

**HUMAN TRAITS THROUGH BOTANICAL METAPHORS:
BOTANOMORPHS IN AMERICAN ENGLISH AND BRAZILIAN
PORTUGUESE FOR TRANSLATION PURPOSES**

Adauri Brezolin¹

Abstract

In this paper, I intend to replicate, in Brazilian Portuguese, part of a study that Sommer (1988) conducted about botanomorphs in American English. For that, I discuss the concept of botanomorphs — fruits and vegetables used as metaphors for human characteristics —, analyze the main connotations involved in such metaphors, and compare the produce items in American English with their counterparts in Brazilian Portuguese searching for person descriptors in dictionaries. Then, I discuss the concept of metaphor following the classical view of metaphor (or the comparison view). As the use of fruits and vegetables with metaphorical or euphemistic connotations is not only lexically but also culturally motivated, rarely do corresponding items have identical connotations in two languages, posing, thus, an interesting challenge to translators. Finally, I discuss ways to transpose botanomorphs from one language into another, considering that, as my results have indicated, fruits and vegetables are, metaphorically or euphemistically, related to human characteristics in different fashions, and that the connotation of the same fruit or vegetable in two languages may be coincidental, approximate, or far-off. So, depending on the type of text, context, and communication channel, translators must decide on the most suitable strategy to transpose produce items and their respective connotations into another language.

Keywords: botanomorphism, euphemism, metaphor, pragmatic translation.

¹ ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4990-0224> ; Email: brezolinadau@yahoo.com.br

Resumo

Neste artigo, pretendo replicar, em português brasileiro, parte de um estudo que Sommer (1988) realizou sobre botanomorfos em inglês americano. Para tanto, discuto o conceito de botanomorfos — frutas e vegetais usados como metáforas indicando características humanas —, analiso as principais conotações envolvidas em tais metáforas, e comparo as frutas e os vegetais em inglês americano com seus correspondentes em português brasileiro em busca de descritores humanos em dicionários. Ainda, discuto o conceito de metáfora alinhando-me com a visão clássica de metáfora (ou visão comparativa). Como o uso de frutas e vegetais com conotações metafóricas ou eufemísticas é motivado de modo tanto lexical quanto cultural, raramente itens correspondentes possuem conotações idênticas em duas línguas, algo que impõe um desafio interessante aos tradutores. Por fim, discuto maneiras de se transpor botanomorfos de uma língua à outra, lembrando que, segundo meus resultados, frutas e vegetais relacionam-se, metafóricamente ou eufemisticamente, com características humanas de modos distintos e que a conotação da mesma fruta ou do mesmo vegetal em duas línguas pode ser coincidente, aproximada, ou bem distinta. Assim, em função do tipo de texto, contexto e canal de comunicação, os tradutores devem escolher a estratégia mais adequada para transpor frutas e vegetais e suas respectivas conotações para outro idioma.

Palavras-chave: botanomorfismo, eufemismo, metáfora, tradução pragmática.

1. Introduction

My inspiration in writing this paper was drawn from an article in which Rebechi and Trindade (2021) described a task proposed to translation undergraduates from a Brazilian university. In such activity, students would search for conventional equivalents of botanical metaphors in English (En) based on Brazilian Portuguese (BP) idioms containing fruits (*abacaxi*/pineapple, *banana*/banana, *laranja*/orange, *limão*/lime, and *mamão*/papaya). It was in this paper that I first came across “botanomorph” (Sommer, 1988), a term that aroused my

interest in carrying out an analysis in BP replicating part of an investigation Sommer had conducted in American English (AE), focusing on “*botanomorphism*, or the tendency to describe human characteristics through fruit and vegetable metaphors” (1988, p. 666, emphasis in original). My interest in investigating botanomorphs was even greater due to the relative rarity of studies on this topic, mainly in BP.

Sommer’s investigation was comprehensive and included three phases: 1. dictionary search looking for instances of fruits and vegetables used as person descriptors; 2. comparison between botanomorphs and non-botanomorphs, and 3. comparison of the connotative meaning of fruit, vegetable, and animal names. In this paper, however, I intend to replicate only phase 1: searches for fruits and vegetables used as person descriptors in BP dictionaries, as replicating phases 2 and 3 would require a more complex investigation, which is beyond my purposes here.

To study botanomorphs, considered here as the use of produce items to describe human characteristics through metaphors, means that the concept of metaphor must be addressed. As an in-depth discussion about metaphors lies outside the scope of this paper, my focus will be on their inherent nature to generate meaning by making comparisons or analogies, an idea based on the comparison view of metaphor.

The classical view of metaphor, or the Aristotelian comparison view, has been constantly criticized by constructivist theoreticians, who claim, for instance, that, in the process of finding a literal equivalent for the metaphor, readers/hearers must decode its literal meaning to understand it. This way, a metaphor is seen just like a figurative substitution for a literal expression, and “in many instances of metaphor it is impossible to find a proper literal equivalent (be it an equivalent expression or an equivalent comparison)” (Volkman, 2004. p. 19-20). However, first, if metaphors may be seen like mere figurative substitutions for a literal word or expression, to my understanding, this does not represent a problem that may lower their status or value; second, mainly when the types of metaphors (used to

describe personality and attributes of people) are used, they are promptly comprehended by speaker/hearers who associate them with their literal meanings due to their conventionalized status; thus, the comparison view may work for some cases of metaphors, as it is the case of botanomorphs.

Apart from different types of metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, van der Broeck, 1981, among others), and for present purposes, emphasis will be placed on popular metaphors used to describe personality and attributes of people. According to Sommer (1988, p. 665), those metaphors that are common in popular speech “may provide insights into ways in which personality is conceptualized, not in the technical language of psychologists, but in common speech”.

In that sense, Goatly’s metaphor definition is useful:

(m)etaphor occurs when a unit of discourse is used to refer unconventionally to an object, process or concept, or colligates in an unconventional way. And when this unconventional act of reference or colligation is understood on the basis of similarity, matching or analogy involving the conventional referent or colligates of the unit and the actual unconventional referent or colligates. (1997, p. 8)

Goatly clarifies certain phrases in his definition: the conventional referent of the unit is the Vehicle; the actual unconventional referent is the Topic, and the similarities and/or analogies involved are the Grounds. He also works through an example to demonstrate how this terminology is applied: “The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there”, in which ‘the past’ is the Topic, ‘foreign country’ is the Vehicle, and the similarity, the Grounds, “is the fact that in both foreign countries and in the past ‘things are done differently’” (1997, p. 8). In some cases, only the Topic and the Vehicle are present, as in “Director Matt Busby, the Godfather of the club” (1997, p. 8). The latter configuration will be important when botanomorphs are analyzed.

According to Foss (2018, p. 285), metaphors are “nonliteral comparisons in which a word or phrase from one domain of experience is applied to a different domain”. Aligned with her, Larsson highlights that “(a) key feature of metaphors is that one concept, from the source domain, is projected on other concepts, the target domain, in order to create an effect of meaning” (2013, p. 2). For example, when “peanut” is used to describe a human being, meaning is generated by transferring the characteristics of the produce item, in this case, its small size, to qualify the human being as “unimportant” (Sommer, 1988); thus, metaphors involve “the process of transferring, borrowing, or carrying over characteristics that apply to one object to a second object” (Floss, 2018, p. 285).

Furthermore, metaphors make “some likeness, often novel or surprising”, stand out “between two or more objects”, contributing to “the discovery of new properties and relationships”, making “familiar words take on a new or extended meaning” (Sommer, 1988, p. 666), it is this combination of elements that makes a botanomorph figurative, allegorical.

Here, I regard botanomorphism as the attribution of fruit, vegetable, and plant characteristics to describe humans, or to compare or treat humans as fruit, vegetables, or plants. It is important to mention that botanomorphs are not similes, “a true botanomorph is a metaphor (rather than a simile) used independently as a person descriptor” (Sommer, 1988, p. 668). For example, if someone is *as red as a beet*, he/she is *red*, so a simile is a true statement; whereas, if someone is a *nut*, he/she is “crazy”, not the seed of a fruit; consequently, this quality ascribed to the individual is metaphoric. This distinction is important since my dictionary searches will locate only single terms used as metaphors for human personality or body parts.

Sommer’s phase 1 (1988), the search for instances of fruit and vegetables used as person descriptors in twelve dictionaries of standard and colloquial American speech, turned up the following results, as observed in Table 1:

Table 1- Botanomorphs in AE for Human Characteristics

Attribute	Connotation	Fruit or vegetable
Personality, including intelligence	Craziness Inexperienced Old-fashioned Disliked person Upstarts Hot stuff, spicy Windbag	Banana, nut Cherry, green pea Corn Lemon, persimmon, quince Mushroom Mustard, pepper Yam
	Stupidity	Dill, gooseberry, onion, cabbage head, potato head, turnip
General attractiveness and status	Beauty	Nectarine, peach, sweet potato, tomato
	Ugliness	Artichoke, prune, squash, rutabaga
	High status	Plum, pumpkin
	Low status	Peanut
Size and shape	Long nose	Banana
	Tall skinny person	String bean
	Man with protruding abdomen	Melon belly
	Small person	Peanut
Specific body parts	Female breasts	Apples, chestnuts, grapefruit, lemons, melons, oranges, peaches, watermelons
	Female genitalia	Cabbage, cauliflower, fig, mushroom, red onion, orange, pumpkin, rhubarb
	Hymen	Bean, cherry
	Penis	Banana, carrot
	Testicles	Apples, berries, chestnuts, gooseberries, nuts, plums
	Male genitalia	Rhubarb
	Pubic hair	Parsley, spinach
	Head	Bean, gourd, nut, onion, potato

Source: Sommer, 1988, p. 669.

Sommer’s selection revealed 46 produce items used as metaphors for human traits, discussed further on.

Next, I present my methodological procedures based on Sommer’s ideas.

2. Methodology

First, I produced two lists with the common fruits (40) and vegetables (40)² in Brazil, Charts 1 and 2 below.

My fruit search in BP included the following items, as shown in Chart 1

Chart 1- Fruit items searched for in BP

1. <i>abacate</i> (avocado)	21. <i>laranja</i> (orange)
2. <i>abacaxi</i> (pineapple)	22. <i>lima</i> (key lime)
3. <i>acerola</i> (Barbados cherry)	23. <i>limão</i> (lime/lemon)
4. <i>ameixa</i> (plum)	24. <i>maçã</i> (apple)
5. <i>ameixa-seca</i> (prune)	25. <i>mamão</i> (papaya)
6. <i>amendoim</i> (peanut)	26. <i>manga</i> (mango)
7. <i>amora</i> (blackberry)	27. <i>maracujá</i> (passion fruit)
8. <i>avelã</i> (hazelnut)	28. <i>marmelo</i> (quince)
9. <i>azeitona</i> (olive)	29. <i>melancia</i> (watermelon)
10. <i>banana</i> (banana)	30. <i>melão</i> (melon)
11. <i>caju</i> (cashew)	31. <i>morango</i> (strawberry)
12. <i>caqui</i> (persimmon)	32. <i>nectarina</i> (nectarine)
13. <i>carambola</i> (starfruit)	33. <i>noz</i> (nut)
14. <i>cereja</i> (cherry)	34. <i>pera</i> (pear)
15. <i>coco</i> (coconut)	35. <i>pêssego</i> (peach)
16. <i>figo</i> (fig)	36. <i>romã</i> (pomegranate)
17. <i>framboesa</i> (raspberry)	37. <i>tamarindo</i> (tamarind)
18. <i>goiaba</i> (guava)	38. <i>toranja</i> (grapefruit)
19. <i>graviola</i> (soursop)	39. <i>uva</i> (grape)
20. <i>jaca</i> (jackfruit)	40. <i>uva passa</i> (raisin)

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

My vegetable search in BP included the following items, as shown in Chart 2

Chart 2- Vegetable items searched for in BP

1. <i>abóbora</i> (pumpkin)	21. <i>couve</i> (collard greens)
2. <i>acelga</i> (chard)	22. <i>couve-flor</i> (cauliflower)
3. <i>agrião</i> (watercress)	23. <i>ervilha</i> (pea)
4. <i>alcachofra</i> (artichoke)	24. <i>espinafre</i> (spinach)

² For producing the lists, two corpora (fruit – 8241 words and vegetable – 7696 words) were compiled with specific texts about fruits and vegetables, extracted from the internet and processed in AntConc, a lexical analysis software (Anthony, 2020).

5. <i>alface</i> (lettuce)	25. <i>feijão</i> (bean)
6. <i>alho</i> (garlic)	26. <i>feijão-vagem</i> (string bean)
7. <i>alho-poró</i> (leek)	27. <i>inhame</i> (yam)
8. <i>almeirão</i> (spadona chicory)	28. <i>jiló</i> (scarlet eggplant)
9. <i>aspargo</i> (asparagus)	29. <i>mandioca</i> (manioc)
10. <i>batata</i> (potato)	30. <i>milho-verde</i> (corn)
11. <i>batata-doce</i> (sweet potato)	31. <i>moranga</i> (pumpkin)
12. <i>berinjela</i> (eggplant)	32. <i>mostarda</i> (mustard)
13. <i>beterraba</i> (beet)	33. <i>nabo</i> (turnip)
14. <i>brócolis</i> (broccolis)	34. <i>pepino</i> (cucumber)
15. <i>cebola</i> (onion)	35. <i>pimentão</i> (bell pepper)
16. <i>cebolinha</i> (chives)	36. <i>quiabo</i> (okra)
17. <i>cenoura</i> (carrot)	37. <i>rabanete</i> (radish)
18. <i>chicória</i> (endive)	38. <i>repolho</i> (cabbage)
19. <i>chuchu</i> (chayote)	39. <i>rúcula</i> (arugula)
20. <i>coentro</i> (coriander)	40. <i>tomate</i> (tomato)

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

Then, all the fruits and vegetables were looked up for person descriptors in six dictionaries of general language, namely: *Aulete Digital* (D1), *Dicio*, *Dicionário Online de Português* (D2), *Dicionário Priberam da Língua Portuguesa* (D3), *Dicionário informal* (D4), *Houaiss Online* (D5), *Michaelis Online* (D6), and in one dictionary of BP slang (SL)/(Gurgel, 2005)³, from now on, referred to as indicated in parentheses. Additionally, all botanomorphs in AE were also looked up in *Green's Dictionary of Slang*, the largest historical dictionary of English slang, written by Jonathon Green⁴. This decision was meant to somewhat “update” or corroborate the data collected by Sommer in the late 1980’s. The results of my searches were combined with Sommer’s and appear in Tables 2 and 3. By the way, due to space limitations, only the fruits and vegetables found as person descriptors in BP will appear in Tables 2 and 3;

³ It is worthy mentioning that my search was done in only one slang dictionary in BP due to the lack of updated material. The other two dictionaries found were discarded since they had been published more than 50 years ago.

⁴ <https://greensdictofslang.com/about/>.

respectively. Inspired by Sommer (1988), I branch out botanomorphs into “fructomorphs” and “vegetomorphs”.

In the following section, I present my analysis and results.

3. Fructomorphs and vegetomorphs spring up

Quantitatively, in my initial comparison, out of the 46 botanomorphs in AE only 19 (41%) of their botanical counterparts in BP were also found as metaphors for person descriptors. Considering the languages individually:

- out of the 46 items in AE, 26 (56.5%) are vegetables and 20 (43.5%) are fruits,
- out of the 19 items BP, 10 (53%) are fruits and 9 (47%) are vegetables.

Curiously, those results reveal inversely proportional figures: more vegetables in AE and more fruits in BP are used as metaphors for human characteristics.

However, after I searched for the most common fruits (40) and vegetables (40) in the BP dictionaries, my results revealed a larger number of botanomorphs, a total of 36 items (21 fruits and 15 vegetables). As Sommer’s selection did not contain those items, I then “cross-searched” for AE counterparts of those new botanomorphs in *Green’s Dictionary of Slang*, and the AE selection of botanomorphs went up to 54 items (28 vegetables and 26 fruits). In view of that, two new sceneries were created, as observed in Tables 2 and 3. New items appear in bold-type.

Table 2 contains the addition of ten new fruit items in BP — *abacate* (avocado), *abacaxi* (pineapple), *caju* (cashew), *coco* (coconut), *goiaba* (guava), *jaca* (jackfruit), *mamão* (papaya), *morango* (*strawberry*), *uva* (grape), *uva-passa* (raisin), and six new fruit items in AE — “avocado”, “coconut”, “grape”, “guava”, “raisin” and “strawberry”—.

Table 2- Fructomorphs in BP with AE counterparts and respective connotations

BP	connotation	AE	connotation
abacate	sluggish person (D4)	avocado	Female breasts, testicles
abacaxi	boring person (D1, D2, D6)	pineapple	∅
<i>ameixa</i>	∅	plum	high status; testicles; beauty
<i>ameixa-seca</i>	old, wrinkled woman (SL)	prune	ugliness; unpleasantness; unattractiveness
<i>amendoim</i>	∅	peanut	low status
<i>bagas; bagos</i>	testicles (D1, D3, D4, D6)	berries	testicles
<i>banana</i>	penis (D1, D3, D4, D5, D6); coward person, sluggish person (D1, D3, D6); good person, sluggish person, penis (SL)	banana	craziness; penis; stupidity
caju	stupid person (D5, D6,)	cashew	∅
<i>caqui</i>	∅	persimmon	disliked person
<i>castanha</i>	∅	chestnuts	female breasts; testicles
<i>cereja</i>	∅	cherry	inexperience; attractive
coco	head (D1, D3, D4, D5, SL)	coconut	head, testicles
<i>figo</i>	∅	fig	female genitalia; vagina
<i>groselha</i>	vagina (SL)	gooseberry	stupidity; testicles
goiaba	boring person (D1, D3, D4); stupid (innocent) person (D4, SL)	guava	buttocks
jaca	female buttocks (D1, D2, D5, D6); buttocks (D3, D4, SL)	jackfruit	∅
<i>laranja</i>	naïve person; middleman (D1)	orange	female breast; female genitalia
<i>limão</i>	female breasts (D3); ill-humored person (SL)	lemon	disliked person; female breasts
<i>maçã</i>	female buttocks ((D4)	apple	female breasts; testicles; vagina
<i>mamão</i>	female breasts (D4, SL); stupid person (D5)	papaya	∅
<i>marmelo</i>	∅	quince	disliked person; buttocks
<i>melancia</i>	self-centered person (SL)	watermelon	female breasts
<i>melão</i>	female breasts (D4)	melon	female breasts (pl.)
morango	anus (SL)	strawberry	beauty
<i>nectarina</i>	∅	nectarine	beauty
<i>noz</i>	Head (D2, D3 D5, D6)	nut	craziness; testicles; head; vagina
<i>pêssego</i>	handsome and elegante man (D3); anus (D4, D5)	peach	beauty female breasts
<i>toronja</i>	∅	grapefruit	female breasts
uva	pretty/attractive woman (D1, D2, D5, D6, SL); attractive girl or child (D4)	grape	(pl.) female breasts, testicles
uva-passa	wrinkled woman (SL)	raisin	old person, testicles (pl.)

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

Table 3 contains the inclusion of six new vegetable items in BP — *alho* (garlic), *chuchu* (chayote), *jiló* (scarlet eggplant), *mandioca* (manioc), *pepino* (cucumber), *quiabo* (okra) —, and two new vegetable items in AE — “cucumber” and “okra” —.

Table 3- Vegetomorphs in BP with AE counterparts and respective connotations

<i>abóbora</i>	head (D1, D4, D5, D6); fat woman (D1, D2); short and fat woman (D5, D6); weak and sluggish man (D2); unimportant person (SL)	pumpkin	high status; female genitalia
<i>abobrinha</i>	∅	squash	ugliness; stupidity; head; face
<i>alcachofra</i>	∅	artichoke	ugliness; vagina
alho	(very) smart person (D1, D2, D3, D5, D6)	garlic	∅
<i>batata</i>	large biceps (D1); large nose (D6); rightfulness (SL); smartness (SL)	potato	head
<i>batata-doce</i>	∅	sweet potato	beauty; male and female genitals
<i>cabaça</i>	∅	gourd	head; stupidity
<i>cebola</i>	weak, tired, insolente person (D1, D5, D6)	onion	stupidity; head
<i>cebola-roxa</i>	∅	red onion	female genitalia
<i>cenoura</i>	penis (SL)	carrot	penis
chuchu	graceful/attractive/lovely woman (D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6, SL); dear person; one’s favorite (D2, D3, D5)	chayote	∅
<i>cogumelo</i>	∅	mushroom	upstarts; female genitalia; vagina
<i>couve-flor</i>	∅	cauliflower	female genitalia; vagina
<i>endro</i>	∅	dill	stupidity
<i>ervilha</i>	∅	green pea	inexperience; naivete
<i>espinafre</i>	very tall and thin man (D1, D5, D6)	spinach	pubic hair
<i>feijão</i>	∅	bean	hymen; head; stupidity
<i>feijão-vagem</i>	∅	string bean	tall skinny person; penis
<i>inhame</i>	penis (SL)	yam	windbag
jiló	unbearable person (SL)	scarlet eggplant	∅
mandioca	penis (D4, D6)	manioc/cassava	∅
<i>milho-verde</i>	∅	corn	old-fashioned
<i>mostarda</i>	∅	mustard	hot stuff
<i>nabo</i>	penis (D1, D3, D4, D6, SL); stupid person (D6)	turnip	stupidity; head, penis
pepino	penis (SL)	cucumber	penis
<i>pimenta</i>	∅	pepper	hot stuff
quiabo	penis (SL)	okra	penis
<i>repolho</i>	short and fat person (D3)	cabbage	female genitalia

<i>ruibarbo</i>	∅	rhubarb	female genitalia; male genitalia
<i>rutabaga</i>	∅	rutabaga	ugliness
<i>salsinha</i>	∅	parsley	pubic hair
<i>tomate</i>	(pl.) testicles (D2, D3, D5, D6, SL)	tomato	beauty; attractiveness, vagina

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

In general terms, my dictionary search, as did Sommer’s search, “turned up a relatively small number of fruit and vegetable terms used colloquially to describe human characteristics” (1988, p. 674). Comparing the results in both languages, they show that BP has a smaller number of produce items and confirm that more fruit than vegetables are used as metaphors for human characteristics in that language.

My qualitative analysis is now presented combining Sommer’s findings with mine. I will combine all the results and contrast the botanomorphs in terms of connotation, as shown in Table 4. Items with direct counterparts appear in bold-type.

Table 4- Botanomorphs for Human Characteristics in AE with possible counterparts in BP

Connotation	Botanomorphs in AE	Botanomorphs in BP
1. anus	∅	<i>morango</i> (strawberry), <i>pêssego</i> (peach)
2. arrivism	mushroom	∅
3. beauty/elegance	cherry, nectarine, peach , plum, sweet potato, tomato	<i>cbuchu</i> (chayote); <i>pêssego</i> (peach), <i>uva</i> (grape)
4. boredom	∅	<i>abacaxi</i> (pineapple); <i>goiaba</i> (guava)
5. buttocks	guava, quince	<i>jaca</i> (jackfruit)
6. cowardice	∅	<i>banana</i> (banana)
7. craziness	banana, nut	∅
8. crossness	∅	<i>limão</i> (lime/lemon)
9. excessive talking	yam	∅
10. face	squash	∅
11. female breasts	apple, avocado, chestnut, coconut, grapefruit, lemon , melon , orange, peach, watermelon	<i>limão</i> (lime/lemon); <i>mamão</i> (papaya); <i>melão</i> (melon)
12. female buttocks	grapes	<i>jaca</i> (jackfruit); <i>maçã</i> (apple)
13. female genitalia	cabbage, cauliflower, fig, mushroom, red onion, orange, pumpkin, rhubarb, sweet potato	∅
14. goodness	∅	<i>banana</i> (banana)
15. head	bean, coconut , gourd, nut , onion, potato, squash, turnip	<i>coco</i> (coconut), <i>noz</i> (nut)
16. high status	plum, pumpkin	∅
17. hymen	bean, cherry	∅

18. inactivity	∅	<i>abóbora</i> (pumpkin)
19. inexperience	cherry, green pea	∅
20. innocence	green pea	<i>goiaba</i> (guava); <i>laranja</i> (orange)
21. large biceps	∅	<i>batata</i> (potato)
22. large, fat nose	∅	<i>batata</i> (potato)
23. long nose	banana	∅
24. low status	peanut	∅
25. male genitalia	rhubarb, sweet potato	∅
26. obsolescence	corn	∅
27. overweight	∅	<i>abóbora</i> (pumpkin); <i>repolho</i> (cabbage)
28. penis	banana, carrot, cucumber, okra, string bean, turnip	<i>banana</i> (banana), <i>cenoura</i> (carrot); <i>inhame</i> (yam); <i>mandioca</i> (manioc); <i>nabo</i> (turnip); <i>pepino</i> (cucumber); <i>quiabo</i> (okra)
29. pubic hair	parsley, spinach	∅
30. rightfulness	∅	<i>batata</i> (potato)
31. self-centeredness	∅	<i>melancia</i> (watermelon)
32. sluggishness	∅	<i>abacate</i> (avocado), <i>banana</i> (banana)
33. small person	peanut	<i>repolho</i> (cabbage)
34. smartness	∅	<i>alho</i> (garlic), <i>batata</i> (potato)
35. stupidity	banana, bean, dill, gooseberry, gourd, onion, squash, turnip	<i>caju</i> (cashew); <i>goiaba</i> (guava); <i>laranja</i> (orange); <i>mamão</i> (papaya); <i>nabo</i> (turnip)
36. tall skinny person	string bean	<i>espinafre</i> (spinach)
37. testicles	avocados, apples, berries, chestnuts, coconuts, gooseberries, grapes, nuts, plums, raisins	<i>tomates</i> (tomatoes)
38. ugliness/old age	artichoke, prune, squash, raisin , rutabaga	<i>uva-passa</i> (raising)
39. unpleasantness	lemon , persimmon, prune, quince	<i>jiló</i> (scarlet eggplant), <i>limão</i> (lime/lemon)
40. vagina	apple , artichoke, cauliflower, fig, mushroom, nut, tomato	<i>maçã</i> (apple), <i>groselha</i> (gooseberry)
41. vitality	mustard, pepper	∅
42. weakness and sluggishness	∅	<i>abóbora</i> (pumpkin), us. for men.
43. weakness, tiredness, and indolence	∅	<i>cebola</i> (onion)

Source: Author (2023).

Now, I compare the data above with the main results obtained from phase 1 by Sommer (1988).

Out of the 43 types of connotation:

- eighteen (42%) types have negative associations (boredom, cowardice, craziness, crossness, excessive talking, inactivity, inexperience, low status, obsolescence, overweight, self-centeredness, sluggishness, small person, stupidity, ugliness/old age, unpleasantness, weakness and sluggishness, weakness, tiredness, and indolence);
- sixteen (37%) types are associated with specific human body parts;

- six (14%) types have positive connotations (beauty/elegance, goodness, high status, rightfulness, smartness, vitality), and
- three (7%) types have neutral associations (arrogance, innocence, tall skinny person).

Out of the 43 types of connotation only 8 (19%) types have direct counterparts (same fruit or vegetable/ same association):

- beauty (peach/*pêssego*);
- female breasts (lemon/*limão*, melon/*melão*);
- head (coconut/*coco*, nut/*noz*);
- the penis (banana/*banana*, carrot/*cenoura*, cucumber/*pepino*, okra/*quiabo*, turnip/*nabo*);
- stupidity (turnip/*nabo*);
- the vagina (apple/*maçã*);
- ugliness/old age (raisin/*uva-passa*) and
- unpleasantness (lemon/*lime*/*limão*).

Distinctive size or shape seems to determine how a produce item will be used to describe humans, for example, "some pumpkins" and "peanut" for an important person; "pea-brained" for a stupid person, and in BP, the same can be observed: *abóbora* (pumpkin) for a short and overweight person; *repolho* (cabbage) for a small person; *batata* (potato) for large biceps.

The physical resemblance between produce and body shape associates "string bean", in AE, and *espinafre* (spinach), in BP, with a tall thin person.

Now, comparing the evaluative associations of vegetomorphs and fructomorphs in both languages: fructomorphs in AE tend to involve more positive traits than vegetable metaphors do; however, in BP, fructomorphs seem to boast more negative traits than vegetomorphs, for instance, eight fructomorphs against four vegetomorphs:

- *pêssego* (peach) and *uva* (grape) are associated with beauty;

- *abacaxi* (pineapple)/*goiaba* (guava) with boredom;
- *banana* (banana) with cowardice/sluggishness;
- *limão* (lime/lemon) with crossness/unpleasantness;
- *caju* (cashew)/*goiaba* (guava)/*laranja* (orange)/*mamão* (papaya) with stupidity;
- *uva-passa* (raisin) with ugliness;
- *abóbora* (pumpkin) with inactivity, overweight, weakness and sluggishness;
- *repolho* (cabbage) with overweight, small person;
- *nabo* (turnip) with stupidity, and
- *jiló* (scarlet eggplant) with unpleasantness.

If, in AE, no botanomorph indicated high intelligence; in BP, *alho* (garlic) was found to be associated with smartness; insanity was observed in “banana” and “nut”, but in no botanomorph in BP.

Several round or ellipsoid vegetable names were used for the head in AE (“bean”, “coconut”, “gourd”, “nut”, “onion”, “potato”, “squash” and “turnip”), just two in BP [*coco* (coconut), *noz* (nut)]; however, few botanomorphs were found to refer to other major non-erogenous body parts, like arms, legs, shoulders, ankles, feet, toes, or fingers, but to face (“squash”) and long nose (“banana”) in AE, large, fat nose [*batata* (potato)] in BP.

Desirability is reflected by metaphors that relate to an item's taste:

- “peach” for an attractive person;
- “lemon” for a sour and disagreeable person, and
- “onion” for a stupid or boring person.

The counterparts of those botanomorphs in BP exhibit similar associations related to taste:

- *pêssego* (peach) for a beauty, attractive woman;
- *limão* (lime/lemon) for an unpleasant person, and

- *cebola* (onion) for an indolent person.

In BP, *jiló* (scarlet eggplant), due to its bitterness, is used for an unpleasant individual.

As most botanomorphs have some colloquial usage in connection with the male and female erogenous zones, they deserve closer attention. At this point, it is necessary to say that, as Sommer has put it, “(d)escriptions of sensitive body parts through metaphor are a type of euphemism” (1988, p. 671). Understood as the substitution of a milder word or expression for a harsh, unacceptable, or inappropriate on certain occasions, euphemisms are “used to protect oneself or one’s audience from embarrassment or other emotional discomfort” or to signify that “the speaker is avoiding sexual overtures” (Spears, 1982, p. xii). This way, when botanomorphs are used to replace erogenous body parts, they will be treated as having euphemistic overtones:

- although it is not easy to understand the logic behind the associations of produce items and their respective metaphors, some, related to certain erogenous body parts, are very evident when distinctive shape is concerned. For example, coincidentally, in both languages, “carrot”/*cenoura*, “cucumber”/*pepino*, and “okra”/*quiabo* are used euphemistically for the penis. Comparatively, if the vagina has more botanomorphs used as euphemisms in AE (“apple”, “artichoke”, “cauliflower”, “fig”, “mushroom”, “nut”, “tomato”), it has only one direct counterpart in BP (*maçã*/“apple”);

- interestingly, in both languages, female breasts are associated with fructomorphs only, usually in the plural: [“apples”, “avocados”, “chestnuts”, “coconuts”, “grapefruits”, “lemons”, “melons”, “oranges”, “peaches”, “watermelons” and *limões* (lemons); *mamões* (papayas); *melões* (melons)], with AE exhibiting a larger number of produce items;

- when it comes to testicles, both languages use botanomorphs in the plural: “apples”, “avocados”, “berries”, “chestnuts”, “coconuts”, “gooseberries”, “grapes”, “nuts”, ‘plums” and “raisins”, and *bagos* (berries) and *tomates* (tomatoes), with the peculiarity that in AE, only fruit items are used;

- if, on the one hand, AE has no botanomorph for anus; *morango* (strawberry) and *pêssego* (peach) in BP, the latter has no botanomorph for female genitalia (“cabbage”, “cauliflower”, “fig”, “mushroom”, “red onion”, “orange”, “pumpkin”, “rhubarb”, “sweet potato”), for hymen (“bean”, “cherry”), for male genitalia (“rhubarb”, “sweet potato”) nor for pubic hair (“parsley”, “spinach”), and

- curiously, in AE, the same botanomorphs may be used euphemistically for body parts of both genders, for example, “rhubarb” for male and female genitalia, “apple”/“chestnut”/“coconut”, always, in the plural, for female breasts and testicles, likewise, “grape”, always in the plural, for female buttocks and testicles.

My dictionary searches have also turned up some interesting results closely related to the grammatical peculiarities of the BP language. As it is known, Portuguese, like other languages, is a grammatically gendered language, which means that nouns have gender and that adjectives, articles, and pronouns must agree with their gender, either masculine or feminine. For example, the word “berry” may have as its counterpart in BP *baga* (feminine-gendered term) or *bago* (masculine-gendered term), but only the plural form of the latter, *bagos*, is used euphemistically for testicles. Another example, the fruit *banana* is feminine in BP, so one should say *Comi uma banana*/I have eaten a banana; however, if the fruit is used metaphorically to refer to a man or a woman, as an expressionless person, either a masculine or a feminine article must follow it: *Ele é um banana*/*Ela é uma banana*. The same goes for *goiaba* (“guava”) and “orange” (“laranja”). Another peculiarity of the language is the use of diminutives or augmentatives, indicated by suffixes *-inbo/-inba* or *-ão/-ona*. For example, “a small garlic”, or *albinbo* was found to be used euphemistically for clitoris, *quiabinbo* (“small okra”) for small penis, and *goiabão* (“large guava”) for a boring person; crazy-like person. Two terms related to a vegetable, “corn”, *espiga*/ear and *espiga de milho*/“ear of corn” are used euphemistically or metaphorically; respectively, for the penis and a tall and thin person, two usages clearly associated with the shape of the produce. I also came across some collocations:

laranja chupada (“sucked orange”) for a thin person; *limão azedo* (“sour lemon”) for a ill-humored person, in this case reinforcing the taste of the fruit; *maracujá-de-gaveta* (“passion fruit in the drawer”) for an old wrinkled woman, and the hypernymic term *fruta* (“fruit”) for the vagina. I also came across a collocation in AE, “okras and prunes” for the male genitals (*Green’s Dictionary of Slang*).

According to Rebechi and Trindade (2021), no matter if the same botanomorphs are interlingually recurrent in two languages, the relationship between them and their metaphorical sense is rarely the same. Interestingly, the same fruit in AE and BP were found to be used with the same connotation, like in “carrot”/*cenoura*, “cucumber”/*pepino*, and “okra”/*quiabo*, euphemisms for the penis; however, “the metaphorization of fruits” — and vegetables — “relates directly to their abundance or absence in different regions and to their shape and characteristics” (Rebechi and Trindade, 2021, p. 121, my translation)⁵, so much so that tropical produce (like “cashew”, “chayote”, “guava”, “jackfruit”, “manioc”, “pineapple”, “scarlet eggplant”), more popular in Brazil, tend to be more used metaphorically to describe people in BP. In general terms, however, the transposition of botanomorphs into another language requires solutions other than, for example, literal translations.

At this point, it is important to make it clear that the meanings of fruits and vegetables used as metaphors found in the dictionaries may not coincide with the knowledge and familiarity that some Brazilian speakers have of their language, so, to validate the recognition and use of such meanings, further research on the topic is required.

4. Transposing fructomorphs and vegetomorphs into another language

As already mentioned, the transposition of botanomorphs into another language is directly associated with the translation of metaphors. For example, van den Broeck (1981)

⁵ In original: “(...) a metaforização das frutas tem relação direta com sua abundância ou carência em diferentes regiões e também com sua forma e características” (Rebechi and Trindade, 2021, p. 121).

suggests three possibilities for translating metaphors — and euphemisms —. Before looking over his ideas, however, it is important to resume the basic structure of metaphors (Goatly, 1997) and euphemisms.

When botanomorphs are used as metaphors and Goatly's terms Topic and Vehicle are applied, the most common configuration is: a person + a linking verb + a botanomorph, where the "person" is the Topic and the "botanomorph" is the Vehicle, as in "My cousin is a nut" ("my cousin = Topic and "nut" = Vehicle). But botanomorphs can appear in a wide range of different constructions as "Look at that prune!". In both examples, botanomorphs are used as metaphors for human characteristics. In other situations, mainly when botanomorphs refer to erogenous body parts, like in "April has nice melons", the botanomorph, besides metaphorical, is highly euphemistic, as a way of avoiding taboo words and following etiquette rules. "The culture defines the areas which are to be avoided, but it is the rules of being polite — etiquette — which motivate people to euphemize" (Spears, 1982, p. xii).

The suggestions for translating metaphors presented by van den Broeck (1981) can also be applied to the translation of euphemisms. His three suggestions are:

1) Translation 'sensu stricto' or literal translation. For lexicalized metaphors, this mode of translating may give rise to two different situations depending on what Vehicle to describe a person/thing is used in the target language.

a) If the Vehicles in the source and target languages correspond, the resulting metaphor in the target language will be idiomatic. For example, "The guy is a lemon" translated into Brazilian Portuguese as "*O cara é um limão*", since *limão* like "lemon", is used to refer to an unpleasant person.

b) If the Vehicles in the source and target languages differ, the resulting metaphor in the target language may be either a semantic anomaly or a daring innovation.

(2) Substitution. A possibility in which the Vehicle of the source language is replaced with a different, but also conventionalized, Vehicle in the target language. For example, “she is a peach” rendered into Brazilian Portuguese as “*ela é uma uva*” (“she is a grape”), in this case both “peach” and *uva* may be used metaphorically to imply beauty, attractiveness.

(3) Paraphrase. A possibility in which the source language metaphor is rephrased by a non-metaphorical expression in the target language. In most situations, the metaphor here is made explicit through a commentary or an explanation. For example, “she is a peach” into BP as *ela é muito bonita* (“she is very pretty”).

It is beyond doubt that translators can resort to any of the suggestions above; however, I am favorable to two of them: literal idiomatic translation (when Vehicles are similar in form, and in sense, as in “lemon”/ *limão*), and substitution (when Vehicles are different in form, but similar in sense, as in “peach”/ *uva*). Personally, these are the solutions that I would recommend to translators as ideal since that the result in both would be idiomatic and sound natural. Yet, these solutions may also be considered as pragmatic translations (Baker, 1992). When translating botanomorphs, a pragmatic solution means searching for lexical choices in the target language that convey the same connotation, not necessarily the same fruit or vegetable. There are cases when the Vehicles in both languages coincide (literal idiomatic translation), however, they seem to be more the exception than the rule. The idea behind substitution is like that of equivalence (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958/1995), a procedure through which the translator can resort to a fixed word or expression that belongs to the “phraseological repertoire of idioms, clichés, proverbs, nominal or adjectival phrases”, or popular metaphors.

Rebecchi and Trindade (2021) also consider the use of paraphrase if the two suggested solutions might seem inappropriate. To my understanding, it could eventually be used only as a last resort. In general, I would avoid it as much as possible in that when a metaphor is

used, there is a reason for it, for instance, embellishment, which may be part of one author's style, and its elimination would be removing a special tint applied to the text.

Though I am favorable to an idiomatic literal rendering or pragmatic substitution, translators never work under optimum conditions, they must make decisions according to the text type, context, and communication channel. In some cases, mainly when verbal and non-verbal constraints are combined as in dubbing and subtitling, a fruit or vegetable on the screen, in general, used metaphorically or euphemistically, cannot be substituted, or omitted. In situations like those, as the vehicle in the source language cannot be replaced, the resulting metaphor in the target language might be inevitably “a semantic anomaly or a daring innovation” (van den Broeck, 1981, p. 77).

5. Concluding remarks

The main goal in this paper was to replicate part of Sommer's (1988) investigation into the names of fruits and vegetables used as metaphors for human characteristics in AE. My search was conducted in six general language dictionaries and in one slang dictionary of BP. The fruits and vegetables in BP corresponding to those in Sommer's study were also looked up for person descriptors. Additionally, the most common Brazilian vegetables and fruits were selected and the produce items not in Sommer's study were looked up in the same dictionaries.

Some of my findings are:

- botanomorphs in AE (54) exceeded botanomorphs in BP (36), revealing that sixty-five percent (67%) of the botanical counterparts in BP are not used as metaphors for human characteristics;
- considering the languages individually, out of the 54 items in AE, 52% (28) are vegetables and 48% (26) are fruit, and out of the 36 items in BP, fifty-eight percent (21) are fruit and 42% (15) are vegetables, demonstrating inversely proportional

figures: more vegetables in AE and more fruit in BP are used as metaphors for human characteristics;

- coincidentally, in both languages, “carrot”/*cenoura*, “cucumber”/*pepino*, and “okra”/*quiabo* are used euphemistically for the penis; and
- some botanomorphs are used only in the plural in both languages to connote testicles, for example, “apples”, “avocados”, “berries”, “chestnuts”, “coconuts”, “gooseberries”, “grapes”, “nuts”, “plums” and “raisins”, and *bagos* (berries) and *tomates* (tomatoes), with the peculiarity that in AE, only fruit items are used.

As far as the translation of botanomorphs is concerned, translators should find lexical items that make sense to the target audience and that are analogous from the pragmatic point of view. The most relevant aspect guiding the translator in his/her search for a suitable lexical choice is not the botanomorph *per se*, but its connotation. In this respect, my suggestions (Table 5) should be viewed merely as possible choices in both languages, and not as prescriptive equivalents. Translation and decision-making walk hand in hand.

Sommer (1988) implemented his investigation to verify whether the dictionary meanings of botanomorphs used as metaphors were in widespread use or generally recognized, and subjected his findings to AE speakers who would inform familiarity or not with the metaphoric or euphemistic usage of produce items. Thus, if, on the one hand, my paper lacks a similar verification and this might represent a limitation; on the other, it provides new avenues for continuing and expanding my investigation into other varieties of Portuguese and languages.

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