

MACHINE TRANSLATION AND POETRY. THE CASE OF ENGLISH AND PORTUGUESE

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Abstract

This article sets out to analyse the translations into Portuguese of three poems written in English, “A Letter is a Joy of Earth” by Emily Dickinson, “To a Stranger” by Walt Whitman and “Sandra” by Charles Bukowski. Three translations by three human translators, Geir Campos, Pedro Gonzaga and Jorge de Sena, are compared to the translations made by Google Translate in order to evaluate machine translation quality. This research shows that machine translations are less “ludicrous” than some would think and are in fact quite acceptable. In the cases investigated, machine translations are sometimes as acceptable as the ones made by the professional translators, and they could even help them to make mistakes through a lack of attention or by ignoring all the possibilities in the case of polysemous words. The Google translations are obviously plainer and there are a number of mistakes in them of the kind one expects: wrong concordances, wrong interpretations of polysemous words, wrong interpretation of gendered words. However, overall the results are far more satisfying than forecast. Google Translate, or similar programmes, may help translators with different, albeit sound alternatives. Additionally, machine translations provide a useful tool to analyse the idiosyncrasies of translators.

Keywords: Machine translation; Poetry; Portuguese-English

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Introduction

Machine translation is an area in full expansion. Google Translate and the like might have been the laughing stock of many plurilinguists for a long time, but it is now considered a quite reliable way of translating texts, certainly when of a technical kind. Google Translate has been followed suit by Microsoft and, of lately, by DeepL. Where progress in machine translation had been slow over the last decades, new data mining techniques have brought about great progress in the last two years, especially since the emergence of Neural Networks. It goes without saying that the driving force behind this evolution is industry and trade, both relying heavily on translation to conquer the global market. The ever-increasing globalisation of trade indicates that this evolution will lead to increasingly more refined machine translation protocols, reducing the need of intervention of the human translators, their jobs being redefined as pre- and posteditors of texts translated by computer programmes.

When looking at the literature on the subject of machine translation, it is difficult to get rid of the impression that linguists and other traditional language experts are hardly being involved in this quest. A search on Google Scholar with the term ‘Machine Translation’ shows that the academic authors of articles on this subject are all employed at technological faculties. It is also striking that a great deal of them are Chinese, maybe an indication that the interests of researchers involved in machine translation are being stimulated primarily by global trade. Machine Translation is foremost “big business”. It is therefore not surprising that a combination of search terms such as “Machine Translation Prose”, concentrating the search on literary topics, does not yield many results. One does not expect computer engineers to be enthused by the translation of Flaubert or Cervantes. It is therefore all the more surprising that the search term “Machine Translation Poetry” does yield a whole series of results, this time again with Chinese authors as a majority. Especially Chinese computer linguists have been interested in the topic of “producing poetry” (Qixin Wang, Tianyi Luo, Dong Wang, Chao Xing, 2016) (Jiyuan Zhang, Yang Feng, Dong Wang, Yang Wang, Andrew Abel, Shiyue Zhang, Andi Zhang, 2017). The results are truly fascinating, even if outside the immediate scope of this article. Generating poetry through machines is not the same as translating it; it only seems more difficult and the point of coincidence is that a machine is used to deal with language in a highly creative and supposedly unexpected way.¹

As far as the translation of literary prose is concerned, there have been a few initiatives such as those reported on by Toral and Way (2018) and Toral, Wieling, and Way, (2018). In “What Level of Quality can Neural Machine Translation attain on Literary Text?” Toral and Wieling set out to compare three kinds of translations of English novels into Catalan by means of traditional Machine Translation (statistical phrase-based Machine Translation PBMST), Neural Machine Translation (NMT) and humans. The study includes literary works like *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling, but also *Ulysses* by James Joyce. Not surprisingly the machines performed better in the case of *Harry Potter* than of *Ulysses*. The

authors conclude that human translation is still the better option, but that NMT meant a great improvement when compared to PBMST and that the gap with human translation is therefore narrowing. Human translators were asked to evaluate the translations of three books done by machines and by humans and the authors conclude: “NMT outperformed PBSMT. For two out of the three books native speakers perceived NMT translations to be of equivalent quality to those of human translations in around one third of the cases (one sixth for PBSMT)” (p. 22). When it comes to translating novels, Machine translation still has a long way to go so as to attain human capacity, but these studies reveal that machine translation can at least be of great help, also to professional translators. Besides, one detail catches the eye: machine translation seems to be better at translating sentences when they are shorter, especially in the case of PBSMT. This seems like an indication that poetry might stand a chance when translated by machines.

Another article by Toral and Way (Toral et al, 2018) gives a good overview of what has been achieved in the field of machine translation and literary texts. In Toral and Way (2018) the authors analyse a chapter of a science fiction novel translated by, first, six professional translators and, second, by means of post-edited PBMT and post-edited NMT. They conclude that NMT, even more so than PBMT, helps when translating literature, at least in the case of novels, and that for professional translators the procedure is certainly faster than working purely from scratch. However, the hypothesis the authors raise is that working with machine translation can lead to the final result bearing the traces of its passage through the computer. In short, literary texts are not immediately suitable for machine translation, but methods are improving and even in the present state machine translation helps at speeding up the process.

In “Traduction automatisée d’une œuvre littéraire: une étude pilote”, Laurent Besacier states that current machine translation (MT) techniques are continuously improving and he inquires if the “pipeline (MT+PE)” (Machine Translation with Post Editing) could be useful translating literary works? (Besacier, 2014) To investigate this, Besacier machine-translated a short story by the American writer Richard Powers and then had it post-edited and revised by (nonprofessional) translators. The translation output was subsequently evaluated by a panel of readers (who read the translated short story in French and answered a survey afterwards). Eventually, the translated text was submitted to Powers’ official French translator, who formulated a few very interesting comments.² The translated text is generally readable, and some scientific passages are very convincing, but there are clumsy wordings: “The most repetitive defect, from which the work of any beginner translator suffers, is situated at the syntactic level, since the French language structures a sentence differently. The translation is understandable but does not really sound like French.” Other shortcomings are the anglicismes which he calls “Frenghish”. Finally, cultural references are (evidently) not taken into account. This summarizes well what one would expect to be the drawbacks of MT. The lack of awareness of context is probably the cause of most of the mistakes encountered.

The conclusion is that machine translation is booming business and that linguists seem to play no major role in it. The recent use of Neural Networks is revolutionising Machine Translation and progress is rapid due to the ever-growing input of translated texts. Finally, and contrary to popular belief, computer engineers and scientists are sometimes also interested in literature.

The research

All forms of machine translation are based on the premise that language repeats itself and that especially “word sequences” repeat themselves. The order in which words are used is not coincidental, neither is it the object of a series of continuous choices. It might be useful to recall the findings of John Sinclair here (1995). Sinclair’s main discovery was that people do not write or read by filling separate slots one by one, but used “chunks”, sequences typically between two and five words. Instead of the “slot and filler” principle, the mechanism that would govern linguistic communication would be the “idiom” principle. Several words are selected in a row and used over and over again. The more a text is governed by this “Idiom principle”, the more predictable it is. Good examples are technical texts, journalistic texts and scientific articles. The novelty of these texts lies not in the form, but only in the message. Quite another story are literary texts, where form is just as important as the message and authors tend to avoid chunks, preferring the more laborious technique of choosing words one by one. This is why “Literature is news that stays news”, as Ezra Pound used to say.

In what follows I will analyse the translation of three poems in English by canonical authors: “A Letter is a Joy of Earth” by Emily Dickinson, “To a Stranger” by Walt Whitman and “Sandra” by Charles Bukowski. The poets were chosen because of their notoriety. From each we compared the “official” translation, published from the hand of a professional translator, with a translation done by Google Translate. The authors of the poems, Dickinson, Whitman and Bukowski, can do without any comments. It might be useful to comment on the translators.

Jorge de Sena (1919-1978) translated Emily Dickinson. He was a Portuguese-born poet and university lecturer who lived exiled for six years in Brazil and, after the coup in 1964, immigrated to the United States where he worked as an academic. The fact that he had Portuguese roots was taken into account when comparing his translation with Google’s.

Geir Campos (1924-1999) translated Walt Whitman. He was a Brazilian poet and university lecturer. He lived his whole life in Brazil. He studied French, English, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian and Greek. He translated a total of thirty texts from all the languages he learned, including nine poetry titles, six novels and four plays.³

Pedro Gonzaga (1977) translated Charles Bukowski. He is a poet, translator, musician, writer and broadcaster. He translated seven books by Charles Bukowski.⁴

The translations

A Letter is a Joy of Earth

Jorge de Sena translated Emily Dickinson's "A Letter is a Joy of Earth" probably in Araraquara in 1962 (Dickinson, 1979). It was published posthumously in 1979 (for more information on Sena translating Dickinson see Monteiro, 1982).

Sena obviously understands the poem, whereas Google does not, and cannot relate the words to their context other than in terms of form. When Google succeeds in reproducing an alliteration or an assonance this is pure coincidence, although this coincidence occurs more than one would expect. An example is "At Deity decree", translated by Sena as "Conforme Deus estatui", Google: "No decreto da Deidade". Google reproduced the assonance (d/d), not present in Sena's translation. Besides, Sena translates 'Deity' as 'Deus', which is debatable, whereas Google correctly translated 'Deity' by 'Deidade'.

Google blunders much less than one would expect. This might in fact indicate that Dickinson's poetic language is more predictable than expected. Maybe for the same reason, Google's translation is sometimes better than Sena's, since the Portuguese author has a tendency to elevate the rather plain register of Dickinson's poetry, albeit alternated with outdated language forms. The second verse of the poem is a case in point: "It is denied the Gods", translated by Sena as "Denegada aos Deuses" and plainly rendered by Google as "É negado aos deuses". Google respects the informal level of the original. Sena is more formal, but he reproduces the alliteration. Sometimes Sena privileges a poetic device, missing an essential content feature such as in: "And I'm a Rose!", which Sena translates as "E sou uma Rosa!", whereas Google translates: "E eu sou uma rosa!". Google and Sena both drop the rhyme (Breeze/trees), but the Google translation is more literal and seems more correct. Sena omitted the 'I', privileging the rhythm but the 'I' is essential. Sometimes neither of the translations entirely convinces. In "There's something in the flight", Sena elevates the register, as he usual: "Algo há na fuga silente". "Silente" is a very unusual word, also in Portugal, and furthermore there is no adjective in the original. Google, on the other hand, interprets 'flight' in its most literal, modern and common version: "Há algo no vôo".

In general, Sena's translation is the result of quite some analysing and reflection. This shows in his observance of the traditional poetical elements of the original (the complete comparison can be consulted in the Appendix). On the other hand Sena, being a human being, "interprets". This is sometimes beneficial, as when elements have to be put in a relationship, especially when these elements are rather far apart. Sometimes, however, a more literal translation would have been truer to the original. As previously mentioned, Sena also has a tendency to elevate the general register of the poem. Dickinson occasionally uses outdated features, but this does not mean the whole poem is as solemn as Sena seems to insinuate.

To a Stranger

Geir Campos' translation of Walt Whitman was published in 1964 (Whitman, 1964). Quite a few of the comments to be made on Jorge de Sena's translation of Emily Dickinson apply to this translation as well. Geir Campos very often "ennobles" the original in his translation, using words and turns of phrase pertaining to a register more elevated than the original. The title is a case in point: Campos translated "To a Stranger" as "A um Ser Estranho", whereas Google translated plainly as "Para um estranho". "Stranger" is a polysemous word. It can be a person one doesn't know, or someone who does not belong to a particular place. In Portuguese, however, the most obvious translation, "estranho", is equally polysemous, with the same sense possibilities. There is no obvious need to translate as "ser estranho". Geir Campos obviously "explained" the original and gave it a somewhat more mysterious touch. The second verse was translated as follows:

Dickinson	Campos	Google
Passing stranger! you do not know how longingly I look upon you,	Estranho ser que passas! não sabes com que ansiedade ponho meus olhos em ti,	Passando estranho! você não sabe o quanto ansioso eu olho para você,

Here the inevitable drawbacks of machine translation catch the eye. Google translated "Passing" as a Present Participle and "how longingly" by "o quanto ansioso". The first translation is an outright mistake, the second one might sound a bit odd.

In the next verse, however, one can doubt if Google did not translate more accurately.

You must be he I was seeking, or she I was seeking, (it comes to me as of a dream,)	bem podes ser aquele que eu andava bus- cando ou aquela que eu andava buscando (isso me ocorre como num sonho),	Você deve ser ele que eu estava procu- rando, ou ela estava procurando, (vem a mim como de um sonho,)
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Obviously "ele" as a translation of "he" is incorrect (aquele), but "You must be" is, in my opinion, more accurately rendered by "você deve ser" than by "bem podes ser". Apart from this, the translation by Brazilian Geir Campos sounds rather peninsular (podes, buscar), which in Brazil means elevating the register. This is also the case in the next verse, where "somewhere" is translated by "algures" ("em algum lugar" by Google). There are a number of other examples of this characteristic (afeiçoados, cresceste, fôste, tomas-me a barba) Besides this, Google sometimes simply knows more English than the translator as in the expression "I am to + verb", which Campos translates as follows:

I am not to speak to you, I am to think of you when I sit alone or wake at night alone,	eu não estou para falar contigo, mas para pensar em ti quando me sento sozinho ou quando à noite desperto sozinho,	Não devo falar com você, devo pensar em você quando eu me sentar sozinho ou acordar sozinho na noite,
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I am to wait, I do not doubt I am to meet you again,	estou à espera, não duvido de que estou para encontrar-te outra vez,	Eu espero, não duvido que eu seja para te conhecer de novo,
I am to see to it that I do not lose you.	com isso estou por ver que não te perco.	Preciso assegurar que não o perca.

Surprisingly Google does not Translate all these sequences in the same way (Não devo, devo, Eu espero, preciso) and, unsurprisingly, errs once. Campos, on the other hand, translates all occurrences the same way, not correctly, as far as I can judge.

A number of other observations can be made (all to be consulted in the Appendix), but all come down to the same: Google blunders every so often, but Campos also isn't without fault. Besides, Campos has a "plan" and his translation is coherent according to this "plan". He knows who or what he is referring to when he speaks about a "Ser Estranho" and this fact conditions the rest of the translation. For whoever prefers a more solemn tone for this poem, Geir Campos is a "safe bet". Those who prefer a more down to earth version might not be totally disappointed by the Google version.

Sandra

"Sandra" by Charles Bukowski was translated by Pedro Gonzaga. One of the most striking and also most expected features of the Google translation is again the machine's difficulty in choosing the right alternative in the case of polysemous words. Polysemy is a troublesome problem for a machine, since it will immediately choose the most common alternative. In "Sandra" there are several examples of this: "as" translated as "como" instead of "enquanto", "light" translated as "luz" instead of "acender".

as she attempts to	enquanto ela tenta	como ela tenta	Google fails in the translation of the homonym "as".
light	acender	luz	Google is wrong in the translation of the homonym "light".
a new cigarette on an	um novo cigarro num	um novo cigarro em um	

Google also has no way to always distinguish between "ser" and "estar", although the context helps in some cases. The "literality" of Google often induces mistakes as in "spirit", which Google translates as "espírito", instead of "alcohol" but Gonzaga as well errs.

she's always high	está sempre alta	ela é sempre alta	Google doesn't distinguish between "ser" and "estar". The ambiguity of "high" is lost.
in heels	em sapatos de salto	nos saltos	Gonzaga explains. The Google translation is not quite understandable.
spirit	espírito	espírito	Gonzaga and Google have translated literally, but this is most likely about "alcohol".
pills	boletas	pílulas	Gonzaga curiously translates this as "boletas". It's probably drugs Bukowski is talking about.
booze	trago	bebidas alcoólicas	Gonzaga captured the informal register. Google formalized.

Google also does not always respect the collocations and translates break a man's heart as "partir o coração de um homem". "Quebrar o coração de um homem" is not so common (I leave the judgment of the choice of both of "de um homem" to my reader). On the whole, however, and when compared to Google, Gonzaga elevates the register, just like Sena and Campos.

Conclusion

The most obvious conclusion is that the machine gets it right more often than expected. The translations by Google are readable and would probably have been even more so if the verses had been joined together to make sentences and then broken up again. The astonishing fact is that a programme that relies basically on statistics and the analysis of the most likely sequence of words gets it right so often. Especially in the case of poetry where words are supposed to be chosen almost one by one, instead of in chunks, thus reducing predictability.

Google is also able to correct a wrong interpretation by the human translator and can, at least, function as a kind of safeguard for the human translator. In every one of the three poems analysed, Google had it right at least once where the human translator missed. Google errs where one expects it to err: polysemous words, gender, number and, in general, every time there is no distinction needed in the source text where there is a mandatory one in the target text. As Roman Jakobson is said to have said: "Languages differ less in what they can express than in what they must express". This is especially significant in Machine Translation.

Besides, the comparison of the machine-translated poems with the translator-translated ones allows for a zero degree comparison that reveals the idiosyncrasies of poetry and shows that the computer effectively has problems with what are considered to be these characteristics of poetry: alliteration, assonance, rhythm and polysemy. Only a programme designed specifically to detect these features would be able to spot these. Having said that, the human translator mostly struggles with the same problems as the machine. My analysis shows the various layers present in poetry and how, between these different layers, translators have to choose the ones they will translate (alliteration, assonance, rhythm, repetition), unable to translate all of them all the time. According to my analyses, it is very rare for a translator to be able to render each and every one of these features every time.

The comparison of the computer-translated poems with the translator ones also provides a zero degree of comparison revealing the translators' idiosyncrasies. In this case, maybe fortuitously, all three translators tended to use a more elevated register when compared to the plain Google translation. In some cases, the Google translation seemed to be more justified and closer to the original.

One caveat. This research is a snapshot. Technology evolves every day and the Google translation done in 2017 will now possibly be very different. Besides, as of October 2018, DeepL, the new automatic translation programme which started its activities in August 2017, has included Portuguese as one of its

working languages. Translations are constantly getting better, and this will have an influence, acknowledged by translators or not, on every kind of translation and, why not, poetry translation.

Notes

1. It is interesting for literary scholars to take a look at the drawbacks cited by scientists when it comes to the translation of poetry by machines. For example, Ghazvininejad, Shi, Priyadarshi & Knight (2017, p. 43) cite three disadvantages. Number 3 is the next one: “Slow generation speed. Generating a poem may require a heavy search procedure. For example, the system of Ghazvininejad et al. (2016) needs 20 seconds for a four-line poem. Such slow speed is a serious bottleneck for a smooth user experience, and prevents the large-scale collection of feedback for system tuning. Certainly not a consideration that a literature scholar would make.”
2. «Il reste bien sûr des imperfections, des lourdeurs, voire des erreurs ponctuelles, qui appellent une correction». Principales erreurs
 - «Le défaut le plus répétitif, celui dont souffre d’ailleurs le travail de tout traducteur débutant, est le calque syntaxique, là où le français structure différemment la phrase .../... On comprend, mais ça ne sonne pas vraiment français»
 - «Autre défaut assez fréquent, la perte des idiomatismes du français au profit d’anglicismes. (...)»
 - «Un troisième défaut tient à la non prise en compte de certains repères culturels .../... Par exemple, Powers fait plusieurs références à la topographie de Boston qui donnent lieu à des inexactitudes dans la traduction : « la rivière Charles » par exemple (p. 12) qui n’est pas une rivière mais plutôt un fleuve ; c’est pourquoi on traduira par « la Charles River » ou simplement « la Charles » (...)»
3. <https://dicionariodetradutores.ufsc.br/pt/GeirCampos.htm>
4. <https://dicionariodetradutores.ufsc.br/pt/PedroGonzaga.htm>

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APPENDIX. COMMENTS ON THE TRANSLATIONS BY THE TRANSLATORS AND GOOGLE

Emily Dickinson - A Letter is a Joy of Earth

Emily Dickinson	Jorge de Sena	Google	Comments
A Letter is a Joy of Earth	Uma carta é uma alegria da Terra	Uma carta é uma alegria da Terra -	Identical
It is denied the Gods –	– Denegada aos Deuses.	É negado aos deuses -	Google respects more the informal level of the original; Sena is more formal, on the other hand he reproduces the alliteration.

A sepal, petal, and a thorn	Sépala, pétala, espinho.	Um sepal, uma pétala e um espinho	Google did not notice the alliteration. It placed an article before each noun (generalized the article in the original in the first and last noun. It did not know how to translate 'sepal'. Sena removed the article, maintained the alliteration and the assonance.
Upon a common summer's morn –	Na vulgar manhã de Verão –	Em uma manhã de verão comum -	Google did not respect the rhythm but translated the language level in a more appropriate way; appropriate lexical choice. Sena chose a strange (vulgar) lexical alternative but achieved an alliteration.
A flash of Dew – A Bee or two –	Brilho de orvalho – uma abelha ou duas –	Um flash de Orvalho – uma Abelha ou dois -	Neither Google nor Jorge de Sena respected the internal rhyme (Dew/two), compensated by Sena by an alliteration (lh). Google kept 'flash' (it could be Haroldo de Campos). Google did not respect the 'bee' gender.
A Breeze – a caper in the trees –	Brisa saltando nas árvores –	Uma brisa - uma alcaparra nas árvores -	Google translated literally, did not relate the words, did not create a context that would indicate that 'a caper in the trees' is impossible. Sena chose 'jumping', a hypernym (cabriola?), but which favors the rhythm.
And I'm a Rose!	– E sou uma Rosa!	E eu sou uma rosa!	Google and Sena both lose the rhyme (Breeze/trees). The Google translation is more literal and seems more correct. Sena omitted the 'I', privileging the rhythm.

Afraid? Of whom am I afraid?	Ter Medo? De quem terei?	Receoso? De quem tenho medo?	Google didn't respect the intentional repetition of 'afraid', neither did Sena, but he did respect the rhythm.
Not Death – for who is He?	Não da Morte – quem é ela?	Não a morte - para quem é ele?	Google made no connection between 'fearful' and the proper pronoun (grammatical error).
The Porter of my Father's Lodge	O Porteiro de meu Pai	O Porteiro da Loja do Pai	Sena omitted 'lodge', Google translated it wrongly (store). The meaning in English is not very clear (hut, inn?)
As much abasheth me.	Igualmente me atropela.	Tanto abadesa-me.	Old English form (abasheth) for reasons of rhythm (?), not recognized by Google. If you switch to 'abashes', Google translates as 'me aborrece'
Of Life? 'Twere odd I fear [a] thing That comprehendeth me In one or more existences –	Da Vida? Seria cómico Temer coisa que me inclui Em uma ou mais existências –	Da vida? "É estranho, eu tenho medo [a] coisa Isso me compreende Em uma ou mais existências – EDITED: Era estranho temer [uma] coisa Que me compreende Em uma ou mais existências'	Old, poetic "Twere" form not recognized by Google. 'estranho' (Google) probably more appropriate than 'cômico' (Sena). Article [a] not recognized by Google. After editing the verses regularizing them (It were odd I fear [a] thing that comprehends me in one or more existences), Google's translation sounds like this: 'Era estranho temer [uma] coisa que me compreende em uma ou mais existências'. In this case, the Google translation is not absurd. Sena omits [a]. Google omits nothing.

At Deity decree –	Conforme Deus estatui.	No decreto da Deidade -	Sena translates 'Deity' as 'Deus' (debatable), Google is correct translating it by 'Deity'. Google maintains the alliteration.
Of Resurrection? Is the East	De ressuscitar? O Oriente	Da ressurreição? O Oriente	Neither Sena nor Google respects the capital letter of 'Resurrection', but Google translates the noun by a noun. Resuscitate' may simply refer to 'restore, revive'. 'Resurrection' is a religious concept.
Afraid to trust the Morn	Tem medo do Madrugar	tem medo de confiar na manhã	Sena dubiously translates 'Morn' as 'madrugar', but keeps the rhythm. Google retains the lexical sense, but loses the rhythm.
With her fastidious forehead?	Com sua fronte subtil?	Com sua testa fastidiosa?	The word 'subtle' does not seem to be a better translation than simply 'fastidiosa'. Both Sena and Google lose the assonance (fastidious forehead).
As soon impeach my Crown!	Mais me valera abdicar!	Daqui a pouco impeque minha coroa!	Sena translates the idea well, but loses the 'crown', loss of concrete content. Google does not recognize 'impeach'.

From here the English version has been edited to facilitate machine translation.			
By a departing light	A uma luz evanescente	Por uma luz de partida	Edited version: "By a departing light we see acuter, quite, than by a wick that stays."
We see acuter, quite,	Vemos mais agudamente	vemos um pouco mais	Sena ennobles, Google did not interpret the right sentence/verse, did not link with 'We see'.
Than by a wick that stays.	Que à da candeia que fica.	Do que por um pavio que permanece.	
There's something in the flight	Algo há na fuga silente	Há algo no vôo	Loss of assonance (acute/quite) in both Sena and Google. (There's something in the flight that clarifies the sight and decks the rays.) Loss of rhythm in Google translation. Sena ennobled ('silente'; according to the Priberam dictionary: 'poetic language'). The Google version is literal and, in this case, wrong, for choosing the false alternative of the homonym 'flight'. Lack of rhythm in the Google version.
That clarifies the sight	Que aclara a vista da gente	Que esclarece a visão	Here, curiously, Sena chose a more popular version (da gente), contrary to his habits.
And decks the rays.	E aos raios afa.	E a plataforma dos raios.	The meaning of 'deck' here is not very clear, neither for Sena nor Google apparently. (Deck = 1 adorn, apparel (archaic) array, attire, beautify, bedeck, bedight (archaic) bedizen (archaic) clothe, decorate, dress, embellish, engarland, festoon, garland, grace, ornament, trim) The translation 'platform' has nothing to do with it, would it be 'embelezar'?

			Next step: correct the translated unedited version by the edited version. Edited version: I died for beauty - but was scarce adjusted in the Tomb, When One who died for Truth was lain In an adjoining Room - He questioned softly why I failed? "For Beauty," I replied - "And I - for Truth - Themself are One - We Brethren are," He said - And so, as Kinsmen met a-Night - We talked between the Rooms - Until the Moss had reached our lips - And covered up - our names -

I died for beauty – but was scarce	Morri pela Beleza – mas mal eu	Eu morri por beleza - mas era escasso	Eu morri por beleza - mas foi escasso no túmulo, quando alguém que morreu pela verdade estava preso em uma sala adjacente - ele questionou suavemente por que eu falhei? “para a beleza”, eu respondi - “e eu - para a verdade - eles são um - nós, irmãos, somos”, disse ele - e assim, como os parentes encontraram uma noite - falamos entre os quartos - até que o musgo tivesse chegado aos nossos lábios - e coberto - nossos nomes – Google wrongly translates ‘scarce’ and ‘adjusted’ separately (poorly accommodated)
Adjusted in the Tomb,	Na tumba me acomodara,	Ajustado no túmulo,	Sena translates ‘Tomb’ as ‘tumba’, Google as ‘túmulo.’ The discussion as to which of the two is more appropriate is relevant. There is a slight rhyme room/tomb that is respected by Sena (accommodate/detach). Of course, Google does not notice. As far as ‘adjoining room’ is concerned, Google ‘an adjoining room’ is more literal and matches more with what follows ‘we talked between the rooms’, which is a bit odd in the version if Seine, when he needs to translate ‘we talked between the Rooms’/ ‘From room to room we talked’.
When One who died for Truth was lain	Um que pela Verdade então morrera	Quando (um) alguém que morreu pela verdade estava lá	
In an adjoining Room –	A meu lado se deitava.	Em uma sala adjacente -	
He questioned softly why I failed?	De manso perguntou por quem tombara...	Ele questionou suavemente por que eu falhei?	Strangely enough, Sena translates “why” as “by whom.” The rhythm in his translation, however, is much better.
“For Beauty,” I replied –	– Pela Beleza – disse eu.	“Para a beleza”, respondi -	‘For’ is translated as ‘para’ instead of ‘por’ by Google. Sena, on the other hand, does not respect the repetition of ‘for’ which makes the poem incomprehensible.
“And I – for Truth – Themself are One –	– A mim foi a Verdade. É a mesma Coisa.	“E eu - para a verdade - eles mesmos são um -	Also the translation of ‘Themself are One’ is translated by Sena a bit coarsely as ‘É a mesma coisa’, when Google is able to capture a better tone with ‘are one’ this time, being more faithful to the original. In another edition, this verse says: “And I for truth, the two are one;”.
We Brethren are,” He said –	Somos Irmãos – respondeu.	Nós, irmãos, somos”, disse ele -	Again, the Google version is more literal, as expected, and sounds more poetical.
And so, as Kinsmen met a-Night –	E quais na Noite os que se encontram falam –	E assim, quando (como) os parentes encontraram uma noite -	Here again, Sena’s translation seems to give a wrong impression of the poem. ‘those who meet speak’ suggests that it is a repetition, a habit, which is not the case.
We talked between the Rooms –	De Quarto a Quarto a gente conversou –	Conversamos/falamos entre os Quartos -	Sena respected the rhythm. One can notice the use, again, of ‘a gente’ that seems to be out of touch with the general, more solemn tone of the poem.
Until the Moss had reached our lips –	Até que o Musgo veio aos nossos lábios –	Até o musgo ter atingido/ tivesse chegado aos nossos lábios -	Here, in neither case the rhythm of the verse has been respected.
And covered up – our names –	E os nossos nomes – tapou.	E coberto - nossos nomes -	Google has difficulty with homonymous forms (covered) which results in a wrong translation.

Walt Whitman - To a Stranger

Walt Whitman	Geir Campos	Google	
To a Stranger	A um Ser Estranho	Para um estranho	Geir Campos ennobled the original and gave it a more mysterious touch.
Passing stranger! you do not know how longingly I look upon you,	Estranho ser que passas! não sabes com que ansiedade ponho meus olhos em ti,	Passando estranho! você não sabe o quanto ansioso eu olho para você,	Google misinterpreted the grammatical function of 'passing'. 'how longingly': Google translates more formally, because more literally (register).
You must be he I was seeking, or she I was seeking, (it comes to me as of a dream,)	bem podes ser aquele que eu andava buscando ou aquela que eu andava buscando (isso me ocorre como num sonho),	Você deve ser ele que eu estava procurando, ou ela estava procurando, (vem a mim como de um sonho,)	Geir uses 'tu', which gives a more solemn touch (register) in Brazil, albeit common in Portugal. Geir: 'must' is not 'podes ser' (English error). Google translates more straightforwardly and more accurately. Google couldn't distinguish between 'ele' and 'aquele' (grammar). Both Google and Geir respect the identical repetition (I was seeking), but Geir sophisticates the language by using 'buscar' instead of 'procurava' (register).
I have somewhere surely lived a life of joy with you,	algures certamente eu já vivi contigo uma vida de alegrias,	Em algum lugar, certamente vivi uma vida de alegria com você,	Again Geir ennobles the language (algures). Google sounds more modern (or 'standard Brazilian'). Two alliterations (somewhere surely/lived a life) . Google and Geir respect one each.
All is recall'd as we flit by each other, fluid, affectionate, chaste, matured,	tudo é lembrado ao passarmos um pelo outro, fluidos, afeiçoados, castos, amadurecidos,	Tudo é lembrado quando nos viramos um ao outro, fluido, carinhoso, casto, amadurecido,	'flit by': neither one translates this satisfactorily. Higher register translation of 'affectionate', in the case of Geir. Google ignores the plural of 'fluid, etc.', undifferentiated in English (grammar).
You grew up with me, were a boy with me or a girl with me,	cresceste junto comigo, foste menino comigo ou menina comigo,	Você cresceu comigo, era um menino comigo ou uma menina comigo,	Again, Geir prefers the noblest form 'cresceste/foste', misses an alliteration by putting 'junto' (cresceste junto comigo). Here too, Google ignores the (second) person 'were', for being undifferentiated in English (grammar). This shows how Google sometimes adapts to the context, but it is, in general, a 'literal' translator, in that it translates the word in the sense that it has when used without any context (Sinclair).
I ate with you and slept with you, your body has become not yours only nor left my body mine only,	comi contigo e dormi contigo, teu corpo não se fez exclusivo nem meu corpo ficou meu exclusivo,	Eu comi com você e dormi com você, seu corpo não se tornou seu apenas e deixou o meu meu corpo apenas,	Geir uses more traditional forms (contigo) and thus achieves a more poetic result (comi contigo e dormi contigo) with an alliteration and a repetition, although these also exist in the Google translation. Geir chose not to respect the repetition 'yours only/mine only', which Google, for being more literal, did respect, although it was necessary to correct the translation (e/nem; meu meu).
You give me the pleasure of your eyes, face, flesh, as we pass, you take of my beard, breast, hands, in return,	tu dá a mim o prazer de teus olhos, rosto, carne, ao cruzarmos, tomas-me a barba, o peito, as mãos, em troca,	Você me dá o prazer de seus olhos, rosto, carne, ao passar, você tira minha barba, peito, mãos, em troca,	The original is relatively simple. There are alliterations (face, flesh/beard, breasts) and assonances (flesh/pass; breast/hands), not respected in any of the translations. High register in Geir: 'tomas-me'.
I am not to speak to you, I am to think of you when I sit alone or wake at night alone,	eu não estou para falar contigo, mas para pensar em ti quando me sento sozinho ou quando à noite desperto sozinho,	Não devo falar com você, devo pensar em você quando eu me sentar sozinho ou acordar sozinho na noite,	At first glance, Google translated 'I am not to speak to you' better, since it is a prohibition or a very 'decided' decision. In Geir's translation there is also a problem of rhythm or emphasis. In the original verse 'when I sit alone or wake at night alone', the reader would usually emphasise 'sit' and 'wake'. In Portuguese it is more difficult to emphasise 'sit' and 'awake' and the result sounds a bit odd.

I am to wait, I do not doubt I am to meet you again,	estou à espera, não duvido de que estou para encontrar-te outra vez,	Eu espero, não duvido que eu seja para te conhecer de novo,	Neither of them was right, although it is simply 'I must wait'. In the translation of the second part of the verse the two translators were also not very successful. In the case of Google, there was a wrong translation of 'am', because of the two possibilities of 'to be' translation. (ser/estar) (grammar).
I am to see to it that I do not lose you.	com isso estou por ver que não te perco.	Preciso assegurar que não o perca.	There is a repetition of 'I am/devo' (five times) that has not been respected. Google naturally has no way of understanding this kind of feature and if it could, it wouldn't take it into account.

Charles Bukowski - Sandra

Charles Bukowski	Pedro Gonzaga	Google	
Sandra	Sandra	Sandra	
is the slim tall	é a alta e magra	é o magro alto	Google makes no gender distinction.
ear-ringed	donzela do quarto	anel de orelha	Gonzaga inverts the verses. Google did not understand 'ear-ringed'. Gonzaga: it would probably have to be 'donzela DE quarto'.
bedroom damsel	de brincos	donzela de quarto	
dressed in a long	coberta por um longo	vestida por muito tempo	Dressed is simply 'vestida'. Gonzaga specifies: 'coberta'.
gown	vestido	vestido	'Gown' is more specific, but there is no equivalent in Portuguese.
she's always high	está sempre alta	ela é sempre alta	Google doesn't distinguish between 'ser' and 'estar'. The ambiguity of 'high' is lost.
in heels	em sapatos de salto	nos saltos	Gonzaga explains. The Google translation is not quite understandable.
spirit	espírito	espírito	Gonzaga and Google have translated literally, but this is most likely about 'alcohol'.
pills	boletas	pílulas	Gonzaga curiously translates this as 'boletas'. It's probably drugs Bukowski is talking about.
booze	trago	bebidas alcoólicas	Gonzaga captured the informal register. Google formalized.
Sandra leans out of	Sandra se inclina	Sandra se afasta	Google translates more literally.
her chair	em sua cadeira	da cadeira	Google eliminated the repetition of 'lean'.
leans toward	inclina-se em direção a	em direção a	Google is more informal, Gonzaga more formal.
Glendale	Glendale	Glendale	
I wait for her head	guardo que sua cabeça	Eu espero por sua cabeça	Google register is more informal. Gonzaga is more formal.
to hit the closet	bata na maçaneta	bater no armário	Gonzaga makes a necessary inversion that Google does not, for which it becomes incomprehensible.
doorknob	do guarda-roupa	maçaneta	
as she attempts to	enquanto ela tenta	como ela tenta	Google fails in the translation of the homonym 'as'.
light	acender	luz	Google is wrong in the translation of the homonym 'light'.

a new cigarette on an	um novo cigarro num	um novo cigarro em um	
almost burnt-out	outro já quase	quase queimado	Gonzaga clarifies by adding 'outro'.
one	consumido	1	Google didn't understand.
at 32 she likes	aos 32 ela gosta de	às 32 anos, ela gosta	Strangely Google clarifies, but misses the gender.
young neat	jovens limpos	jovem arrumado	Google didn't 'know' that a plural would follow. Grammatical error.
unscratched boys	imaculados	meninos não arranhados	Google translated literally, but not incorrectly. Gonzaga raises the register.
with faces like the bottoms	com rostos semelhantes ao fundo	com rostos como o fundo	Gonzaga explicates and formalizes (semelhantes ao).
of new saucers	de pires	de novos pires	Gonzaga clarifies and formalizes (recém-comprados).
she has proclaimed as much	depois de se vangloriar	ela proclamou tanto	Gonzaga explains.
to me	a não mais poder	para mim	Gonzaga explains.
has brought her prizes	acabou me trazendo seus prêmios	trouxe seus prêmios / trouxe os prêmios	(The second Google version is with the two verses in English joined together to complete the verb.) Gonzaga explains (acabou me trazendo).
over for me to view:	para que eu desse uma olhada:	sobre para ver: / para mim ver	Gonzaga: 'view' is possibly a bit different from 'take a look'. It informs and loses the irony.
silent blonde zeros of young	garotos nulos, loiros e silenciosos	zeros silenciosos loiros de jovens	Gonzaga explains and doesn't translate 'zero'.
flesh		carne	Gonzaga jumped 'flesh'.
who	que	quem	Google grammatical error.
a) sit	a) sentam	a) sentar	Google grammatical error.
b) stand	b) levantam	b) suporte	Google grammatical error.
c) talk	c) falam	c) falar	Google grammatical error.
at her command	ao seu comando	a seu comando	
sometimes she brings one	às vezes ela traz um	às vezes ela traz uma	Google gender error.
sometimes two	às vezes dois	às vezes dois	Identical.
sometimes three	às vezes três	às vezes três	Identical.
for me to	para que eu os	para mim / para eu	Gonzaga explains and elevates the register.
view	veja	Visão / ver	Idem.
Sandra looks very good in	Sandra fica muito bem em	Sandra parece muito boa em	Google involuntarily 'eroticized' the translation, grammatical error. Gonzaga translated correctly and in the same register.
long gowns	vestidos longos	vestidos longos	Identical.
Sandra could probably break	Sandra pode partir provavelmente	Sandra provavelmente poderia quebrar	Google did not respect the collocation: 'partir o coração'. 'Quebrar o coração' is much less used.
a man's heart	o coração de um homem	o coração de um homem	Identical. 'Cara' might have been more adequate.
I hope she finds	espero que ela encontre	Espero que ela ache	'Ache/encontre'. Gonzaga raised the register.
one.	um.	um.	