MULTIMODAL TRANSLATION AND QUEER REPRESENTATION: SUBTITLING CHOICES AND THEIR IMPACT ON LGBTQ+ NARRATIVES IN ARCANE

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how subtitling choices influence audience perceptions of queer relationships and feminist themes in the animated series *Arcane*. Recognizing the growing representation of LGBTQ+ characters in global media, this research examines the complexities, challenges, and cultural sensitivities associated with translating queer narratives. Through a qualitative comparative textual analysis of original English dialogues and Brazilian Portuguese subtitles from selected key episodes of *Arcane*, this study examines linguistic shifts and translation strategies such as condensation, omission, explicitation, and cultural adaptation. The results indicate that subtitling choices subtly impact emotional dephts, gendered language, and thematic coherence, potentially shaping viewer engagement with the characters' queer identities. Furthermore, the analysis reveals how translation strategies can either intensify or soften LGBTQ+ visibility, thereby influencing the reception of feminist and queer themes. The findings underscore the ethical responsibility of translators in authentically representing LGBTQ+ relationships, making a significant contribution

Carolina Tavares de Carvalho
Ph.D. student in Applied Linguistics at São Paulo State University (UNESP), São José do Rio Preto campus. She works in the research line of Pedagogy of the Lexicon and Translation Based on Corpora, where she also completed her master's degree. As part of her Ph.D., she carried out a research internship at the University of Queensland, in Brisbane, Australia. Her research focuses on Data-Driven Learning (DDL), with an emphasis on its pedagogical implementation in developing country contexts, especially in teacher education and language curriculum design. She is particularly interested in how translation intersects with corpus-based pedagogical practices. She is a member of research groups focused on translation and corpora and collaborates on projects aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9446-6394. E-mail: carolina.tavares@unesp.br

Dr. Talita Serpa
Translator, linguist, and professor affiliated with São Paulo State University (UNESP), where she serves as a collaborating professor in the Graduate Program in Linguistic Studies (IBILCE). She also teaches at the Elias Nechar Technical School and the São Paulo State Faculty of Technology (FATEC). She holds a Ph.D. and an M.A. in Translation Studies from UNESP, and three undergraduate degrees: a B.A. in Translation (UNESP), a B.A. in Social Sciences (UFSCar), and a B.A. in Portuguese and English Language and Literature (UNIP). She completed a CAPES-funded postdoctoral fellowship at UNESP between 2019 and 2023. Her academic and teaching work bridges translation studies, corpus linguistics, terminology, and the social sciences, with a particular focus on corpus-based approaches to translation. She is especially interested in the intersections between language, society, and specialized discourse, and her recent projects have explored the use of multilingual corpora and terminological analysis in professional and educational contexts. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3324-9593. E-mail: talita.serpa@unesp.br

Lauro Maia Amorim
Translator and professor at São Paulo State University (UNESP), São José do Rio Preto campus, where he teaches in the Undergraduate Program in Translation and the Graduate Program in Linguistic Studies (Translation Studies). He holds a Ph.D. in Translation Studies from Binghamton University – State University of New York. His research investigates the representation of linguistic variation in translated literary texts and its connections with the cultural and economic dynamics shaped by the publishing industry. More recently, he has been interested in the role of affect and emotion, cooperativity, and mindfulness-based approaches in the training of literary and non-literary translators. These interests have been explored both in his academic research and in his teaching practice, especially through courses such as "Affects, Translation, and Language Studies." ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9141-9840. E-mail: lauro.maia@unesp.br

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to feminist and queer translation studies by highlighting the nuanced impact of translation on media representation and audience interpretation.

Keywords: Gender Performativity. Feminist Translation. LGBTQ+ Representation. Cultural Adaptation. Media Narratives.

RESUMO

Este estudo analisa o impacto das escolhas de legendagem na percepção do público sobre relações queer e temas feministas na série animada *Arcane*. Diante da crescente representação de personagens LGBTQ+ na mídia global, a pesquisa explora os desafios e sensibilidades culturais envolvidos na tradução de narrativas queer. A partir de uma análise textual qualitativa comparativa dos diálogos originais em inglês e das legendas em português do Brasil em episódios-chave, identificam-se deslocamentos linguísticos e estratégias de tradução, como condensação, omissão, explicitação e adaptação cultural. Os resultados mostram que as escolhas de legendagem influenciam nuances emocionais, marcadores de gênero e a coerência temática, podendo afetar o envolvimento do espectador com as identidades queer dos personagens. O estudo destaca a responsabilidade ética dos tradutores na representação autêntica de relações LGBTQ+ e contribui para os estudos de tradução feminista e queer ao evidenciar o impacto sutil da tradução na construção de significados na mídia.

Palavras-chave: Performatividade de gênero. Tradução feminista. Representação LGBTQ+. Adaptação cultural. Narrativas midiáticas.

Introduction

The representation of gender in the media has long been a focus of academic research, particularly with regard to the visibility and accuracy of LGBTQ+ narratives. Although queer identities are becoming more prevalent in contemporary media, they are often vulnerable to reinterpretation, particularly during the translation process. Media translation involves more than simply translating dialogue from one language to another; it also involves negotiating cultural, social, and ideological nuances (Venuti, 1995).

Visibility of queer characters in the media plays a vital role in promoting cultural recognition and social inclusion. While LGBTQ+ characters are now more prevalent in mainstream productions, the depth, authenticity and agency of their portrayal can vary considerably (Baer & Kindl, 2018). Research has shown that certain translations may obscure or diminish queer identities due to heteronormative assumptions in the target culture (Epstein & Gillett, 2017). These findings emphasise the importance of critically examining the translation strategies that influence global perceptions of LGBTQ+ relationships.

Within this framework, audiovisual translation emerges as a key site for negotiating queer visibility. Subtitling, constrained by character limits and temporal limitations, often involves simplification, omission, or reformulation (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021). These limitations can significantly impact how queer relationships are portrayed, either preserving or diminishing their expressive nuance. This study examines how subtitling decisions in Arcane influence perceptions of Vi and Caitlyn's relationship in a Brazilian Portuguese translation context.

Arcane, an animated series developed by Riot Games in collaboration with French animation studio Fortiche and distributed by Netflix, expands the narrative universe of the acclaimed game League of Legends. Set in the socially divided cities of Piltover and Zaun, the series explores deep socio-economic divides (Epicstream, 2021; Riot Games; Fortiche, 2021). At the heart of the narrative lies the canonically queer relationship between Vi and Caitlyn, two women from opposing social backgrounds, officially confirmed in Season 2. This dynamic provides a compelling site for examining how translation mediates LGBTQ+ representation.

The presence of powerful, multidimensional female characters like Vi, Caitlyn, and Jinx further distinguishes Arcane. These characters defy traditional gender roles through their physical strength, emotional depth and narrative agency. These are aspects that reflect the show's feminist dimension (Butler, 1990). Vi and Caitlyn, as a lesbian couple, enhance the storyline and serve as pivotal figures of queer representation, inviting critical reflection on gender and identity. However, the clarity with which their relationship is conveyed varies across cultural and linguistic contexts, highlighting the importance of analyzing how subtitling influences audience perception.

Subtitling plays a central role in audiovisual translation. It must strike a balance between conciseness, legibility, and fidelity to meaning (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021). When applied to queer narratives, it may result in representational shifts such as the neutralization, attenuation, or reinforcement of LGBTQ+ themes (Baer & Kaindl, 2018). The technical constraints of subtitles-limited space and timing-can contribute to the dilution or even erasure of queer subtexts. This study analyzes the Brazilian Portuguese subtitles of *Arcane* to assess how linguistic choices affect the visibility of Vi and Caitlyn's relationship, and whether the subtitled version preserves or alters its emotional and ideological nuances.

Research Gap

While many studies focus on textual or literary translation, fewer have examined the role of subtitling in shaping queer and feminist themes in animated series. This research addresses this gap by examining how the choices made by translators in *Arcane* influence the portrayal of LGBTQ+ characters, and either enhance or diminish feminist narratives.

Research questions

1. How do subtitling choices in Arcane influence the representation of Vi and Caitlyn's queer relationship?
2. What translation strategies (e.g., omission, compression, reformulation) are employed at key moments in the relationship, and how do these strategies affect audience perceptions?
3. To what extent do subtitling choices reflect, amplify, or mitigate the feminist and queer narratives present in the original dialogue?

This article explores the intersections of queer theory, feminist critique, and translation studies. By integrating perspectives from audiovisual translation theory, feminist translation practices (Von Flotow, 1997), and queer translation studies (Epstein; Gillett, 2017), this research contributes to discussions on translation as a mediator of gender and sexuality in global media.

The following sections present the theoretical framework, methodology, analysis of key episodes, and conclusion, emphasizing how translation choices shape perceptions of Vi and Caitlyn's relationship through Portuguese subtitling in Arcane.

Theoretical Framework

Media representations of gender and queer identity are intricately woven into broader cultural discourses and shaped by practices of translation. Central to this discussion is Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, which challenges essentialist notions of gender by arguing that it is not an innate trait but rather an ongoing performance enacted through language, social expectations, and mediated representations. In audiovisual media, these representations are further complicated by translation, which becomes a site of ideological negotiation—either reinforcing normative gender hierarchies or disrupting heteronormative assumptions.

Translation, particularly across linguistic and cultural boundaries, plays a critical role in shaping how gender and queer identities are perceived, adapted, or erased. As Jagose (1996) notes, queer identity itself resists fixed definition, making its representation especially vulnerable to shifts in meaning during translation. Building on these perspectives, the present research adopts an interdisciplinary lens, drawing from gender theory, media studies, and translation studies, to examine how subtitling mediates LGBTQ+ representation.

Butler's concept of performativity is foundational to understanding the fluid and constructed nature of gender, which is enacted and reiterated through media. This theoretical stance is particularly pertinent in contexts of media accessibility, where translation must grapple with the ethical implications of representing non-normative identities. Iturregui-Gallardo (2023) highlights the ethical stakes of translating

marginalized bodies—queer, disabled, or otherwise—underscoring how translation practices may reproduce or resist systems of oppression.

The media, as a powerful tool in shaping public perceptions, plays a dual role: it can validate queer identities or contribute to their marginalization. According to Baer and Kaindl (2018) and Epstein and Gillett (2017), translation strategies used for LGBTQ+ characters often depend on the sociopolitical context of the target culture. These strategies—ranging from explicit representation to erasure—are influenced by censorship, audience expectations, and dominant cultural ideologies, all of which impact how queer narratives are received.

Within translation studies, media translation is understood as a multidimensional process that involves linguistic, cultural, and ideological mediation. Lawrence Venuti's (1995) concepts of domestication and foreignization are particularly useful for analyzing subtitling practices. Domestication aligns the source text with the norms of the target culture, often toning down or omitting LGBTQ+ content, while foreignization retains source-language features and may challenge dominant assumptions in the target context.

A concrete example can be seen in the animated series *Arcane*, where Vi's use of the nickname "cupcake" evolves from ironic to affectionate. In the Brazilian Portuguese subtitles, this term is rendered as "docinho," a more culturally familiar and neutral expression. This translation choice exemplifies a domesticating strategy that reduces the original's layered ambiguity, revealing how subtitling can dilute the queer-friendly tone of the source material.

Adding another dimension to this analysis is Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality, which elucidates how structures of class, race, and power intersect with gender and sexuality. *Arcane* explores these intersections through the characters of Vi and Caitlyn. Vi, raised in the marginalized undercity of Zaun, is criminalized and imprisoned, while Caitlyn enjoys the privileges of her elite Piltover background. Their emerging queer relationship unfolds within this socio-economic asymmetry, and capturing these dynamics in translation requires attentiveness to their distinct linguistic registers, slang, and cultural references.

Taylor (2013) expands the analysis by emphasizing the multimodal nature of audiovisual translation, which includes verbal, visual, and auditory elements. Subtitling, unlike literary translation, must balance conciseness with synchronicity to on-screen action. Díaz Cintas and Remael (2021) underscore how technical constraints—such as character limits and reading speed—affect how queer relationships are conveyed, often shaping or constraining their perceived authenticity.

Queer translation studies further explore how translation can function as a site of resistance or erasure. Baer and Kaindl (2018) draw attention to the risks of neutralizing queer content, while feminist translation theorists, such as von Flotow (1991), frame translation as a political act that challenges patriarchal discourse. In this sense, subtitling becomes not merely a technical practice but an act of gendered and ideological intervention.

Recent scholarship reinforces this view: Sáez del Álamo points to the importance of paratextual elements—such as translator notes—in fostering critical awareness and preserving queer complexity. Similarly, Villanueva-Jordán and Martínez-Carrasco (2023) show how these strategies can counteract narrative simplification and invite deeper engagement with LGBTQ+ themes.

By integrating insights from gender performativity, intersectionality, and multimodal translation, this research offers a theoretically grounded framework for analyzing how subtitling influences queer representations in media. Using *Arcane* as a case study, the following sections examine how specific translation choices shape audience perceptions of LGBTQ+ relationships, highlighting the ethical and cultural stakes embedded in the act of translation.

Methodology

Building on the theoretical frameworks outlined above, this study examines how subtitling choices impact the representation of queer relationships in the animated series Arcane. Specific scenes were selected from Episode 8 of Season 1, as well as Episodes 1, 3, 6, 8, and 9 of Season 2, because they depict key developments in Vi and Caitlyn's evolving relationship arc.

Season 1, Episode 8, presents a bedroom scene in which both characters reveal their emotional vulnerabilities, followed by a public confrontation that creates distance between them. In Season 2, the selected episodes capture the progression toward their first kiss, a subsequent separation due to external conflict, and ultimately a reunion that highlights their renewed commitment to each other. These scenes collectively offer a comprehensive view of how the series constructs and translates a queer narrative.

To ensure a careful analysis, transcriptions of the original English dialogue and their corresponding Brazilian Portuguese subtitles were collected directly from Netflix. These transcriptions serve as the foundation for a line-by-line comparative examination, aimed at uncovering how translation decisions shape audience perception. Each English utterance was analyzed alongside its Portuguese counterpart, with a focus on shifts in vocabulary, syntax, and tone.

Building on the linguistic variations observed above, this study categorizes these subtitle modifications into the following strategies:

- Condensation and omission, which may reduce or eliminate queer-coded language;
- Explicitation, where implicit meanings are made explicitly clear through subtitle choices;
- Cultural adaptation, examining how local norms influence translators' decisions;
- Multimodal cohesion, evaluating how subtitles align with visual and auditory elements to preserve narrative coherence.

By systematically comparing linguistic elements and annotation patterns, the study identifies potential erasures or reinforcements of queer subtexts, with particular attention to how subtitles mediate gendered language, power dynamics, and emotional nuance. This analytical orientation aligns with feminist and queer translation studies, examining whether translation choices amplify, mitigate, or neutralize LGBTQ+ themes embedded in the original dialogue.

Reliability and Constraints

This study draws on established methodologies in audiovisual translation research, particularly comparative textual analysis techniques commonly applied in subtitling studies (Díaz Cintas; Remael, 2021). Since the data were collected from official Netflix subtitles, the analysis also considers platform-specific norms that may influence translator decisions. These include character limit policies, reading speed guidelines, and name translation protocols outlined in Netflix's general style guide.

Notably, Netflix specifies that proper names must not be translated unless explicitly authorized, and that nicknames should only be adapted if they carry a specific meaning (NETFLIX, 2024). This policy is especially relevant to terms of endearment, such as "cupcake", which may be kept as is or adapted to fit cultural expectations, depending on how it functions within the character relationship. While no additional platform constraints were identified beyond these publicly available instructions, recognizing such standards is essential to understanding how institutional frameworks subtly influence translation decisions and, by extension, the representation of queer relationships.

By combining qualitative and comparative methods, this analysis sheds light on the complex interplay of linguistic, cultural, and ideological factors that shape subtitling practices and influence global representation of LGBTQ+ communities.

Analyses

The interactions between Vi and Caitlyn in *Arcane*, spanning both Season 1 and Season 2, offer a rich context for examining how translation choices influence the portrayal of queer relationships and feminist themes. By comparing original English dialogues with their corresponding Brazilian Portuguese subtitles, we identify how subtitling mediates gendered language, emotional nuance, and sociocultural themes, aligning closely with feminist translation practices (von Flotow, 1991) and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (Butler, 1990). Additionally, we assess whether these strategies reflect domestication or foreignization (Venuti, 1995) and consider any potential erasures of queer visibility (Baer & Kaindl, 2018).

Scene-by-Scene Analysis

To illustrate these dynamics, Tables 1–3 present key lines from specific episodes. Table 1 focuses on Episode 8 (Season 1), where Vi and Caitlyn's emotional vulnerabilities and social differences come to the fore. Tables 2 and 3 examine selected moments from Season 2.

Table 1. Selected Exchanges from Episode 8 (Season 1)

English Source Dialogue	**Portuguese Subtitle**	**Comments**
"Will you be okay? I'll be right back." *(Vi)*	"Você vai ficar bem? Já volto." *(Vi)*	Retains Vi's reassuring tone, reflecting minimal domestication. Aligns with feminist translation by maintaining the affective subtlety that underpins the characters' growing intimacy (von Flotow, 1991).
"It was all for nothing." *(Cait)*	"Foi tudo em vão." *(Cait)*	Direct translation, capturing Caitlyn's despair. **No attenuation**, thus preserving the **emotional resonance**. Reinforces the queer subtext of shared vulnerability.
"And you found a stray." *(Cassandra)*	"E trouxe uma zé-ruela." *(Cassandra)*	A **domesticating** choice that uses colloquial Brazilian slang. Signals class-based prejudice, underscoring *Arcane*'s intersectional aspects (Crenshaw, 1989) of socio-economic discrimination.
"What happened to her, it's not your fault." *(Cait)*	"A culpa pelo que aconteceu com ela não é sua." *(Cait)*	Maintains Caitlyn's comforting tone, emphasizing Vi's emotional vulnerability. Reflects Butler's performativity in demonstrating **the fluid roles of comforter/caregiver**.
"Oil and water. Wasn't meant to be." *(Vi)*	"Óleo e água. Não era pra ser." *(Vi)*	By preserving the phrase's literal structure, it **suggests a foreignizing approach**, emphasizing structural inequalities that hamper their relationship (Venuti, 1995).

Source: this research

In these examples, we see subtitling choices that maintain emotional resonance ("Foi tudo em vão", "A culpa... não é sua") alongside more colloquial adaptations ("zé-ruela"). Together, they reflect a mixed strategy: preserving certain metaphors and emotional content (foreignization) while also using local slang (domestication). From a queer translation perspective, the lines remain faithful to the characters'

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emotional arcs, ensuring minimal erasure of the relationship's intimacy and emotional complexity. Next, we build on this by examining performativity and emotional stakes in Season 2, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Selected Exchanges from Episode 3 (Season 2)

English Source Dialogue	**Portuguese Subtitle**	**Comments**
"I think we should cut the others loose. Listen, if that Heenot idiot is telling the truth, Jinx is gonna have surprises in store for us." *(Vi)* "All the more reasons to bring back up. (*Cait, Ep. 3)* "She'll smell their nerves a mile and find a way to use them against us. Tell me I am wrong. *(Vi)*	"Acho melhor liberar os outros. Se o idiota do Heenot estiver falando a verdade, Jinx vai ter surpresas guardadas para nós. (Vi) "Mais um motivo para trazer reforços." *Ep. 3)* "Ela vai farejar o medo deles de longe e dará um jeito de usa-los contra nós. Diga que estou errada." *(Vi)*	This exchange reflects strategic alignment and mutual concern. While the subtitles remain mostly faithful, certain tonal nuances—such as Vi's urgency and Caitlyn's restrained pragmatism—are softened. The figurative "smell their nerves" is translated literally, which is not incorrect and can be understood, but in Brazilian Portuguese, the expression "sentir o medo" is more common and idiomatically resonant. The choice reflects a slightly **foreignizing approach** (Venuti, 1995), yet it may lack the visceral emotional impact that the original evokes. As such, this example illustrates a **subtle disconnect**: even when translations are accurate, they can **miss affective intensity**—highlighting the **limits of formal fidelity** in conveying queer subtext and emotional nuance.
"I can let her get away again. Are you sure you're ready to...? " (*Cait)* "My sister is gone. There's only Jinx now. It has to end. I'm so sorry about your mother. I'm sorry I can't bring her back, but please, just... Everyone in my life has changed. Promise me you won't change." *(Vi)*	"Não posso deixá-la escapar de novo. Tem certeza de que está pronta...? (*Cait)* "Minha irmã se foi. Só existe a Jinx agora. Isso tem que acabar. Sinto muito pela sua mãe. Sinto muito por não poder trazê-la de volta, mas por favor... Todos na minha vida mudaram. Prometa que não vai mudar. *(Vi)*	This emotionally charged sequence layers grief, trauma, and queer longing. The subtitles are mostly faithful, preserving key metaphors and affective phrases. Vi's plea—"Promise me you won't change"—emerges as a pivotal moment of emotional anchoring, underscoring the **queer performative construction of loyalty and identity** (Butler, 1990). By retaining this vulnerability, the translation supports **feminist translation principles** (Von Flotow, 1991), safeguarding emotional nuance.

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English Source Dialogue	Portuguese Subtitle	Comments
(They kiss) "I won't." *(Cait)*	*(Elas se beijam)* "Não vou." *(Cait)*	This is the narrative climax of queer intimacy between Vi and Caitlyn. The subtitle retains the simplicity and emotional force of Caitlyn's promise—"Não vou"—preserving the tone of affective commitment. From a queer translation perspective (Baer & Kaindl, 2018), this moment exemplifies minimal mediation and high narrative impact, thereby reinforcing the emotional coherence of the scene.
"I keep telling myself that you're different. But you're not. It's her blood in your veins." *(Cait)*	"Fico me dizendo que você é diferente. Mas não é. O sangue dela corre nas suas veias." *(Cait)*	A mostly **faithful rendering** that retains the tension between Caitlyn and Vi. Reflects Butler's notion of performativity: Caitlyn frames Vi's identity as "inherited," shaping conflict. No strong domestication, so the **conflict and possible queer subtext** remain intact.

Source: this research

The scenes selected from Episode 3 (Season 2), detailed in Table 2, mark a turning point in Vi and Caitlyn's relationship. These moments portray growing intimacy, emotional vulnerability, and shared risk, offering a particularly fertile ground for analyzing how subtitling mediates affective and performative dimensions of queer representation.

In one exchange, Vi warns: *"She'll smell their nerves a mile and find a way to use them against us. Tell me I'm wrong."* The Portuguese subtitle: *"Ela vai farejar o medo deles de longe e dará um jeito de usá-los contra nós. Diga que estou errada"*, retains the literal imagery. While not incorrect, the expression *"sentir o medo"* would be more idiomatically resonant in Brazilian Portuguese. This literal rendering reflects a slightly foreignizing approach (Venuti, 1995), but it risks dulling the visceral emotional impact of the original. The tonal nuance of Vi's urgency and Caitlyn's measured pragmatism is somewhat flattened, revealing how even accurate translations can fall short in capturing affective intensity—highlighting the limits of formal fidelity in conveying queer subtext.

Later in the scene, Vi pleads: *"Promise me you won't change."* The subtitle: *"Prometa que não vai mudar"*, faithfully conveys her emotional vulnerability. From a performative perspective (Butler, 1990), this moment anchors Vi's identity in loyalty and queer longing. It also aligns with feminist translation ethics (Von Flotow, 1991) by preserving the affective charge and resisting erasure.

The emotional climax of the scene occurs when, after Caitlyn and Vi kiss, Caitlyn replies simply: *"I won't."* The subtitle: *"Não vou",* retains this minimalism, preserving

the emotional force of her commitment. From a queer translation standpoint (Baer & Kaindl, 2018), this moment exemplifies minimal mediation and maximum impact, reinforcing the emotional coherence of the relationship and illustrating how subtitles can powerfully sustain queer narratives when handled with restraint and sensitivity.

Following this culmination of emotional intimacy, the next dialogue shifts the tone toward conflict and identity negotiation. Caitlyn asserts: *"I keep telling myself that you're different. But you're not. It's her blood in your veins."* The subtitle: *"Fico me dizendo que você é diferente. Mas não é. O sangue dela corre nas suas veias*, effectively conveys the accusation and emotional weight. This moment adopts a foreignizing approach by preserving the original metaphor without cultural adaptation, supporting the narrative tension. Moreover, it echoes Butler's (1990) notion of performativity, as Caitlyn implies that Vi's identity is shaped by lineage, reflecting how inherited roles and social scripts can influence expressions of selfhood. In Table 3, we present some examples from episodes 1, 6, 8, and 9.

Table 3. Selected Exchanges from Episodes 1, 6, 8, and 9 (Season 2)

Episode	**English Source Dialogue**	**Portuguese Subtitle**	**Comments**
Ep. 1	"I was wrong to spring the badge on you. It's just... every way I slice it, if I go after your sister alone, one of us comes back in a box. It's all coming apart." *(Cait, ep. 1)*	"Errei em mostra o distintivo para você. É que...de todas as formas que vejo, se eu for atrás da sua irmã sozinha, uma de nós voltará em uma caixa. Está tudo desmoronando." *(Cait, ep. 1)*	The idiom "comes back in a box" is preserved literally, suggesting a foreignizing approach (Venuti, 1995) that maintains the emotional gravity of Caitlyn's fear. While potentially unclear for Brazilian audiences, the subtitle sustains the scene's affective tension. Vi's response, "Nós não vamos deixar," reinforces a performative declaration of queer solidarity and emotional partnership (Butler, 1990; von Flotow, 1991).
Ep. 6	"Cupcake!" *(Vi, ep. 6)*	"Docinho!" *(Vi, ep. 6)*	Nickname referencing *League of Legends* lore. **Domestication** from "cupcake" to "docinho" makes it more relatable to Brazilian audiences but slightly **alters the playful resonance** recognized by original fans. Reflects Venuti's (1995) tension between preserving & adapting, and can reduce unique queer-coded flavor.

Episode	English Source Dialogue	Portuguese Subtitle	Comments
Ep. 8	"Had a feeling I might find you here." *(Cait, ep. 8)*	"Imaginei que talvez estivesse aqui." *(Cait, ep. 8)*	Straightforward translation capturing Caitlyn's hesitance. Aligns with a **feminist translation** stance (von Flotow, 1991) by respecting the nuance of vulnerability.
Ep. 8	"I don't fucking care." *(Vi, ep. 8)*	"Não dou a mínima." *(Vi, ep. 8)*	Uses a **less explicit** expletive in Portuguese, indicating **attenuation** that can soften the raw emotional edge of Vi's statement. Potentially reduces the subversive force highlighting their rebellion (Baer & Kaindl, 2018).
Ep. 9	**"Is that... singing?"** *(Cait, ep. 9)*	"Você cantando?" *(Cait, ep. 9)*	Brief, direct line. Retains the sense of mild surprise. Minimal domestication – the original rhetorical structure remains, preserving Caitlyn's inquisitive tone.
Ep. 9	**"It's just a tune my mother used to hum."** *(Vi, ep. 9)*	"É só uma música que a minha mãe cantarolava." *(Vi, ep. 9)*	Faithful rendering that preserves Vi's nostalgic vulnerability. Reflects a **foreignizing** tendency by maintaining the mother/daughter connection without cultural shifts. Aligns with Butler's (1990) idea that identity is relational and shaped by repeated references to one's past.
Ep. 9	**"Are you still in this fight, Violet?"** *(Cait, ep. 9)*	"Você ainda está nessa brigada, Violet?" *(Cait, ep. 9)*	Maintains near-literal translation, slightly adjusting "fight" to "brigada." Emphasizes Caitlyn's direct inquiry about Vi's resolve. **No major attenuation**; upholds tension in line with *Arcane*'s socio-political conflicts.
Ep. 9	**"I am the dirty under your nails, Cupcake. Nothing's gonna clear me out."** *(Vi, ep. 9)*	"Sou a terra sob suas unhas, docinho. Nada vai me limpar." *(Vi, ep. 9)*	**Preserves** the literal imagery of "dirty under your nails," highlighting class prejudice and personal intimacy. "Cupcake" → "docinho" again illustrates **domestication**, possibly diluting the unique *League of Legends* nuance. From a Butlerian lens, it underscores how identity/performativity is shaped by external judgments and internal pride in "where one belongs."

Source: this research

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To conclude this comparative analysis, Table 3 draws from Episodes 1, 6, 8, and 9 of Season 2, further illustrating how translation choices impact the representation of queer intimacy and power dynamics. The scene in Episode 1, for instance, highlights Caitlyn's vulnerability as she admits fear for both her and Jix's lives: *"One of us comes back in a box."* The Brazilian subtitle retains the expression *"voltará em uma caixa"* almost verbatim, a foreignizing choice (Venuti, 1995) that may sound unusual to Brazilian viewers unfamiliar with this idiom. However, this decision preserves the emotional weight of Caitlyn's concern, sustaining the moment's affective charge. Vi's reply, *"Nós não vamos deixar",* reinforces their solidarity, making this a performative moment of mutual protection and queer partnership (Butler, 1990; Von Flotow, 1991). This alignment of danger and commitment anticipates the evolution of their bond across subsequent episodes.

Other examples in the table underscore how tonal adjustments and cultural adaptations accumulate to shape character development and audience perception. For instance, the recurrent domestication of the nickname "*cupcake*" into "*docinho"* reflects a shift toward local familiarity but tones down the distinct, ironic affection embedded in the original. Conversely, expressions such as "*I am the dirty under your nails*" retain their metaphorical intensity, illustrating a semi-foreignizing strategy that privileges emotional authenticity. Lines referencing singing and maternal memory, "*It's just a tune my mother used to hum*", further enrich the narrative with layered sentiment, preserved through minimally mediated subtitles.

Together, these examples reveal that Arcane's Brazilian subtitles follow a hybrid strategy, balancing domesticating and foreignizing tendencies. From a queer and feminist translation perspective, this combination allows many affective and ideological nuances to be maintained, even as some subversive or playful tones are softened. Crucially, the subtitles preserve key moments of intimacy, grief, and defiance—moments that construct Vi and Caitlyn's relationship as emotionally and politically significant. These choices not only shape how Brazilian audiences engage with queer narratives but also demonstrate the ethical and interpretive power of subtitling in mediating identities across cultures.

Conclusion

The analysis of Vi and Caitlyn's interactions across key episodes of *Arcane* demonstrates how subtitling can significantly shape audience perceptions of queer relationships and feminist narratives in audiovisual media. By focusing on specific moments of intimacy, conflict, and reconciliation, this study addresses the following research questions

1. How do subtitling choices in *Arcane* influence the representation of Vi and Caitlyn's queer relationship?

Subtitling choices can maintain or reduce the explicitness of the characters' emotional relationships. When metaphors, endearments, and expressions of vulnerability are faithfully rendered, the original's queer subtext is preserved. However, attenuation or domestication, such as softening expletives or adapting terms like *"cupcake"* to *"docinho",* may affect how viewers perceive the couple's radical potential. Key emotionally charged moments, such as the kiss in Episode 3 or Caitlyn's line *"One of us comes back in a box,"* illustrate how subtitling either preserves, softens, or reconfigures affective intensity. These instances demonstrate the subtler ways in which subtitles mediate queer intimacy, shaping viewer engagement across cultural-linguistic boundaries.

2. What translation strategies (e.g., omission, condensation, reformulation) are employed at key moments in the relationship, and how do these strategies impact audience perceptions? Strategies such as condensation (shortening lines for readability), omission (toning down expletives or removing nuances), explicitation (making implicit meanings more transparent), and cultural adaptation (translating *"cupcake"* to *"docinho")* emerge in the subtitles. These can emphasize or reduce queer visibility: faithful translations retain subversive or intimate tones, while reformulated lines may soften or obscure them. As a result, viewers' engagement with Vi and Caitlyn's bond hinges on the degree to which original nuances are preserved or reshaped.

That said, the presence of some accurately rendered yet emotionally less impactful lines, such as the literal translation of *"smell their nerves",* raises questions about whether fidelity alone ensures the preservation of emotional tension, a key dimension in the portrayal of queer intimacy. While not overtly queer, this moment builds affective stakes by foregrounding trust, danger, and vulnerability—core elements in the characters' evolving relationship. These instances challenge the hypothesis that faithful subtitling alone guarantees the retention of queer subtext, pointing instead to the importance of audience reception and cultural familiarity.

3. To what extent do subtitling choices reflect, amplify, or mitigate the feminist and queer narratives present in the original dialogue? In several instances, subtitling supports feminist and queer elements by conveying emotional complexity and preserving metaphors of agency and commitment. For example, the subtitle *"Não vou"* retains the emotional force of Caitlyn's promise in the kiss scene (Episode 3), reinforcing affective commitment with minimal mediation. Similarly, the line *"Sou a terra sob suas unhas, docinho"* preserves the raw metaphor that expresses Vi's loyalty and defiance, aligning with Butler's view of identity as performative and situated.

However, domestication occasionally neutralizes the edginess of the dialogue and slightly diminishes its subversive potential. The consistent adaptation of *"cupcake"* to *"docinho,"* while culturally accessible, softens a term with queer-coded playfulness rooted in League of Legends lore. Likewise, the attenuation of Vi's expletive in *"I don't fucking care"* to the milder *"Não dou a mínima"* reduces the rebellious tone that underscores her non-conformity.

Overall, the hybrid approach—combining foreignizing elements (e.g., metaphor retention, literal idioms) with domesticating choices (e.g., localized slang, softened expressions)—effectively captures much of Arcane's queer and feminist spirit, albeit with occasional dilution of queer-coded flourishes. The expanded scene-by-scene analysis strengthens the article's critical scope and analytical depth, aligning it more closely with the demands of queer-focused audiovisual translation research, as emphasized by current scholarship in the field.

Netflix Guidelines and Their Impact

In addition, Netflix's style guide for Brazilian Portuguese- a framework that addresses issues such as character limits, reading speeds, and guidelines for translating names and nicknames-likely influenced the translators' strategies. While these rules facilitate clear, consistent subtitles, they can also encourage domestication to promote local cultural accessibility. For example, the retention or adaptation of nicknames (e.g., *"cupcake")* may be influenced by Netflix's provisions for translating or retaining proper names and terms of affection. As a result, the tension between cultural fidelity and viewer comprehension is heightened, particularly in moments crucial to conveying *Arcane*'s queer and feminist resonances.

Ethical Implications

From a queer/feminist translation perspective, translators bear a heightened ethical responsibility to avoid inadvertently undermining LGBTQ+ narratives, particularly amid ongoing internet misogyny and backlash against queer representation (Cantone, Tomaselli, & Mazzeo, 2024). Inclusive subtitles, which faithfully represent strong female and queer characters, serve as a counterweight to potential cultural resistance and censorship. Conversely, mistranslations or neutralizing strategies risk feeding into heteronormative or patriarchal sentiments and limiting diverse storytelling.

These ethical considerations cannot be separated from commercial and sociocultural pressures, which frequently shape how far a translation is allowed to go. In societies where conservative values remain prominent, media producers and

distributors may favor hybrid or toned-down representations to maximize audience reach and avoid backlash. These constraints can affect both the scope of queer visibility, and the narrative boldness permitted in translated content.

In the Brazilian context specifically, where progressive and conservative forces coexist in ongoing tension, queer representation in mainstream media may face additional restrictions—not only from platform policies but from prevailing cultural expectations. This sociocultural environment, marked by both resistance and increasing openness, helps explain the hybrid nature of translated content: one that seeks to gesture toward inclusion while remaining cautious enough to appeal to broader audiences. In this sense, translation operates not only between languages, but also between ideological tensions embedded in national and global cultures.

Limitations

A major limitation of this study is its focus on a single target language, Brazilian Portuguese, and a selection of episodes from *Arcane*. While this approach enables detailed comparative textual analysis, the results cannot be generalized to all languages or the entire series. In addition, the data is derived from official Netflix subtitles, without direct insight into the translator's intentions or workflow, which limits our ability to account for behind-the-scenes decision-making processes.

Future Directions

Future research could extend these findings by examining other languages and cultural contexts, using a larger corpus of episodes or additional series with prominent LGBTQ+ storylines. Reception studies could also help ascertain how Brazilian audiences perceive these translated queer and feminist elements, shedding light on the real-world impact of subtitling. Conducting interviews with subtitlers or analyzing translator commentary could further clarify the rationale behind the choice between domestication and foreignization. These lines of inquiry would deepen our understanding of how translation both reflects and negotiates broader sociocultural discourses around gender and sexuality.

Building on this, it would also be valuable to investigate the extent to which cultural productions, especially global streaming content, truly promote inclusive queer representations, or whether such portrayals remain limited by commercial imperatives that aim to accommodate conservative markets. Such an approach could help discern meaningful inclusion from symbolic gestures shaped more by marketability than by genuine commitment to diversity.

In conclusion, this study underscores the crucial role of translators in promoting inclusive and authentic representations of queer relationships and feminist themes

in the media. By examining the subtitling choices in *Arcane*, we see that deliberate, ethically conscious strategies can either enhance or diminish the transformative potential of the narrative. As global streaming platforms like Netflix continue to bring diverse content to international audiences, a commitment to nuanced and ethical subtitling remains essential to promoting true LGBTQ+ visibility.

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