Translation & Music in Brazil[1]

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No one can deny that Brazil is a musical country. Its dances, songs and a wide range of interventions from its folklore are historically and socially marked by rhythm, melody and lyrics. Central elements in musical composition, rhythm, melody and lyrics were never unmotivated or automatic, but from the outset they can be considered as ways to translate an atmosphere, an experience, an existence. Musical studies or the study of song lyrics have increasingly indicated that these sonic manifestations are in fact political acts, acts of existence and resistance (SOUZA, 2011; PALOMBINI, 2013; GARCIA, 2013; STARLING, 2013).

If on the one hand sonic objects are by themselves elements that translate a people's culture, on the other songs in particular are essential objects of the so-called intralinguistic translation. They are present in different media, in the several arts and in specific moments of daily life. Songs permeate radio, television, plays, films, exhibitions, artistic performances, advertisements, language courses, birthday parties, carnival, as well as many other moments and products in our society. Because they involve melody and objective meaning,[2] songs are repeatedly adapted, translated, and rewritten.
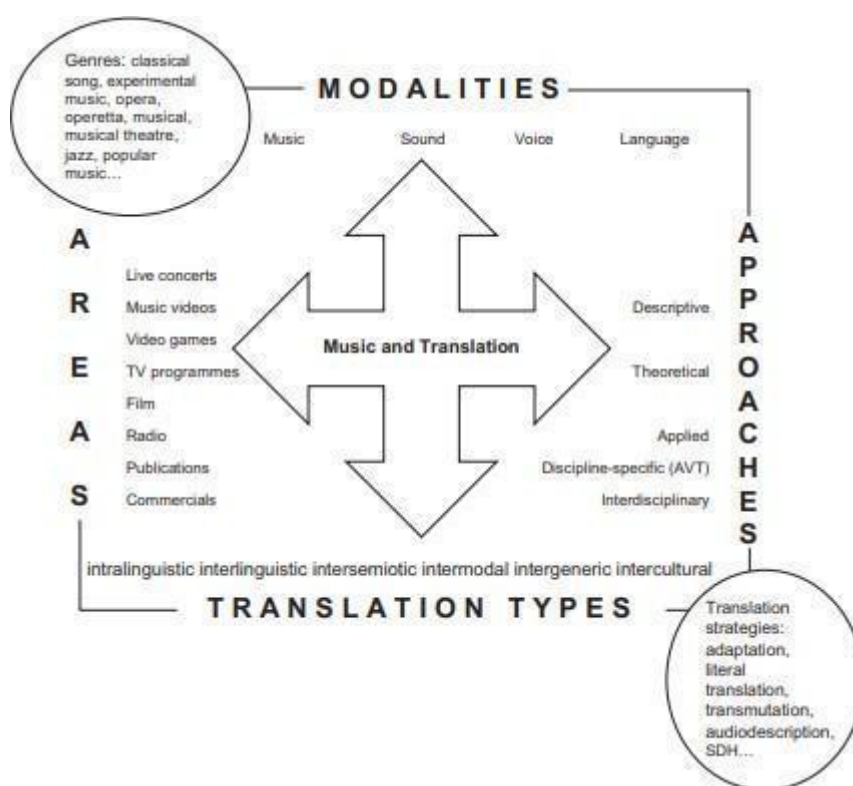
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[1] A longer version of this paper was originally published in Portuguese as a Presentation of this journal's previous Special Issue about Music and Translation. For the Presentation, see SILVA-REIS, Dennys; COSTA, Daniel Padilha Pacheco da. Tradução & Música no Brasil: contrapontos. *Tradução em Revista*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 2, n. 27, p. i-xv, 2019. For the whole Special Issue, see SILVA-REIS, Dennys; COSTA, Daniel Padilha Pacheco da (orgs). *Tradução em Revista*, Rio de Janeiro, vol. 2, n. 27.

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[2] We consider "objective meaning" as the understanding and verbal interpretation of connotations and denotations of words in a given melody. Therefore, classical music and instrumental music also contain a meaning, but without a verbal dimension. In this case, it is an abstract, non-objective meaning.

In her "Music translation map", British theorist Lucile Desblache (2019, p. 220) circumscribes a square figure, whose sides represent the four aspects that interact in music translation, located at the center of the map: translation types, modalities, areas, and approaches. Besides, the author also distinguishes, on the one hand, the respective musical genres, and on the other, the translation strategies applied:

Figure 1 – Music translation map

Source: KAIDL & DESBLACHE, 2013 (apud DESBLACHE, 2019, p. 220)

On the music's side, genres can involve classical or experimental music, opera, operetta, musical, jazz and popular music; on the translation's side, strategies include adaptation, literal translation, transmutation, and audio description. Translation types are: intralinguistic, interlinguistic, intersemiotic, intermodal, intergeneric and intercultural; modalities involve

music, sound, voice and language; the approaches can be descriptive, theoretical, applied discipline-specific, and interdisciplinary; the areas include live concerts, music videos, *games*, TV programmes, films, radio, publications and commercials.

In Brazil, song translation is commonplace, "song" here understood as any kind of sung text. Câmara Cascudo (2006), in his work on oral literature, gives innumerable examples of how Brazilian popular songs would be adaptations of "translations by ear" of European medieval songs. Musicologist Anaïs Fléchet (2013), in a study about Brazilian music in France, also mentions how song translations were responsible to spread Brazilian rhythms and images. Furthermore, song translations in Brazil have not only gained official status, but also consolidated the musical versions and the craft of the versionist. Among all versionists who commented on their own motivations and experiences, Carlos Rennó is probably one of the few who documented this in a publication called *Cole Porter: Canções, versões* [Cole Porter: songs, versions] (RENNÓ, 1991, p. 41, my translation):

> Since long I had been planning to develop a work in the field of popular music poetry which translated the impact that the work of Augusto & Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari on poetic translation caused in me. Considering his exceptional qualities as a *lyricist*, and my admiration for the body of his songs, I decided to start off with Cole Porter. This was also the best way I found to pay a Brazilian homage to the brilliant North-American artist on the occasion of his 100th birthday.

Not all song translations have the same goal as Carlos Rennó's, i.e., to be a musical translation project. Some song versions are nothing more than non-translations of the song lyrics. These are replacement texts in which the artist re-uses a well-known, successful melody and gives it other meanings through another lyric. This is the case of "Tudo que se quer" (1989) by Emílio Santiago – which re-uses the melody of "All I ask of you" (1986), by Andrew Lloyd Webber; or "Vou de Táxi", by Angélica – originally the song "Joe, le taxi", by Vanessa Paradis –; and of numerous songs by singer Latino – for example, "Festa no apê" (originally "Dragostea Din Tei", by the

Romanian group O-Zone), "Dança Kuduro" (originally "Danza Kuduro", by Don Omar), among others.

The non-translation of song lyrics for vocal performance has an unusual history in Brazil. Differently from the replacement texts, the audiovisual and radiophonic products have long used subtitling and *voice-over* with the aim of conveying a certain meaning of the song, but in such a way that it is totally detached from the melody. This trend produced curious cases of translation, like radio programmes. These programmes had a song translation session – the so-called *Love songs* –, or even the endless subtitles for video clips in the 90s which motivated the creation of programmes such as *Manchete Clip Show*, on the now defunct Manchete TV, *Clip Clip* on Globo TV, or even the existence of TV channels totally devoted to this kind of musical translation – MTV, for example.

A more critical movement against the non-translation of song lyrics in Brazil is increasingly conquering supporters, even by this country's most popular social classes. An example of this would be the outrage of fans, critics and music specialists towards the Brazilian version of "Shallow" by Lady Gaga, made by Paula Fernandes in 2019 with the title "Juntos". This careless version had a negative impact and emerged as a trend topic on social media, fueling debates about the musicality of Brazilian Portuguese, as well as about new Brazilian and non-official versions[3] of songs available in numerous platforms, most of all on the Internet.

In fact, globalization and the popularization of culture have increasingly caused a critical position towards song translation in Brazil, as well as a merging of musical genres and concerts, which was not so common before. An example of this are the musicals, which have been produced more often in this country. As regards translation for singing, opera and musicals versionist Cláudio Botelho states that:

> Technically, the game is only perfect if all the syllables from the original
> have been transferred to the version, if prosody is correct, if the location of
> the rhymes is the same as in the original. These are the basics. In relation to
> the rest of it, it is about writing a new lyric in the second language, telling

[3]Retrieved from: https://gente.ig.com.br/cultura/2019-05-23/as-cinco-versoes-brasileiras-de-shallow-de-lady-gaga.html. Access on Oct 20, 2019.

the same story but taking into account that the main thing is to guarantee that the public understands it. If there are terms or quotations which are incomprehensible to the target public, I swap them for other references. (MEINBERG, 2013, p. 145, my translation)

Therefore, singability is the flagship of song translation, while maintaining the meaning of the source text. It is observed or anthropophagically assimilated, so that the target public can understand the musical text as a whole. According to Paulo Henriques Britto (2019, p. 90, author's emphasis, my translation), singability can be seen as a "basic rule to song lyrics: *the strong beats of the song must coincide with the stressed syllables in the lyrics.* Or, to say it differently, *no strong beat of the song should coincide with an unstressed syllable in the lyrics*".

In fact, the emphasis in song translation is to make it singable, so that prosodic elements correspond as the melody unfolds, whether they originate in the sounds of speech or in the sounds of the instruments. Singability is not merely the concern of professional versionists or of scholars who devote themselves to song translation. Some Brazilian songwriters are also self-translators or self-versionists, such as Djavan and Raul Seixas.

Djavan made versions of his own songs and recorded them both solo and in partnership in order to pursue an international career, or to launch albums to specific publics (like the North-American market). *Bird of Paradise* (*Pássaro do Paraíso*), launched in 1988 in the USA had the titles of his songs translated into English, besides three songs translated into this language: "Bird of Paradise" (the title-song, a version of "Navio"), "Stephen's Kingdom" (version of "Soweto") and "Miss Susanna" (version of "Florir"). *Puzzle of Hearts* (*Quebra-cabeça de corações*), an album also made to be launched abroad, in 1990, has three versions: "Puzzle of Hearts" (version of "Oceano"), "Being Cool" (version of "Avião") and "Amazon Farewell" (version of "Curumim"). For the Latin-American public, Djavan wrote versions in Spanish of "Faltando um Pedaço", "Meu Bem Querer" and "Pétala", launched in the CD *Esquinas* (1994).

Raul Seixas started off his career in a time when rock, in order to stand its ground as an art form and to promote their artists in Brazil, should necessarily be translated. Because Seixas was fluent in English and dreamed

of launching his songs internationally, he wrote countless versions – some still unknown to the Brazilian public to this day (SOUZA, 2011). Among these, one can highlight "I am Gita" (1987) (version of "Gita"), "Morning Train" (1998) (version of "O trem das 7"), "Orange is juice" (1998) (version of "S.O.S") and "Fool's Gold" (1973) (version of "Ouro de Tolo").

One should not forget that many times the translation of songs in Brazil did not only follow commercial criteria, but it was also guided by the affinity between rhythms and contents. Examples include Gilberto Gil and Sandra de Sá. The former recorded singable versions to Bob Marley's songs in his album *Kaya N'Gan Daya* (2002), whereas the latter, in her album *Pare, Olhe, Escute!* (2002), recorded singable versions of hits launched by Motown, the most important recording company for black artists in the history of North-American music. In both cases one can notice an act of musical camaraderie through the translation of songs.

Besides the graphic and verbal dimensions, musical translation also has other branches that are conducive to (re)creation. Thus, there is the merging of artistic and multimodal rewritings (if we may call them so, as in the case of the Brazilian Sign Language – LIBRAS, from the acronym in Portuguese). In this sense, the innovative study carried out by Natália Schleder Rigo is worth mentioning. Named *Tradução de Canções de LP para LSB: identificando e comparando recursos tradutórios empregados por sinalizantes surdos e ouvintes* [Song translations from LP to BSL: identifying and comparing translation resources employed by deaf signers and hearers] (2013), this work tries to map tactics, techniques and translation skills to non-hearers of oral languages, and equally of sounds, be them musical or not.

Musical rewritings to other arts, as well as the translation of music for non-oral languages, have been another object of interest to Translation Studies in Brazil, including current Brazilian musical practices, such as the translation of the National Anthem to indigenous languages Guarani[4] and Tikuna[5], made by chief Robson Miguel (2015).

If, in one strand of translation and music one can notice the object "song translation" as the most circumscribed in Brazil between professional

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[4] Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxCgF5ebdx4. Access on 28 Oct 2019.
[5] Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NX2bB3E8gr8. Access on 28 Oct 2019.

practice and both popular and specialized critics, in another strand Wolney Unes (1997) defends the idea that musical practice has been suffering with the primacy of lyrics and literacy. In his work *Músicos vs. Tradutores: a figura do intérprete* [Musicians vs Translators: the figure of the interpreter] (1997), the critic and art teacher defends that, in the teaching and in the practice of musical arts, reading musical notation is an intentionally graphic register of the music, which calls for a sonic translation and which requires an interpreter:

> [...] musical interpretation is nothing more than a translation process in its broadest sense: for non-trained individuals, the meaning of graphic signs (on the score) remains indecipherable. In order to translate these graphic signs into acoustic signs, a translator is needed.
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> Therefore, a trained individual reads (and this is the right word!) an author's creative work – not necessarily his or her acquaintance, from a time not necessarily his or hers, and usually produced in a different context – and re-makes it in another sign system, in another vehicle. In our case, the work is transported from its graphic vehicle to an acoustic vehicle. (UNES, 1997, p. 21-22, my translation)

Therefore, Wolney Unes denounces the sacrality of the graphic, even in an abstract art like music, at the same time highlighting the role of the translator/interpreter so that the musical performance can happen. In brief, the critic and art teacher claims that no musical translation can exist without the interpreter: "In a first moment the interpreter evokes the original work and, based on a point of reference, he or she triggers the second moment, the translation itself, expression of the interpreter's personality, therefore a new work" (UNES, 1997, p. 28, my translation).

From this perspective, we can also regard theatrical interpretation as a translation modality. To Italian theorist Umberto Eco, however, these forms of musical interpretation are not properly translations, but performances, and they are defined as one kind of intra-systemic interpretation, that is, the interpretation "which lies within the same semiotic system" (ECO, 2000, p. 129). Musical and theatrical language can be together in different dramatic genres accompanied by music, be them live or recorded. In both cases, translation involves multimodal texts, so it relates

itself not only to the sonic matter, but also to gestual and visual elements. Live performances include the musical, opera and operetta, for example. Recorded performances include songs that are sung at TV programmes, films, series, games and commercials.

In these multimodal texts, one can distinguish two main types of translation strategy. The first one keeps the source text and the translation simultaneously, whereas the second type obliterates the source text and replaces it with the translation. In live performances, the first strategy is represented by the translations made to be read – be them librettos or surtitles (texts which are projected above the stage), for example; and, in recorded performances, by subtitles (texts under the image). In live performances, the second strategy can be found in translations made for the stage; and, in recorded performances, it can be found in dubbing.

According to Western music historians, the formation of opera as one of the noblest art genres in modernity happened through the emulation of the most prestigious form in Greek-Roman Antiquity: tragedy.[6] In Donald J. Grout and Claude V. Palisca's words (1988, p. 355): "Although the earliest works in the genre we now call opera date only from the very end of the sixteenth century, the association of music with drama goes back to ancient times. The choruses and some lyric speeches, at least, in the plays of Euripides and Sophocles were sung."

Since the mid-18th century, the Kingdom of Portugal – in particular, the court of D. José I, who ruled between 1714 and 1777 and was an opera aficionado – was flooded by opera performances, especially by the *serious operas* written by Pietro Metastasio, pseudonym of Antonio Domenico Bonaventura Trapassi (1698-1782).[7] The Italian composer's plays were uninterruptedly set to music throughout the 18th century by a significant number of composers, like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (GROUT &

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[6] In fact, the theatrical dimension of the libretto (opera text) is closely related to the other five constituent parts of opera – the plot, the characters and the way they speak, the global meaning and the spectacle (scenery, outfit, lighting, make-up) –, besides the music. If we take the six constituent parts of tragedy, according to Aristotle's *Poetic* (2013), the same elements will be defined as *mythos, ethe, lexis, dianoia, opsis, melopoiia*, respectively. This comparison is not arbitrary, if we take into account the use of the Aristotelian principles by the opera composers from European countries during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

[7] On this topic, see Abalada (2008, p. 71 *et seq.*).

PALISCA, 1988). In this period, a great number of translations of *operas* by Pietro Metastasio began to be published, both for the stage and for the page.

These translations were not always signed. In effect, many translations of operas by the Italian composer are anonymous, such as *Adrian in Syria* and *Artaxerxes* (METASTASIO, 1764). One of the main responsibles for the version and adaptation of operas by Pietro Metastasio in Portuguese was the Italian publisher and translator Francisco Luiz Ameno, also known as Fernando Lucas Cesário Alvim.[8] The publication of translations and the performance of Italian operas in Portuguese, in general, and Pietro Metastasio's, in particular, were intensified during the reign of D. Maria, the Mad, which stretched from 1777 to 1816.

At that time Brazil was still a colony, and the performance of Italian operas translated into Portuguese, particularly those by Pietro Metastasio, followed the trend of the Portuguese metropolis. In the description of feasts celebrated in Cuiabá in 1790, José Arouche de Toledo Rendon mentions six *serious operas* by the abbey Pietro Metastasio, all of them catalogued as translations made by Gonçalves Rodrigues (1992).[9] Most of these translations were anonymous, and many have been lost, as occurred with most of the seven translations of that Italian composer attributed to Cláudio Manuel da Costa. Of all these translations, made either in imperfect rhymes or in dramatic prose, only *Artaxerxes* and *Demofoonte* survived, and it received a recent edition (ESTEVES, 2008). Another participant of the Minas Conspiracy, Alvarenga Peixoto translated *Mérope*, by Scipione Maffei (WYLER, 2003).

The translation of operas into Portuguese became more frequent in Brazil from the turn of the 18th to the 19th century onwards. Manuel Maria Barbosa du Bocage (1876) translated three operas, two of which French – *Euphemia or The Triumph of Religion*, by François Thomas Marie Baculard d'Arnaud, and *Ericie ou la Vestale*, by Dubois-Fontanelle[10] – and an Italian one – *Attilio Regolo*, by Pietro Metastasio. Because of the policies implemented

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[8] *Achille in Sciro, Alessando nell'Indie, Semiramis Riconosciuta, Zenobia, La Clemenza di Tito, Demofoonte* and *Antigono* (METASTASIO, 1755).

[9] *Aspazia in Syria, Irene, L'Asilo d'Amore, Siroe re di Persia, Ezio* and *Zenobia*.

[10] *Ericie* was "mistakenly" attributed to D'Anchet by Bocage (MARINHO, 2003, p. 116).

after the independence of Brazil from Portugal (during the Second Empire, in particular) to boost the composition of "national operas", including the translation of European operas into Portuguese and the construction of lyrical theatres, this genre started to enjoy high prestige in Brazil.

The main symbol of this policy of the Brazilian State in the mid 19th century was the creation of the Imperial Academy of Music and National Opera in 1856, by emperor D. Pedro II. In the second half of the 19th century, important writers devoted themselves to translating, adapting and writing *librettos* in Portuguese. In the beginning of his career as a translator, Machado de Assis translated for the Imperial Academy of Music and National Opera three operistic *librettos* that did not survive until nowadays: *A ópera das janelas*, *Pipelet* and *As bodas de Joaninha* (SOUSA, 1955).

Despite these initiatives, the performance of translated operas has always had fierce opponents, notwithstanding notable supporters as Mário de Andrade. In her pioneer study on translated operas, Kaiser (1999, p. 8, my translation) claims: "Contrary to what happens in regions of the so-called 'first world' (as in Europe and in the United States), the performance of translated operas has not been very frequent in Brazil". Capable of mobilizing and modifying cultural ideas until the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, opera acquired, since then, the status of being old-fashioned and eccentric.[11]

The decline of opera gave way to new types of music-theatrical segments which are submitted to the test of translation nowadays, such as the musicals. In addition to the musicals which are performed in foreign languages, with the projection of the translation above the stage (*surtitles*), the musicals translated into Portuguese have increasingly been conquering larger audiences in Brazil. Cláudio Botelho has gained a reputation as a versionist of musicals. He is the author of the "Brazilian version" (as the translation meant for the stage is named) of huge Broadway hits, such as *The*

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[11] It is a known fact that the supporters of the Italian unification, for example, took to the streets shouting "*Viva Verdi*", a code for "*Viva Vittorio Emmanuele Re D'Italia*"; but the yelling also represented a feeling of cultural identity through opera. And the "opera houses" were architectural and urban references in the big cities. In a certain sense, it may not be exaggerated to state that any effort to understand the "spirit" of the 19th century demands a reflection about the operistic phenomenon.

Phantom of the Opera (2005),[12] *Spring Awakening* (2009),[13] *Evita* (2010),[14] *Hair* (2010),[15] *West Side Story* (2018)[16] and *The Sound of Music* (2018),[17] among others.

The examples of music translation mentioned here do not have the pretension to exhaust the theme, but aim at illustrating some of the many musical genres that have been translated in the past centuries in (and from) Brazil, such as songs, popular music, operas, operettas, musicals and classical music. The richness of strategies to translate, adapt and rewrite used to introduce these genres, which originate from different cultural contexts, has only begun to be studied by musicians, translators, and researchers.

Nowadays, we would like to highlight the institutional project carried out by Dr Lauro Meller at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, named "(Não) Tem Tradução: As Canções de Noel Rosa em inglês, segundo o Princípio do Pentatlo, de Peter Low" [(Un)Translatable: Noel Rosa's songs in English, according to Peter Low's Pentathlon Principle]. Its theoretical aspects focus on the reception, diffusion and theorization of a research-action to make Brazilian Music popular abroad – in particular, Rosa's songs – and seeks to integrate the academy – with the distinguished collaboration of Dr Peter Low, a world-famous specialist in song translation – and the foreign, non-lusophone public who might be interested in discovering the art and music of the great Brazilian songwriter. The project is entering its fourth year of activities and has produced singable translations of many of Noel Rosa's songs.

Finally, it is important to point out that the field of Translation and Music in Brazil looks promising, and that it might have a great impact in the future, both from a theoretical standpoint and in a practical perspective – since theory and practice can resize practices and knowledges that were only empirical previously, but which now already show some conceptual and scientific evidence.

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[12] *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986), music by Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyrics by Charles Hart.

[13] *Spring Awakening* (2006), music by Ducan Sheik and lyrics by Steven Sater.

[14] *Evita* (1976), music by Andrew Lloyd and lyrics by Tim Rice.

[15] *Hair* (1967), music by Galt Macdermot and lyrics by Geromo Ragni and James Rado.

[16] *West Side Story* (1957), music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim.

[17] *The Sound of Music* (1959), music by Richard Rodgers and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II.

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