


Drag language translation on RuPaul's Drag Race: a study on representation through subtitles¹ /

A tradução da linguagem drag em RuPaul's Drag Race: um estudo sobre representação através de legendas

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ABSTRACT

Since 2009, the reality show *RuPaul's Drag Race* has been spreading drag culture and language from the United States to many other countries in the world, such as Brazil. The audience, which may speak languages other than English, has access to *RuPaul's Drag Race* through subtitling and dubbing. The study of the translation of this reality show is very relevant, since in oppressive governments, as in Brazil and in the United States, the academic production about/by women, people of color and LGBTQIs is indispensable. Therefore, drag language translation through the subtitles of *RuPaul's Drag Race* is discussed, by studying the language present in the reality show, its aspects and its meanings, and by analyzing the representation of the drag language translation to Brazilian Portuguese. The theoretical framework for this article is composed by the theories of Audiovisual Translation, focusing on subtitling. Besides that, the drag culture and language of both United States and Brazil is discussed. The corpus of this research is composed by six images and subtitles collected from three seasons of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. The analysis encompasses six expressions and their translations in the subtitles. The analysis shows subtitles that translate English drag language through expressions of the Brazilian LGBTQI+ language, as well as subtitles that do not use a language similar to the one presented in the reality show. The translators seem to be aware of the culture and the language presented in the reality show.

KEYWORDS: Audiovisual Translation; Subtitling; Drag language; *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

RESUMO

Desde 2009, o reality show *RuPaul's Drag Race* vem divulgando a cultura e a linguagem *drag* dos Estados Unidos. Essa cultura e linguagem são disseminadas não apenas nos Estados Unidos, mas em diversos países do mundo, como Brasil. Por meio da legendagem e da dublagem, o público não falante da língua inglesa pode ter acesso a *RuPaul's Drag Race*. A tradução desse *reality show* é um ponto relevante para discussão, uma vez que em governos opressivos contra minorias, como o Brasil e os Estados Unidos, é indispensável que haja produção acadêmica sobre/por mulheres, pretos ou LGBTQIs. Assim, discute-se sobre a tradução da linguagem *drag* através das legendas do reality show *RuPaul's Drag Race*, estudando a linguagem presente no programa, seus aspectos culturais e significados, e analisando a representação da tradução da linguagem *drag* para o português brasileiro. O arcabouço teórico deste artigo é formado pelas teorias da Tradução Audiovisual, com foco na legendagem. Além disso, há também uma discussão sobre a cultura e a linguagem *drag* dos Estados Unidos e do Brasil. O corpus da pesquisa é construído por seis imagens e legendas retiradas de três temporadas de *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Ao todo, são analisadas seis expressões e suas traduções nas legendas. A análise mostra legendas que traduzem a linguagem *drag* em inglês através de expressões da linguagem LGBTQI+ do Brasil, assim como legendas que não usam uma linguagem semelhante à apresentada no reality show. Os/as tradutores/as parecem cientes da cultura e da linguagem apresentadas no reality show ao legenda-lo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Tradução Audiovisual; Legendagem; Linguagem *drag*; *RuPaul's Drag Race*;

1 Introduction

The act of dressing up with clothes socially designated to other genders has evolved since the 16th century, the Elizabethan era², and it has become what is known by drag nowadays. The word drag is supposedly an acronym for the expression “dressed as a girl”, firstly used by Shakespeare to refer to men actors who would play feminine roles. Another explanation for the word drag is related to the long dresses, used by these artists, ‘dragging’ on the floor.

² Information about the history of the art of drag presented in this article's introduction comes from the video '*RuPaul's Drag Race*' Cast Explains the History of Drag Culture, which was produced by Allure and which features some of *RuPaul's Drag Race* contestants. (Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHIE3RIkRi0>. Access in: 30 Jun. 2020).

The art of drag arrived in the United States of America in the beginning of the 19th century, being part of the famous Vaudeville shows³. Since this period until the Stonewall Riots, in 1969, drag queens survived as a subculture hidden from society. In the 1960s, drag queens, alongside trans women, gays and lesbian, started to protest against the unfair treatment of the police forces, giving rise to the Stonewall Riots, which was a period of violent protests by LGBTQ+ people (Lesbians, Gays, Bissexuais, Transexuais, Queer) against police raids, which were very common at the time, in the Stonewall Inn, a bar in New York City.

After this period, various drag queens and queer artists reached stardom, becoming icons of this counterculture, like Dame Edna, Divine, Tim Curry and Boy George. During the 1990s, a new era of drag began, with the popularization of drags on cinema, television and theater, like Miss Coco Peru, Miss Understood and Cadis Cayne. RuPaul is considered the responsible for bringing drag culture to mainstream⁴. She walked her way as a prominent drag in pop culture from the 90s to the 2000s. In 2009, RuPaul created RuPaul's Drag Race, a reality show for drag queens which became a national platform for artists across the United States.

The American reality show RuPaul's Drag Race is currently broadcast by VH1 in the USA and it has twelve seasons so far. The show already won nine Emmy awards, including best reality show and best reality show host. Eleven years after its creation, RuPaul's Drag Race reached an undeniable success, validating a marginalized group, drag queens. The show has become one of the most diverse in television. RuPaul believes the show teaches the youngest about the history and the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community. Farrah Moan, one of the season nine contestants, reinforces the role of the show in relation in raising awareness for the youngest, pointing the U.S. political climate as threatening to the LGBTQ+ community:

Drag is so important right now, especially with 'he who shall not be named' as our president. I mean, we've made all of this progress and I can't imagine if I was in high school right now. Kids need something to know that their weirdness is amazing. (Available at: <https://www.elitedaily.com/entertainment/cast-rupauls-drag-race/1834131>. Access in: 30 Jun. 2020).

³ "A show composed by number of acts with no relation between them, like comedy, dance and mimicry presentations. (own translation for "*Espetáculo composto de miscelânea de números sem relação entre si, como números cômicos, dança, mímica, etc.*") (Available at: <https://pt.wiktionary.org/wiki/vaudeville>. Access in: 30 Jun. 2020).

⁴ According to the drag queens in the video '*RuPaul's Drag Race' Cast Explains the History of Drag Culture*. (Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHIE3RikRi0>. Access in: 30 Jun. 2020).

Farrah Moan's statement reinforces the importance of discussing issues like the one highlighted in this article, since it is necessary to fight the oppression and the repression on the basis of governments that are against minorities, such as women, people of colors, immigrants or LGBTQ+ people.

Besides drag culture, RuPaul's Drag Race also spreads the language used by this community, not only in the U.S., but in various countries around the world, like Brazil. Non-English speakers have access to RuPaul's Drag Race through its translations in some languages, like French, Brazilian Portuguese, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian (subtitles and dubbing available on streaming apps Netflix and WowPresents Plus). The reality show is full of expressions used by the U.S. drag community, therefore, their translation is a very relevant point for discussion, because there may be problems in the translation process, due to the specificity of the expressions and of the font and target cultures.

Taking these points into consideration, this study aims to discuss about the translation of drag language through the subtitled of RuPaul's Drag Race, studying the drag language presented on the reality show, considering its cultural aspects and meaning, and analyzing the representation of the translation of drag language to Brazilian Portuguese in the reality show's subtitles.

2 Audiovisual Translation, subtitling, and drag culture and language

Audiovisual Translation (AVT) intends to improve or promote access to audiovisual products or material, such as movies, TV shows, and video games, to the audience which is not proficient in these products' font language⁵. The term AVT refers to a specific kind of translation which needs to keep a constant relation between the written text and other sign systems, like image, and to consider the special features of oral communication (CINTAS; REMAEL, 2007).

According to Meo (2010), the AVT encompasses dubbing, subtitling and simultaneous translation, and it is considered as a research field of Translation Studies. The AVT has emerged as a discipline to teaching and research, having an important role in language teaching and being "one of the most vibrant and vigorous fields within Translation Studies." (CINTAS; ANDERMAN, 2009, p. 8).

⁵ An audiovisual product is originally developed in a given font language.

There are two main ways to perform an audiovisual translation: 1) keeping the translation in oral form; and 2) translating an oral text through a written text. In the first case, called dubbing, the font audio of the audiovisual product is replaced partially or completely. When there is a change from an oral text to a written text, keeping the font audio and adding the written text to the audiovisual product, there is a process called subtitling – this article's interest. Meo (2010) affirms that subtitling has an additive role, because the subtitles are added to the audiovisual material, becoming part of it and influencing the transmitted message. The subtitles, besides oral texts, can present paralinguistic information (what is visible, like signs; and what is audible and non-verbal, like telephones ringing or rain sound) which contribute to the development of the narrative and improve accessibility to the deaf (CINTAS; ANDERMAN, 2009).

According to Cintas and Remael (2007), there are three major components related to the subtitling process: oral text, image and subtitles. Besides the interaction of these three components, subtitles must also adapt to the space in the screen, to the audiovisual product's speech pace and to the audience's reading pace, of both verbal and non-verbal information (CINTAS; REMAEL, 2007).

In relation to the pictorial message, which is everything that is visible on the audiovisual product, Ivarsson and Carroll (1998) highlight the importance of translating indispensable information in images through subtitles, like signs and news (IVARSSON; CARROLL, 1998). Remael (2001) explains that some components of the pictorial message of the audiovisual material do not need to be translated, because there is a common sense of the meaning of some of them, such as a no smoking sign or an angry facial expression.

The relations which exist in the subtitling process are wider than just a written code transmitting oral elements; for it deals with different mediums, channels, signals and codes, subtitling also represents a movement of Intersemiotic Translation, besides being an audiovisual translation (ROSA, 2001)

Intersemiotic Translation, as discussed by Plaza (2003), is, primarily, a movement of interpretation and meaning production which approximates and converge signs in various languages and medium, mainly in multimedia and intermedia. The author affirms that Intersemiotic Translation can be characterized as a creative and critical practice of (re)producing, (meta)creating and (re)writing. Therefore, translation and creation are similar process that coexist in the Intersemiotic. In this way, subtitling would be a form of Intersemiotic Translation, since it involves different mediums (oral and written), channels (vocal-auditive and visual), signals

(sounds and letters) and codes (verbal oral language, verbal written language and non-verbal language).

The different mediums, channels, signals and codes pointed by Rosa (2001) represent four changes related to language in subtitles. Firstly, there is a change of medium, since language changes from a verbal and oral medium (and often from a non-verbal medium – images) to a verbal and written medium, exclusively. Secondly, there is a transfer from a vocal-auditive channel (or sometimes also visual) to a visual channel, exclusively. Thirdly, there is a change on the form of signals from a phonic substance (the sound of the words) to a graphic substance (the letters). Lastly, there is a change of code from verbal oral language and non-verbal language to written verbal language (ROSA, 2001).

Translations can be classified in three categories, according to Jakobson (1959): 1) interlingual translation, which is the interpretation of verbal signs through other verbal signs of the same language; 2) intralingual translation, which is the interpretation of verbal signs of a language through verbal signs of another language; and 3) intersemiotic translation, which is the interpretation of verbal signs through non-verbal signs (this field was deepened later by Plaza (2003), as discussed previously). Meo (2010) affirms that subtitling is the only kind of translation which encompasses the three categories proposed by Jakobson (1959): intersemiotic, as pointed by Rosa (2001) and discussed previously; and intralingual and interlingual, which are two types of subtitles presented by Cintas and Remael (2007).

Subtitling can be classified in five groups, categorized by different criteria: linguistic, time available for preparation, technical, methods of projection and distribution format. This article focuses on the linguistic criteria, since this research is in the field of Translation Studies, in the Linguistic Studies area. According to the linguistic parameter, subtitles can be divided in three groups: bilingual, intralingual and interlingual. The intralingual subtitles can be used by the deaf, to dialects in the same language, to karaoke, with pedagogical aims and for news (CINTAS; REMAEL, 2007). The interlingual subtitles can be used by listeners and deaf which speak a different language than the one used on the audiovisual material. This article focuses on interlingual subtitles for listeners, since subtitles for the deaf were not available on the streaming apps during data collection. More specifically, it focuses on the translation of verbal signs presented acoustically (verbal oral language) of the North-American LGBTQ+ language.

Interlingual subtitles must simplify the message of the audiovisual products for two reasons: 1) they coexist with the products' language, they do not replace it, therefore, the

audience receives information from two mediums at the same time; and 2) the audience has only one chance to read the subtitles, therefore, they need to understand them the first time they read them (SKUGGEVIK, 2009). Besides that, Skuggevik (2009) points that subtitles need to resemble the sonority of words on the font text, and they cannot contradict what is shown on the image.

2.1 Subtitling and linguistic variations

The audiovisual translation must consider all of the audiovisual products' cultural and linguistic specificities. Besides that, it must present a language which corresponds to the language presented on the audiovisual product (IVARSSON; CARROLL, 1998). As language and culture have an indissociable relation, in the sense that "language is an expression of culture and culture is expressed through language" (PETTIT, 2009, p. 44), the audiovisual translator needs to consider at least two cultures when translating: the font culture, represented by the audiovisual product, and the target culture, to be represented on the subtitles. According to Pettit (2009), an audiovisual translator should not be only bilingual, they also need to have a "bicultural" vision of both languages – font and target⁶.

There are two main aspects which can originate questions of untranslatability: i) the target language may not have a word or an expression which is equivalent to a word or an expression on the font language; ii) the sociocultural situation can be inconceivable on the target language (DUDEK, 2018). Rosa (2001) discusses that trying to find a correspondence between font and target languages, taking into consideration their cultural contexts, is a hard task, since verbal oral language is more variable than verbal written language and it is directly connected to the community that produces it (CINTAS; REMAEL, 2007). In the case of RuPaul's Drag Race, the verbal oral language used by the contestants belongs to a specific community: U.S. drag queens – in this case, the show presents a cutout of this language, since the drag contestants do not represent U.S. drag queens as a whole.

The main questioning by Cintas e Remael (2007, p. 185) about subtitling linguistic variants is: "[...] how does one translate the sophistication of spoken language variants into a regimented written form?" (CINTAS; REMAEL, p. 185). Oral language has its own characteristics and when it comes to linguistic variants, oral language becomes even more diverse. Subtitles

⁶ A translation is made through a given target language.

must cover these traces and also maintain a formal register of language for it is a written form. The linguistic variation presented on RuPaul's Drag Race is essential to understand the show and drag culture itself, thereby, representing it on subtitles is of major importance. Cintas e Remael (2007) discuss the fact that these characteristics cannot be considered as untranslatable or avoidable for they are important and not arbitrary.

It is fundamental that the target audience, which will have access to the subtitled audiovisual product, can understand its linguistics specificities; therefore, it is important to translate non-standard registers, "be it a metaphor, an idiom or dialect", to draw the viewer's attention to this characteristic of the audiovisual product (MEO, 2010, p. 24). To translate dialects or expressions that have a strong bond with the culture represented on the audiovisual product, it is important to consider language as a "a complex dynamic system". Its dynamicity is related to the context of the message, since the meaning of words is progressively constructed by the context (MEO, 2010), and its complexity is formed by the amount of information needed to explain a lexical item.

Since orality is so complex and dynamic, spoken language will not always have a stable and clear expression, which can become a problem when translating, since subtitled must cherish stability and clarity (MEO, 2010). In those cases, the translator is responsible for determining the relevance of the elements of spoken language and its role on the subtitles. For such, the translator needs to interpret the message transmitted by the audiovisual material, considering its sociocultural and pragmatic characteristics. Rittmayer (2009) points out three problems that can emerge when translating slangs (which can also be considered when translating dialects, sociolets, idioms, etc.): 1) sometimes there will not be an equivalent in the target language; the target language can have more than one equivalent expression, and the translator has to choose between them; 3) the censorship made by the client or by translators themselves, which can entail a meaning loss on the target text. Corroborating with this idea, Rosa (2001, p. 219) discusses the "strategy of decentralization", which refers to the use of oral language characteristics and non-standard varieties on subtitles. For the author, the use of these language registers it related to the attempt of being more faithful to the font language text. Meo (2010), on the other hand, acknowledges that although valuing local knowledge and cultural varieties on audiovisual products is a current tendency, translating dialects of a font language through a dialect in a target language can lead to comprehension problems. However, the use of these dialects would not prevent the target audience to have a general comprehension of the

audiovisual products. Besides that, the use of these dialects has an important role on the translation process: it shows the target audience the culture represented on the audiovisual product.

If there are equivalent dialects between font and target language, audiovisual translation seems to be a “simpler” task, but Cintas and Remael (2007) set another challenge: when there is not a similar word on the target language. In the case of RuPaul’s Drag Race, the lack of equivalents is very likely, mainly because the reality show is full of neologisms. To overcome problems that can emerge on the subtitling process, Cintas and Remael (2007) propose some strategies: 1) loan, the incorporation of a font language word on the subtitled on the target language; 2) explicitation, the use of hyponym, hyperonymy and generalization, etc.; 3) transposition, the substitution of a cultural concept of the font language for a cultural concept of the target language; 4) omission, simply exclude a given expression from the subtitled – it not the most recommend strategy, although necessary sometimes; 5) compensation, the use of other words and expressions on another part of the text to compensate some omission; 6) addition, adding information to simplify another information of the audiovisual material. Cintas and Remael (2007) also suggest inventing words as a way of resolving the lack of equivalence between font and target language, mainly when the text is full of neologisms. The authors discuss that it is recommended to create neologisms on the target language, always using quotation marks.

2.2 North-American and Brazilian drag culture and language

The language used by the LGBTQ+ community in the United States emerged on a tough time: sexual relations between same sex people was considered a crime, there was not a debate about right equality; they were discriminated, marginalized in the face of what was considered a “normal society”, they were expelled from their home, and some of them were even arrested or killed. The necessity for a secret code for this community was more than just fun, it was a matter of surviving. The code helped to identify members of the same subculture, besides protecting them of being discovered by people outside the group.

Polari, which came from Great Britain, was the very first language used by this group in the United States, and it was usually associated to gay men. In the end of the 1960s, when sexual relations between same sex people was no longer considered a crime, the use of this

language by gay men decrease, and it started to be used by comedians in radio shows. On this study, this language will be denominated as “drag language”, since this nomenclature does not include every member of the LGBTQ+ community as its users, because in fact not all of them use it; and this nomenclature also consider the art of drag as not exclusive to gay men, since it can be interpreted by women and people of other genders.

Although not being accept by society, the LGBTQ+ community kept growing as an esthetically and linguistically rich subculture, being one of the major influences on pop culture. The beginning of the drag pageants (which exist to this day), on the 1970s, helped expanding the community. On these events, drag language and culture were being developed and settled.

During the 1990s, the documentary film *Paris is Burning* (1990) was released. The documentary, filmed by Jennie Livingston, features the LGBTQ+ community on the underground scene – black queer and latinxs⁷ – of New York during this period. On the 90s, the LGBTQ+ subculture was already well-established and it had its own language. This language is closer to the one used to this day. Still on the 90s, RuPaul Charles reached stardom with her song *Supermodel (You better work)*. Because of this song, RuPaul came out of the New York underground scene and became the most famous drag queen of the world. Seventeen years after releasing this hit song, RuPaul released the reality show *RuPaul's Drag Race*, which would launch the career of many drag queens, besides presenting this subculture to the mainstream community and disseminating drag language to the 21st century pop culture.

The language used by the LGBTQ+ community in Brazil is named *pajubá*. This dialect became very popular in 2018, due to a question of the *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio (ENEM)*⁸ of the same year, which brought the text ‘*Acuenda o Pajubá: conheça o ‘dialeto secreto’ utilizado por gays e travestis*’⁹. The text brought some expressions and the history of this dialect, besides mentioning a dictionary, *Aurélia, a dicionária da língua afiada*, which was released in 2006, with some meanings of those expressions. This question originated several debates on social media and showed the urgency of discussing this neglected expression form.

The *pajubá* dialect incorporates expressions from Portuguese with expressions from African ethnic-linguistic groups that were enslaved in Brazil – *nagô* and *ioruba*. This language is

⁷ Latinxs is the neutral form of the words “*latino*” and “*latina*”. The expression is used by researchers, activists and journalists and it is part of the linguistic revolution that aims transcending the gender binarism in some languages, like Portuguese and Spanish, and include the diverse identities of Latin-American people. (Available at: https://www.huffpostbrasil.com/entry/why-people-are-using-the-term-latinx_n_57753328e4b0cc0fa136a159. Access in: 01 jul. 2020).

⁸ The *ENEM* is a test for high school students for admission in universities.

⁹ “*Acuenda o Pajubá: meet the ‘secret dialect’ used by gays and travestis*” (own translation).

widely use in Afro-Brazilian religious practices. It started being used by the LGBTQ+ community when they started to participate on *candomblé* religious practices, because it was one of the few religions which welcomed minorities.

Just as the drag language from the United States, the *pajubá* acted like a secret code for surviving. In 1987, for example, during a month, the police force's Tarantula Operation, which used AIDS eradication as a pretext, chased about three hundred *travestis* and trans women arbitrarily. Besides being necessary for surviving, this language also creates an identity affirmation, which united members from the same community who share the same struggles.

3 Analysing the language on *RuPaul's Drag Race* subtitles

The *corpus* used for analysis is constructed by six images and subtitles from *RuPaul's Drag Race*, specifically from the eighth and ninth seasons, and from *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars*, specifically from the third season. The collected images are presented through a chart which contains the image, the subtitles and the font text. Since the reality show in study has several drag queens, only three of them were selected for analysis: the hostess, RuPaul¹⁰, and the contestants Sasha Velour¹¹, from the ninth season, and Trixie Mattel¹², from the third season of *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars*.

To the collection of data, there were selected scenes of when the participants are in drag, or getting in or out of drag, which could be during the challenges, on the main stage or on the *workroom*. The scenes were chosen according to the presence of expressions from drag language. These expressions were identified with the help of the intralingual subtitles in English, available on Netflix and WoW Presents Plus. The only tool used to take screen shoots was the Windows tool, the print screen. The print screen key was pressed along with the Windows flag key (win + print screen), and the screen shoot would be stored on a file.

To delimit the data collected, the expressions which were identified four times or more were considered: 'bitch' (six times), 'category is' (six times), 'tuck' e its variations (six times), 'squirrel friends' (five times), 'gag' e its variations (four times), e 'queer' (four times). The corpus is constructed by six images, one for each of the expressions reported above.

¹⁰ RuPaul is the stage name of RuPaul Andre Charles, born in 1960 in the United States.

¹¹ Sasha Velour is the stage name of Alexander Hedges Steinberg, born in 1987 in the United States.

¹² Trixie Mattel is the stage name de Brian Markus Firkus, born in 1989 in the United States.

3.1 The expressions and their translation on subtitles

3.1.1 Bitch

The word ‘bitch’ is used to designate a female dog. However, it is also commonly used as a derogatory expression against women, to represent promiscuity. In this case, the word has a violent and misogynistic load. On the other hand, during the 90s, the word ‘bitch’ was taken by the feminist movement as something empowering – instead of devaluing, ‘bitch’ became to be used as a synonym for a strong, independent, confident woman, as discussed by Pardes (2014) on an article published on Vice magazine.

‘Bitch’ continues being used on a pejorative way, but it is also used with this new meaning (even though it does not have a totally positive connotation yet). The LGBTQ+ community, for example, is one of the communities that widely use the word ‘bitch’. Gays and drag queen use to call each other ‘bitch’. This expression is also extensively use by all *RuPaul’s Drag Race* contestants, for example.

However, the feminist movements criticize the use of ‘bitch’ by the members of LGBTQ+ community, mainly gay and bisexual men, because it seems more misogynistic than empowering if not used by women. Therefore, the translation of this word in the context of the show must be discussed, because besides being part of the language in study, it can cause problems of translation. There are several possible translations for this word in Portuguese, like *megera*¹³ [it has a close meaning to shrew] and *vadia*¹⁴ [it is the most direct translation for ‘bitch’], *meretriz* [it has a close meaning to prostitute]¹⁵, and *mulher de vida fácil*¹⁶ [woman with an easy life].

It is possible to observe, on frame 1, that the translator chose to use the word *bicha* on the subtitle. As previously discussed, ‘bitch’ can have several translations, but none of the dictionaries used on this research cited *bicha* (which is used to refer to gay men, it has a close meaning to fag) as a possible translation. However, the translator’s choice is probable related to a

¹³ According to the online dictionary Word Reference. Available at: <http://www.wordreference.com/enpt/bitch>. Access in: 01 jul. 2020.

¹⁴ This translation also came from the online dictionary Word Reference.

¹⁵ *BITCH*. In: Michaelis Dicionário Universal Inglês. São Paulo: Editora Melhoramentos, 2003. p. 32.

¹⁶ *BITCH*. In: Conrad, David. Minidicionário Escola Inglês. São Paulo: DCL, 1999. p. 63.

pragmatic vision of the expression. The word ‘bitch’ when used by the drag queens’ contestants of the reality show works like a kind of vocative, a way to call someone.

Frame 1¹⁷ - RuPaul announces the top five



Fonte: RPDR 2017, T8E10, 00:39:42

Texto fonte: "Top five, bitches "	Tradução: "As cinco melhores, bicha "
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Considering the idea of transposition of concepts between font and target language, as discussed by Cintas e Remael (2007), it is possible to understand that the word *bicha* is used by drag community in Brazil with the same purpose of the word ‘bitch’ in relation to the North-American drag community. It seems like a continuity between font and translation, as discussed by Plaza (2003). Another important issue about this translation is that the transposition of cultural concept on the font language in a cultural concept in the target language may not cause problems, since *bicha* is widely used in Brazil. The positivity or negativity of this expression is also something to be questioned.

The expressions *bicha* and ‘bitch’ went to a similar process of resignification: both of the words were used as depreciative terms and became, inside specific communities, words of empowerment. However, these terms remain with an idea of marginalization and, at the same time, of mockery. Considering that, the transposition between concepts of the language becomes even more clear.

As discussed by Meo (2010), subtitles are connected with the pragmatic characteristics of the audiovisual material, in this case, *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Considering the pragmatic context of a given expression is to consider its specific use, which is of great interest to the translation

¹⁷ The frames used for the analysis are composed by an image and the information if it belongs to *RuPaul's Drag Race* or to *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars*, with the abbreviations “RPDR” e “RPDR AS”, respectively. Besides that, there is the year of its original release and the specification of the season and episode (for example, S8E5). At last, there is a transcript of the font text in English and of the translated text in Portuguese (the expression in bold are the ones to be analyzed).

process. The translator's choice may be motivated by the attempt to transpose an expression on a font language, which is related to a specific community, through an expression that has a similar use on the target language, related to a similar community to the one presented on the font language. The translator's choice may also be motivated by the sound similarity of both words, *bicha* and 'bitch', as discussed by Skuggevik (2009). The words also start with the same letter, and that helps on the lip-sync.

3.1.2 Category is

In *Paris is Burning* (1990), as discussed by Butler (1993), the participants of the balls compete in categories, such as executive realness or butch queen realness. These categories were announced before the presentations so that the audience could know what they were about to see. The expression 'category is' was used to announce the category they would walk. When the presentation for the most feminine participant was about to begin, for example, it was announced "category is FQ realness". This expression is used by the North-American drag community to this day. In RuPaul's Drag Race, for example, this expression is used by RuPaul to inform the runway's theme to the audience and the judges, as shown in frame 2.

There is a movement in Brazil that is similar to the New York balls in the 90s, which is also related to proud and resistance. In Brazil, these groups focus on voguing, but it is not a widespread culture in the country. Therefore, there is not a same concept of a ball category in Brazil. In any case, the subtitles present a literal translation of the expression, *categoria é*, which does not erase the meaning of the English expression: 'category is' is related to a category one is walking in.

Frame 2 – RuPaul announces the category



Fonte: RPDR AS 2018, T3E2, 00:26:46

Texto fonte: "And on the catwalk, **category is:** *rudemption* runway,"

Tradução: "a **categoria é** desfile de 'rudenção' ",

Another aspect of the subtitle in study is the translation of the word *rudemption*. This expression is a neologism created on the show to the word redemption. On this runway, category was redemption: a chance for the queens to redo one of their looks from their original season which had bad reviews (since this image is from an All Stars season). The word redemption became *rudemption* as a word play with the name Ru, RuPaul's nickname. The intralingual subtitles in English, available on the streaming app, highlighted the expression in italics. On the translation, the translator also created a neologism with the word *redenção* [redemption, in Portuguese] using RuPaul's nickname – creating the word *rudenção* (which was used between quotation marks). Creating neologisms in the target language to translate a neologism used in the font language and putting it between quotation marks is one of the strategies discussed by Cintas and Remael (2007).

3.1.3 Gag

There are several definitions of 'gag' on dictionaries, as *mordaça* [an object used to prevent someone to talk, a gag], *piada* [joke], *amordaçar* [verb for the action of putting a gag on someone] and *esforçar-se para vomitar*¹⁸ [to induce vomit]. But for the drag community, this word has a different connotation. According to *Urban Dictionary*¹⁹, 'gagging' is a slang initially used by gay men in the 90s to describe something exceptional, something to impressive that makes someone 'gag'.

On the scene presented on frame 3, Trixie is talking to one of the contestants about the elimination of one of the drags queens on the competition. On the subtitle, the translation of two lines can be visualized: the first one, from Trixie Mattel, "I was a little gagged", translated as "*Fiquei meio passada*", and the second, from BenDeLaCreme, "I was totally gagged", translated as "*Eu fiquei muito passada*".

One of *Dicionário Informal*'s²⁰ definition to *passado* is near to impressed, like in the example provided by the dictionary: "*Menina, tô passado com esse bafão!*"²¹ [which can be

¹⁸ The four definitions for 'gag' are from *Michaelis Dicionário Universal Inglês (GAG)*. In: *Michaelis Dicionário Universal Inglês*. São Paulo: Editora Melhoramentos, 2003. p. 155).

¹⁹ Available at: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=gagging>. Access in: 01 Jul. 2020.

²⁰ Available at: <https://www.dicionarioinformal.com.br/passado/>. Access in: 01 Jul. 2020.

²¹ Available at: <https://www.dicionarioinformal.com.br/passado/>. Access in: 01 Jul. 2020.

freely, and formally, translated to “girl, I am really impressed with this gossip”²²]. It is possible that the translator’s choice to translate the expression ‘gagged’ as *passada* was a result from an attempt to find a word on the target language that was similar to the word on the font language – what Cintas e Remael (2007) call transposition.

Even though ‘gagged’ means something near to ‘being choked’ in Portuguese (literally translating), when it is used by this community, it has the connotation of being impressed by some event. The word *passada* is a widely used expression in Portuguese, and it denotes the same idea as ‘gagged’ and, although it is used by many people, it was originated in the LGBTQ+ community.

Frame 3 – Trixie talks about the elimination



- Fiquei meio passada.
- Eu fiquei muito passada.

Fonte: RPDR AS 2018, T3E4, 00:02:30

Texto fonte: “I was a little gagged”

Tradução: “Fiquei meio *passada*”

Furthermore, the expression *passada* was initially used by a community similar to the one that used ‘gagged’ on the font language. This shows that the translators are aware of the specificities of the language used on RuPaul’s Drag Race and of the need to adapt it in the best possible means. Hence, the target audience can comprehend the role of this language on the show without having troubles to understand the audiovisual material.

3.1.4 Queer

²² Of course, considering that this sentence represents LGBTQ+ Brazilian language, “Bitch, I am gagged” would be a more suitable translation.

The word ‘queer’ has several definitions on dictionaries, such as the adjective ‘queer’ as original, eccentric and rare²³. As a slang, the word ‘queer’ can be defined as homossexual²⁴. Fressles and Rauch (1997, p. 39) define the expression *near queer* as “one who is nearly out of the closet”²⁵. Consequently, ‘queer’ could be considered someone who is already out of the closet. The same authors define ‘queer’ as “homossexual. Once derogatory, now often used by lesbians and gays in an effort to destigmatize the term.” (FESSLER; RAUCH, 1997, p. 41).

Fessler and Rauch’s (1997) definitions were written in 1997. On that time, the authors define the word in study as term that is changing from a negative connotation to a positive one. It is valid to question if the word ‘queer’ is considered negative or positive nowadays. The word ‘queer’ is used as a positive, empowering and resigified term for the gender norms on Butler’s (1993) studies. The author defined the idea of ‘queer’ as beyond homosexuality, being related with everything that dissent the heterosexual and binary gender norm. Therefore, ‘queer’ encompasses gays, lesbians, transexuais, bissexuais, drag queens, etc. Morton (2002, p. 121 apud COLLING, 2007, p. 2) defines ‘queer’ as “to enter and to celebrate a ludic space of a textual indetermination²⁶”.

Frame 4 – Sasha Velour introduces herself



²³ QUEER. In: Conrad, David. *Minidicionário Escola Inglês*. São Paulo: LCL, 1999. p. 261.

²⁴ QUEER. In: Conrad, David. *Minidicionário Escola Inglês*. São Paulo: LCL, 1999. p. 261.
Fonte: RPD/R 2017, 19E1, 00:20:53

²⁵ Near queer: one who is nearly out of the closet. (FESSLER; RAUCH, 1997, p. 39)
Tradução: berço da arte biba, Haring, Warhol, Basquiat.

²⁶ Own translation for “entrar e celebrar o espaço lúdico de uma indeterminação textual.” (2002, p. 121, apud Colling, 2007, p.2).

On frame 4, the word ‘queer’ on the subtitle was translated as *biba* [an offensive way to call a gay man]. The word *biba* is defined as “homossexual” and “euphemism for homosexual” by *Dicionário Informa*²⁷. On the other hand, the word ‘queer’, as previously discussed, is not related exclusively to cis gay men, as suggested on the subtitles. When Sasha Velour defined New York as the home of queer art, she was probably not speaking specifically about cis gay men. Anyway, she cites only gay men as reference to the artistic movement. In this case, it seems appropriate to translate ‘queer’ as *biba*.

Another question that should be taken into consideration is the seriousness of camp aesthetics and of queer art, as called by Sasha. The word *biba*, even though considered as a possible translation for ‘queer’, is considered a pejorative slang. Therefore, using *biba* to refer to something so important as the representation of LGBTQ+ community in art can be problematic. Cintas and Remael (2007) highlight the importance of using expressions of the target culture which seem appropriate to the context of the audiovisual product and which has a similar use to the font culture. Thus, it is important to question if, in fact, *biba* can be used to translate the idea of a queer art/aesthetic, considering the representativity and relevance of the matter.

The use of the expression *biba* by the drag community in Brazil can be problematized, to meet the need to verify, previous to translation, how target language’s native speakers behave linguistically (cf. NIDA, 1945). In Portuguese, there are several expressions that relate to the general idea of the word ‘queer’, as the acronym LGBTQ+, and some alternatives if ‘queer’ is related to the idea cis gay men – if it really were Sasha’s intention –, such as *gay*, *bicha* [fag] and *viado* [fag]. Therefore, it is necessary to question the use of these expressions by the studied community during the subtitling process.

The translator also needs to evaluate the impact and the emotional value of a given word, as discussed by Cintas and Remael (2007). It is worth mentioning that it is possible to use the word ‘queer’, just as in English, in Portuguese, since this is the term used in the research and

²⁷ Available at: <https://www.dicionarioinformal.com.br/biba/>. Access in: 01 Jul. 2020.

activism in Brazil (e.g. *Teoria Queer* [queer theory], *literatura queer* [queer literature], *movimento queer* [queer movement]). In that case, the subtitler would use the loan strategy, discussed by Cintas and Remael (2007).

3.1.5 Squirrel Friends

Urban Dictionary defines ‘squirrel friends’ as “reference among drag queens to refer to other drag queens, especially those that hide their nuts”²⁸. In English, ‘nuts’ is used as an informal expression to refer to testicles in the same way that *bolas* [balls], or even *ovos* [eggs] is used in Portuguese. Drag queens are known for hiding their penis and testicles (this will be discussed in the next section) to create an illusion of a more “feminine” body, or, in *Urban Dictionary*’s word: hiding their nuts. RuPaul – the likely responsible for creating the expression ‘squirrel friends’, or at least for its popularization – comments about the “drag queens’ secret language” on an interview for *The Late Show*²⁹. In that occasion, RuPaul explains that ‘squirrel friends’ are friends who like ‘nuts’ (or *bolas*, in Portuguese).

In English, one can refer to their drag queen friends as ‘squirrel friends’, since squirrels are known for hiding their nuts to consume them later. The pun makes perfect sense in English, since ‘nuts’ is a slang for ‘testicles’. RuPaul’s definition for ‘squirrel friends’ has a similar pun, but instead of being related common practice for drag queens, it has a more sexual connotation: ‘squirrel friends’ are friends who like men, or, as explained by RuPaul, their nuts.

Frame 5 – RuPaul starts deliberating



²⁸ Available at: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=squirrel+friends>

²⁹ RuPaul And Steve Harvey Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...>

020.

available at:

Fonte: RPDR 2016, T8E3, 00:33:07

Texto fonte: “All right, now just between us **squirrel friends**”

Tradução: “Aqui entre nós, **amigas drags**”

The translation for this expression to Portuguese can be problematic, since it brings a cultural reference which is hard to conceive on the target culture, as discussed by Dudek (2018). Firstly, *nozes* [the most direct translation for ‘nuts’] is not used in Portuguese to refer to testicles. Secondly, squirrels are not very common in Brazil – therefore, using the word ‘squirrels’ on the translation may cause comprehension problems on the subtitles. In that case, the ‘bicultural’ vision, as discussed by Pettit (2009) is fundamental to a comprehensible translation. This translation, specifically, deals with an extratextuality problematic, since the concept of the font language does not exist on the target language (MEO, 2010).

RuPaul’s line (presented on Frame 5), “All right, now just between us squirrel friends”, is repeated on most of the episodes during this specific moment (when the queens leave the mainstage and the judges deliberate about the performances on the challenge). The expression ‘squirrel friends’, which is used to name your friends who do drag, or, as defined by RuPaul, who like ‘nuts’, was translated on the subtitles as *amigas drags* [drag friends]. In that case, the subtitler kept the specificity of the expression: not any friends, but your drag friends.

The translation does not have any reference to squirrels or any sexual connotation, which is one of the main reasons to the pun. Trying to maintain the sexual connotation of the translation is not an easy task, since there is no similar concept in Portuguese related to squirrels or nuts. However, the translator managed to keep the special characteristic of the word (relating to people from a specific community). Also, the expression *amigas drags* probably would not cause problems on the subtitle’s reception.

3.1.6 Tuck

The expression ‘squirrel friends’ means ‘friends who hide their nuts’, as discussed previously. ‘Hiding their nuts’ to resemble a vagina is a common practice amongst drag queens (even though it is not a rule). In English, this practice is called ‘tuck’. Daily Beast website defines ‘tuck’ as: “tuck (v.): to affix one’s male genitalia in a way that it is not visible so that one resembles a woman (n.): the product of a man affixing his genitalia (typically with duct tape and multiple pairs of pantyhose) so that it is not visible”³⁰

³⁰ Available at: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/rupauls-drag-race-slang-tuck-sickening-and-more-drag-terms?ref=scroll>. Access in: 01 Jul. 2020.

The language used by Brazilian drag queens, also known as *Pajubá*, has a similar expression for the same practice: *aquendar*. This word does not only relate to the act of hiding the genitals, but also to having sexual relations, according to *Dicionário Informa*³¹. In English, ‘to untuck’ is an inflection of the verb ‘to tuck’, and it refers to the act of removing a tuck (noun). Same as in English, the Brazilian Portuguese expression *aquendar* has an inflection: *desaquendar* [the same meaning as ‘to untuck’].

Frame 6 – Trixie at the Snatch Game



Fonte: RPDR AS 2018, T3E5, 00:17:08

Texto fonte: “My balls are tucked so tight”	Tradução: “Michelle, minhas bolas são tão aquendadas ”
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On the scene presented on frame 6, Trixie’s line, “my balls are tucked so tight”, is translated as “*minhas bolas são tão aquendadas*”. Firstly, there is a problem related to the verb to be, since, in Portuguese, it means both verbs *ser* (in the sense of being someone/something) and *estar* (in the sense of being somewhere/somewhat). Drag queens stay ‘tucked’ for a short period of time, mainly during their performances. Therefore, it is important to reflect if “*são tão aquendadas*” is the most suitable translation to determine an action that do not last long, since *são* is related to the sense of being something (in this case, ‘being tucked’). Drag queens are not [as in *são*] tucked for life, they are [as in *estão*] tucked for now. Nevertheless, the apparent confusion between the verbs *ser* and *estar* do not completely change the idea of the sentence.

Secondly, the translator chose to use the expression *aquendada* to translate ‘tucked’, which is the expression used by the Brazilian drag community to refer to this practice. As discussed by Cintas and Remael (2007), language is directly connected to the community which

³¹ Available at: <https://www.qualeagiria.com.br/giria/aquendar/>. Access in: 01 Jul.

produces it. Therefore, it is very important for the translation process to consider these language's specificities, trying to establish an equivalent not only between two languages, but between font and target culture. The use of the expression *aquendada* to translate the expression 'tucked' demonstrates concern and valorization of the North-American and Brazilian LGBTQ+ communities, which is very important of the subtitling process (MEO, 2010).

Final considerations

Discussing issues related to the LGBTQ+ community is of great importance to strengthen the community and its representation on academy, mainly in the face of repressive and excluding governments. This discussion has a queer author as main author, debating about queer people and language, written with the intention to problematize some aspect of the queer universe.

This article sought to bring visibility to the need to reflect about drag language in the context of translation studies, through the analysis of the translation of drag language expressions on the reality show RuPaul's Drag Race, promoting a contextualization of the history of drag queens since the practice of cross-dressing by Shakespeare, going through the Stone Wall Riots to the creation of RuPaul's Drag Race.

Six images and subtitles were analyzed based on the theories presented on section two. The analysis of the translations of expressions from the English drag language to Portuguese followed the strategies discussed by Cintas and Remael (2007). The collected images show translations which sought a parameter which considers the specificities of drag languages. This concern with the language used by this community represents a tendency to value local knowledges and cultural varieties represented on the audiovisual material, as discussed by Meo (2010). Therefore, it was possible to identify that RuPaul's Drag Race translators are aware and concerned about the specificities of this language and the need to represent them on the Portuguese subtitles. Accordingly, the translators seem to have knowledge of the languages involved on the translation, as well as of both cultures, offering a "bicultural" vision of the theme.

On the other hand, some images presented translations which seem to avoid terms of Brazilian drag language, as the use of *esconder o pacote* (freely translated as 'to hide the package') instead of *aquendar* (to tuck), or *transformismo* ('transformism') instead of *drag*. In these cases, the translators seem apprehensive to use a similar language in Portuguese to the

language presented on the audiovisual material, which may arise from the concern that the audience would not fully understand the subtitle's information. However, as discussed by Meo (2010), the use of these Brazilian Portuguese expressions on the subtitles does not prevent the audience of having a general comprehension of reality show. Besides that, using them would present to the audience, which may not know this language, a new vision of the culture represented on the audiovisual material and, through the subtitles, a similar culture on national context.

Further studies of this thematic are also important. Moreover, it is possible to identify, through researches about subtitles reception, whether the audience is or is not ready to watch the reality show with subtitles that fully use drag language in Brazil. Finally, it is necessary to understand that language and culture cannot be separated – one cannot be understood without the other, one does not exist without the other. Therefore, studying North-American drag queens linguistic practices and their translations and relations with the linguistic practices of a similar Brazilian community is a rich field of research, which can still be exploited by studies from linguistics, anthropology, psychology and publicity.

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