

# Book 1 and season 1 from the series

## “Bridgerton”: intersemiotic translation and ethnic-racial issues

## Livro 1 e temporada 1 da série “Bridgerton”: tradução intersemiótica e questões étnico- raciais

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the first season of the *Netflix* series "Bridgerton," which was adapted from the first book in the "Bridgerton" series, "The Duke and I," written by Julia Quinn. It does so by drawing on a variety of viewpoints to offer fresh perspectives and promote intercultural conversations. The categories of "alteration," "omission," and "addition", adapted from interlingual translation, are used to discuss the changes that resulted from the translation of one sign into another. In this work of bibliographical origin, writers with experience in translation were chosen, and as the study includes a case study, books, interviews, and articles from online magazines served as sources, giving a more in-depth understanding of the object mentioned. The adaptation from a literary work to an audiovisual one, as suggested in this article, results in the source work being transformed, through alterations, additions and

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omissions. The additions and changes to the series opened a discussion about racial issues and, since this work involves qualitative research, it points out how these modifications affect both the media and society, highlighting the significance of having conversations about the matters above mentioned. Additionally, the racial representativeness shown in the series had wide acceptance and support from the general audience. All in all, this article develops topics such as: intersemiotic translation, ethnic-racial issues and analysis of the differences exposed in the series adapted from the book "The duke and I".

**Key words:** Intersemiotic translation; Ethnic-racial; Adaptation.

**Resumo:** Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar a primeira temporada da série "Bridgerton", série da plataforma de streaming *Netflix*, que foi adaptação do primeiro livro "The Duke and I" da série de livros "Bridgerton", da autora Julia Quinn. Com a inspiração de múltiplas perspectivas, buscou-se trazer novas interpretações e diálogos interculturais. As categorias de "alteração", "omissão" e "adição", adaptadas da tradução interlingual, são utilizadas para discutir as mudanças que resultaram da tradução de um signo para outro. Neste trabalho de origem bibliográfica, foram escolhidos escritores com experiência em tradução, e como o estudo inclui um estudo de caso, livros, entrevistas e artigos de revistas online nos beneficiaram como fontes, assim promovendo um conhecimento mais detalhado do objeto abordado. Conclui-se que a adaptação de uma obra literária para uma audiovisual, conforme proposto neste artigo, resulta na transformação da obra e na perda/acríscimo de novas informações. Os acréscimos e mudanças na série abriram uma discussão sobre questões raciais e, por se tratar de uma pesquisa qualitativa, esta aponta como essas modificações afetam a mídia e, por sua vez, a sociedade, e destaca a importância de se dialogar sobre tal assunto. Além disso, a representatividade racial apresentada na série teve grande aceitação e apoio do público geral. Com isso, é desenvolvido neste artigo assuntos como: tradução intersemiótica, questões étnico-raciais e análise das diferenças expostas na série adaptada do livro "The Duke and I".

**Palavras-chave:** Tradução intersemiótica; Étnico-racial; Adaptação.

## Introduction

This research has as its goal to analyze the intersemiotic translation between two works: book one, "The duke and I", by the author Julia Quinn and the first season of the TV series, "Bridgerton", based on the mentioned above book. Adaptations of literary works to the cinema, TV and streaming platforms are commonly known, and may be or not be well-accepted by the audience, often due to the lack of veracity and resemblance with the original work. In this work, some aspects of the intersemiotic translation will be considered aiming at analyzing the following: the additions, omissions and alterations made comparing the book and the series, according to some categories of analysis.

The present research has its origin in the observation that there are many works that have gone through a change related to the ways their ideas are conveyed, through translation. Therefore, this study intends to understand how the translation process takes place and how the final adapted work relates to the source work, discussing some important aspects of the characters, plot and scenario which have been adapted from the target text to the screen. According to Jakobson, "No linguistic specimen may be interpreted by the science of language without a translation of its signs into other signs of the same system or into signs of another system." (JAKOBSON 1959: 233). And as Kahmann explains "Intersemiotic translation is defined as the translation of a given sign system into another." (KAHMANN 2010: 80, *own translation*).<sup>1</sup> We can say that adaptations of novels, short stories, poems and the like to TV series are intersemiotic translations.

It can be seen in a recent work displayed on the digital streaming platform, *Netflix*. The Bridgerton series was originally published as a set of romance books by the author Julia Quinn, and with this conversion from the written to the audiovisual signs, changes inevitably occur, which often end up being necessary.

The literary work tells the story of a family whose matriarch is Violet. This powerful woman has the life she has always dreamed of. She is a viscountess who is married to the man she loves and her house is full of children. However, she ended up being a widow when she was about to give birth to her eighth child. Years have passed and now her children are all grown up and she really wants a house filled with grandchildren. That is where our story begins. Each book in the series tells the love story of one of Violet's children, from the eldest to the youngest one, but not in that specific order. Every title is independent and does not happen in chronological order. So far, only the first and second books have been adapted to the screen.

In this work, the focus is on the first piece of writing, "The Duke and I", which shows the story of Daphne, the eldest of Violet's daughters. She has

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<sup>1</sup> "A tradução intersemiótica é definida como a tradução de um determinado sistema de signos para outro".

reached the age when society at the time starts seeing her as a spinster. So, her mother desperately tries to marry her off, taking her to every party possible. And, on the other side of the story, we have the newest Duke of Hastings, Simon, who has just inherited the title from his late father. Simon did not want to get married, but when he was introduced to society, the number of marriage proposals was exorbitant. That is when our protagonists meet and decide to fake a relationship, so that Daphne does not have to go to parties and Simon does not have to refuse to get married. However, as expected, this plan does not work as they imagined.

## 1. Important Topics

### 1.1 Intersemiotic Translation

Interlingual translation is the most studied type of translation: “Interlingual translation or translation proper is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.” (JAKOBSON 1959: 233). Nevertheless, we also have the intersemiotic translation, which refers to the transfer of a text/work of one form of expression to another, observing how the characters, plot and scenario will be adapted from the source text to the screen. According to Jakobson “Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs through systems of nonverbal signs.” (JAKOBSON 1969: 233). With this, it is possible to affirm that visual works such as: film, series, theater, etc fit in the intersemiotic translation and according to Júlio Plaza

The first (explicit) reference to Intersemiotic Translation that I had the opportunity to get to know was in the writings of Roman Jakobson. As far as I am aware, Jakobson was the first to discriminate and define the possible types of translation: interlingual, intralingual and intersemiotic. (PLAZA 2003, *own translation*).<sup>2</sup>

With the examples of intersemiotic translations it is important keeping in mind that the translation, at times, maintains the same ideas, but changing the code/sign used to transmit them, as exemplified by Kahmann:

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<sup>2</sup> A primeira referência (explícita) à Tradução Intersemiótica que tive oportunidade de conhecer foi nos escritos de Roman Jakobson. De que tenho notícia, Jakobson foi o primeiro a discriminar e definir os tipos possíveis de tradução: a interlingual, a intralingual e a intersemiótica.

The most common form of intersemiotic translation is the passage that takes place between a verbal and a non-verbal system: a poem that becomes a painting; [...] a play that becomes a ballet. intersemiotic translation between two fields of non-verbal signs can occur, as, for example, between music and dance. (KAHMANN 2010: 80, *own translation*).<sup>3</sup>

According to the system proposed, you can translate anything into different signs. Intersemiotic translation is a concept that involves transposing a message from one sign system to another. This form of translation encompasses not only the translation of written or spoken words, but also the translation of visual, musical, gestural and other elements.

However, this translation is not free from specific alterations, from one sign to another, in order to better adapt to the new purpose. For example, adapting a book into a film is a form of intersemiotic translation. Due to this transformation, the story is told through images and sounds rather than written words. This process can involve significant changes in the way the message is transmitted and received and can lead to different or new interpretations of the source work (PLAZA 2003).

Filmmaking is composed of the visual, audio and varied technical elements of production, differing from the literary construction that is based on drafts and later corrections. As can be seen and will be analyzed in more detail in this article, there are some differences between the streaming platform series Bridgerton and the book The Duke and I, whose narrative tends to be constructed in the past, the experience provided by the movie is lived in the present. The cinematographic language is based on technical, cultural and semiotic factors, exploring images in depth, while literature analyzes the text from its historical context and other theories. (KAHMANN 2010)

Although there is narrative in both systems, the film uses visual resources such as settings, lighting, audio and actual physical characteristics of the characters, while literature uses descriptions and attributions to build the image mentally. The big difference between these two forms of language is

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<sup>3</sup> A forma mais corriqueira de tradução intersemiótica é a passagem que se dá entre um sistema verbal e outro não-verbal: uma poesia que se transforma em pintura; [...] uma peça de teatro que vira balé. Contudo, pode ocorrer a tradução intersemiótica entre dois campos de signos não verbais, como, por exemplo, entre música e dança.

that the film presents the finished images along with the narrative, while literature leaves the construction of the images to the reader. In short, the visual image, photography, lighting and soundtrack are crucial elements that convey and explain the meaning of cinematographic language.

For Thais Flores Diniz, who graduated in Languages (English and Portuguese), the definition of intersemiotic translation is clear:

Intersemiotic translation, defined as the translation of a given system of signs into another semiotic system, has its expression between the most varied systems. Among the translations of this type, there is the one from plastic and visual arts to verbal language and vice versa. (DINIZ 1999: 313, *own translation*).<sup>4</sup>

The transition of a literary work to the cinema system involves not only the transformation from written text to visual images, but also encompasses the elements of music, costumes, scenery, and sound effects. It is possible to explore several possibilities of creating meanings with the signs (DINIZ 1999).

Given the intersemiotic translation mentioned above, we can say that there are points of similarity between films and books, as filmmakers and film writers can work based on novels, poems, short stories. However, no matter how hard they may try to be faithful to the story, there will come a time when it will be impossible to reproduce the source work identically, as the creativity of the ones in charge of the movie can freely influence its production.

## 1.2 Ethnic-racial Issues

As a long-awaited adaptation by the public, the expectation about the TV series was huge, as it is a series of books well known and admired by readers, it was expected to be a faithful plot and as similar as the books as possible. This could be a challenge because it is a series of historical fiction books with complex characters and an already pre-defined audience by readers who had high expectations. The audiovisual adaptation in question has raised great euphoria and since the announcement of the cast chosen for the series.

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<sup>4</sup> A tradução intersemiótica, definida como tradução de um determinado sistema de signos para outro sistema semiótico, tem sua expressão entre sistemas dos mais variados. Entre as traduções desse tipo, encontra-se a das artes plásticas e visuais para a linguagem verbal e vice-versa.

In this sense, aiming to promote social inclusion and paying attention to the most pressing social issues of today, the cast choice ended up surprising most readers, the story portrayed in the series of books begins in the year 1813, historical period which is very close to the date of the slavery abolition in England, where the narrated events take place. It is important to note that the Abolition Act, which declared the involvement of all British subjects in the slave trade illegal, was only approved in February 1807 (SIQUEIRA 2018). Consequently, many viewers were surprised about the presence of several black characters occupying high positions in society, including one of the protagonists, Daphne Bridgerton's love interest.

Regarding the question above mentioned, the creator of the series, Chris Van Dusen, states that "The show is for a modern audience, and everything on this show is filtered through a modern lens." (Interview conducted on December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020, to the Town & Country Magazine). He adds:

We're re-imagining this world; it's not a history lesson and it's not a documentary. There weren't actual Bridgertons in 1813, so we took some creative liberties there. The first thing you see is the cast, this amazing diverse cast, everyone from Phoebe Dynevor to Regé-Jean Page to Julie Andrews. We knew we wanted the show to reflect the world we live in today, and even though it's set in the 19th century, we still wanted modern audiences to relate to it and to see themselves on screen. I feel we did it in a way that makes sense. (DUSEN to T&C Magazine 2020).

Therefore, an important point that astonished the audience and especially the readers of the books is the representation of black characters in the streaming adaptation, in a historical context that, traditionally, has been portrayed as predominantly white. This can raise debates about the importance of inclusion and the creation of a more representative and all-embracing community, especially in historical portraits. Despite being a fictional creation, the diverse and all-encompassing approach of the series mirrors the world's tendency to discuss and encourage racial parity in various aspects of society, as evidenced by the series and other social movements. That is a positive sign that people are actively engaging in the quest for a more egalitarian society. These conversations are crucial in establishing a world where all individuals are appreciated, esteemed, and their opinions are heard, irrespective of their

ethnicity or race. They also endeavor to create a fair society where diversity is cherished, and everyone's rights are respected.

It is important to emphasize that the Bridgerton series is just one instance of how the media can play a major role in these discussions. However, creating a more compassionate and inclusive community requires persistent work from all segments of society, such as governments, corporations and, of course, the people. Education, awareness raising and enforcement of anti-discrimination protocols are essential components of this procedure.

## 2. Research Methodology

When it comes to the study objectives, we can say it is exploratory because it aims to provide greater familiarity with the main theme, making it more explicit. Also, it can be considered bibliographic since it has been elaborated from published material on intersemiotic translation. (SILVA; MENEZES 2001)

As a case study, this research allows an in-depth analysis of a given topic, with the aim of providing detailed knowledge on the main strategies used in the transition of ideas between a certain book and a specific series. In addition, this research can also be considered qualitative, as it discusses the cultural, historical and racial issues in the nineteenth century background, and it does not require statistical methods or techniques to do so. (SILVA; MENEZES 2001). Furthermore, this study can be seen as an applied one, which for SILVA and MENEZES (2001) aims to construct knowledge suitable for application in practical contexts.

A work like Bridgerton may undergo a variety of modifications during its intersemiotic translation to fit the new media and local culture. In order to analyze these changes in more detail, we consider three categories: alteration, omission and addition. They were adapted from MENEZES (2019), which used them to study interlingual translation.

The category **alteration** describes the changes made in some elements of the book in the translation process to the series. An example of alteration is the need to adjust dialogues, scenes and scenarios to make them more visually

attractive or suitable for the narrative pace of television. Some minor characters can have their roles expanded or more plots can be created to increase the suspense or romance.

The category **omission** describes the **exclusions** of some elements of the book in the translation process to the series. It is common for certain details, subplots and less relevant characters to be left out in the television adaptation. Scenes that might work well in the book may be omitted for time limitations or to keep the focus on the main story. To emphasize essential moments and the most crucial interpersonal ties, certain long descriptions of social events or characters inside monologues may be eliminated and other characters may be simplified or completely eliminated.

The category **addition** describes the **inclusion** of some elements, which may not be in the book, in the translation process to the series. In the process of intersemiotic translation, new elements are frequently added. Additional scenes or characters can enhance the narrative and provide audiences with a more enjoyable experience. As an example, the series might introduce additional characters who are not in the book but are important to the plot or offer a new viewpoint. These additions can improve the suspense, bring humor, or increase the variety of Bridgerton's world.

In conclusion, Bridgerton's intersemiotic translation requires adaptations in the forms of changes, exclusions and inclusions in order to fit the new media, meet audiovisual narrative demands, and improve audience comprehension and engagement.

### 3. Discussion and Results

The manner the narrative is conveyed is one of the key distinctions. The series is presented in an episodic fashion and mostly follows the points of view of the protagonists, Daphne Bridgerton and Simon Basset, while the book is told in the third person, from the points of view of many people in different chapters.

The prominence given to specific characters is another noteworthy distinction. Some minor characters, like Anthony's affair and Marina have larger

roles in the series. On the other hand, Anthony Bridgerton, Daphne's older brother, has less relevance than in the book. In addition, there are some variations in the storyline and order of events. To fit the TV adaptation, some book scenes were left out of the series, while others were added or adjusted.

As examples of alteration, we see the plot of Marina and Siena, two characters that gained more importance, and as well some scenes were changed. In Julia Quinn's novels, Marina is not involved at all with Colin Bridgerton and is only briefly mentioned at a later stage as a deeply depressed woman who eventually passes away after a suicide attempt. Furthermore, in the universe of the books, Marina is related to the Bridgerton family, not the Featheringtons as portrayed in the series. Maria Rosso, who in the series is renamed Siena, an opera singer and former lover of Anthony Bridgerton, makes a brief appearance in Quinn's book series. Her role in the novels is minor and her relationship with the Viscount is brief. However, in the TV series adaptation, Maria's character is transformed into Siena Rosso, a woman who is also an opera singer, but with a much more important role in the story and as Anthony's enduring love interest. Their relationship is deepened and explored throughout the first season, creating a more developed narrative arc for the character, highlighting her personal struggles and difficulties in her career.

Also, right at the beginning of the season we already have changes in scenes and dialogues, the first chapter of the book begins with Daphne and her mother reading one of the "*Lady Whistledown Chronicles*" in the newspaper, and in the series they are getting ready to go to meet the queen, who does not exist in the book; furthermore, different from the series, in the literary work this is not Daphne's first year at the balls looking for a husband, not to mention she was not even considered as one of the most beautiful or highlighted in the wedding season like she is in the series. Simon and Daphne meet at different times in the book and in the series, some dialogues and scenes were changed because of this detail too. Some alterations, in addition to being necessary to suit the audiovisual format, could have been made to surprise fans of the source book, keeping them interested and uncertain about the unfolding of the plot. These changes can include new twists, conflicts, or character developments. Another reason could be to attract a wider audience, for instance, using current

music in the soundtrack makes people comment, identify the songs and relate to them, attracting, thus, more viewers.

Regarding omissions, one can talk about the character Francesca, the sixth child of the Bridgerton family, who was excluded from many moments in most of the series, only appearing with very few lines in the first episode and briefly in the last one. Nevertheless, not only were characters omitted, but many scenes as well. For example, the moment when Simon and Daphne communicate and ask for Anthony's support to fake a romance; the Duke's trip with the Bridgerton family by boat to Greenwich, which provides many amusing scenes and dialogues in the book; the fact that the main couple spent more than a month apart and Anthony, Daphne's brother, had to take a letter to Simon communicating about a possible pregnancy. It is important to note that these omissions were made to condense the story and make it more suitable for the series format, while maintaining the core of the main characters and events.

An addition that made a big difference and distinguishes the series from the books was the introduction of the character Queen Charlotte, who does not exist in the written work. However, it is worth mentioning that historically Queen Charlotte is well documented. In fact, she was queen consort from 1761 until her death in 1818 and is recognized as the first queen of England "*of African descent*". Despite not having her lineage officially confirmed, some historians, such as Mario de Valdes y Cocom, a specialist in the African diaspora, affirm her African descent, using knowledge of the queen's family tree, her characteristics portrayed in paintings and documented comments made by people who knew her personally. Information that can be verified in the article made by BBC News Brasil (VEIGA 2019), whose corresponding reference can be found at the end of the article.

The creator and executive producer of the television series "Bridgerton", DUSEN, thought this addition was a great idea as he talked about it in the interview:

Working with historians and advisers, there's a lot of evidence to the idea that Queen Charlotte was England's first queen of mixed race, and that idea really resonated with me because it made me wonder

what that could have looked like and what would have happened. What could she have done? Could she have elevated other people of color in society? (DUSEN to T&C Magazine 2020).

The introduction of this character in the series was widely accepted by the public, who were very pleased and appeased with the spin-off that addresses the queen's life and her involvement with her king. Another character added was Mr. Featherington, in the source work the patriarch of the Featherington family has already passed away, but he is alive in the series. This addition is probably due to the alteration in the storyline of the character Marina who appears in the first season of "Bridgerton" as a distant cousin that Mr. Feartherington asks his wife to help with her debut. Genevieve Delacroix is the modiste who, over the course of the series, becomes the lover of Benedict Bridgerton, Daphne's second brother, and one of the main suspects of being the mysterious Lady Whistledown, according to Eloise Bridgerton. However, an important point is that Genevieve was never described in the books. Remembering that new characters can bring different stories and perspectives to enrich the narrative, representing groups that bring ethnic and cultural diversity can expand the story and universe of the series. Also, it can introduce new dynamics, conflicts and relationships which keep the plot interesting and unpredictable, maintaining the interest of the public throughout the seasons.

Plot-wise, the series largely follows the story of the first book in the series, "The Duke and I", but also incorporates elements from subsequent books. Some scenes were added or changed to better adapt to the television format, while others were omitted or simplified. All in all, as it is known, the very definition of the term "adaptation" presupposes the adjustment, adequacy and modification of the original work with a view to presenting it in another format (DINIZ 1999). Even if the first season of the Bridgerton series generally follows the plot of the first book in the series, there are some differences between the two forms of storytelling, such as the emphasis placed on specific characters, stories and how the series incorporated drama and suspense elements that are not included in the book.

## Conclusion

Through this paper, students, teachers, professors, researchers of the intersemiotic translation field can make good use of the knowledge and information discussed here, aiming at improving different works in the area in question, especially when it comes to book adaptations and streaming platform series. Intersemiotic translation studies play an important role in bringing significant contributions, in addition, it can broaden creative horizons, promote interaction between different forms of expression and enrich cultural, social, political, racial dialogues. This work used categories, applied in interlingual translation, which were adapted for analyses of intersemiotic translation, thus, becoming part of relevant content within the field related to the translation of different signs. We can say that this paper allows the exploration of new possibilities of interpretation and understanding, contributing to the artistic and intellectual development of translation researches.

Despite the many similarities between both works, which greatly pleases viewers who have already followed the previous book, the characters also have some differences between the book and the series. For example, in the series, Queen Charlotte is a major character, but she does not appear in the books. Furthermore, some of the characters' personalities are different between the two media, as well as the presentation and description of settings, clothing and hairstyles. In summary, the intersemiotic translation between the book and the series "Bridgertons" involves a series of adaptations that consider the differences between the two forms of artistic expression as one is composed of audiovisual signs and, the other, of written one. These changes are made with the aim of creating an audiovisual experience that is true to part of the meaning construction of the book, and also brings new layers of significance and interpretation to the story and its characters. Precisely these differences are what helped the success of the adaptation, since they are made of unlike elements, the works cannot be equal in everything. For instance, even if the cinema has the ease of vision, acting, clothing, the appearance, the environment and also the soundtracks, intonation, sound effects, it has a time limit and cannot explore some small details, as the literary works can. Due to

these and other restrictions and dissimilarities, other types of interpretation occur based on which signs the work was observed by the viewer.

Semiotics investigates all possible languages, having as the objective the modes of constitution of each and every phenomenon such as: phenomenon of production of meaning and significance. As there are several forms of languages for communication, consequently, these modes insert different meanings or not, from the personal and/or shared interpretation that are related by their personal opinions and culturally imposed and accepted conventions. (GARRIT 2007: 41-42, *own translation*).

Therefore, these varied aspects that each sign makes available influenced the book fans to get involved and accept the series more easily, as the adaptation brought new views and interpretations of the source work.

A topic of debate among viewers was about the way the series represented the black community in the British aristocracy. It is important to point out that the show is fictional and not tied to historical reality; the inclusion of black characters in British high society challenges traditional conventions and highlights the importance of diverse representation in the media. After the first shock, the series has received appreciation for its varied cast and the way it approaches racial and social concerns within a historical setting. The show provides a more inclusive depiction of society by featuring black individuals in influential and powerful roles, which broadens the issues pervading historical fiction, a genre greatly influenced by the white supremacy.

It is fundamental to highlight that the TV show managed to exceed viewers' expectations and according to the website *NSC total*, the first season is in the top 10 among the most watched series on the platform. The Bridgerton series was a great audience success in 76 countries and it may have reached more than 60 million people. According to a post made on *Netflix* social networks, in the first four weeks it became the most watched series on *Netflix*. The data can be checked on the websites provided in the references.

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