito is possible, which thus becomes an actual translation choice, alternating with simple Perfeito; cf. examples (26)-(29):

- (26) until the water cleared and he *could see*
 por fim, a água tornou-se clara e *pôde ver*
 Lit.: finally, the water became clear and he was able to see
- (27) After a moment the big gate opened a few inches. Kino *could see* the green coolness of the garden
 Pouco depois abriu-se uma greta do portão. Kino *viu* a verde frescura do jardim.
 Lit.: Some time after a chink of the gate opened. Kino saw the green coolness of the garden.
- (28-29) [The scurrying procession came at last to the big gate in the wall of the doctor's house.] They *could hear* the splashing water [...] And they *could smell* the frying of good bacon
 Também ali todos *ouviram* [...] o cair da água [...] E, além disso, as narinas *encheram*-se-lhes do cheiro bom a presunto frito
 Lit.: Also there everyone heard [...] water falling [...] And, furthermore, their nostrils filled with the good smell of fried bacon

In any case, what is at stake is the inception of perception – or the inception of the ability to perceive –, which, as an event, must be rendered in Perfeito in Portuguese. It should be noted, however, that *could* in English is such that it conveys (or can convey) both the state of ability and the inception of such state,

a behaviour it shares with a lot of other expressions in English and which I analysed as membership of the aspectual class of 'acquisitions'; see Santos (1996, 1997) for further details. In other words, *could* is vague between the two 'meanings', which explains why the translator has free choice – but also indicates that, most probably, whatever the choice the translation will be poor.

Further examples that confirm this last observation are the less than optimal translations in pairs (30)-(31):

- (30) And then Kino *could see* that they were eating
E então Kino *percebeu* que eles estavam a comer
Lit.: And then Kino realized that they were eating
- (31) Even in the distance he *could see* the two on foot moving slowly along
Mesmo àquela distância, *pôde ver* que os que vinham a pé andavam lentamente
Lit.: Even at such a distance he was able to see that those on foot were walking slowly

D. It is relevant to note, in view of the previous examples, that all cases involving *ver que* ('see that') in the corpus were expressed in Perfeito, irrespective of whether the original text had *could* or just the simple past, that is, irrespective of the difficulty in perception expressed in the original text, because to understand or realize something is conceived as punctual (a change of state) in Portuguese, and thus the option of turning it into a backgrounded event simply did not exist.¹⁰

E. Another translation strategy observed in Portuguese was the rendering of the English habitual sentences in Imperfeito, again irrespective of whether they were expressed with or without *could*:

- (32) so that everything they *saw* or thought or did or *heard* became a song
que tudo o que *viam*, pensavam, faziam ou *ouviam* se transformava num canto
Lit.: that everything they saw, thought, did or heard transformed into a song

¹⁰ In fact, the felicitous use of *via que* ('saw that' in Imperfeito) involves either the realization of a habitual state of affairs or a diffuse perception like *Via que alguma coisa estava mal* ('He realized that something was wrong'). One cannot use it for the perception of a semelfactive event, which is the case for all English source sentences in the material.

- (33) He *heard* every little sound of the gathering night
Distinguia o mínimo som da noite envolvente:
Lit.: He distinguished the least sound of the enveloping night
- (34) He was uneasy and nervous; he glanced over his shoulder; he lifted the big knife and *felt* its edge.
Estava inquieto e nervoso. Olhava para trás por cima do ombro, pegava na faca e *experimentava*-lhe o fio.
Lit.: He was anxious and nervous. He looked back over the shoulder, took the knife and tried its edge
- (35) The animals that used the pool came near and *smelled* men there and drifted away again into the darkness.
Os animais da lagoa iam chegando. Mas mal *sentiam* cheiro de homem desapareciam outra vez nas trevas.
Lit.: The pool animals were arriving. But as soon as they felt man smell they disappeared again in the darkness
- (36) [Kino heard the creak of the rope when Juana took Coyotito out of his hanging box and cleaned him and hammocked him in her shawl in a loop that placed him close to her breast.] Kino *could see* these things without looking at them
tudo isto Kino *via* sem olhar
Lit.: all this Kino saw without looking

It is true that in many cases it is up to the translator to interpret a specific English utterance as habitual or semelfactive – the English sentences are vague with respect to this distinction. It is a matter of debate whether habituality is a grammatical category in English – it is, however, indisputable that habitual sentences are much rarer in English than in Portuguese. One could, in fact, question the adequacy of the last three translations: as for (34), did Kino glance over his shoulder and feel the knife's edge more than once? Or, in (35), was it a sequence of comings and goings which kept occurring, or did the animals come once and give up? And, finally, in (36), was the author describing a property which was true of Kino in general, or was he talking about the particular occasion in the narrative? *Could* in English marks the difficulty of seeing from auditory clues only, but in Portuguese there is no linguistic mark of difficulty left – as usual.

F. As far as perception sentences in the simple past are concerned, when they were neither construed as habitual nor translated by a perception verb with a *that*-clause as object, it still remains to be explained why there is an almost even distribution between Imperfeito or Perfeito translations, though one would expect Perfeito to be the only plausible rendering.

On the one hand, even before looking at the data, we can explain this if we grant that perception verbs themselves have acquisitional behaviour, i.e. if we agree that words like *saw* or *heard* in English are vague between inception of seeing, hearing, and the state itself of seeing, hearing, etc. This is something which is actually recognized since Vendler's (1967) historical discussion of verbs and times; cf. Vendler's observation quoted in Section 2 above. If we accept their fundamental vagueness, we are led to conclude that it is the narrative context, as well as the particulars of what is said, that makes the translator choose between rendering either possibility, given the contrastive fact that this vagueness cannot be maintained in the Portuguese past.

- (37) and he raised the blade and looked at it and *saw* a little line of blood on the steel.
Levantou a lâmina e viu no aço um delgado fio de sangue.
Lit.: He raised the blade and saw a thin line of blood
- (38) But Kino had grown tight and hard. He *felt* the creeping of fate
Mas Kino estava inflexível e duro. *Sentia* o peso do destino
Lit.: But Kino was inflexible and hard. He could feel the weight of destiny

In cases like examples (37)-(38), it is fair to say that there was no other sensible choice of Portuguese tense: the first part of (37) must be interpreted as a sequence of events, and thus *Perfeito* is obligatory; in contrast, in (38), the sequence pluperfect and simple past forces a stative meaning of the second sentence,¹¹ which must thus be translated by *Imperfeito*.

On the other hand, there were many cases where alternative choices could be considered and even preferred:

- (39) He *smelled* the breeze and he listened for any foreign sound of secrecy
Sorveu a brisa e escutou, à espera de qualquer som estranho
Lit.: He sipped the breeze and listened, waiting for any strange sign
- (40) And Kino *heard* the music of the pearl, distorted and insane.
E Kino *ouvia* a música da pérola, falseada e louca.
Lit.: And Kino could hear the music of the pearl, distorted and mad.

In (39), the Portuguese sentence talks about a first event of consciously attending to smell, followed by the conscious attending of the hearing faculty, while one might argue that in the English original the two senses are being attended to simultaneously. Likewise, the Portuguese rendering of (40)

¹¹ Basically, because there is no time point mentioned in the first sentence which could be advanced by the second sentence read inceptively.

describes a state of affairs as holding, while one might claim the English original tells us simply that it begins. And finally, in example (41) the translator adds differentiation where the English author used similar devices.

- (41) Juana and Kino, sitting in the corner of the brother's house, could see the leaping flames through the wall. They *saw* the flames tall and furious, they *saw* the roof fall
 Joana e Kino, sentados a um canto da casa do irmão, viam, pelas fendas das paredes, as chamas. *Viam* as chamas altas e enfurecidas, *viram* o tecto cair
 Lit.: Juana and Kino, sitting at a corner at the brother's house, saw, through the cracks of the walls, the flames. They could see the high infuriated flames, they saw the roof fall

One might say that the translator chose to express the seeing of the flames tall and furious as durative, and simultaneous to seeing the leaping flames mentioned in the previous sentence; but he had to render the event of the roof falling in *Perfeito*. Without questioning the translation, this is obviously undeniable evidence that more specific choices than those required to understand the text in English must be taken by the translator when translating an acquisition.

G. In contrast, the opposition between *could* and the simple past could be disregarded in example (42) below, which shows that there is no need to mention physical conditions when talking about perception in Portuguese:

- (42) He *could see* the little image of the consecrated candle reflected in the soft surface of the pearl, and he *heard* again in his ears the lovely music of the undersea
 Via a imagem da vela benta reflectida na superfície lisa da pérola e de novo os ouvidos se lhe *enchiam* da maravilhosa música submarina
 Lit.: He saw the image of the consecrated candle reflected on the smooth surface of the pearl and again his ears filled with the wonderful submarine music

The translator chose consistently to use *Imperfeito* whenever Kino saw in the pearl, in accordance with Sten's (1973) contention that *Imperfeito* is appropriate to describe the content of a vision or dream, and this accounts for a fair number of occurrences. This example, however, gives me the opportunity to draw a parallel with example (29) above, and claim that there is nothing in form or content in the English text that distinguishes (42) from (29).¹² In addition, the

¹² To support this assertion, note the naturalness of the alternative translations, namely *Viu a imagem da vela benta reflectida na superfície lisa da pérola e de novo os ouvidos*

lexical choice made by the translator was the same (and quite appropriate, in my view); however, he made different choices of tense. One may suspect that in this case tense choice is actually close to random (or a choice conditioned by other properties of the target – translated – text): it is definitely not something that is controlled or even influenced by the English source.

H. Before attempting to draw some general conclusions, I want to make it clear that the classifications I am suggesting here are not meant to be mutually exclusive. For example, in the case of *could*, the most natural reason why so many senses are attributed to the same form is that the choice between them is often irrelevant, and/or that it is convenient to express them all in one fell swoop. This I have termed grammatical vagueness in Santos (1997) and I consider it to be of extreme importance for translation. For example, in (43), does *could* express possibility, ability, ability after some changes, or difficult perception? One of these, some of these, all of these?

- (43) And, looking down, she *could see* the cigarette of the man on watch.
Por baixo da gruta, Joana *viu* o cigarro da sentinela.
Lit.: Below the cave, Juana saw the cigarette of the sentinel

The following paraphrases (with possible translation choices in square brackets) may help an English speaker understand why one might want to decide on a particular interpretation:

- Perception at last: Juana looked down and could see the cigarette... [*viu* or *pôde ver*]
- Simple possibility, or background conditions: If she looked down, she would see the cigarette. [*via* or *podia ver*]
- Difficult perception: Looking down, she was able to see the cigarette [*via* or *viu*]

The simplification made by the translator in this case was remarkable, to say the least. It remains to be seen whether these 'translation shortcuts' occur consistently whenever the source text has very many possibilities of interpretation.

To sum up, my conclusion after having analysed in detail every translation pair involving perception verbs in the English material is that there is no correlation between the choices made by the English writer in order to produce a coherent and natural text and the choices taken by the Portuguese translator in order to convey the 'same' text into a hopefully equally natural text. If my analysis is

se lhe *encheram* da maravilhosa música submarina with Perfeito, and *E as narinas enchiam-se-lhes com o cheiro bom de presunto frito* with Imperfeito.

right, the first paid attention to conditions of perception and results of perception, whereas the second was preoccupied with distinguishing between habituality and semelfactivity, inception and state of affairs, and with identifying at least some special kinds of events, such as mental realization, or description of a vision.

This leads us to the following conclusion: some of the dynamics of the source text is irrelevant for translation into a language which does not make the particular distinctions which such dynamics is based on; and some of the dynamics of the target text is due to the target language structure and the necessary additional interpretation that is required from the translator.

3.3 The translation of the English perception of events

Since there are quite a few cases of VP objects in the English original, it is possible to examine this group by itself, although the results discussed in the previous section fully apply here as well. There are, however, more degrees of freedom in this case which also deserve to be looked into.

One such case is the opposition between gerund and bare infinitive in the VP object, traditionally explained by invoking the notions imperfective and perfective (of the event mentioned in the VP clause); others invoke progressiveness: cf. Palmer (1965: 170), 'the distinction is between an incomplete (progressive) and a complete (non-progressive) action'.

Given that there is quite a close parallel in Portuguese, namely infinitive and *a*+infinitive, which have roughly the same role and distribution,¹³ one would expect that, at the level of VP objects at least, quite a good correlation could be established between these forms. Table 4 gives an overview of the correspondences in terms of tenses and the form of VP object.

In view of the parallel between the two languages, it is surprising that both infinitive and gerund VPs suffer a drastic reduction in the Portuguese translation, which uses complex noun phrases in many cases, as the following examples show:

- (44) through the knife he *could feel* the muscle tighten hard
sentiu na faca a resistência do manto.
 Lit.: he felt in the knife the resistance of the muscle

¹³ In fact, one could say that Portuguese has the ability of making yet finer distinctions: in parallel to *a*+infinitive, one could use gerund (it is unclear to what extent this is just a stylistic/regional variety or is distinctive in the present context – in most of the cases this choice does not carry a semantic load in European Portuguese, but a deeper analysis should be carried out for this particular context); and one can have impersonal or personal infinitive in both infinitive or *a*+infinitive contexts. Some of the criteria for this last choice are syntactic or discorsal, but, again, I lack a good basis for discarding it as not bringing about any meaning changes.

- (45) Kino left his foot there and *watched* them move over it.
 Kino não se mexeu mais e *ficou a observar* o movimento das formigas.
 Lit.: Kino did not move further and remained watching the movement of the ants.
- (46) She looked up at Kino when he came back; she *saw* him examine her ankles, cut and scratched from the stones and brush,
 e olhou para Kino, que voltava e lhe *via* os tornozelos esfolados e feridos das pedras e das urzes.
 Lit.: and she looked at Kino, who was coming back and could see her ankles, scratched and sore from the stones and the heather.

Table 4: The translation of English VP objects in the past

could	Vpinf 2	1 Perfeito Vpinf, 1 gerúndio VPainf
	VPger 10	3 Imperfeito, 1 Imperfeito VPger, 1 Imperfeito VPainf, 1 Imperfeito VPpastpart, 1 Perfeito VPainf, 1 Perfeito VPinf, 1 gerúndio, 1 <i>pôde ver</i>
simple past	Vpinf 16	7 Perfeito VPinf, 6 Perfeito, 2 Imperfeito, 1 Imperfeito Vpinf
	VPger 12	3 Perfeito VPger, 3 Perfeito VPpastpart, 3 Perfeito, 1 Perfeito VPainf, 1 Imperfeito VPainf, 1 Mais que Perfeito
pres perf	Vpinf 3	1 Perfeito VPinf, 1 Perfeito VPainf, 1 Perfeito

This seems to indicate that such constructions in Portuguese are not as natural as the ones that were preferred in the translation; in other words, VP objects in English and Portuguese are parallel in grammatical behaviour but not in markedness. I hypothesize that we face just another instance of the English preference for detail as opposed to the Portuguese tendency towards abstraction (analogous to the distinction claimed for the pair English-French in Vinay and Darbelnet's (1977) ground-breaking work).

Another translation regularity which became conspicuous in my material was the one concerning body position verbs in the gerund, which are translated by the past participle, as examples (47)-(48) illustrate (incidentally, these and other examples show that one category relevant for the description of Portuguese – and possibly English as well – is a VP object in the past participle; cf. examples (2), (22), (42), and (46) above):

- (47) In the pearl he *saw* Coyotito sitting at a little desk in a school
 Na pérola, *via* Coyotito na escola, sentado à sua carteira
 Lit.: In the pearl, he could see Coyotito at school, seated at his desk

- (48) And in the pearl Kino *saw* himself and Juana squatting by the little fire in the brush hut while Coyotito read from a great book.
 E, na pérola, Kino *via-se* já agachado na cabana, ao pé do lume, com Joana ao seu lado, enquanto Coyotito lia um livro enorme.
 Lit.: And, in the pearl, Kino could see himself squatted in the hut, near the fire, with Juana beside him, while Coyotito read a huge book.

This is certainly not a surprise for anyone with just a bare knowledge of the two languages; rather than regarding it uninteresting idiosyncrasy, however, we can view it as an example of the different lexicon organization strategies in the two languages, which Talmy (1985) described in detail. Furthermore, this mode of description extends – in a less predictable way – to other pairs:

- (49) *he could see* the bottoms of the canoes sticking through it
 através do qual Kino *via* o fundo dos barcos imóveis
 Lit.: through which Kino saw the bottoms of the boats immobile

Example (49) is quite analogous to body position examples in English (describing the boats' position relative to the surface of the water); however, there is no standard Portuguese verb whose past participle could be taken off the shelf.¹⁴

Conversely, we find in English translated from Portuguese flagrant cases of disrespect for the inverse rule, resulting in clear cases of translationese, as example (50) shows:

- (50) No prédio fronteiro, *viu* o calafate sentado à mesa, que o observava amigavelmente por cima da escudela fumegante.
 In the building opposite, he *saw* the caulker seated at the table, observing him amicably above his steaming wooden bowl.
 Lit.: In the house in front, he saw the caulker sitting at the table, watching him in a friendly mood over the steaming plate.

Thus, we have here one example of different linguistic categorization of presumably the same domain of experience: human body positions (or the way to get into them). By belonging to a different aspectual class, the verbs in the two languages have grammatical properties, appear in contexts, and form part of expressions which often relate translationally in quite a complex way, despite the apparent simplicity of the lexical correspondence (*sit* – *sentar*, for

¹⁴ *Espetados* would be the 'right' term if one followed the corresponding rule. However, this rule may not be part of the translator's knowledge; in any case, it is undeniable that the Portuguese rendering provides more than enough detail for a Portuguese text, so the present translation is in line with Slobin's (1996) findings on the removal of locative detail in translation from English to Spanish.

example). This might be called **aspectual gaps** instead of lexical gaps, and, in my opinion, it is something whose importance cannot be overemphasized.

In addition, this relatively uninteresting case also shows how dangerous it is to speak loosely about universal categories across languages: events can be – and often are – perceived differently by the speakers of two languages, as the case of body position easily shows. English speakers may well perceive sitting as an activity, which can then be perceived imperfectly (and perfectly: *I saw him sit there all afternoon*). In contrast, *estar sentado* ('sitting') is definitely a state to a Portuguese mind and cannot be perceived imperfectly (**Vi-o a estar sentado*).

3.4 Addition or omission of perception in translation

Before concluding this review of perception verbs in my material, and because of my first observation, I examined the cases of added or deleted perception more closely, and found out that this was due to several different factors. Still, I noted that it was often the case that translators either added a subject of experience or removed it without further ado. Here, I will only be concerned with one cause of this, which is intimately connected with the problem of translating acquisitions, discussed above, and actually constituted one of many independent clues to the delimitation of this class.

- (51) Kino lifted the flesh, and there it lay, the great pearl, perfect as the moon.
Kino levantou a carne e viu-a. Lá estava ela, a grande pérola, perfeita como a Lua.
Lit.: Kino lifted the flesh and saw it. There it was, the big pearl, perfect as the moon.
- (52) Kino held the great pearl in his hand, and it was warm and alive in his hand.
Kino apertou a pérola na mão e sentiu-a quente e viva.
Lit.: Kino clasped the pearl in the hand and felt it warm and alive

In these examples, the English stative (acquisition) is to be read as inceptive. Given that this is impossible in Portuguese, the translator chose the perception verb to express an event in (51), or to make clear that the next stative sentence is to be interpreted as a thought or sensation corresponding to an event of perception (52).

My material shows that these strategies are fairly systematic, although competing with other means of translating acquisitions.

4 Perception verbs in the systems of the two languages

Tobin may be right in claiming that 'even the most cursory examination of spoken and written discourse reveals that "sensory verbs", or "verbs of perception" in general, and "verbs of visual perception" in particular, are among the most frequently used in human language' (1993: 53). Languages, however, differ quite drastically.

While I take it that no one would claim that visual or auditory perception, represented by *see* and *ver*, and *hear* and *ouvir*, etc., is different according to the language one speaks, this study shows that the frequency of these verbs, the kind of objects they co-occur with, the kind of information that is co-specified with them, etc. may be quite different, as Tables 5 and 6 show in a condensed way.

Table 5: Past perception verbs in Portuguese original and translated text

	Portuguese original text			Portuguese translated from English		
	Imperfeito Perfeito	<i>pôde</i>	VP objects	Imperfeito Perfeito	<i>pôde</i>	VP objects
ver + observar	37 + 2	0	7 + 0	93 + 7	3 + 0	22 + 0
ouvir +escutar	19 + 2	0	5 + 0	35 + 1	0	9 + 0
sentir	20	0	2	34	0	5

Table 6: Past perception verbs in English original and translated text

	English original text			English translated from Portuguese		
	past instances	<i>could</i>	VP objects	past instances	<i>could</i>	VP objects
see+watch	89 + 23	31+ 1	24 + 9	27 + 2	6 + 0	4 + 0
hear+listen	43 + 4	11+ 0	12 + 0	24 + 3	1 + 0	7 + 0
feel	24	7	7	24	1	2
smell	5	3	0	0	0	0

In order to partially explain the translation of verbs of perception, I made use of an array of other pieces of evidence amassed during my attempt to describe – albeit imperfectly – the whole system. I believe that this refining of the analysis is at the core of informed corpus studies – that one should reanalyse the data with the help of the insights gained by analysing the same and other data once again (if not many times). That progress can be made can be verified by comparing the present text with Chapter 11 of Santos (1996), which describes the first stage of analysis.

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