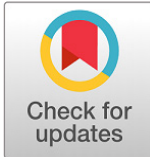


“But, Bitch, I’m Still Serving It”. Subtitling a Drag
Language Verb in *RuPaul’s Drag Race*
into Brazilian Portuguese: New Meanings, Old Words



Willian Henrique Cândido Moura
willianmoura.tradutor@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2675-6880>
Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil.

Luciana Iost Vinhas
luciana.vinhas@ufrgs.br
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1026-2277>
Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

Abstract

RuPaul’s Drag Race is a reality show that has been on air since 2009. Throughout its seasons, the show received multiple spin-offs and became a franchise with versions in several countries around the world. Due to this popularization, we consider that *Drag Race* plays an unavoidable role in the way that we socially understand drag culture nowadays. In this paper, we analyze the translation into Brazilian Portuguese of a drag language verb used in the speech of Season 13 contestants of the reality show broadcast in Brazil by Netflix. We present a contrastive analysis between the subtitling and the entries for the verb in general bilingual Portuguese-English/English-Portuguese dictionaries. The analysis is based on materialist discourse analysis, on theorizations about camp and drag, and on research on the audiovisual translation of the show. Our findings indicate that the subtitling of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* allows the circulation of other unforeseen meanings for verbs that are part of this semantic-discursive network in Brazilian Portuguese. We reflect on the effects of meanings put into circulation by verbs in drag language, which do not compose what can and should be said from the dominant ideological position in our social formation, and on its dictionary use, which obeys processes of institutionalization of the hegemonic knowledge. Through this study, we stated that the functioning of drag language comes to be understood as “drag words,” as it performs caricatures of femininity by subverting the barriers imposed by the gender binarism that dominantly regulates social relations.

Keywords: drag language, queer language, camp talk, materialist discourse analysis, audiovisual translation



«But, bitch, I’m still serving it»). La subtitulación de un verbo del lenguaje drag en *RuPaul’s Drag Race* al portugués brasileño: nuevos significados, viejas palabras

Resumen

RuPaul’s Drag Race es un programa de telerrealidad emitido desde 2009. A lo largo de sus temporadas, el programa ha ganado *spin-offs* y se ha convertido en una franquicia con versiones en varios países del mundo. Debido a esta popularización, consideramos que el programa tiene un papel ineludible en lo que actualmente entendemos por cultura drag. Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la traducción al portugués brasileño de un verbo del lenguaje drag empleado en el discurso de participantes de la 13ª temporada del programa de telerrealidad, transmitido en Brasil por Netflix. Realizamos un análisis contrastivo entre las traducciones de los subtítulos de las escenas y las acepciones del verbo en diccionarios generales bilingües portugués-inglés/inglés-portugués. El análisis se basó en el análisis materialista del discurso, las teorizaciones sobre lo *camp* y lo *drag*, e investigaciones sobre la traducción audiovisual del programa. Observamos que la subtitulación de *RuPaul’s Drag Race* permite la circulación de otros significados no previstos para los verbos que forman parte de esta red semántico-discursiva en portugués brasileño. Con esto, reflexionamos sobre los efectos de significado que ponen en circulación los verbos en el lenguaje drag, que no componen lo que puede y debe decirse desde la posición ideológica dominante en nuestra formación social, y en su uso diccionarizado, que obedece a procesos de institucionalización del saber hegemónico. A través de este estudio, planteamos que el funcionamiento del lenguaje drag pasa a entenderse como «palabras drag», ya que performa caricaturas de la feminidad al subvertir las barreras impuestas por el binarismo de género que regula predominantemente las relaciones sociales.

Palabras clave: lenguaje *drag*, lenguaje *queer*, *camp talk*, análisis materialista de discurso, traducción audiovisual

« But, bitch, I’m still serving it ». Sous-titrage d’un verbe du langage drag dans *RuPaul’s Drag Race* : nouvelles significations, anciens mots

Resumé

RuPaul’s Drag Race est une émission de télé-réalité lancée en 2009. Au fil de ses saisons, elle est devenue une véritable franchise, comptant de nombreux *spin-offs* (ou versions) dans plusieurs pays du monde. Du fait de cette diffusion à grande échelle, nous pensons que le programme télé joue un rôle incontournable dans ce que, de nos jours, nous entendons socialement par « drag ». Cet article vise à étudier la traduction en portugais brésilien des verbes du « langage drag » utilisés dans le discours des participants de la 13e saison de la télé-réalité, diffusée au Brésil sur Netflix. Nous avons effectué une analyse contrastive entre la traduction des sous-titres des différentes scènes et les entrées des dictionnaires généraux bilingues portugais-anglais / anglais-portugais portant sur ces verbes. La recherche s’est basée sur l’analyse matérialiste du discours, les théorisations sur le « camp » et le « drag », et la traduction audiovisuelle. Il a été observé que le sous-titrage de *RuPaul’s Drag Race* permet l’apparition de sens nouveaux et inattendus, vis-à-vis des verbes de ce réseau sémantico-discursif en portugais brésilien. En outre, il convient de s’attarder davantage sur les effets de sens véhiculés par les verbes dans le « langage drag », qui se démarquent de ce qui peut et doit être dit selon la position idéologique dominante de notre système social, et dans son usage du dictionnaire, qui obéit à des processus

d'institutionnalisation du savoir hégémonique. Le fonctionnement du « langage drag » commence à s'appréhender en tant qu'e « mots drag », en ce sens qu'il dresse des caricatures de la féminité en renversant les barrières imposées par la binarité du genre qui régit de manière dominante les rapports sociaux.

Mots-clés : langage drag, langage queer, camp talk, analyse matérialiste du discours, traduction audiovisuelle

“But, bitch, I'm still serving it”. A legendagem de um verbo da linguagem drag em *RuPaul's Drag Race* para o português brasileiro: novos sentidos, velhas palavras

Resumo

RuPaul's Drag Race é um reality show que está no ar desde 2009. Ao longo de suas temporadas, o programa ganhou diversos spin-offs e se tornou uma franquia com versões em vários países do mundo. Devido a essa popularização, consideramos que o reality tem um papel incontornável no que, hoje em dia, entendemos socialmente por cultura drag. Este artigo tem o objetivo de analisar a tradução ao português brasileiro de verbos da linguagem drag empregados na fala de participantes da 13ª temporada do reality show, veiculada, no Brasil, pela Netflix. Realizamos uma análise contrastiva entre a legendagem da cena e os verbetes de dicionários gerais bilíngues português-inglês/inglês-português sobre o referido verbo. A análise foi baseada na Análise Materialista de Discurso, nas teorizações sobre o camp e o drag e em pesquisas sobre a tradução audiovisual do programa. Observamos que a legendagem de *RuPaul's Drag Race* permite a circulação de outros sentidos não previstos para verbos que fazem parte dessa rede semântico-discursiva em português brasileiro. Com isso, refletimos sobre os efeitos de sentido colocados em circulação pelos verbos na linguagem drag, que não compõem o que pode e deve ser dito a partir da posição ideológica dominante na nossa formação social, e em seu emprego dicionarizado, que obedece a processos de institucionalização de saberes hegemônicos. Por meio deste estudo, afirmamos que o funcionamento da linguagem drag passa a ser compreendido como “palavras montadas”, pois performa caricaturas da feminilidade ao subverter as barreiras impostas pelo binarismo de gênero que predominantemente regula as relações sociais.

Palavras-chave: linguagem drag, linguagem queer, camp talk, análise materialista de discurso, tradução audiovisual

This comes out clearly in the vulgar use of the word Camp as a verb ‘to camp’, something that people do. To camp is a mode of seduction - one which employs flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation: gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another more impersonal, for outsiders. Equally and by extension, when the word becomes a noun, when a person or a thing is ‘a camp’, a duplicity is involved
Susan Sontag (2018, p. 13)

Introduction

The emergence of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* transformed the history of reality shows and drag culture worldwide. Created and hosted by drag celebrity RuPaul Andre Charles, the show began broadcasting on the pay TV channel Logo in 2009. The goal of the reality show is to select, from an initial group of drag queens, the one who will be considered the next drag superstar of the United States. Each episode presents a maxi-challenge, which selects the queens with the best performance—among whom the winner of the challenge is chosen—and those who had the worst performance. The two queens with the worst evaluation in the maxi-challenge and the worst outfits presented on the catwalk are selected to lip-sync a traditional or popular song in drag culture. The queen who does not have the best lip-sync is eliminated from the competition.

The number of drag queens varies between seasons, as does the number of challenges and the format for selecting the participants. There are occasions when RuPaul decides that two queens will be eliminated in the same episode, which is called “double elimination.” This was first seen in the fourth episode of Season 5 with the elimination of both contestants Vivienne Pinay and Honey Mahogany. Likewise, RuPaul may decide to keep two queens on the show after the lip-sync, which is called a “double shantay.” This first happened when the hostess saved both Yara Sofia and Carmen Carrera in Season 3. Despite relying on the judges’ evaluations—Michelle Visage, Carson Kressley, and Ross Mathews have been regulars in recent editions—the decision concerning the

elimination and the best performance always rests with RuPaul.

RuPaul’s Drag Race is of special interest to us because it is extremely influential in the constitution and dissemination of the so-called “drag culture,” which is characterized, among other elements, by the language used by the contestants. *RuPaul’s Drag Race* promoted the diffusion of different elements of this culture, which has currently become popular and takes part in the way that clothes, makeup, linguistic features, and music are inserted in our social formation, no longer considered as something marginal (Collins, 2017; Villanueva-Jordán, 2019a; Barra et al., 2020; Brennan & Gudelunas, 2022). We see the audiovisual translation of the reality show as a social phenomenon that broadens the way in which drag language and queer culture are perceived and understood beyond the context of its production.

Our paper is based on theories supported by the materiality of language in its semantic-discursive relationships, materialized both in verbal and non-verbal elements of the audiovisual translation of drag language. Through materialist discourse analysis, we aim to analyze the subtitling into Brazilian Portuguese of a drag language verb used in the speech of participants in the reality show *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, broadcast in Brazil by the streaming platform Netflix.¹ We will focus on the last season available on this platform until the writing of this article, Season 13, which took place in the first half of 2021 with 13 contestants. The importance of this study derives from its problematization of the relation between dictionary language, which obeys the processes of institutionalization of hegemonic knowledge, and drag language, which puts into circulation knowledge that does not conform to what can and should be said from the dominant ideological position in our social formation.

1 Until July 2022, the most recent season of the show, Season 14, is available in Brazil only through the streaming platform Paramount+.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical articulation that supports this research involves four work fields: (1) camp and camp talk; (2) drag queens and drag language; (3) audiovisual translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race*; and (4) materialist discourse analysis, semantics, and dictionary, which we describe in this section.

2.1. Camp and Camp Talk

In the 1960s, Susan Sontag published *Notes on 'Camp'* (Sontag, 2018), an essay that gave new visibility to the homosexual community. At that time, a homosexual person was considered a mental patient, because homosexuality² was a pathology cataloged in the International Classification of Diseases (Laurenti, 1984), which reinforced a negative view of homosexual people as individuals belonging to a community.

In her essay, Sontag (2018) established the characteristics of camp aesthetics, whose essence is linked to a predilection for what is unnatural, artificial, extravagant, and exaggerated. In a complex way, the author related camp to homosexuality because, although the taste for camp does not correspond exactly to the homosexual taste, it is clear that there is a peculiar affinity between both. In addition, Sontag (2018) stated that there are things that can be camp, such as objects, people, movies, clothes, music, etc. In this sense, we understand that language can also be camp. According to Harvey (1998, 2000) camp talk contains verbal and semiotic elements that can be used to produce surface textual and visual effects. From this, Harvey (2000) lists four strategies through which camp signals its meanings, namely paradox, inversion, ludicism, and parody.

Authors like Harvey (2000) and Martínez Pleguezuelos (2017) argue that camp encompasses a set of actions, gestures, speeches, and

linguistic features that constitute an exaggerated parody of women's behavior. It is not about imitating a woman, but about presenting an excessive caricature of one. Furthermore, these authors mention that it is important to consider the subversive potential of queer discourse to deconstruct the sex/gender system, which has been naturalized in our society through binomials such as man/woman and heterosexual/homosexual. As Sontag (2018, p. 12) explains, "camp sensitivity is one that is alive to a double sense in which some things can be taken." Based on these characteristics of camp, we understand that drag language, that is, the language used by drag queens, is intrinsically linked to camp talk, as explained in what follows.

2.2. Drag Queens and Drag Language

The concept of "drag queen" has changed over time. Until the mid-2010s, several researchers defined drag queens as gay men who perform in women's clothing but do not try to hide the fact that they are men (Newton, 1972; Tyler, 1991; Barrett, 1998; Rupp et al., 2010; Mann, 2011). More recently, Parsemain (2019, pp. 96–97) defines drag as "the practice of cross-dressing in front of an audience (...). The art of transforming oneself to perform femininity [drag queens] or masculinity [drag kings] in front of an audience". In both definitions, we observe that drag queens challenge hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity through their performances.

We believe that *RuPaul's Drag Race* plays an unavoidable role in the way that we socially understand drag today. We hold such statement because, over the seasons of the reality show, two contestants came out as trans women during their participation in the show: Kylie Sonique Love in the episode "Reunion" in Season 2, and Monica Beverly Hillz during a runway challenge in Season 5. Other contestants declared to be trans after participating in the reality show: Carmen Carrera and Stacy Layne Matthews (Season 3), Jiggly Caliente and Kenya Michaels (Season 4), Honey Mahogany (Season 5), Gia

2 In Brazil, homosexuality [*homossexualidade*] was incorrectly called *homossexualismo* [homosexualism], further reinforcing the concept of disease in the term.

Gunn and Laganja Estranja (Season 6). In Season 9, Peppermint became known as the first contestant to debut in the competition as a trans woman; and in Season 13, Gottmik was the first trans man to participate in the show.

In this sense, we observe that even the drag community, brought to the mainstream due to the show’s success, was still stuck in the sex/gender binarism. Little by little, this binarism is being deconstructed as new contestants who identify with other genders participate in the competition. This rupture with the social conventions dictated by the sex/gender system makes drag, as a transgressive performance, destabilize those categories “by making visible the social basis of femininity and masculinity, heterosexuality and homosexuality, and presenting hybrid and minority genders and sexualities” (Rupp et al., 2010, p. 277). Therefore, we affirm that *RuPaul’s Drag Race* increases understanding of drag’s gender dynamics by giving visibility to genres other than the cis and becomes an important part of the LGBTQIA+ movement’s history.

Through drag performance, we can try to understand the transgressive power of queering gender and sexuality, as drag subverts hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative sexual identity. As Stryker (2006, p. 10) and Parsemain (2019, p. 97) propose: “drag shows that gender is something we ‘do,’ not something we ‘are.’” By looking at drag from this perspective, we find approximations with camp, mainly in aesthetic terms and how certain elements acquire a double meaning. For Newton (1972, p. 104), camp and drag queens are closely related: “both the drag queen and the camp are expressive performing roles, and both specialize in transformation.” Newton (1972) emphasizes that, in drag, transformation is related to the reversal of male-female gender roles, while camp is concerned with a philosophy of transformation, an incongruity.

Drag language is related to camp talk since it puts into circulation linguistic elements that do not conform to the discourse that is established

from the dominant ideological position in today’s society. At the same time, drag language destabilizes the dominant sense, questioning and producing a caricature of the dominant position. At this point, we begin to analyze the process of formulating utterances: words, expressions, and propositions. This process, in relation to the conditions of discourse production, enables the production of effects of meanings unforeseen by semantic networks ideologically forged and put into circulation in different enunciative spaces of the drag scene. These words are simultaneously incongruous with traditional linguistic and normative conventions (camp) and they play with male-female gender roles (drag). It is as if certain words also *dragged* when penetrating drag language, that is, as if they *served* something specific related to the drag universe, which leads to the transgressive character of queer discourse.

A common practice in drag language is “to use feminine third-person singular pronouns to refer to drag queens within this speech community” (Mann, 2011, p. 809). Concerning this linguistic feature, Barrett (2017) describes the language of drag queens as a performance marked by the grammatical use of the female gender, although, in most cases, drag queens do not see themselves as women when they are de-dragged. Comparing the pronominal uses in the speeches of drag kings and drag queens through ethnographic research, Rupp et al. (2010, p. 280) identified that drag kings have a greater predilection “to match pronouns to gender of presentation than the drag queens, who in everyday life switch back and forth between masculine and feminine pronouns.”

Drag queens emphasize social stereotypes about what it means to be feminine (fishy³).

3 According to the show’s fandom, *fishy* is “a term used to describe a drag queen who looks extremely feminine, or one who convincingly resembles a cis woman. The term is a reference to the scent of a vagina, which is colloquially likened to the smell of fish” (RuPaul’s Drag Race Dictionary).

According to Mann (2011), creative linguistic features shared across multiple language varieties and expletives mark drag queens' uses of language. As Barrett (1998, 2017) exemplifies, in drag performance, there is a mix of linguistic variants of three different social groups: white females, gay males, and African Americans. Although this linguistic characteristic does not reflect a natural discourse of any of these groups (Barret, 1998), this exchange of linguistic variants performs individual characteristics and identity aspects of race, gender, and sexuality (Mann, 2011).

We consider that these linguistic characteristics used by drag queens to perform femininity are features of camp, as "in the mid-sixties, camp was an in-group word which denoted specifically homosexual humor" (Newton, 1972, p. xx). This tradition of camp humor, that is, homosexual humor that plays with stereotypes, especially female and homosexual stereotypes, can currently be seen as self-deprecating (Rupp et al., 2010). However, like Harvey (2000) and Martínez Pleguezuelos (2017), we understand that camp aesthetics and camp talk are not really about imitating a woman, but about presenting a parody, an excessive caricature of a woman, deconstructing the sex/gender system through queer discourse and drag queens' performances.

Since "drag queens have a knack for their ability to play with language, creating inside jokes, catchphrases, and neologisms" (Libby, 2014, p. 52), it is possible to visualize features of camp humor in drag language through an iconic catchphrase from *RuPaul's Drag Race*:

The "grammatical cross-dressing" of RuPaul's catchphrase "Gentlemen, start your engines, and may the best woman win!" transgresses the gender binary by suggesting that the contestants are both male and female. Although most queens in the series identify as cisgender men, they call themselves "girls" and "ladies" and use female pronouns and drag names even when out of drag. (Parsemain, 2019, p. 97)

Although iconic, the catchphrase was replaced in Season 13, in 2021, as it did not encompass the diversity of genders of the show's contestants and received negative reviews from the audience. "The exclusion of transgender women from the competition reflects binary ideologies that have traditionally dominated drag culture" (Parsemain, 2019, p. 100). The new catchphrase "Racers, start your engines, and may the best drag queen win" follows the evolution of drag; it presents an inclusive language for trans and non-binary contestants, considering that since Season 2, when Kylie Sonique Love came out as a trans woman, *Drag Race* made very few changes. Parsemain (2019) cites as an example that, in 2015, the segment "She Done Already Done Had Herses" replaced "Girl... You Got She-Mail" which had a transphobic charge. The linguistic features debated in this subsection describe what we call drag language. However, it is also important to understand how drag language is translated from English into different languages. Next, we present works that investigated the audiovisual translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race*.

2.3. Audiovisual Translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race*

In this subsection, we present papers that analyze the audiovisual translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. In the timeline presented by Villanueva-Jordán⁴ (2022), updated on July 25, 2022, we found six articles dealing with this subject. By bringing these works together, it is possible to identify the theoretical and methodological bases of the authors and indicate possible improvements in research designs on the subject (Villanueva-Jordán & Chaume, 2021). In addition, this cataloging has shown that the intersection of research on both topics allows the identification of theoretical aspects about different sexualities and their representation in

4 Villanueva-Jordán (2022) has been cataloging, in a detailed and didactic way, research on audiovisual translation and LGBTQIA+ studies that have been published in peer-reviewed journals and books.

the audiovisual translation of linguistic features, for example. This leads to a progressive integration of LGBTQIA+ related studies in the field of translation studies (Villanueva-Jordán, 2021), as we present in Section 4.

Villanueva-Jordán (2019a) discussed the concepts of dragqueenism and audiovisual translation, identifying how the fansubbing of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, that is, the subtitling made by fans of the show, translates camp as a form of representation of drag performance in Latin American Spanish subtitles. The author concluded that the subtitles made by fans impacted the reception of dragqueenism and the consumption of the program in several Hispanic American countries. This impact could be seen when camp talk, an essential part of drag culture, gained visibility in spaces beyond the subtitles made by fans, as viewers of this version began to use this language in other spaces, such as comments in Facebook groups and online discussion forums.

Another work by Villanueva-Jordán (2019b) analyzed the presence of micro-textual elements referring to camp talk and the way these elements were translated in the Spanish subtitling available on Netflix compared to the subtitling made by fans on the *RuPaul’s Drag Race Venezuela* Facebook community. The author observed that both subtitles used female gender marking in the translation, respecting one of the main characteristics of camp talk. In addition, Villanueva-Jordán (2019b) found that Netflix subtitles had a large number of literal translations,⁵ which can be seen as a remnant of the fact that camp talk has been going through an acculturation process.

5 We emphasize that *literal translation* in the work of Villanueva-Jordán (2019b) is one of the translation techniques. In discourse analysis, *literal translation* refers to a conception of language as transparent, understood, therefore, as one of the possible effects of meaning to be established by the relationship between languages.

Barra et al. (2020) explored the distribution, circulation, and reception of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* in Italy. The authors’ investigation was based on the process of adaptation and dubbing of the reality show and the local and international projections of the hostess, RuPaul. The results showed that over the course of a decade, the Italian edition and the program’s distribution changed along with the national media landscape and its audience. The authors also concluded that “much of the entertaining potential of the *RuPaul’s Drag Race* show is based on verbal and cultural humor, which is hard to properly translate (and to communicate) in Italian” (Barra et al., 2020, p. 14). These results show that the translation of camp talk is a challenge, and the way this sociolect is translated impacts the understanding of the audiovisual product and, consequently, its reception.

Passa (2021a) debated the translation techniques and strategies used by translators to linguistically characterize drag queens in the voice-over of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* into Peninsular Spanish. The results showed the complexity of translating drag language and that many features of drag lingo were standardized, generalized, or eliminated; many double meanings were made explicit; and other words of this sociolect were creatively invented. Regarding the aspects of the use of the feminine grammatical gender before masculine words, the author concluded that in most cases the translation kept the same meaning. This process reflects the non-binary condition of drag queens and makes a parody of heteronormative society.

Tavares and Branco (2021) investigated the translation of drag language in the subtitling of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* into Brazilian Portuguese. For these authors, the show is full of idioms used by the drag community in the United States (us). The translation of these idioms is a fruitful topic for translational discussions because there may be issues with equivalence and (self-)censorship in the translation process due to the specificity of the idioms and the source and target cultures. In this sense, Tavares and

Branco (2021) propose the use of *pajubá*, the name given to the LGBTQIA+ dialect in Brazil, as an alternative for translating the US drag language. The authors concluded that the subtitlers had translated the expressions of the US drag language through idioms of the *pajubá* in some cases but not in others, which shows that the subtitlers knew the LGBTQIA+ sociolect in both languages.

Using corpus linguistics, Passa (2021b) highlighted the construction of drag lingo and parenting in *RuPaul's Drag Race* by analyzing the discourse around drag family, parenthood, and sisterhood in a corpus of 174 episodes, including the intralingual subtitles of the first thirteen seasons of the show. The author carried out an investigation using the #LancsBox software to analyze linguistic data. The results presented by Passa (2021b) showed that femininity plays a leading role within drag lingo, as the occurrences of female forms outnumbered their male counterparts. The data on the drag family discourse revealed that, in the show, the meanings of parenting revolved around emotional support and refuge for young gay men who were rejected by their biological families, though references are also made to the financial support that drag queens receive inside their drag houses.

By analyzing the few studies that focus on the audiovisual translation of *RuPaul's Drag Race*, we can see that the audiovisual translation of queer language, here materialized by the language of drag queens, is a useful topic of activism for translation studies. Thus, we present a discursive analysis of the translation of a drag language verb because we understand that the production of meanings is materialized in both texts, that is, in the source text and its translation. Below, we present the discourse analysis perspective that we work with in this article.

2.4. Materialist Discourse Analysis, Semantics, and Dictionary

As previously mentioned, a semantic perspective of discourse analysis from a materialist

tradition supports our work. The main assumption of this approach is that the production of meanings do not exist apart from a relationship with ideology. Through language, ideology is produced and reproduced materially in our social formation (Pêcheux, 1982). All forms of material existence, which can encompass both verbal and non-verbal language, are understood as materializations of political, ideological, and class positions (Haroche, Pêcheux, & Henry, 2007). Thus, elements considered pragmatic or semiotic are understood from the discursive perspective as material forms of ideology. Such designations, coming from other epistemological fields, are not incorporated into the theoretical-analytical device of materialist discourse analysis, which considers all material existences subject to analysis.

Camp talk can be understood as a polysemic form of production of meaning which occurs through the caricaturing of women. These meanings differ from the hegemonic, stabilized meaning of woman (and also of man), as a critique of this gender binarism. This caricaturing is materialized through both visual composition (gestures, clothing, body movements), and linguistic features (words, expressions, and propositions, including suprasegmental elements of oral language). The material forms go beyond this logically stabilized imaginary of women. It causes gaps and points out flaws in the dominant imaginary about women and about how someone can go beyond the logically stabilized meanings of sexual binarism. It is part of a heterogeneous and diverse field of gender relations, which gains material form through verbal and non-verbal language. All this causes a rupture with the hegemonic knowledge that circulates in our social formation, thus affecting how subjects relate to the meanings imaginatively forged about themselves, about the other, and the (im)possible sociability. Therefore, drag language provokes the emergence of a new political, ideological, and class position in the way meanings are produced, formulated, and circulated, marking a position in the dispute of meanings to be established and reproduced.

As we will explain in Section 3, our analysis is based on dictionaries. At that point, we agree with Petri (2008) when the author addresses the constitutive heterogeneity of dictionaries. Despite the popular belief that dictionaries are places of language observation where political-ideological disagreements can be reduced, for us, dictionaries materialize certain positions that allow the reproduction of certain meanings but not others. However, the other meaning is always present in the dictionary, constituting what is said and leaving its marks. The meanings that can and should be formulated in dictionaries are the effects of a socio-historical-ideological process that materializes what is considered the dominant meaning of a given term. Thus, the dictionary⁶ puts the dominant knowledge about words into circulation, materializing part of the process of social dispute that revolves around language. It is as if, on the one hand, the drag language tried to disrupt the sedimented language that permeates our social formation, and on the other hand, dictionaries worked to preserve the meanings that can and should be shared socially.

Therefore, when we look at the dictionary as a discursive object that stabilizes the dominant meanings in our social formation and we establish a relationship with the reality show, we will have other possible formulations for the selected terms, coming from the so-called drag language, whose presence in general dictionaries is still absent. The dictionary produces an effect of

the totality of possible meanings as if everything that can and should be said were present in its entries. However, because the material that constitutes the dictionary, that is, the language, is opaque and prone to misunderstanding (Leandro-Ferreira, 2003), we can question this imaginary by considering what is not said but constitutes what is said. That is why the dictionary, despite trying to build a homogeneous and stable discourse about language, is constitutively heterogeneous due to the existence of language in the discursivity of the archive (Pêcheux, 1994).

3. Methodology

In this section, we present our study material as well as the reasons that led us to choose it. We describe the criteria established for the selection of the drag language verb and, finally, the step-by-step procedure used in the analysis.

3.1. Material

Our material is Season 13 of the reality show *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. We chose this show due to its current relevance for drag culture, given that it has been on air since 2009 and has had 14 seasons, launched until July 2022. *RuPaul’s Drag Race* released several spin-offs: *RuPaul’s Drag Race All Stars*, *RuPaul’s Drag U*, *RuPaul’s Secret Celebrity Drag Race*, and behind the scenes of eliminations *RuPaul’s Drag Race: Untucked*. With great international acceptance, the show became a franchise, with contests hosted by RuPaul in the United Kingdom (*RuPaul’s Drag Race UK*) and in Australia & New Zealand (*RuPaul’s Drag Race Down Under*). Besides these, the show also has versions presented in Canada (*Canada’s Drag Race*), Chile (*The Sweet Drag Race*), Spain (*Drag Race España*), France (*Drag Race France*), Holland (*Drag Race Holland*), Italy (*Drag Race Italia*), and Thailand (*Drag Race Thailand*).

As we stated in Section 1, this reality show is a competition for drag queens to demonstrate their abilities in drag performance. Season 13 of the show took place between January and April 2021. The season was filmed during the

6 We are not considering specific monolingual or bilingual dictionaries about queer language, for example, in both languages studied. Our study proposal deals with general and online bilingual dictionaries. Our election is also a criticism, since we notice that this type of dictionary does not incorporate the “new meanings” of words in recent editions, even in digital format. Despite the fact that these “new meanings” are starting to have their use socially established in minority communities that have been historically stigmatized by the hegemonic culture, in this case, the LGBTQIA+ community, the dictionaries still maintain a conservative view of the process.

COVID-19 pandemic, relying on strict protocols, including isolation and testing of contestants, judges, and crew (Alter, 2021). It had 16 episodes and 13 participants: Symone, Kandy Muse, Gottmik, Rosé, Olivia Lux, Utica Queen, Tina Burner, Denali, Elliott with 2 Ts, LaLa Ri, Tamisha Iman, Joey Jay, and Kahmora Hall.

3.2. Selecting the Corpus of Analysis

As Libby (2014) points out, drag queens create their own vocabulary. In this sense, we did not find studies in the literature that specifically analyze the verbs in the language of drag queens. Therefore, there is no consensus on which verbs constitute this sociolect. Based on what we presented in Section 2 about the characteristics of camp talk and drag language, we propose the following criteria for cataloging drag language verbs:

- Verbs that name specific actions of drag performance but may not be in the dictionary
- Verbs that demonstrate incongruity when used in a different context from the conventional one
- Verbs that have different meanings from the hegemonic dictionary definition

These criteria served as an initial attempt to define the characteristics of the verbs⁷ that are part of the specific queer discourse of this community since the linguistic features usually indicated in studies on drag queens discuss the use of feminine grammatical gender in comparison to hegemonically male words. Thus, by viewing the Season 13 episodes of *RuPaul's Drag Race* on Netflix, we observed the occurrence of verbs whose dictionary meaning did not match the meaning put into circulation in drag language. Due to this difference, we drew our attention to a specific field of circulation of words, expressions, and propositions that, despite circulating in other possible spaces of enunciation, gain a

specific effect of meaning when formulated in the drag enunciative space.

In our preliminary selection, we observed that numerous verbs fit our defined criteria. We present the initially identified drag verbs in alphabetical order: *to de-drag*, *to deliver*, *to drag*, *to drip*, *to fangirl*, *to gag*, *to give*, *to goof*, *to kiki*, *to kill*, *to live*, *to read*, *to roast*, *to sashay (away)*, *to serve*, *to sick*, *to slay*, *to snap*, *to snatch*, *to start*, *to stir*, *to strike*, *to (un)tuck*, *to work (werk)*. Because it is a relatively large number of verbs, and considering that we aim to analyze the verb in English and its subtitling into Brazilian Portuguese, and that the subtitles can present different translations for the same verb, we chose in this study to carry out a qualitative analysis of one drag language verb. Thus, we randomly selected the verb *to serve*, whose analysis can be consulted in Section 4.

We organized the corpus of analysis through discursive sequences of reference (DSRs) (Courtine, 2009) because the selected speech, based on the verbs used by the contestants, is situated in specific conditions of production. These conditions are fundamental to understanding the semantic-discursive functioning of the verbs in both verbal and non-verbal elements.

In Table 1, we present the DSRs that constituted our parallel corpus. We organized the table using the transcription of the English (EN) audio, selected with the help of intralingual subtitles, and the transcription of the Brazilian Portuguese (PT-BR) subtitles. We analyzed in our corpus only the subtitles that presented translations with different effects of meaning for the same verb. We reiterate that throughout the season we found subtitles whose verb translations and their effects of meaning were repeated, and these repetitions were disregarded. In the table, we highlight the verbs in bold in both languages in order to facilitate contrastive analysis. Finally, we present the scene description in which the verb was used.

We cataloged the sequences as follows: DSR represents the verbal or non-verbal sequence; the

⁷ As this is the first attempt to catalog drag language verbs, we did not consider phrasal verbs.

Table 1. Uses of the Verb *To Serve*

Audio (EN)	Subtitles (PT-BR)	Scene Description
I'm serv ing bright colors, lots of geometry.	Estou trazendo cores vivas e muita geometria.	Rosé, in voice-off, comments on her Moschino-inspired "lady" paper doll look for the "Lady and the Vamp" challenge.
And your hair is serv ing <i>Beyond the Valley of the Dolls.</i>	e seu cabelo está bem estilo <i>De Volta ao Vale das Bonecas.</i>	RuPaul praises Kahmora Hall's wig.
But, bitch, I'm still serv ing it like it's leather, girl. I live for this look.	Mas funciona como se fosse couro legítimo. Adoro esse visual.	LaLa Ri, in voice-off, comments on her faux leather "vamp" look for the "Lady and the Vamp" challenge.
Kahmora is serv ing you dark lady on the prowl for her meal.	Kahmora está trazendo uma mulher sombria à espreita de sua próxima refeição.	Kahmora Hall, in voice-off, comments on her "vamp" look for the "Lady and the Vamp" challenge.
I'm serv ing full horse experience.	Estou servindo uma experiência equina completa.	Tina Burner, in voice-off, comments on her runway look.

number corresponds to the scene in which the verb was identified; and the letter serves to identify the material element, that is, the image (a), the original audio in English (b), or the subtitles translated into Brazilian Portuguese (c).

3.3. Analysis Procedures

We carried out a contrastive analysis between the translations of the subtitles of the scenes and the entries of general bilingual Portuguese-English/English-Portuguese dictionaries about the verb *to serve*. The dictionaries consulted in this study were the *Cambridge Dictionary* (CD) and *Word Reference* (WR), both freely available online.

The analyses are qualitative and were based on discourse analysis, studies of camp talk and drag language, and the audiovisual translation of the show, as explained in Section 2. For purposes of differentiation, throughout the analyses, we wrote in italics the transcripts of the dialogues, subtitles, and dictionary entries, as well as the selected verb, in both languages. The analyses are arranged as follows:

1. Description and analysis of entries from both dictionaries
2. Screenshot of the scene subtitled into Brazilian Portuguese made with the Windows Snipping Tool (DSRA)

3. Audio transcription in English (DSRB)
4. Subtitle in Brazilian Portuguese (DSRC)
5. Contrastive analysis of the DSRS from the entries and the theoretical framework

4. Analysis and Discussion

We begin the analysis and discussion section of this paper by presenting the entry of the selected verb as it appears in the dictionaries. According to Nunes (2008), the examples introduced in the dictionary are perhaps the most visible mark of its ideology. Thus, we have the following composition, starting with the *Cambridge Dictionary*:

- [CD] SERVE (*VERB*)
(PROVIDE FOOD/DRINK)
to provide food or drinks → servir
(Could you serve the drinks to the guests?)
(Você poderia servir as bebidas aos convidados?)
- (WORK)
to work for; to do your duty to → servir
(soldiers serving their country.)
(soldados servindo seu país.)
- (HELP ACHIEVE)
to help achieve something or to be useful as something → servir/ser útil
(The old dock serves no purpose anymore.)
(A velha doca já não é útil para mais nada.)

(SPEND TIME)

to spend a period of time doing something → *cumprir*

(He served 22 years.)

(Ele cumpriu pena por 22 anos.)

We understand that the effects of meaning that are established around the verb in the CD revolve around the meaning stabilized by the discursive memory concerning labor relations—serving drinks, serving the country, being useful, as observed in the four meanings of the verb *to serve* (*provide food/drink; work; help achieve; spend time*). In the examples, *to serve* puts into circulation the effects of meaning that regulate the semantic-discursive functioning of this verb, that is, subservience to another, be it the country, the State, or the employer. In the CD, the discursive functioning of the verb operates as a socially sedimented meaning that, according to social-historical-ideological coordinates, remains stable and produces the effect of literality in semantic-discursive relations.

Word Reference dictionary has more translation meanings for the verb *to serve*. However, the semantic configuration of the verb continues to refer to the same relationships presented in the CD. It allows us to affirm that there is a paraphrastic relationship in the discursive functioning of this verb. Therefore, it refers to the same discursive process, linked to the effect of literality and reproducing the effect of the dominant sense.

[WR] SERVE (VERB)

serve [sb] (vtr) (**help, work for**) → (**ajudar, trabalhar para**) *atender, servir*

(People join the police force in order to serve their community.)

(O gerente diz que a sua prioridade é atender seus clientes.)

serve [sth] to [sb] (vtr) (**food: give, bring**) → *servir* (vt)

(The waiters served roast beef and mashed potatoes to the diners.)

(Os garçons serviram rosbife e purê de batatas para os convidados.)

serve [sb] [sth] (vtr) (**give, bring food to**) → (**servir comida para**) *servir* (vt)

(She served the children their food.)

(Ela serviu comida para suas crianças.)

serve [sb] (vtr) (**attend to: a customer**) → (**ao cliente**) *atender* (vt)

(The salesperson is serving another customer right now.)

(O vendedor está atendendo outro cliente neste momento.)

serve [sb] (vtr) (**be a servant to**) → (**como servo**) *servir* (vt)

(Alfred served Bruce Wayne loyally.)

(Alfred servia a Bruce Wayne com lealdade.)

serve [sth] (vtr) (**spend time: in prison**) → *cumprir* (vt)

(He is serving a 10-year sentence for the crime.)

(Ele está cumprindo uma pena de 10 anos pelo crime.)

serve [sb] (vtr) (**fulfil the needs of**) → *servir* (vt)

(Yes, this particular screwdriver will serve me fine.)

(Sim, esta chave de fenda em particular vai servir bem para mim.)

serve (vi) (**tennis, etc.: play first**) → (**tênis, etc.**) *sacar* (v int) *servir* (v int)

(Who serves next? I think I do.)

(Quem é o próximo a sacar? Acho que sou eu.)

serve (vi) (**work as a waiter**) → (**trabalhar como garçom**) *trabalhar* (v int)

(He has been serving at that restaurant for two years.)

(Ele vem trabalhando naquele restaurante há dois anos.)

In WR, most of the meanings of *to serve* also refer to the subservience relationship assumed in the semantic functioning of the verb. It occurs due to its syntactic configuration as a direct and indirect transitive verb, which claims the presence of two complements: direct object and indirect object. These complements produce the effect that *to serve* is *to serve something to someone* (*The waiters served roast beef and mashed potatoes to the diners; She served the children their food.*).

In its direct transitive syntactic functioning, the established effects of meaning concern the

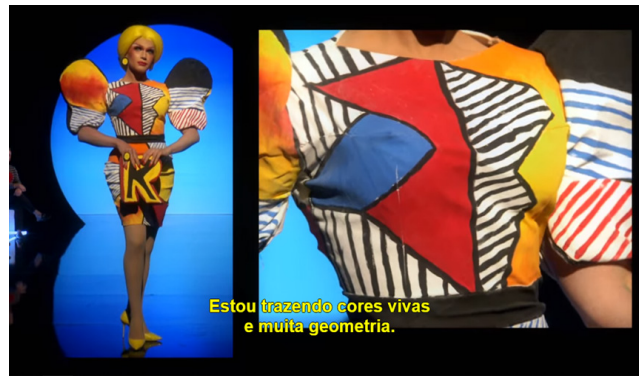
following: a relationship of subservience to an entity (the country, the community); an employment relationship (the client, the boss); an object that serves a person; or even *serving time in prison*. This latter, in Portuguese, is expressed by a different verb, *cumprir*, which does not put into circulation the sense of servitude (to the State) that is put into circulation in the verb in English. Thus, it is possible to affirm that in the dictionary uses of the verb *to serve*, a relationship of domination implied in its semantic-discursive functioning is maintained. Dictionary definitions formulate the verb’s stabilized meaning, which is sedimented from the examples that they put into circulation.

It is important to mention that, in WR, there are still two functions of the verb that are syntactically characterized as intransitive: *sacar* (in sports: *Who serves next? I think I do.*) or *trabalhar*

(in a place: *He has been serving at that restaurant for two years.*).

In *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, this verb represents a displacement of the effect of meaning established for the verb. As will be shown later, it leads to the interpretation that it is about different discursive formations operating in the way this verbal element gains meaning. On DSR1a (Figure 1), we see Rosé walking the runway and commenting in voice-off on her outfit. The subtitle “*Estou trazendo cores vivas e muita geometria*” (DSR1c) relates to her image from two angles: on the left, Rosé’s entire body shows yellow hair and shoes and a colorful dress with geometric figures in yellow, blue, red, white, and black; in the cutout on the right, the region of the drag queen’s chest is approximated in a big close-up, in which one can see more clearly what she talks about in voice-off.

Figure 1. (DSR1a) *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (S.13 E.3 11:40). Rosé, in voice-off, comments on her Moschino-inspired “lady” paper doll look for the “Lady and the Vamp” challenge. Available on Netflix.



(DSR1b) *I’m serving bright colors, lots of geometry.*

(DSR1c) *Estou trazendo cores vivas / e muita geometria.*

In DSR1c, the translation of the verb *to serve* (*Estou trazendo cores vivas e muita geometria*) brings as an equivalent the verb *trazer* in PT-BR. The image referring to it (DSR1a), in which Rosé appears walking down the catwalk, is related to the moment when the verb is linearized (DSR1b). In the translation, an indirect object in ellipsis can be resumed, that is, Rosé would be *trazendo* bright colors and a lot of geometry

para a passarela do reality show (indirect object). However, observing the verb chosen in Brazilian Portuguese, it seems that there is a semantic-discursive insufficiency, which concerns the functioning of drag language. A clue that leads to this interpretation is that we could not use, in English, another verb that refers *trazer*, such as *to bring*. That is, the original utterance could not have been said as *I’m bringing bright colors,*

lots of geometry because it would not be configuring the usage related to drag language.

This is an important aspect of how drag language works. There are certain words that cannot be replaced because, if they were, they would not be materializing the drag effect that this language seeks to put into circulation. It is a functioning of grammatical cross-dressing (Parsemain, 2019) but, for it to happen, it is necessary that the linguistic elements put into circulation make reference to the queer discourse. It means that it is not just *any* word that can and should be said when thinking about the discursive functioning of drag language. When materialized, these words mark a strong relationship between the axis of circulation and the axis of formulation. This relationship seeks to record the specific functioning of drag language, which is configured as a space in which this culture can and should be strengthened alien to social conventions and logically stabilized meanings based on the effects of disjunctive logical coercion (Pêcheux, 2006). To employ *to serve* rather than *to bring* aims to highlight this difference in positions as a means of resisting the gender oppressions that are reproduced in our social formation. Language becomes a material element that supports this new mode of subjectivity and social survival.

Libby (2014) points out that drag queens create their own vocabulary. Thus, the verb *trazer* in PT-BR, like the verb *to bring* in EN, does not materialize the effects of meaning related to drag culture. However, the existence of a direct correspondence between the word in English and Portuguese under the same conditions of production is impossible. This “drag word,” which is placed in the middle between femininity and masculinity, still lacks symbolic work in Portuguese. It means that, if a new term is not created to refer to the meanings established by the verb *to serve* in Brazilian drag language, it may be that the incorporation of *trazer* or *to serve*, borrowed or calqued from English, happens to account for these effects of meaning. That is why the translation process reveals that the margin of

the texts is illusory, as the cracks are shown with each passage to be translated, explained, or even silenced (Mittmann, 2008). In DSR1c, translation can produce the effect of totality, of direct substitution of a term in the source language for another in the target language, but this “substitution” does not include the totality of the meanings put into circulation in the source language. This translational totality is of the order of the impossible because the real of language determines the production of meaning.

As depicted in DSR2a (Figure 2), Kahmora Hall’s wig is smooth, static, and voluminous. Golden, with dark and long roots, whose lace, very well placed, becomes imperceptible. When RuPaul praises Kahmora Hall’s wig, or rather her hair, she is referring to a movie considered a classic in drag culture. The comparison with the movie also shapes the functioning of the verb *to serve*. In DSR2b, when Ru says “*and your hair is serving Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*,” we could also say that *the hair is bringing back Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*, because the wig updates, and *brings back* to the queen’s body, the movie reference. In this sense, drag queens synthesize gender fluidity as they blur and parody the male/female heteronormative binarism (Passa, 2021a). Reference to drag culture elements in relation to the queens’ bodies and words results in a different way of referring to their performances. However, this reference does not only affect their performances, but, also, it changes the way they connect to the society in general. The whole performance produces a unique and singular place for themselves.

The Brazilian Portuguese subtitles provided by Netflix (DSR2c) do not use a verb to translate *serve*, which caught our attention. Instead of using the verb *trazer*, as in the previous case, the expression *bem estilo* is used. Because the verb is not used, there is a difference in the way the sentence is syntactically configured. Instead of a verbal predicate made up of a direct transitive verb (*trazer algo trazer* → *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*), the translation used the linking verb

Figure 2. (DSR2a) *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (S.13 E.1 51:11). RuPaul praises Kahmora Hall’s wig. Available on Netflix.



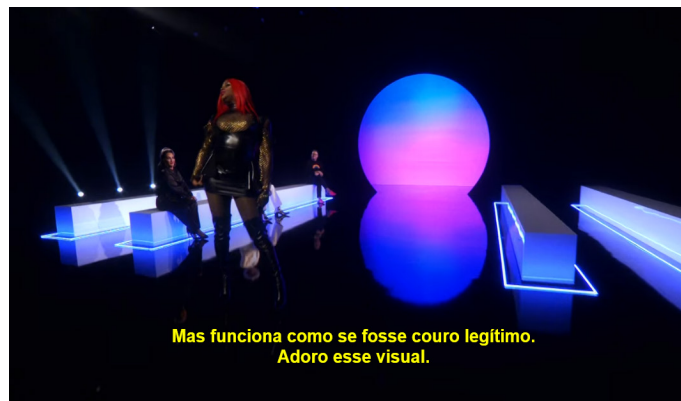
(DSR2b) *And your hair is serving Beyond the Valley of the Dolls.*
(DSR2c) *e seu cabelo está bem estilo / De Volta ao Vale das Bonecas.*

estar, resulting in a nominal predicate. The hair, therefore, does not *serve something*: the hair *has a characteristic*; it is *bem estilo* of the movie. The difference in the translation has an effect on the performativity related to the use of the verb, since *to serve* is linked to how drag culture presents its particular characteristics and shows its way of speaking and dressing. These are incongruities marked by camp (Harvey, 2000), which produce an effect of meaning not linked to performance, as seen in DSR2c. This is another translation into PT-BR that cannot retrieve the elements of US drag culture that make up how the effects of meaning are

established in relation to the verbal and visual elements of drag performance.

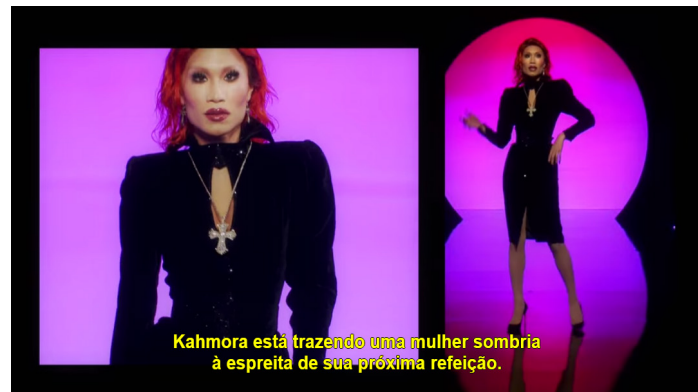
A first issue to which we draw our attention, although it is outside the scope of this work, is the omission in the PT-BR subtitling of the vocative *bitch*, widely used in drag language. *Bitch* is configured as a swear word, and, as pointed out by Mann (2011), the use of expletives is one of the features of drag language. LaLa Ri is commenting on her outfit presented in the first challenge of the season (Figure 3). Despite the outfit not being made with genuine leather, it produced, according to her, the effect that

Figure 3. (DSR3a) *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (S.13 E.2 19:05). LaLa Ri, in voice-off, comments on her faux leather “vamp” look for the “Lady and the Vamp” challenge. Available on Netflix.



(DSR3b) *But, bitch, I’m still serving it like it’s leather, girl. I live for this look.*
(DSR3c) *Mas funciona como se fosse couro legítimo. / Adoro esse visual.*

Figure 4. (DSR4a) *RuPaul's Drag Race* (S.13 E.3 16:49). Kahmora Hall, in voice-off, comments on her “vamp” look for the “Lady and the Vamp” challenge. Available on Netflix.



(DSR4b) Kahmora is **serv**ing you dark lady on the prowl for her meal.

(DSR4c) Kahmora está **trazendo** uma mulher sombria / à espreita de sua próxima refeição.

it was made with this material (DSR3b). More important than whether it is genuine leather or pleather is how the queen presents (*serves*) it on the catwalk. In DSR3c, the drag queen’s performance presenting something not real as if it were real is not guaranteed by the use of the verb *funciona*. As happened in the previous analysis, the subject LaLa Ri (*LaLa Ri serves it as real leather*) is removed in the translation to be replaced by the object she is presenting: *the clothing works [funciona] as genuine leather*. This displacement removes the drag queen from the focus of the sentence and transfers it to the clothes she presents. It does not characterize the functioning of drag language, which places the focus of the sentence, that is, the subject of the sentence, on the drag queens themselves.

Unlike DSR1b, DSR1c, DSR5b, and DSR5c, in which we find first-person grammatical marking both in the scene dialogue and in its translation into Brazilian Portuguese, in DSR4b and DSR4c, this mark was replaced by the use of the third person (she/*ela*). In this case, Kahmora Hall comments on her own outfit. We highlight that when the contestants comment on their looks in voice-off, they are not in drag. This is one of the main characteristics of drag performance since, in most cases, drag queens do not see themselves as women outside of drag

performance (Barrett, 2017). In DSR4, when we observe Kahmora Hall referring to herself in the third person, we are faced once again with this rupture of the heteronormative patterns provided by camp aesthetic (Newton, 1972).

Drag, defined as the art of transforming oneself to perform femininity (Parsemain, 2019), changes Kahmora Hall into a persona that *serves/ traz* her caricatured performance of the dark woman in DSR4a (Figure 4). It is interesting to observe that the verb in DSR4b makes no specific reference to the outfit she is wearing but actually to what she is trying to represent through her performance: a dark woman. The verb *to serve* does not refer in drag language only to the presentation of an outfit but to an entire aesthetic-performative experience that revolves around this woman parody. To delineate these different effects of meaning that can be established from the same verb, the translation does not manage to find equivalence, using the verb *trazer* once again. The issue is that the verb *to serve* not only *brings (traz)* something, but it also offers something to the ones who are watching the show, that is, it provokes a change in those who witness this artistic performance.

In DSR5a (Figure 5), Tina Burner comments on her outfit. The drag queen’s camp look is

Figure 5. (DSR5a) *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (S.13 E.9 43:41). Tina Burner, in voice-off, comments on her runway look. Available on Netflix.



(DSR5b) *I’m serving full horse experience.*

(DSR5c) *Estou servindo / uma experiência equina completa.*

inspired by horses, visually represented by a hat that features a horse’s head. In addition, Tina Burner wears boots similar to the riding boots used by equestrian athletes, flowers that are often part of the ornaments of the obstacle course in competition with horses, and she carries in her hand a medal that represents the animal awarded in the competition. In terms of subtitling, when comparing DSR5b with DSR5c, we observe that the drag language verb (*serving*) was literally translated into Brazilian Portuguese (*servindo*).

We can relate this translation to the findings of Villanueva-Jordán (2019a, 2019b) for the translation of *RuPaul’s* camp talk into Latin American Spanish on Netflix. According to this author, Netflix’s literal translations of camp talk may reflect a process of language acculturation. In this case, we understand that the meanings expressed by the verb *serving* in the US drag language begin to enter the Brazilian language and culture through its dictionary translation, *servindo*. We note that the foreignization of the meanings of the term occurs in subtitling, which also dragged the word into Brazilian Portuguese since it does not present these hegemonically

dictionary meanings either. We did not find studies on *serving* as a verb of *Pajubá*,⁸ but we believe in the strength that *RuPaul’s Drag Race* exerts on the queer community worldwide, mainly in linguistic terms, as demonstrated by Villanueva-Jordán (2019a) and Barra et al. (2020). Therefore, the Netflix Brazilian translation may be an indicator that these new meanings expressed by the drag language verb *serving* in English are also entering Brazilian Portuguese. This process can be facilitated due to both the morphological and phonetic similarities of the verbs *serving* and *servindo*.

Whether referring to *trazer* (DSR1 and DSR4), *funcionar* (DSR3), or *servir* (DSR5), the drag language verb *to serve* shows the semantic instability linked to it when presenting these different translations into Brazilian Portuguese. This occurs precisely because it does not manage to put the effects of meaning that it is trying to express into a material form. These effects are related to the shattering of the differences gender marked in the effects of meaning crystallized in the dictionary language. The “literal

8 We consider *Pajubá* as the Brazilian queer sociolect closest to the US drag language.

translation,” *servir*, is seldom used in Brazilian subtitles. It shows an attempt to configure the verb in a verbal form closer to the drag language used in the original language or a process of acculturation of the term, as pointed out by Villanueva-Jordán (2019a, 2019b).

5. Conclusions

As Leap (1995, p. xvii) points out, “there is more to lesbian and gay communication than coded words with special meanings, and more to lesbian and gay linguistic research than the compilation of dictionaries or the tracing of single-word etymologies.” An example of this is the verb *to serve*, which is regularly used in drag language, especially throughout the seasons of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. For the analyses, we did not select all the appearances of the verb throughout the season, but we sought to present occurrences in which we could observe different effects of meaning established in relation to the verb in its stabilized use. These are, therefore, occurrences in which the relationship between English (source language) and Brazilian Portuguese (target language) presents a tension. The verb translation into PT-BR does not present a direct correspondence with the verb in the source language in terms of effects of meanings of drag language. This issue is important as it refers to the semantic-discursive instability characteristic of drag language. This instability seems to have English as the language in which this linguistic variant is produced and stabilized. On the other hand, other languages seek to adapt terms that already exist but do not seem to produce the same materialization of the effects of meaning they do in the original drag language. This is confirmed when we observe, in the selected occurrences, the wide variation of translations for the verb *to serve* from EN into PT-BR. At this point, like Villanueva-Jordán (2019a), we understand that research on drag performance is important to overcome binary notions of gender both in translation and in translation studies.

Ideologies are made of practices (Pêcheux, 2019). This means that, in drag language, we observe a practice that materializes itself in the necessary relationship between word and performance, which is understood as a practice of drag in a way that can be seen in line with the epistemology of discourse analysis. Here, the performance is understood as referring to words *servir* to construct a different reality from the hegemonic, natural reality, referring to the logically stabilized meanings of the dominant ideology. They are, therefore, old words but with different (new) effects of meaning linked to a specific enunciative scene: the enunciative scene typical of drag culture. We agree with Moura (2020) regarding the existence of a queer discursive formation, which accounts for what can and should be said by the discursive position debated here. This position configures gender relations as impossible to adhere to the norms of sedimented language that makes up the dominant social relations, reproducing the relations of sexual/gender binarism. In this sense, we present that the functioning of drag language is constituted by the triad: drag culture, drag word, and performance.

Drag language is just one medium, albeit a fundamental one, that drag queens have at their disposal in the process of creating and realizing their collective identity and gender subversion (Passa, 2021b). In this sense, the discussion in this article reflected on the effects of meaning put into circulation by drag language verbs and their dictionary use. When we problematize this relationship, we can conclude that, in drag language, there is a rupture with the hegemonic knowledge about masculinity and femininity, materially producing a difference that destabilizes the disjunctive logical coercion regarding gender relations (Vinhas & Ernst, 2021).

Thus, we claim that the subtitling of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* allows for the circulation of other meanings unforeseen for verbs that are part of this semantic-discursive network in Brazilian Portuguese. This can be called “drag word,”

a linguistic-discursive configuration that, as in the dragging observed in the body and performance of drag queens, creates caricatures of femininity by subverting the barriers imposed by the sex/gender binarism that dominantly regulates social relations. The drag word also acts in the process of subversion of evident knowledge around sexualities.

With regard to the verb *to serve*, it is important to note that, when verifying the impossibility of a direct relationship in terms of the effects of meanings between the drag language and its translation, we can conclude that, *in drag language, it is only possible to serve oneself without subservience*. The verb *to serve* establishes unforeseen meanings for the dominant ideological position, which places a circulation of other possible meanings for the same word. The fluctuation in the translation of verbs shows that a standard form for these words has not been established yet, and there are no crystallized terms in Brazilian Portuguese. This may be an indication that the drag culture in Brazil has not found terms that are equivalent to English or even that the Brazilian drag culture uses English terms to refer to certain specific situations in the drag culture. In summary, like drag art, drag language subverts hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative sexual identity, enabling the establishment of new unforeseen meanings through the same old dictionary words.

References

- Alter, R. (2021). “RuPaul’s Drag Race Is Serving Face (Masks) in COVID-19 Documentary Special”. *Vulture*. February 17, 2021. <https://www.vulture.com/2021/02/rupauls-drag-race-covid-19-documentary-trailer-watch.html>
- Barra, L., Brembilla, P., Rossato, L., & Spaziante, L. (2020). “Lip-Sync for your life” (abroad). The distribution, adaptation and circulation of *RuPaul’s Drag Race* in Italy. *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture* 9(17), 119–133. <http://doi.org/10.18146/view.210>
- Barrett, R. (1998). Markedness and style switching in performances by African American drag queens. In C. Myers-Scotton (Ed.), *Codes and consequences: Choosing linguistic varieties* (pp. 139–161). Oxford University Press.
- Barrett, R. (2017). *From drag queens to leathermen: Language, gender, and male subcultures*. Oxford University Press.
- Brennan, N., & Gudelunas, D. (2022). Post-RuPaul’s Drag Race: Queer visibility, online discourse and political change in a global digital sphere. In N. Brennan, & D. Gudelunas (Eds.), *Drag in the global digital public sphere: Queer visibility, online discourse and political change* (pp. 3–13). Routledge.
- Cambridge Dictionary. (n. d.). Serve. In *Cambridge dictionary. English-Portuguese*. Retrieved July 29, 2022, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pt/dicionario/ingles-portugues/serve>
- Collins, C. G. (2017). Drag race to the bottom?: Updated notes on the aesthetic and political economy of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. *tsq: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 4(1), 128–134. <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-3711589>
- Courtine, J.-J. (2009). *Análise do discurso político: o discurso comunista endereçado aos cristãos*. EdUFSCar. (First Published in 1981)
- Haroche, C., Pêcheux, M., & Henry, P. (2007). A semântica e o corte saussuriano: língua, linguagem, discurso. (Trans. R. L. Baronas, & F. C. Montanheiro). In R. L. Baronas (Org.), *Análise do discurso: apontamentos para uma história da noção-conceito de formação discursiva*. Pedro & João Editores. (First published in 1971)
- Harvey, K. (1998). Translating camp talk: Gay identities and cultural transfer. *The Translator*, 4(2), 295–320. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.1998.10799024>
- Harvey, K. (2000). Describing camp talk: Language/pragmatics/politics. *Language and Literature*, 9(3), 240–260. <http://doi.org/10.1177/096394700000900303>
- Laurenti, R. (1984). Homosexuality and the International Classification of Diseases. *Revista de Saúde Pública*, 18(5), 346–347. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-89101984000500002>

- Leap, W. (1995). Introduction. In W. Leap (Ed.), *Beyond the lavender lexicon: Authenticity, imagination and appropriation in gay and lesbian languages* (pp. vii–xix). Gordon & Breach.
- Leandro-Ferreira, M. C. (2003). O caráter singular da língua no discurso. *Organon*, 17(35), 189–200. <https://doi.org/10.22456/2238-8915.30023>
- Libby, A. (2014). Dragging with an Accent: Linguistic Stereotypes, Language Barriers and Translingualism. In J. Daems (Ed.), *The Makeup of RuPaul's Drag Race: Essays on the Queen of Reality Shows* (pp. 49–66). McFarland & Company.
- Mann, S. L. (2011). Drag Queens' Use of Language and the Performance of Blurred Gendered and Racial Identities. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58(6–7), 793–811. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2011.581923>
- Martínez Pleguezuelos, A. J. (2017). Representación y traducción del camp talk en el cine de Almodóvar: los casos de *La mala educación* y *Los amantes pasajeros*. *Trans. Revista de Traductología*, 21, 235–249. <https://doi.org/10.24310/TRANS.2017.v0i21.3655>
- Mittmann, S. (2008) Autoria e tradução: da dispersão às identificações. In S. Mittmann, E. Grigoletto, & E. Cazarin (Orgs.), *Práticas discursivas e identitárias: sujeito e língua*. (pp. 80–96). Nova Prova.
- Moura, B. N. (2020). *Tradução queer: pensando gênero na tradução de fanfictions femslash*. [Undergraduate thesis, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul].
- Newton, E. (1972). *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Nunes, J. H. (2008). Uma articulação da análise de discurso com a história das ideias linguísticas. *Letras*, 18(2), 107–124. <https://doi.org/10.5902/2176148511982>
- Parsemain, A. L. (2019). *The Pedagogy of Queer TV*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Passa, D. (2021a). «Reinas unidas jamás serán vencidas»: Drag queens in the Iberian Spanish Voice-Over of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. *Trans. Revista de Traductología*, (25), 349–371. <https://doi.org/10.24310/TRANS.2021.v1i25.11450>
- Passa, D. (2021b). “You all are sisters! We are all family!” The construction of parenthood in ‘*RuPaul's Drag Race*’. *Linguaculture*, 12(2), 127–144. <https://doi.org/10.47743/lincu-2021-2-0199>
- Pêcheux, M. (1982). *Language, semantics and ideology: Stating the obvious*. (Trans. H. Nagpal). Palgrave Macmillan (First Published in 1975).
- Pêcheux, M. (1994). Ler o arquivo hoje. (Trans. B. Mariani et al.). In E. Orlandi (Org.), *Gestos de leitura: da história no discurso* (pp. 55–66). Editora da UNICAMP (First published in 1982).
- Pêcheux, M. (2006). *Discurso: estrutura ou acontecimento*. (Trans. E. Orlandi). Pontes.
- Pêcheux, M. (2019). Linguística e marxismo: formações ideológicas, aparelhos ideológicos de Estado, formações discursivas. (Trans. R. Fonseca). In G. A. Oliveira, & L. Nogueira (Orgs.), *Encontros na análise de discurso: efeitos de sentido entre continentes* (pp. 307–325). Editora da UNICAMP (First published in 1976).
- Petri, V. (2008) A produção de efeitos de sentidos nas relações entre língua e sujeito: um estudo discursivo da dicionarização do “gaúcho”. *Letras*, 37, 227–243. <https://periodicos.ufsm.br/letras/article/view/11989>
- RuPaul's drag race*. (2009-). IMDb entry: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1353056/>
- RuPaul's drag race dictionary. (n.d.). Fishy. In *Drag race wiki*. Retrieved November 11, 2022, from https://rupaulsdragrace.fandom.com/wiki/RuPaul%27s_Drag_Race_Dictionary
- Rupp, L. J., Taylor, V., & Shapiro, E. I. (2010). Drag queens and drag kings: The difference gender makes. *Sexualities*, 13(3), 275–294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460709352725>
- Sontag, S. (2018). *Notes on 'camp'* (First published in 1964). Penguin Books.
- Stryker, S. (2006). (De)subjugated knowledges: An introduction to transgender studies. In S. Stryker, & S. Whittle (Eds.), *The transgender studies reader* (pp. 1–17). Routledge.

- Tavares, J. L., & Branco, S. O. (2021). Drag language translation on *RuPaul’s drag race*: A study on representation through subtitles. *Revista Letras Raras*, 10(1), 210–235. <https://doi.org/10.35572/rlr.v1i1.1890>
- Tyler, C.-A. (1991). Boys will be girls: The politics of gay drag. In D. Fuss (Ed.), *Inside/Out: lesbian theories, gay theories* (pp. 32–70). Routledge.
- Villanueva-Jordán, I. (2019a). Dragqueenismo y traducción: el papel del *RuPaul’s drag race* en la circulación del habla camp en español. In J. F. Carrero Martín, B. Cerezo Merchán, J. J. Martínez Sierra, & G. Zaragoza Ninet (Eds.), *La traducción audiovisual: aproximaciones desde la academia y la industria* (pp. 45–64). Comares.
- Villanueva-Jordán, I. (2019b). “You better werk”. Rasgos del camp talk en la subtitulación al español de *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. *Cadernos de Tradução*, 39(2), 156–188. <https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-7968.2019v39n3p156>
- Villanueva-Jordán, I. (2021). Metasíntesis de estudios publicados sobre traducción audiovisual y estudios LGBTQ+ (2000–2020): dimensiones teóricas y conceptuales. *Meta*, 66(3), 557–580. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1088350ar>
- Villanueva-Jordán, I. (2022, 25 July). *Línea temporal sobre traducción audiovisual y estudios LGBTQ+*. <https://trujamancia.com/linea-del-tiempo/>
- Villanueva-Jordán, I., & Chaume, F. (2021). Revisión sistemática de bibliografía sobre traducción audiovisual y estudios LGBTQ+ (2000–2020): dimensiones epistemológica y metodológica. *Hikma*, 20(2), 95–126. <https://doi.org/10.21071/hikma.v20i2.13301>
- Vinhas, L. I., & Ernst, A. G. (2021). A derrisão no discurso político: a homossexualidade em questão. In A. G. Ernst, & R. C. M. Pereira (Orgs.), *Linguagem: texto e discurso* (pp. 73–95). Pontes.
- Word Reference. (n.d.). Serve. In *WordReference.com. English-Portuguese dictionary*, Retrieved July 29, 2022, from <https://www.wordreference.com/enpt/serve>

How to cite this article: Moura, W. H. C., & Vinhas, L. I. (2023). “But, bitch, I’m still serving it”. Subtitling a drag language verb in *RuPaul’s Drag Race* into Brazilian Portuguese: New meanings, old words. *Mutatis Mutandis, Revista Latinoamericana de Traducción*, 16(1), 182–203. <https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.mut/v16n1a11>