

Brazilians and Americans habits and perceptions analysis for the translation of coffee packages and labels

Análise de hábitos e percepções de brasileiros e americanos para a tradução de embalagens e rótulos de café

Análisis de hábitos y percepciones de brasileños y estadounidenses para la traducción de envases y etiquetas de café

Received: 08/29/2021 | Reviewed: 09/07/2021 | Accept: 09/10/2021 | Published: 09/12/2021

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Abstract

In this paper, we analyze the consumption habits and perceptions of Brazilians and Americans regarding the consumption, preparation and handling of the coffee product and its packaging, in order to better think about translating the packaging of coffee produced in southern Minas Gerais to the USA market. Through bibliographic research and other resources, information such as preparation, reasons for consumption, and place of consumption were compared between the two populations to understand if there were relevant cultural differences. The packaging of eight coffee brands, four from each country, was also compared in order to notice any differences and similarities between them. The results show that there are indeed differences between the two cultures, both in their habits and in their packaging. Some examples are the valorization of the semantic field of coffee in Brazilian packaging, and the preference for quick methods of brewing the product for the Americans. We conclude that any translation of Brazilian coffee for the American public must consider these differences. Finally, we present some possibilities for packaging translation, using for this the idea of country brand and its influences on consumers, as well as the concepts of Localization, Intersemiotic Translation and Paratranslation.

Keywords: Intersemiotic translation; Localization; Coffee; Packaging; Consumer habits.

Resumo

Neste trabalho, analisamos os hábitos de consumo e as percepções de brasileiros e de norte-americanos quanto ao consumo, preparação e manuseio do produto café e suas embalagens, de modo a melhor pensarmos a tradução de embalagens do café produzido no sul de Minas Gerais para o mercado norte-americano. Através de pesquisa bibliográfica e outros recursos, foram comparados hábitos como modo de preparar, razões para consumo e local de consumo entre as duas populações, de modo a se perceber se havia diferenças culturais relevantes. Também foram comparadas embalagens de oito marcas de café, quatro de cada país, para se perceber eventuais diferenças e semelhanças entre elas. Os resultados mostram que de fato há diferenças entre as duas culturas, tanto em seus hábitos como nas embalagens. Alguns exemplos são a valorização do campo semântico do café nas embalagens brasileiras, e a preferência por métodos rápidos de preparação do produto para os norte-americanos. Concluímos que qualquer tradução do café brasileiro para o público norte-americano deve levar em conta tais diferenças. Por fim, apresentamos algumas possibilidades de tradução de embalagens, utilizando para isso a ideia de marca país e suas influências sobre os consumidores, além dos conceitos de Localização, Tradução Intersemiótica e Paratradução.

Palavras-chave: Tradução intersemiótica; Localização; Café; Embalagem; Hábitos de consumo.

Resumen

En este trabajo, se analizan los hábitos de consumo y las percepciones de brasileños y estadounidenses sobre el consumo, la preparación y la manipulación del producto café y su envase, para pensar mejor en la traducción del envase del café producido en el sur de Minas Gerais al mercado estadounidense. A través de la investigación

bibliográfica y otros recursos, se compararon informaciones como la preparación, los motivos de consumo y el lugar de consumo entre las dos poblaciones para entender si había diferencias culturales relevantes. También se compararon los envases de ocho marcas de café, cuatro de cada país, para observar las diferencias y similitudes entre ellas. Los resultados muestran que, efectivamente, existen diferencias entre las dos culturas, tanto en sus hábitos como en sus envases. Algunos ejemplos son la valorización del campo semántico del café en los envases brasileños, y la preferencia por métodos rápidos de preparación del producto para los estadounidenses. Concluimos que cualquier traducción del café brasileño para el público estadounidense debe tener en cuenta estas diferencias. Por último, presentamos algunas posibilidades de traducción de envases, utilizando para eso la idea de marca país y sus influencias en los consumidores, así como los conceptos de Localización, Traducción Intersemiótica y Paratraducción.

Palabras clave: Traducción intersemiótica; Localización; Café; Envase; Hábitos de consumo.

1. Introduction

Coffee is part of many current Western cultures. This food involves rituals and habits in most people's daily lives: starting with the search for it in supermarkets, through storage at home, preparation - mostly infusions using hot water and roasted beans or powder - to the act of enjoying it - pure or with sugar, milk, chocolate, among other additives. These habits, however, differ among cultures, as we will see later on this paper. This work sought to understand the differences in the way Brazilians and Americans understand and appreciate coffee, to think about how to better translate the Brazilian product to the USA market through the packaging and presentation of the product. We observed cultural aspects (consumption habits) of Brazilians and Americans, and packages (and their labels) from the two countries, in order to design a possible coffee packaging for export that could have a higher rate of acceptability.

The importance of packaging and its respective labels for the food industry is vital and irreplaceable. Stefano and Filho (2012) point out that, nowadays, more than packing and preserving food, packaging has the role of informing and representing the product it carries. In this way, packaging and product end up merging into a single concept. Moreover, consumer perception of packaging goes far beyond beauty, aesthetics, or technical information: the colors, design, shape, label information, and even smell can attract consumers and highlight a brand over others in the consumer market.

On the other hand, according to Guerrero et al. (2000), the attitude of purchase and acceptance of food by the consumers is a complex phenomenon, influenced by factors related to marketing, psychology, culture, and even sensory aspects. The cultural aspect is the one that interests us the most: the above authors point out that when presented with products unfamiliar in their culture, consumers tend to give little value to the brand of these products. However, when they know and use the product, the brand becomes a preponderant factor. We will return to the issue of branding later in this text.

Giacalone and Jaeger (2016) also confirm that the cultural factor, in the form of familiarity and usage appropriateness, affects how beverages and foods are seen and used by consumers. Any new food, or new way of using a food, will be resisted by a population that is not familiar with it.

If product and packaging are closely related for consumers, and if a product and its consumption are directly affected by the culture of a society, then there will be aspects of the packaging, or the product, which will be more relevant for one society and not so relevant for others. Depending on the food, even the label, with its mandatory information, will have more or less importance to the consumer, who may or may not verify the information expressed there, according to their trust and cultural relationship with the product (Sousa et al., 2020). In this sense, it is possible to think that a packaging may present some product attributes that can make it more attractive to a people that does not take it into account so much, or even present new possibilities of appreciation. Indeed, it is correct to say that one of the main factors for a good acceptance of some food in commerce is directly linked to how the packaging is seen and what it causes to the product visibility.

The idea of conveying attributes of a product that are of value in one people/language/culture to another is possible through what is known in Translation Studies as Localization: Prudêncio, Valois, and De Lucca (2014) explain that many industries think of their products manufacturing adapting certain parts, or instructions for use in manuals, according to the

region of the world where such products will be taken. This idea of translation and this way to reach a culture has already been widely applied in the food, electronics, and software industries, among others, becoming effective in the strategy for implementing potential products in a certain location. The above authors mention, for instance, the case of computer programs that change automatically the way they present data depending on the language and/or region the user chose when setting up the program.

To carry out this kind of translation, some tools can also be used, such as the ideas of intersemiotic translation and paratranslation. The first, according to Da Silva (2017), involves translating an element of one language/culture into another element of another language/culture - a word in one culture can become an image in another, a gesture can become a facial expression, an image can become a smell, among several other possibilities. The second, according to Yuste Frias (2013), determines that any translation must take into account not only the words of a text, whatever the type of text, but also the elements that surround and follow the words - in a label, for example, it is not enough to translate *café* into coffee, it is also necessary to translate the font of the words, the colors, and images of the label, the arrangement of the information, etc., from the Brazilian culture into the English-speaking culture.

Finally, it is worth remembering that Brazil, according to Silva et al. (2021), is the largest producer and exporter of coffee in the world; the state of Minas Gerais, the largest coffee producer in the country (responding to 50% of the production); and the South and Southeast of Minas Gerais State have about 650,000 hectares of coffee planted area, covering 154 cities. These figures demonstrate the economic and cultural importance of coffee for the region and the development of the country's agricultural sector. Promoting ways to increase coffee exports from the region is to promote directly the socio-economic development of the region and the country.

2. Methodology

To carry out the study, two methodologies were adopted for data collection and analysis. The first methodology relates to consumption habits. We sought to understand and answer the following questions: the reason for coffee consumption; the amount of coffee consumed per day; the time of most consumption; the preferred preparation method; foods and other additives added to ready-made coffee; the place where the beverage is most consumed; the qualities people attribute to coffee. We believe that these questions, although not completely, help to draw a very detailed socio-cultural profile of coffee consumers in Brazil and the United States. To obtain this information, we resorted to a literature survey, an essentially documental qualitative methodology, with searches of scientific papers in specialized databases and on the Internet, using combined keywords. The keywords used for the bibliography in Brazil were *análise*, *hábitos*, *consumo* and *café*. For the United States: *coffee*, *habits*, *consumption* and *analysis*.¹ After that, some studies were selected for presenting the information we wanted in more detail: Arruda et al. (2009) and Sousa et al. (2016) for Brazil; Olsen (2013) and Beans (2020) for the United States. The discarded studies presented less information or were too old.²

As a complement to the bibliographic information for the Brazilian public, an online form with closed questions (multiple choice) was set, and answered by 226 coffee consumers during July 2020, most of them from the southern Minas Gerais region. The non-consuming public was not considered (and neither were the answers from people under 18 years old).

¹ We had to change the search configurations when using the Internet browser, or the Google site, to have better results in each language.

² For example, the study of LaComb et al. (2011), which talks about beverage choices in USA, but not emphasizing coffee, and, accordingly, having less data on the questions we issued before.

The questionnaire was anonymous and its main objective was to confirm the data obtained from the bibliography, which indeed happened.³

For the American case, the confirmation proof happened through the analysis of some coffee lovers' groups on the social media Facebook. Such groups are formed by affinities (in this case, the taste for coffee), and it is customary for a member to ask a question directed to others, to get to better know the group's audience. In this case, two groups were analyzed, Coffee Lovers and Coffee Coffee Coffee, in the period between August 2018 and July 2020. We also launched some questions in those groups, to stimulate answers for some of the aforementioned research questions. Nowadays, social media are considered reliable sources of information about consumer habits, and there are already surveys that use their data, such as the research by Samoggia, Riedel, and Ruggeri (2020). However, again, the goal of the Facebook survey was to confirm the data from the papers, which also happened.⁴

After collecting information from the two involved cultures, we compared and crossed the data and information, both quantitatively - comparison of numbers and percentages on a certain aspect - and qualitatively - analysis of some peculiarities.

The second methodology is related to the comparison between some coffee packages from the two countries: we used a documental qualitative methodology, comparing four packages of different Brazilian coffee brands - Melitta, Canecão, 3 Corações Espresso Gourmet, and Pilão - and four American packages - Maxwell House, Starbucks French Roast, Folgers, and Starbucks Veranda Blend, all containing roasted coffee powder. We sought to observe features, such as predominant colors, packaging material, technical information, designs, seals and other recognizable symbols, etc.

The study was registered in the GPPEX platform, with protocol 21934975, and approved by the Institutional Research and Extension Center (NIPE) of the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Southern Minas Gerais – IFSULDEMINAS – Brazil.

3. Results

The comparison between the data and cultures of the two countries provided a large amount of information, which will serve for future analysis and publication. In this work, we present below some results of the comparison that most caught our attention at a first sight.

3.1 Brewing coffee at home

Regarding how coffee is prepared at home, the use of cloth and/or paper filter is the rule in Brazil: as shown in Table 1, almost 8 out of 10 people consulted use one of these two methods to prepare coffee. On the other hand, espresso coffee is hardly made at home. In the USA, the cloth filter is not even mentioned in the surveys, the drip machine is used by about half of those surveyed, and espresso represents almost 12% of the most used preparation method.

³ The raw data of the form can be accessed at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1-BXRhcFXYSNbX2WQO89NB62jwSWyS-ImdVMbNL5xNmE/edit?usp=sharing>

⁴ The raw data of the form can be accessed at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1HXXdQoBQe8Zd6jUKU14F6S9RXBD-yu5OzURkRDLO-jk/edit?usp=sharing>

Table 1. Coffee Brewing Method.

		Paper filter	Cloth filter	Drip machine	Espresso
Brazil	Online form (2020)	70,3%*	70,3%*	9,9%	3,8%
	Sousa et al. (2016)	23%	63%	-	1%
USA	Beans (2020)	-	-	45%	12%
	Facebook (2018/2020)	12,4%	-	54,6%	11,3%

* In the form, paper and cloth filters appear together. Source: Made by the authors based on online form, Sousa (2016), Beans (2020) and Facebook groups data.

3.2 Reasons for consumption

Correlating the data collected in the papers, an interesting aspect appears about why to consume coffee in each culture: pleasure and habit are by far the main reasons that lead Brazilians to consume coffee, according to Arruda et al. (2009) and Sousa et al. (2016) – respectively, 69% and 80% gave that answer. Among Americans, nonetheless, reasons such as taste, energy, and even caffeine are options of choice in the surveys and were chosen by most of those surveyed. According to Beans (2020), taste and energy represent 69% of the reasons for drinking coffee in the US, while Olsen (2013) shows how much Americans are aware of caffeine and its effects in the body: 82.1% of those surveyed said they ingest caffeine as a way to stay awake. We can see from the data that caffeine content is a crucial piece of information among USA consumers, although this content is not shown on the labels of the packages we analyzed, as we will see soon.

3.3 Consumption location

Another interesting qualitative aspect is where coffee is consumed: Beans (2020) and data from Facebook groups show a strong preference among Americans for specialized coffee shops. Beans further shows that: 1) stores like Starbucks and Dunkin Donuts are frequented at least once a month by more than half of those surveyed; 2) Among those who consume coffee away from home, half buy coffee “to go” (or “take away”), i.e., consume coffee on the go or buy it ready for the work. Among Brazilians, buying coffee for travel does not even appear as an option in the research of Arruda et al. (2009) and Sousa et al. (2016), that is, the average Brazilian does not have the habit of buying ready-made coffee. Instead, they drink coffee at home in the morning or at the workplace – both studies show a strong relationship between drinking coffee and social interaction at workplaces.

3.4 Labels and packages

Comparing the coffee packages showed that the greatest similarities between the packages of the two countries were in the colors used for the packages of coffees considered gourmet or special: the colors gold, black and brown are used in both countries. We also noticed that technical information, such as bar code, nutritional table, and data related to the producer, are present in the packaging of both countries. It can be explained by the fact that coffee is considered a food, and food product labeling follows strict laws in most Western countries. In Brazil, although there is no a specific law, several regulations and resolutions from the Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária (National Health Surveillance Agency) play this regulatory role, such as, for example, the Resolution No. 360/2013 (Anvisa, 2013), which approves the Technical Regulation on Nutrition Labeling of Foods. In the United States, the USA Department of Health and Human Services provides the Food Labeling Guide (FDA, 2013), which also regulates what information should appear on packaging in that country. The existence of laws and regulations for food labeling is not without purpose, since food is a major factor in the onset of several physiological conditions that can lead to various diseases, such as cholesterol and heart attack, or glucose and diabetes.

Among the differences, the amount of coffee per package is quite peculiar in the United States, with a great variety of weights: the four packages analyzed had weights of 200 grams, 12 ounces (340 grams), 13.5 ounces (382 grams), and 3 pounds (1.36 kilograms), very different from the standard weights in Brazil, which are either 250 grams or a half kilo (for roasted coffee). The packaging materials and formats also vary: in Brazil, the packaging is quite always the “pillow” type, made of malleable plastic. In the United States, there are also pillows, made of plastic or paper based material, but many packages are made of hard plastic in a rounded shape. We also observed that the coffee packages sold in Brazil have more references to the source of the raw material, through drawings, photos or symbols, that is, it is more likely to find the image of coffee beans, or even a coffee plant, on the Brazilian packages (Figure 1). This is not so noticeable on coffee packaging from the United States, which often does not even show any reference to coffee, using instead a different symbology. One example is the Starbucks Veranda Blend, which shows the draw of a stylized hummingbird (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Images and symbols differences between the cultures.



Source: Authors.

4. Discussion and Possibilities

The results show that there are differences in habits between the two populations. Brazilians take more time to prepare coffee at home since the filtering and straining processes require more time; on the other hand, coffee is a way to socialize at work, which certainly indicates that coffee is accompanied by conversations. In turn, Americans are quicker and more "practical", as they prefer electric and espresso coffee makers, which deliver the finished product in less time. Moreover, they perceive coffee as a source of energy and caffeine and not linked to socialization, as many buy ready-made beverages and even agree to drink coffee while commuting. No studies were found to indicate the reasons for the behavior of each population.

Another relevant piece of data is the way each population views or perceives the product itself: coffee packages clearly show that Brazilians tend to find more information related to the semantic field of coffee (images of beans, plants, coffee cups...), while Americans have less access to this type of information on the packages. This finding further strengthens the idea that Americans see coffee essentially as an energy source, regardless of where it comes from.

These differences in habits and perceptions are clearly cultural and need to be taken into account by those who intend to translate Brazilian coffee for the American public.

Having the above information, we thought about some possibilities of packaging and semiotic resources that may attract the attention of Americans, since, as said before, this is the main idea of this research. An extra piece of information we use here is the idea of country brand: as explained by Roth, Diamantopoulos, and Montesinos (2008), when associating a

product with a country, the consumer builds relationships and triggers impressions and emotions that will influence his perception of the product, both positively and negatively. Thus, we bet on the "exotic" aspects of Brazil, foreignizing⁵ our packaging and ways of consumption presented to Americans. The idea was already explored before by other companies, such as the Brazilian company Maricota Alimentos,⁶ which a few years ago bet on the exportation of pão de queijo (Brazilian cheese bread). This food is so well known worldwide that it even has a page in English on Wikipedia.⁷ In 2018, the company exported about 50 tons of the product (Fonseca, 2018). We also took into account the mandatory legal standards and information that must appear on American packaging (FDA, 2013).

One of the first possibilities we considered was to associate coffee with the other well-known Brazilian food, the pão de queijo. A package that associates the images of coffee and pão de queijo – this one serving as a paratext – could evoke positive feelings to the coffee, since, as said before, pão de queijo is a very appreciated Brazilian food abroad. With this in mind, we designed the packaging shown in Figure 2. It is important to clarify that the packaging should contain the message "merely illustrative image".

Figure 2. Packaging associating coffee and pão de queijo.



Source: Authors.

Another possibility we thought of is related to the association that Americans make of coffee with caffeine: as shown before, coffee serve as a source of caffeine, and caffeine would serve as an energizer or a way to stay awake for longer. In our research, we could not find out why this association is so strong and why it does not occur among Brazilians. In this case, we thought about changing the color of the packages according to the caffeine content of the coffee. Depending on the variety of the coffee bean, as well as the grinding and roasting process, it is possible to change the percentage of caffeine in the final product (Debona et al., 2020). Thus, coffee powder with less caffeine would have a lighter colored package, while the product with high caffeine content would have a darker color (Figure 3). It is the same system used by some chocolate companies: the higher the cocoa percentage, the darker the package. We can also think of using a stamp or another symbol

⁵ The concept of foreignization comes from Venuti (1995).

⁶ More information at <https://maricotaalimentos.com.br/exportacao>, access 15/08/2021.

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P%C3%A3o_de_queijo, access 15/08/2021.

more accustomed to Americans to represent, along with the color of the package, the caffeine concentration. Thus, using intersemiotic translation, we translate the caffeine content into color gradation, which allows for easy recognition.

Figure 3. color gradation according to caffeine concentration.



Source: Authors.

It is important to note that our translation ideas focused on the packaging colors and symbols. According to the data presented above, we believe that we still need to better understand the uses of materials, formats, and weights used in the USA. For example, our research did not allow us to understand why there is so much variation in weights there. Therefore, we decided not to think about applying intersemiotic translation and paratranslation to such aspects for now.

A third possibility arising from the results of our research would be to translate the way coffee is consumed. Remembering that there is practically no cloth filter coffee preparation in the United States, an American coffee shop chain could prepare coffee in front of the final consumer through straining: the consumer would have the option of receiving a pot of boiling water, a cloth filter containing a dose of powder coffee, and a cup. They would then pour the water into the filter and experience the process themselves, as well as the related sensations (the smell of coffee being strained, the cup warming up with the infusion, etc.). Logically, this way of serving coffee, which could be called Brazilian Coffee Brewing, should be in loco, with the consumer enjoying the product inside the coffee shop, and maybe even accompanied by some pães de queijo (Brazilian cheese breads).

The three ideas above have not yet been tested in real life, but we hope to test them in the future, according to resources and opportunities we may have. We do not discard the possibility of failure in these future tests: according to Cardello et al. (2000), when regarding to foods it is extremely difficult to predict any aspect of consumer behavior in real life. Indeed, many factors, besides cultural ones, can contribute to the acceptance or not of a foreign product, including political or economic. Nonetheless, our ideas continue to serve as guides and theoretical possibilities for future advances in our research.

5. Final Considerations

We observed that there are indeed cultural differences between the habits of the two peoples investigated here, and these differences influence the way each people perceives, handles, and consumes coffee. A good translation of the coffee packaging and label from southern Minas Gerais for USA consumers must consider these differences.

About the research work itself, it proved to be very productive and engaging. Everyone in the group learned more and better about the cultures involved and developed new research skills.

The research still has many potentials to develop, especially for other markets and cultures, such as Latin American, European, Asian... Of course, for each case, it would again be necessary to choose a specific language/culture and check its peculiarities. In fact, as the next group to be studied, we intend to approach the Mercosur audience.

The research could also focus on understanding how other countries translate their products into the major consumer markets: for example, how Colombian coffee is presented to Americans. That would allow to an even greater knowledge about how each language/culture understands, feels, and evokes senses for each food.

Finally, we hope to be able to apply some of the translations explored here on the product labels and packaging of our Institute or other possible partners, also trying to evaluate the reception of these ideas, through forms, interviews or even sensory analysis.

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