

Analyzing gay male terms in Brazilian Portuguese subtitles from the movie *The Boys in the Band*

Adauri Brezolin
Independent Researcher, São Paulo, Brazil

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Abstract

The Boys in the Band was one of the first American movies to thrust gay characters into the limelight, giving visibility to their way of acting, dressing, and speaking. In this article, I analyze gay male terms used by the characters in the original film (1970), and in its 2020 remake. My selection includes the lexical items “fag”, “faggot”, “faggy”, “fairy”, “gay”, “homosexual”, “nelly”, “pansy”, “queen”, “queer”, and “sissy”, all representative of camp (Harvey, 1998). My main goal is to verify how they were transposed into Brazilian Portuguese, and to what extent they can equate to camp talk from the pragmatic viewpoint. Apart from these terms, my analysis will include other linguistic resources able to shape the identity of this group of speakers. After introducing the main features of the film (Cohen, 2015; Bell, 2016), I will discuss gay issues and camp talk (Harvey, 1998/2000; Martínez Pleguezuelos, 2017); next, I will compare the data mainly focusing on their evaluative load (Hughes, 2006; Valdeón, 2010). My results have demonstrated that, in the target language, the terms analyzed were consistently used and largely equated with the evaluative load of their source counterparts.

Key Words

Camp talk, Portuguese, subtitling, *The Boys in the Band*, translation.



Introduction

The year is 1968, the setting is a two-floor apartment in West Village, New York City, the host is preparing a birthday party for a friend, and his guests, all gay men, are showing up. While they wait for the birthday boy, the atmosphere, still flowing gaily, is suddenly spoiled by the unexpected announcement that a straight college buddy of the host is about to barge in. After all of them have

arrived, and until the night is over, each member has their standout moment to “wash the dirty linen”, when they also have the chance to reveal their true selves and, especially, their language.

According to Bell (2016, Introduction, Location No. 97), “(a)fter more than four decades, audiences and commentators of various persuasions have already settled on a certain reckoning of’ *The Boys in the Band* “value for cinema, history, and queer politics.” Still, “(t)he conventional understanding of the film may concede its important place in the history of gay male representation, but that understanding also implies an expectation that the film will know its place and dutifully stay there” (Location No. 101). As a fictional representation, an allegory, of gay male, it depicts “very real conflicts that had taken place before or were taking place during the historical moment of its creation” (Location No. 122). Even if it was “objectionable both for its exposition of hostility and self-loathing in its main character and for the highly specific constitution of the population it depicted” (Location No. 197), the film reflected “the wide range of lived experiences of real gay people”, and above all, it showed “gay people favorably, as law-abiding, sane, moral persons who are capable of happiness”, different from previous “negative and harmful portrayals of homosexuals in both fictional and nonfictional contexts” ((Locations No. 192/193).”

The film was important for showing gay identity through a variety of fictional characters, among them a bookstore clerk, a fashion photographer, a public-school teacher, and a luxury antiques dealer, all of whom were exposing their compassion and hatred, their arrogance and self-pity, their joy and disenchantment, a series of conflicting emotions typical of any real social group – homosexual or not. By showing contemporary gay male, Mart Crowley, in his play, depicted an “‘undisguised’, realistic treatment” of what he knew, and the film made audiences feel identified with it, winning wide acclaim. Additionally, “*The Boys in the Band* should be valued precisely because of its refusal to supply an easy, affirmative vision of queer life, precisely because it offers a highly particularized vision of the specific characters who inhabit it, and precisely for its unique visual style.” For Bell (2016), “it deserves recognition as an example of “New Queer Cinema” *avant la lettre*”, since, by standards of “(s)ome currents in the most recent queer discourse,” the film would prompt objections. Paradoxically,

(e)ven in some of the earliest formulations of queer theory, especially those founded on feminist thought, a tension exists between, on the one hand, considerations of the inevitability and power of linguistic exclusion and, on the other, insistence on the political and ethical principles of diversity and inclusion.

And the movie subverts some of these principles exactly by showing stereotypical characters and, notably, diverse, inclusive language. (Bell, 2016, Introduction, Locations No. 276-285).

When looked in hindsight, in 1970, when the movie was released, “gay audiences did not universally applaud it, as some believed that the self-loathing and dysfunctional characters perpetuated negative stereotypes”. But it was important for the gay liberation movement, helping many gay men “come out”, reducing “much of the shame and stigma associated with homosexuality” (Cohen 2015), so, inevitably, it gave visibility to homosexuals.

It is important to point out that; however, if the movie offers only “a snapshot of a particular generation of gay men in New York City” (Cohen, 2015) in a stereotyped manner, as some critics have argued, it may well be an honest representation of the situation many other homosexuals found themselves in several parts of the world at that time. Additionally, the portrayal of an ensemble of today’s gay characters might probably be different since social interactions and interpersonal relationships have changed, transforming, and shaping the way we think, behave, and, above all, speak; however, at the same time, it would carry much of what has been conquered and incorporated by gay people.

The two feature films, 1970 and 2020, directed by William Freidkin and Joe Mantello, respectively, were adapted from the play, *The Boys in the Band*, by Mart Crowley, in which the gay characters used “a specific verbal style”, known as camp (Harvey, 1998: 295), so, in this manuscript, I intend to analyze some of the terms employed by the characters in the original lines in American English (AE) of both films (1970/2020), compare them with their subtitles into Brazilian Portuguese (BP), and then, contrast the two sets of subtitles in the target language. My goal is to verify whether the evaluative load of the terms used in the target language equate with their source counterparts, mainly, from the pragmatic point of view.

Gay issues and camp talk

According to Harvey, camp talk is “a specific verbal style” used by homosexuals” (1998, p. 295). In his article, in which he describes the functions and features of camp in association with how “male homosexual characters in French and Anglo-American post-war fiction” speak, he also considers “(t)he implications of such an association” “in relation to the translation of this fiction” (p. 295).

To address the functions and features of camp talk, Harvey (1998) first compares “linguistics of community” with “linguistics of contact” (Pratts, 1987). The former, present in dialectology, represents “essentially homogeneous language practices” that “result from a consensual process of socialization of the individual by a community” (Harvey, 1998: 297), the latter, in turn, refers to a contact model of language, in which “speakers constitute each other relationally and in difference” (Pratt, 1987: 60). According to this view, even if the representation of talk is fictional, it is not created in a vacuum, or “*constructed* deliberately by an author for the purposes of character development and narrative advancement”, but, like real language use, it “draws on a stock of language features that are invested with cultural (and stereotypical) values in order to achieve the *effect* of a specific communal identity” (Harvey, 1998: 297, *emphases original*). This way, one group of speakers will construct its language through “processes of appropriation, penetration or co-optation” of the language of other groups (Pratts, 1987). In the case of camp talk, “(a) linguistics of contact would recognize the fact that gay men and lesbians work within and appropriate prevailing straight (and homophobic) discourses”, suggesting that “gay speakers’ frequent use of language practices” are “associated with a whole range of communities” (Harvey, 1998: 297). For Harvey,

(w)hat counts, then, is not the empirically verifiable truth of the relation between a language feature and a speaker’s identity, but the fact that these language features have come to stand for certain gendered and subcultural differences”, this means that “(c)amp talk enlists these stereotypical differences in order to index a distinct sexual identity. (Harvey, 1998: 298).

For Harvey, camp is presented as “a complex problem for translators in that while it draws on similar formal devices”, considering distinct languages, it fulfils different functions in the literary and cultural contexts of” such languages. According to the author, “the functions of camp are intimately bound up with the question of its *evaluation*” (*emphasis original*), and they “can usefully be broken down into two distinct” levels, micro and macro levels (1998: 295). The micro-functional fictional level is related to the evaluative load given to camp talk, either positive or negative. It can boast a positive evaluative load when a character is, for example, presented as having appreciative, supportive, cheerful feelings and attitudes; or a negative evaluative load when a character is described with arrogance, hostility, self-pity, and so on. Thus, as these attributes, either positive or negative, appear in a book or film, they help readers and viewers to construct an image, an identity of the characters. The macro-functional dimension, according to Harvey, may not be so apparent as the micro level, since

it “taps into the wider (sub)cultural values that homosexual/gay identity has established for itself and within which the fictional text operates and develops its meanings” (1998: 296). As such, it is manifested through principles of solidarity, difference, discrimination, resistance, for example, which may escape the attention even of the most observant reader or viewer.

Applying these functions to the movie *The Boys in the Band*, even if it was perceived negatively by showing, for example, hostility and self-loathing; in general, it showed gay people more favorably than previous fictional depictions of homosexuals had. Much of this change may be attributed to gay activist movements that were initiated at the time and that continued in the following decades. Similar changes have also occurred in the way fictional gay characters have been represented in Brazilian television and cinema, as the two studies I present next can illustrate.

Drawing on Gay and Lesbian studies, mainly Queer Theory, Colling (2007), analyzed characters that were homosexuals or bisexuals (even when they did not openly reveal their sexual orientation) from soap operas played on Globo TV¹ during the years 1974 and mid-2007. According to him, the image of homosexual characters in this kind of fictional genre along these years was shaped by a constellation of types and stereotypes ranging from overaffected and caricatural butlers, waiters, *chefs de cuisine*, fashion designers; hustlers and transvestites involved in murders; effeminate men; bisexual men to “uncaricaturized” multiracial gay couples, and unaffected couples wishing to get married and adopt children, or gay couples very similar to couples considered heterosexual in our society.

Considering these and other characters, Colling (2007) grouped them into three main stereotypes: criminals; affected effeminate men, and heteronormative gay men. Although negative stereotypes never disappeared from Brazilian soap operas, a movement from negative to more positive images has been perceived throughout the years, confirming, to a certain extent, that the new and more progressive views on homosexuality had caused this shift. Although this can be seen as a gain, Colling is critical mainly of gay couples presented through “male/female” asexual relationships, perfectly integrated into a heteronormative model.

¹ One of the largest open television broadcasting networks in Brazil, famous for showing the fictional genre, soap opera, since the mid-1960s.

Similarly, Lacerda Júnior (2017) investigated politics of representation, but in Brazilian gay cinema, addressing its relation to two different trends of LGBT activism (assimilationism and liberationism), and its use of the camp sensibility and the assumptions of queer theory². In his comprehensive study, analyzing Brazilian movies from the 1930s to 2010s, he could also identify a plethora of types and stereotypes, and unlike Colling, he also identified gay male terms more frequently used in the time periods covered by his study.

In cinematographic productions of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, Lacerda Júnior (2017) identified farcical transgenderism (*transgeneridade farsesca*), defined by him as the transitory gender swapping motivated by needs prompted by the plot (usually as a resource of comicality), and the effeminate type, who became a recurrent character in movies in the following years. During the same period, he also identified other terms to characterize a man with extravagant manners and outfits, *fresco*, *puto*, *veado*, and *bicha* (all referring to homosexual men), according to the author, it is not known whether these terms were initially used as derogatory or as a token of identification within the subculture they referred to.

In the 1960s, as put by the author, the ghost of homosexuality was brought into the movies through the homophobia typical of hegemonic masculinity, that is, the fear of being considered a homosexual. In the 1970s and 1980s; however, male homoeroticism was shown more frequently and more directly in movies of then, represented by three main types: *bicha* (a homosexual man), *bofe* (a heterosexual man who would have sex with other men, but would not consider himself a homosexual), and *entendido* (a sophisticated, discreet gay man). Considering homoerotic relationships between *bicha* and *bofe*, the roles played by both were rigidly ruled by hierarchical dichotomies of feminine/masculine such as: passive (bottom)/active (top); receptor/insertor; submissive/dominant. *Entendidos*, in their turn, besides becoming more popular in urban medium and high classes, departed from the more affected feminine manners of *bichas*, and could assume both roles in homoerotic intercourses. Different from *bofes*, they neither considered themselves as heterosexuals nor engaged in sexual intercourse with women.

In the 1990s, the changes brought about by more organized masculine homoerotic practices, the popularization of the gay identity, the organization of film festivals on sexual diversity and the establishment of a Brazilian gay cinema

² My resorting to these studies does not mean that I am fully aligned with them from the theoretical and ideological point of view. My main interest in them resides in their importance as reliable sources of information related to fictional representations of homosexuals in Brazil.

gave positive visibility not only to gays, but also to other LGBT identities, moving from a hierarchical to an egalitarian model, promoting sexual diversity and two new identities *gay* and *lesbian*, as a way to debunk the pathological nature associated with homoerotic identities. During this time, there also appeared *transvestites* (soon giving rise to *transsexuals* and *transgenders*), and *bisexuals*.

In the 2000s, the egalitarian model of gay identity continued to be the backdrop of movies that explored specific issues and conflicts of male homoerotic life, such as the recurrent discovery of homoerotic desire, especially in adolescence; conflicts of acceptance and self-acceptance; conflicts of marital life (relationship breakups, difficulty in starting a new relationship, the loneliness of large cities), among others.

According to Lacerda Júnior (2015), the Brazilian contemporary gay cinema has alternated between two trends of LGBT activism: assimilationism and liberationism, summarized by me, as follows: whereas assimilationism aimed at assimilating or integrating homosexuals into society, advocating for equality between homosexuality and heterosexuality, and in practice, promoting a certain normalization of homosexuality, expecting it to fit into the values demanded by this society, liberationism sought to debunk the very practices of normalization, assuming, otherwise, the difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality, and advocating for the legitimacy of a life within this difference.

Lacerda Júnior (2015) also detected the presence of camp in Brazilian movies. According to him, camp, among other things, rejected the notions of respectability and seriousness typical of assimilationism, this way, subverting the norm, consciously embracing theatricality, mockery, and humor, for instance. Among characters with this profile, he identified: two transvestites who adopted a cat stuffed animal; two gay superheroes; a boy whose dream was to impersonate a famous Brazilian woman singer, just to mention a few.

If, according to Harvey (1998), camp is presented as an intricate problem for translators since its functions may vary depending on different literary and cultural contexts, detecting all these gay fictional characters from Brazilian soap operas and cinema is important to show that the features identifying camp are not something new to the Brazilian audience, which, to some extent, makes things less difficult for translators dealing with films using this specific verbal style.

Now, I again turn to camp talk that can be identified through certain aesthetically and linguistically marked resources, or features. For Babuscio (1993), they are

irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humor, for Harvey (1998), paradox, inversion, ludicrism, and parody. I, however, have opted for more objective categories despite the possibility of having them criticized as a simplification of both. My suggestions are – femininity, irony/sarcasm, theatricality, and humor – which will be described and illustrated further in my analysis of the movie.

Now, considering the functions as well as the features of camp talk, and associating them with the findings of Colling (2007), and Lacerda Júnior (2015) about how gay characters have been presented in Brazilian soap operas and movies, it is possible to infer that the perception of these characters gained by viewers throughout the years have inescapably oscillated from negative – mainly when gays were associated with criminals –, to positive – even when gays were associated with highly marked stereotypes (affected butlers, hairdressers, or fashion designers, for instance), and with gay men and couples of different colors, social classes, professions, and so on. In terms of Harvey’s (1998) macro-functional fictional levels, no fictional depiction of men, women, gays, or any other sexual orientation seems, to a greater or lesser degree, devoid of identification, affability, understanding, and, at the same time, free of disapproval, hostility, prejudice. Thus, along the years, the ways that gays have been depicted have inevitably contributed to give them more visibility, and, like non-gay characters, they have been perceived as any human being – with virtues and defects. Besides, camp features – irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humor – have also permeated most of the plots showing different gay characters. And, as Harvey (1998: 295) puts it, if “camp talk is associated with a whole range of homosexual identities”: “the marginalized transvestite”; “middle class ‘arty’ types”; “the post-Stonewall hedonistic ‘faggot’”, and “the politicized AIDS-aware ‘queer’”, among others, they are no strangers to the Brazilian audience.

Before I move on to the next section, it is important to point out that my study is aligned with views that consider the construction of sexual identities as influenced by how speakers use the language, like the study by Martínez Pleguezuelos’ (2017), who applied Harvey’s (1998/2000) ideas on camp talk to analyze the representation and translation of this verbal style through the strategies used in Spanish and in the English subtitled version of two movies by film director Pedro Almodóvar. Martínez Pleguezuelos departs from more radical identity politics and is more inclined to adopt interdisciplinary studies about

language, translation, and sexuality that will not only embrace issues regarding how desire and sexual identity are represented through language, but also that will reflect the way in which sexualities are shaped through what is said, what is

not said and what cannot be said in the discourse because of social, historical, and cultural conditioners of each context. (2017: 228, my translation)³.

Next, I will briefly introduce the characters of the movie to address aesthetical and linguistic features of camp talk, and will focus on the selection of lexical terms related to camp talk in the movie.

The characters and camp aesthetical/ linguistic features

The characters of *The Boys in Band* includes Michael, the host, who is preparing a birthday party for his friend, Harold, a former ice-skater who is taking drugs to cope with depression and self-loathing; Bernard, an Afro-American library clerk; Donald, a conflicted and sentimental friend, mainly of Michael; Emory, an antiques dealer, the most flamboyant and girlish-like of all; Hank, a schoolteacher who left his wife and two children to live with Larry; Larry, a commercial artist; the Cowboy, a handsome street hustler in a cowboy outfit hired by Emory to sing “Happy Birthday” to Harold), and Alan, Michael’s former college buddy, a lawyer from Washington, the one who is not homosexual.

It is important to recall that, no matter if Crowley’s play, like any other groundbreaking work, has received criticisms of all fashions and convictions, as negative as these: it is “difficult to accept this play as a look at gay life because it was written with no awareness of the most critical, sweeping social change to affect the gay community during the 1980s and 1990s, the AIDS epidemic”, or “simultaneously such a film negatively depicts those gay lives that do not follow heterosexual paradigms, reinforcing long-held stereotypes of gays as sad, troubled, and unhappy people”, or as positive as these: the novelty of the play “was based on its respectful handling of the many facets of gay life. Coming at a time when the only homosexuals that showed up in popular entertainment were hysterical ‘fruits’ or deviants bearing the burden of their “unnatural crimes”, or “(a)s quickly as the play ascended, so too did it burn out in a flash. The world was different for gays at the start of the 1970s, and *The Boys in the*

³ (...) *sobre lengua, traducción y sexualidad no solo abarcará cuestiones en torno a cómo se representa el deseo y la identidad sexual a través del lenguaje, sino que, además, reflejará el modo en el cual se moldean las sexualidades mediante lo que se dice, lo que no se dice y lo que no puede decirse en el discurso por los condicionantes culturales, históricos y sociales de cada contexto.* (Martínez Pleguezuelos, 2017: 228)

Band was already a relic”. The importance of the film, then, lies in the fact that “it was the first mainstream piece to show gay men in their own environment, interacting with each other, acknowledging camp posturing, in-jokes, and psychological torment without mocking or overemphasizing”, and, moreover, giving visibility to a spectrum of personality types among gays at a time when homophobia was common. (Encyclopedia.com, 2021)⁴

Now, I resume camp aesthetic features relating them to passages of the movie. As I mentioned before, my analysis will concentrate on femininity; irony/sarcasm; theatricality, and humor, categories developed from Babuscio’s (1993) and Harvey’s (1998) ideas.

Femininity: this category refers to situations in which the inversion of gender-specific terms, such as names and pronouns; the assignment of female names to men can also be encountered.

The inversion of gender-specific terms seems to be the most common and recurrent resource throughout the movie when only gay males are talking, these are some of the occurrences: “*Who is this exotic woman? My dear, I thought you had perished!*”; “*Oh, it's only another queen! - And it ain't the red one either. - It's the queen of spades!*”; “*He's not here yet./ She's never been on time in her li...*”; “*Oh, Mary, don't ask.*”; “*Sweetie, I paid you for the whole night, remember?*”; “*Mary, she's gorgeous./ “She may be dumb, but she's all yours.*”; “*Mary, take me home.*”; “*I'd make somebody a good wife.*”; “*Blow out the candles, Mary, and make a wish!*”; “*Oh, Mary, don't ask.*”; “*She's 32 years young!*”; “*Oh, Mary, it takes a fairy to make something pretty.*”; “*Mary, you're a heavy mother.*”; “*Anything for a sis.*”, and “*If they're not lovers, they're sisters.*” As it can be noted, the reference to women is indicated by very evident lexical items such as “woman”, “queen”, “wife”, “mother”, “sis/sister”, by the pronoun “she”, and by the vocative “Mary”. In the BP subtitles, the same references were also possible through *prima facie* renderings (*mulher, rainha, esposa, mãe, irmã/irmãzinha, and ela*). The vocative “Mary” was transposed into BP not through a feminine proper noun, but through common feminine words such as *colega* (“female colleague”), *menina* (“girl”) and *querida* (“dear girl”) in the 1970 film version, and through a dysphemic term (*bicha* > fairy) or omitted in the 2020 film version.

Assigning female names to men was also recurrent throughout the movie, as it can be seen in: “*Hello, darling. Connie Casserole.*”, referring to Emory who has

⁴ *The Boys in the Band.* (2021) Encyclopedia.com. [Online] Available at: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/boys-band#C>. [Accessed on 21st September 2021]

brought lasagne to the party; and, also “*Sheer poetry, Emmy.*” for Emory; “*Happy birthday, Hallie.*” / “*You're funny, Hallie.*” / “*Blow out your candles, Laura.*” for Harold, and “*Go ahead, Hankola.*”, for Hank. In BP, they were translated literally. As the original names are not common men’s names in Brazil, perhaps, some of the changes may have passed unnoticed.

Irony/sarcasm: refers to situations in which there is the presence of contradictory or incongruous, or still sharp and offensive utterances or attitudes. The following are some the occurrences found in the movie: “*Straight? If he's the one I met, he's as straight as the yellow brick road.*”: this is how Larry reacts to Michael’s comment announcing that Alan, his former college roommate, “*is stopping by for a fast drink on his way to dinner*” ... “*but he's straight, so...*”; his straightness is incongruous with everybody’s suspicious that Alan may be gay; “*I'll be out of your way in a second. I've only got one more thing to do.*”, here Michael is telling Donald that he is about to leave the bathroom, to which Donald replies: “*Surgery? So early in the evening?*”, it was a very sarcastic comment since Michael had mentioned his receding hairline while getting ready for the party; “*I promise to sit with my legs spread apart and keep my voice in a deep register.*”, this how Donald reacts after Michael tells him that Alan, his former college roommate, is coming over; “*What's he had, a lobotomy?*”, this is how Larry reacts after he had asked Michael if Alan had never suspected he was gay; “*He's like a butterfly in heat.*”, this is how Alan describes Emory’s exaggerated and affected manners; “*Dear Harold, bang-bang. You're alive. Now roll over and play dead.*”, Michael is teasing Harold insinuating that he would be old enough to be already dead; “*And the pills! Harold has been gathering, saving, and storing up barbiturates for the past year like a goddamn squirrel. Hundreds of Nembutals, hundreds of Seconals. All in preparation for, and anticipation of, the long winter of his death.*”, as in other parts of the film, Michael is shooting barbs at Harold who assumes to be a drug addict as a way of dealing with his depression and suicidal tendency, and “*Why would anybody want to go to bed with a flaming little sissy like you? Who'd make a pass at you? I'll tell you who. Nobody. Except maybe some fugitive from the Braille Institute.*”, this is Michael again, and after he started drinking, he becomes even more aggressive and assaults Emory verbally. Again, as most of the occurrences were translated literally, the ironical/sarcastic effect could be reproduced in BP. However, I call attention to an excerpt that lost its ironical/sarcastic effect in the target language (in the 1970 version) due to a problematic translation. It refers to “*The punching bag is now dissolved into Flo Nightingale.*”, uttered by Emory after someone suggested serving some lasagne to Alan, the man who had assaulted him earlier. The ironical feature comes from the fact that Flo(rence) Nightingale was a nurse; according to the passage then, the assaulter had suddenly become

an “angelical” person. In BP, it was rendered as *O saco de pancadas está se dissolvendo num rouxinol*, back translated as “The punching bag is dissolving into a nightingale”, that is, a result that was not up to the mark since the reference to the bird could not recover the same effect, or perhaps a different effect, for nightingale in BP metaphorically means someone who sings well.

Theatricality: refers to situations in which exaggerated comments or attitudes can be observed, and dramatization may take place. The following excerpts are lines of exaggeration uttered by Michael revealing his worry about aging as well as his cruelty towards his friends: “*I’ve got to comb my hair for the 37th time.*”; “*My hair, without exaggeration, is clearly falling on the floor.*”; “*Alan’s so goddamned pulled together, he wouldn’t show any emotion if he were in a plane crash.*”, and “*No! Not pills and alcohol. I’m gonna die!*”. One more time, the transposition of these passages into BP did not seem to have caused great difficulties for translators since most of them could be rendered in considerable literal ways.

Humor: wordplays, double entendre, renaming characters based on a certain physical trait or a specific sexual behavior are some of the instances under this category. Wordplays were generated in the following occurrences, through substitution, as in “*Now that’s the pot calling the kettle beige*” (referring to *The pot calling the kettle black*), translated as *Macaco que senta no rabo pra falar do rabo dos outros*⁵ (1970), and *O roto falando do esfarrapado*⁶ (2020), both in BP equating pragmatically with the unchanged idiom, this way creating no wordplay; in “*The ménage, baby. Two’s company, three’s a ménage*”, referring to *Two’s company, three’s a crowd*, translated as *Um ménage a trois, baby*, completely disregarding the wordplay, *Dois é bom, três é ménage* (1970), which partially recovered its pragmatic counterpart, *Um é pouco, dois é bom, três é demais*⁷, and *O ménage, amor. Dois é companhia, três é ménage* (2020), which was literally translated, avoiding the expected counterpart in BP, but creating a wordplay with the French expression *ménage à trois*, “*trois is ménage*”; and in “*Uh-oh, Yvonne the Terrible is back*”, translated as *Ivan o Terrível, voltou* (1970), and *Ivone, a Terrível, está de volta*, in the former, the effect was completely eliminated by “undoing” the wordplay *Ivan/Yvonne*, which, in the latter, it was

⁵ Hipócrita. (2021). In *Dicionário InFormal* (Online). Retrieved from <https://www.dicionarioinformal.com.br/significado/hip%C3%A9crita/1017/>.

⁶ Roto. (2021). In *Aulete Digital* (Online). Retrieved from <https://www.aulete.com.br/roto>.

⁷ Um é pouco, dois é bom, três é demais. In *Dicionário de Expressões* (Online). Retrieved from <https://dicionariodeexpressoes.com.br/busca.do?expressao=Um%20%C3%A9%20pouco,%20dois%20%C3%A9%20bom,%20tr%C3%AAs%20%C3%A9%20demais>.

successfully recovered, adding to it the strategy of gender inversion of the source construction. One of the wordplays was generated through polysemy (*happy/gay*), "*Show me a happy homosexual, and I'll show you a gay corpse*", translated as *Me mostre um homossexual feliz que eu te mostro um cadáver 'gay'* (1970), and *Me mostre um homossexual feliz e te mostro um cadáver alegre*", in both cases, the source wordplay was effaced since *gay* in BP is synonymous with neither *feliz* (happy), nor *alegre* (glad). By the way, maintaining this effect in BP implies a great difficulty for translators.

In some parts of the film, there is the reassignment of names to highlight some of the traits or attitudes of those receiving the "nickname", usually combined with gender inversion: "*Look, it's the Geriatric Rockettes!*", four of the boys dancing together in a line, translated as *São as Roquettes Geriátricas!* (1970)/[The Geriatric Rockettes], which is literal, and as gender is also an inflectional grammatical category of adjectives in BP, *geriátricas* reinforced the strategy of gender inversion, and *Que grupo de dança geriátrico!* (2020)/[What a geriatric group!], which almost eliminated the wordplay at all. Other occurrences were generated by some playing with words, mainly through alliteration: "*Oh, my God, it's Lily Law. Everybody, three feet apart.*", referring to possible cops conducting a raid, translated as *Meus Deus! É o bofe. Todo mundo a 1 metro de distância.* (1970)/[My God, it's the straight guy. Everybody one meter apart], which reveals another interpretation indicating that Emory had thought it was Alan ringing the bell, and *Meus Deus, os tiras. Pessoal, separem-se* (2020)/[My God, the cops. Everybody apart.], interpreted accordingly as the cops, but creating no play on words; "*Harriet Hypocrite, that's who you are.*", rendered as *Hipócrita, isso que você é.* (1970)/[Hypocrite, that's what you are.], and *Emory, você é um baíta hipócrita* (2020)/[Emory, you are such a big hypocrite.]; in both cases the play on words was eliminated and no reference to gender inversion was made; "*Polly Paranoia.*", translated as *Poli-paranoia* (1970)/[Poly-paranoia], very likely an interpretation based on homophony (Polly/poly-), which recovered the idea that Harold is an extremely paranoid person, but downplayed the strategy of gender inversion, and *Polly Paranoia* (2020), though a literal solution, but successful in recovering the intended effect, and "*Phyllis Phallic.*", translated as *Felícia Fállica* (1970)/[Phallic Felicia], which recovered the effect also through alliteration, and *Que falofilia* (2020)/[What a phallophilia], which was created through alliteration,

but removed the strategy of gender inversion. At last, “*Thank you, Quasimodo.*”, uttered by Michael and directed to Harold, in reference to the fictional character “the Hunchback of Notre Dame”, usually described as ugly and deformed, of the homonymous novel by Victor Hugo. Doubtlessly, a nasty comment reminding Harold of his appearance as he had already pictured himself as: “*What I am, Michael, is a 32-year-old, ugly, pock-marked, Jew fairy ...*”. The utterance was translated literally, as *Obrigado, Quasimodo.*, in both film versions.

Two passages of the film play a significant role in showing the combination of camp features by showing incongruity, femininity, and theatricality, for instance. One is when Michael does a Bette Davis impression, and says “*I adore cheap sentiment.*”, after Donald attempted to solace him for his sadness and disenchantment. The incongruity of his utterance first derives from Michael’s demureness, very different from his usual arrogance, and second, from the fact that Bette Davis, in the movie *All About Eve*, says “*I detest cheap sentiment.*”. Besides such incongruities, Michael’s imitation is performed with dramatized feminine gestures. The other is when Emory recalls one of the iconic scenes of the movie *Sunset Boulevard*, in which Gloria Swanson plays Norma Desmond, a decadent actress whose career had started during the golden ages of silent film. Believing that she will make a film again after decades, Norma dramatically descends her grand staircase, and, in an impromptu speech, she says: “*All right, Mr. DeMille, I’m ready for my close-up.*” However, Emory says: “*I am not ready for my close-up, Mr. DeMille*”, since his lips were bleeding after Allan had assaulted him, another case of incongruousness, theatrically and humorously performed. Both passages seem to reinforce the penchant for imitation typical of fictional gay characters through exaggeration, femininity, theatricality, and above all, humor.

Now, if “these effects contribute to the development of fictional representations of homosexual/gay/queer characters in postwar fiction and also to the elaboration of a gay critique of dominant cultural norms and practices” (Harvey, 2000, p. 240); they are not the only “ingredients”, the selection of specific lexical items used in camp talk is also of great importance to the presentation and representation of gayness. According to Valdeón (2010, p. 74), as we are dealing with translated camp talk, “the significance of the linguistic choices” “in the construal, maintenance and projection of certain images of gayness” is particularly relevant in both the source and target texts. For him (drawing on Fairclough), the same way that “the interpretation of a text, whether it is verbal, visual or multimodal, depends on previous knowledge and experience”, “(t)ext producers also rely on it when creating a product” (2010, p. 74), from which I

infer that the lexical choices used in fiction is not “invented”, but constructed from real evidence.

Thus, my selection of terms related to gay males encountered in both film versions, extracted from the original transcripts (1970⁸ and 2020⁹), are presented in Table 1. The number of occurrences appear between brackets.

1970	2020
fag (3)	fag (3)
faggot(s) (7)	faggot(s) (7)
faggy (1)	faggy (1)
fairy (7)	fairy (8)
gay (7)	gay (6)
homosexual (6)	homosexual (6)
nelly (3)	nellie (3)
pansy (2)	pansy (2)
queen (10)	queen (10)
queer (1)	queer (1)
sissy (1)	sissy (1)

Table 1- Selection of terms related to gay male, and number of occurrences (1970/2020).

In the next section, this selection will be analyzed and compared with the corresponding lexical choices in BP in both subtitled versions of the film.

Lexical choices in the original lines and in the subtitles

After extracting the terms from the scripts, the corresponding lexical choices were manually retrieved from the movies subtitled into BP (DVD and Netflix).

⁸ Scripts (2021): The Boys in the Band. Retrieved: April 12, 2021. Available at: <https://www.scripts.com/script/the_boys_in_the_band_19837>

⁹ Subslikescript (2021): The Boys in the Band (2020). Retrieved: April 12, 2021. Available at: <https://subslikescript.com/movie/The_Boys_in_the_Band-10199914>

The selected terms in English and their counterparts in BP are presented in Table 2.

1970		2020	
AE	BP ¹⁰	AE	BP
fag (3)	<i>bicha</i> (2); <i>viado</i> ¹¹	<i>fag</i> (3)	<i>bicha</i> (2); <i>veado</i>
faggot(s) (7)	∅; <i>viado(s)</i> (6)	<i>faggot(s)</i> (7)	<i>bicha</i> (s) (3); <i>veado(s)</i> (4)
(too) faggy (1)	<i>viado (demais)</i>	<i>(too) faggy</i> (1)	<i>bicha (demais)</i>
fairy (7)	<i>biba</i> (2); <i>bicha</i> ; <i>bicha-biba</i> ; <i>fadinba</i> ; <i>viadinbo</i> ; <i>viado</i>	<i>fairy</i> (8)	<i>bicha</i> (3); <i>mona(s)</i> (5)
gay (7)	<i>gay</i> (7)	<i>gay</i> (6)	<i>gay</i> (6)
homosexual (6)	<i>homossexual</i> (6)	<i>homosexual</i> (6)	<i>homossexual</i> (6)
nelly (3)	<i>bichinba</i> (2); <i>bicha-viado-maricas</i>	<i>nellie</i> (3)	<i>bicha</i> (3)
pansy (2)	<i>bicha</i> ; <i>maricas</i>	<i>pansy</i> (2)	<i>veadinbo</i> ; <i>veado</i>
queen (10)	<i>bicha</i> (6); <i>bichas-bibas</i> ; <i>bicha-viado-maricas</i> ; <i>rainba</i> (2)	<i>queen</i> (10)	<i>bicha</i> ; <i>mona(s)</i> (8); <i>omission</i> (1)
queer (1)	<i>viado</i>	<i>queer</i> (1)	<i>bicha</i>
sissy (1)	<i>bicha</i>	<i>sissy</i> (1)	<i>maricas</i>

Table 2- Selected AE terms and BP counterparts (1970/2020 movies)

Comparing both movies in AE in terms of vocabulary consistency, it was significantly high, as expected, since they were based on the same screenplay (only minor differences were detected). In BP, consistency, on the one hand, was, to a certain extent, also high, considering that the same terms were used throughout each subtitled production; on the other hand, words such as *biba* and *fadinba* appeared in the 1970 subtitles only whereas *mona* appeared in the 2020 subtitles only.

Based on the terms above (Table 2), it can be inferred that they create a similar hierarchy in both languages, with “gay/homosexual//*gay/homossexual*”

¹⁰ Though I am considering this set of subtitles as from 1970; in reality, they were only produced in 2008, when the DVD was released.

¹¹ The word *veado* was misspelled as *viado* in subtitles throughout the 1970 movie.

occupying the top position, then branching out into a series of hyponyms, all of them referring to a man who is sexually attracted to members of the same-sex:

- Gay/homosexual > fag; faggot; fairy; nelly(ie); pansy; queen; queer; sissy
- *Gay/homossexual* > *biba; bicha; bichinha; fadinha; maricas; mona; rainha; ve(i)ado; veadinho*

For my comparative analysis of these terms, I will draw on Valdeón (2010); Hughes (2006); *Merriam-Webster* (2021), and *The Free Dictionary* (2021), as regards the terms in AE, and to Alonso (2005/2010) as well as to *Aulete Digital* (2021) and *Michaelis* (2021), in Portuguese, with respect to the terms in BP.

According to Valdeón, today, *gay* is the most universal term, and, although it fell into disuse for some time, it was at last adopted by homosexuals “as their preferred way to define themselves”, being used in most of Western and Westernized languages. In general, *gay* is not a dysphemic term and can be used in positive or neutral contexts, so it may be accepted by homosexuals as an in-group label or avoided by heterosexuals who do not wish to show affinity towards homosexuals (2010: 76). In the movie, the term also seems to be used to classify certain places or art manifestations, such as “gay bar”, and “gay pop art”.

The term *homosexual* “expresses some degree of neutrality”, and although it had been deemed as a medical label, it came to be used “outside the group as a marker of not-belonging without being disrespectful or offensive” (Valdeón, 2010: 77). For example, “*Oh, and you, Donald, you are a credit to the **homosexual***”, and “*Because Justin Stuart is a **homosexual***.”

Queer, in turn, different from *gay* and *homosexual*, “was extremely dysphemic when first applied to homosexuals”, until it was “reclaimed and positivised by gay activists”, due to its “more inclusive connotations.” In the movie, its only occurrence, “*There will be six tired, screaming fairy queens and one anxious **queer***” still seemed dysphemic. *Fag*, abbreviated from *faggot*, “is a very negative term”, “even if also reclaimed by gay activists” (Valdeón, 2010: 77). *Fag* status can be attested in Merriam-Webster: “*offensive* – a gay person - used as a term of abuse and disparagement.” This negative evaluative load is clearly perceived in the lines uttered by Alan after Emory’s provocations: “***Faggot! Fairy!***”; “*I’ll kill you, you son of a bitch! **Fucking faggot! Faggot!***”, for instance.

In the original lines of the movie, other gay-related terms such as *fairy*; *pansy*; *nelly(ie)*; *queen*, and *sisy* were found. According to Hughes (2006: 236), these are “slang terms or metaphorical extensions of common words”, which, in general, are “contemptuous or insulting.” In both dictionaries, *Merriam-Webster* (2021) and *The Free Dictionary* (2021), the five terms are defined similarly as: “slang, offensive: a gay person —used as a term of abuse and disparagement”; *pansy* is also defined as “a weak or effeminate man or boy —used as a term of abuse and disparagement”, and *queen*, as “a gay man especially: an effeminate one”, confirming Hughes’ comments. *Nelly(ie)* and *sisy* do not appear in Hughes’ (2006) dictionary, and according to the just mentioned online dictionaries, they are defined as “offensive slang - used as a disparaging term for an effeminate gay man”, and “offensive - a boy or man regarded as effeminate”; respectively. If, on the one hand, all terms are considered as offensive and derogatory, *pansy* and *sisy* may be used to refer to a weak or effeminate man or boy, not necessarily to a gay person. The following excerpts extracted from the movie illustrate such uses: “*Faggot! Fairy!*” (Alan insulting Emory); “*He just... Seems like such a goddamn little pansy*” (Alan referring to Emory), and “*You're a falling-down-drunk-nellie-queen*” (Michael insulting Emory for being defied).

In BP, Alonso (2005/2010), in his studies about sexual diversity in the city of São Paulo, drawing mainly on Sociolinguistics, states that *gay* (incorporated into Portuguese as a borrowing) is used with some neutrality, and positively, in general, to point out the positive attributes of a homosexual man, such as elegance, congeniality, politeness, and beauty, and also the preferred term by mass media and heterosexuals, following the politically correct trend, to designate both male and female homosexuals. As in the original lines, the BP subtitles, *gay* appeared in *bar gay*, *pop art gay*, and *sauna gay* (only “baths” in AE). *Homossexual* (homosexual), according to Alonso (2005/2010), was also a term associated with pathological deviations or abnormalities, and today is employed to refer to a man or woman sexually attracted to the same sex. Considering the examples in AE and the corresponding subtitles in BP, *homossexual* appeared in “*E você, Donald, modelo de homossexual*” (1970), and “*E você, Donald, é um exemplo de homossexual*” (2020).

Alonso (2005/2010) also highlights *bicha*, normally used to accentuate negative attributes of a male homosexual, such as poverty, impoliteness, rudeness, and

feminine behavior, and *veado*, which suggests that the homosexual guy is a novice in the gay community or has recently “come out”. Both are used negatively and considered as vulgar terms (Aulete Digital), for example, *bicha* and *veado* are defined as “masculine homosexual”, but *veado* is accompanied by a note: “Attention – Under this meaning, it implies depreciation or prejudice”, as such, it is one of the most aggressive and derogatory terms, also used by prejudiced heterosexuals. The diminutive form of *bicha* – *bichinha*, and of *veado* – *veadinho* may also be used with the same negative evaluative loads. This can be attested in the following BP subtitles: “**Bicha Veado! Bicha!** (1970/2020); “*Desgraçado! Vou te matar, filho da puta! Veado do caralho! (...)* (1970/2020); “*Mas ... ele é uma bicha louca*” (1970)/“*Ele parece ... Ser bem veadinho*” (2020), for “**Faggot! Fairy!**”, “*I’ll kill you, you son of a bitch! Fucking faggot!*, and “*He just... Seems like such a goddamn little pansy*”, respectively.

Still, in the BP subtitles, other gay-related terms were encountered: *biba*: a homosexual man, also a form of address indicating intimacy, or still a derogatory form of address among homosexuals (Alonso, 2005/2010), as in “*As mesmas bibas cansadas que você já viu desde o primeiro dia*” (1970), for “*I mean, the same old tired fairies you’ve seen around since day one*”; *fadinha*, the diminutive form of *fada* (fairy), probably a literal interpretation of the word under the meaning “homosexual”. In BP, *fadinha* is not commonly used to refer to a gay person; however, in the context of the film, it was reasonably effective, as in “*Imagino o quanto os analistas devem se cansar de escutar do tanto que papai e mamãe transformaram o filho numa fadinha*” for “*Oh, Christ. How sick analysts must get of hearing how Mommy and Daddy made their darlin’ into a fairy*”; *maricas*, a man with effeminate manners; a homosexual, or a fearful and cowardly man (Michaelis, 2021), as in “*Uma bicha viado-maricas bêbada e caída*” for “*You’re a falling-down-drunk-nellie-queen*”, and *mona*, a homosexual man, once used by transvestites as a form of address that later was adopted by male homosexuals. This word, which means “child”, along with others such as *aque* (money), *edi* (asshole), *ekê* (lie), for instance, are originated from African languages, and used by several LGBT members (Alonso, 2005/2010). In Aulete Digital (2021), it is also defined as “male homosexual”, with no reference to its evaluative load, except that it is a slang term. In the BP subtitles, its use seemed to have a positive, or at least a neutral,

evaluative load: “*É só outra mona!*” for “*Oh, it's only another queen!*”, in reference to Bernard’s arrival.

As far as the translation of camp is concerned, I share some Baker’s ideas that utterances and communicative situations can only be interpreted in context, and this is closely connected to pragmatics, that is, “the study of language in use” (1992: 217). Thus, when translators are dealing with texts involving the rendering of a specific verbal style, like camp, for example, they must encounter lexical items that make sense to the target audience; lexical choices that are comparable from the pragmatic viewpoint.

Now, I present the lexical choices found in the subtitles, considering their evaluative load: positive (+); neutral (n), or negative (-), shown in Table 3.

AE/evaluative load	BP/evaluative load
fag (-), faggot (-), faggy (-)	<i>bicha</i> (-); <i>veado</i> (-)
fairy (-)	<i>biba</i> (-); <i>bicha</i> (-); <i>fadinha</i> (n); <i>mona</i> (n/-); <i>veadinho</i> (-), <i>veado</i> (-)
gay (n)	<i>gay</i> (n)
homosexual (n)	<i>homossexual</i> (n)
nelly (-)	<i>bicha</i> (-); <i>bichinha</i> (-)
pansy (+/-)	<i>bicha</i> (-); <i>maricas</i> (+/-); <i>veadinho</i> (-); <i>veado</i> (-)
queen (-)	<i>bicha</i> (-); <i>mona</i> (n/-); <i>rainha</i> (n)
queer (+/-)	<i>bicha</i> (-); <i>veado</i> (-)
sissy (+/-)	<i>bicha</i> (-); <i>maricas</i> (+/-)

Table 3- Lexical choices in AE and in BP and their evaluative load.

Although it is possible to observe a slight tendency to use dysphemic terms in the subtitles, as in the solutions for *pansy* and *sissy*; in general terms, the evaluative loads of the choices in BP seem to equate with their original counterparts. All in all, it is important and necessary to bear in mind that the exact evaluative load of a term can only be established considering its context and by whom it is being used. For example, even the word “faggot”, usually endowed with very negative connotations, as in “*I’ll kill you, you son of a bitch! Fucking faggot!*”, uttered by Alan, and directed to Emory, can assume a less negative value, as in “*You know, faggots are worse than women about their age*”, said by Michael when he was talking with Donald about aging and appearance. As Hughes argues, “(t)he key factor in the

development of a term of abuse is not the word itself, but who uses it” (2006: 146); this way, hardly ever will there be strong consensus on what words and expressions really mean and whether they are derogatory, insulting, degrading or not. As it happens in all types of translations, context, among others, is a determining aspect in this decision-making process.

Although some linguistic events, as wordplays, for instance, could not produce the desired effect in the target language, the overall results in the subtitles were very positive, mainly when camp was involved. I infer that the professionals responsible for preparing the subtitles resorted to lexical items that could function as effectively as those of the source language, producing effects capable of making the target audience recognize such terminology and feel identified with. As put by Valdeón (2010, p. 76), if “(g)ay speakers will have recourse to elements of an in-group variety of the language”, mainly to “lexical choices that express affinity or group-belonging”, it seems that the translator(s) could reproduce that in the target language.

Concluding remarks

In this article, I analyzed gay-related terms representative of the Anglophone gay language, known as camp, used by the characters of the film *The Boys in the Band* (1970/2020). For that, I touched on some gay issues related to the identities and representations of gayness relating them to camp’s aesthetical and lexical features, to compare the evaluative loads of the lexical choices in the original scripts with those in the subtitles.

I have also come across relevant studies in BP that detected how different fictional types and images of gay men have been depicted in Brazilian soap operas and films. If these fictional representations are unavoidably susceptible to positive and negative criticisms, to acceptance and rejection, to identification and rebuttal, they serve, above all, to show that Brazil has a long tradition of including masculine homosexual types and identities in television and cinema, and that can be deemed as an important contribution to give visibility to the many pieces forming the rich mosaic of sexual diversity, which the Brazilian audience is familiarized with. By and large, my results have demonstrated that the way how gay-related terms were transposed in BP could provide viewers with lexical choices that were mostly comparable in terms of evaluative load, despite the very few dysphemetic solutions.

I conclude recalling Dyer (2005), for whom camp has a lot to do with gays, since it is a verbal style developed by them as a distinctive way of behaving and of relating to each other. If society is more inclined to expound and vindicate the rightness of heterosexuality, camp expounds and vindicates gayness, and if the two versions of the movie *The Boys in the Band* were successful in making it (camp) visible, so were the subtitles in BP.

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