



## TIKTOK FOR PRACTICING TRANSLATION OF SONGS<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** Technology and translation are related since the competences of using different resources can be helpful for the translator. Thus, this study aims to explore the potential of the tools of the social network "TikTok" as a resource for learning the English language, and practicing translation skills such as: translation units, subtitling, copywriting skills, knowledge of the language context within the culture. It is an experience report about how this tool was useful for exercising the translation of pop songs by means of a page named "traduzindo.hits". The linguistic aspects highlighted about the translations are mainly morphological and lexical. The theoretical perspective adopted to analyze the data is mostly based on Alves et al (2010), Baker (2019), Desjardins (2016), and Hobold (2010). As some results accomplished, with just over one year, more than 200 songs were translated and published on the mentioned page, which has gathered more than 45 thousand followers by November 2022.

**Keywords:** TikTok. Translation. Song.

**RESUMO:** Tecnologia e tradução estão relacionadas, uma vez que a competência de usar diferentes recursos pode ser útil para o tradutor. Assim, este estudo tem como objetivo explorar o potencial das ferramentas da rede social "TikTok" como recurso para aprender a língua inglesa e praticar habilidades de tradução como: unidades de tradução, legendagem, habilidades de copywriting, conhecimento do contexto da língua dentro da cultura. Trata-se de um relato de experiência sobre como essa ferramenta foi útil para o exercício da tradução de músicas pop por meio de uma página denominada "traduzindo.hits". Os aspectos

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linguísticos destacados nas traduções são principalmente morfológicos, e lexicais. A perspectiva teórica adotada para analisar os dados baseia-se principalmente em Alves et al (2010), Baker (2019), Desjardins (2016), e Hobold (2010). Como resultado, com pouco mais de um ano, mais de 200 músicas foram traduzidas e publicadas na página mencionada, que conquistou mais de 45 mil seguidores até novembro de 2022.

**Palavras-chave:** TikTok. Tradução. Música.

## INTRODUCTION

This research aims to report the experience of practicing translations of songs using a social media platform, namely TIKTOK, as a tool to develop translation competences.

TikTok is an “application”, popularly known as “app” for making and sharing short videos. Concerning some characteristics of these videos, we highlight: a) the format: elongated videos that fill the entire mobile screen, b) the length: initially the videos were between 30 seconds to a minute, but recently the platform made available the duration of 10 minutes for longer videos, a function that is still rarely used by creators, c) the interaction among the users: users can follow each other, react to the videos of their "friends" using “like” button, as well as react to random people’s videos, make comments and share the videos to other platforms like *Facebook*, *Instagram* or *WhatsApp*; users can also interact with each other via live streams.

For Desjardins (2016, p. 14) “Gone are the days when only the few could share information or disseminate knowledge; today, anyone with access to the Web and an electronic device, be it a mobile phone, tablet or computer (laptop or desktop), can contribute to ‘the conversation’”. The author reflects on the fact that social media have become democratic to the point of having all the interaction we see today with globalization, and contrasts this with translation: “Translation, in a sense, shares a similar history. Globalization has undoubtedly increased contact between different cultures and different languages” (DESJARDINS, 2016, p. 15).

Video creators have many tools to use in their videos, such as effects that can change the color of the video or even the scenery, or add props on the person's head, add makeup on the face; you can also add sound to the video, and subtitles. Users may be interacting with

each other through comments, likes, replies with videos, and as already mentioned by sharing the videos.

Tiktok is a free and easy-to-use application, thus being one of the most used social media or social networks in recent times, having a significant increase during the COVID-19 pandemic. “Since November 2018 figures have increased from 680 million active monthly users to over 1.1 billion monthly active users in 2021” (THE RISE OF TIKTOK DURING COVID-19, 2021). People couldn't leave the house to work, study, or do anything else because of the social distancing and isolation that was imposed so that it could contain the spread of the virus, so people without much opportunity to do the things they were used to do daily, found on Tiktok the opportunity to continue doing these things, even from inside their homes, and having the possibility to share with the world a little of their daily life and the things they knew so that they wouldn't feel so much impact that social isolation would have on their lives.

In this paper, the application tiktok was used as a tool to practice the translating of songs, focusing on its editing tools, such as the possibility to add subtitles to videos, effects, and music.

## **JUSTIFICATION**

Why using Tiktok for translation practice? The TikTok application, in addition to being an easy-to-use application, has a wide range of tools that can be used in the practice of translation and subtitling, as well as the application also allows users to quickly create videos and maintain interaction with the other creators and users of the application, thus stimulating more and more the use of the platform and its tools that are rich in filters, types of subtitles, and the variety of sounds that you can use, or even use your own audio and video.

According to Pilgrim et. al. (2012, p. 1) “New technologies are changing the way educators think about education and literacy”. With so much advancement in technology, we can't help but update ourselves frequently, always changing the way we teach and learn, and adapting to these changes. In the US, the Department of Education provided a technology plan education to encourage and improve personal and professional development. “National educational technology plan (2010), titled *Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology*. The authors of this plan recommend applying the advanced

technologies for personal and professional use to instruction and pedagogy to improve student learning”, According to Pilgrim et. al. (2012, p. 1).

With the pandemic, TikTok became one of the most used social networks, people spend hours watching videos, and there are also several people teaching how to dance, to cook, teaching new languages, such as English, which can be taught in a few ways, and in this work, the TikTok application will be used as a tool to practice music translation.

Browsing on Google Scholar, it is possible to observe there are not many works written in this area of social media as a tool for translation practice, and also how there is not much research using media applications/social networks for teaching the English language, although it is widely used for teaching, not only the English language, but also several other languages, even so, there are not many academic works addressing these topics.

Technological resources such as "TikTok" should be more explored by education professionals, especially by English language teachers, since in the application it is possible to create conversation, listening, translation activities, and thus make students develop autonomy in learning the language.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

The theoretical framework of this research will be composed, at first, by authors who analyze and discuss questions about Translation Studies, in this perspective, the contribution of authors such as Munday (2001), Toro (2007), Baker (2019), Juci Mara Cordeiro (2006), and Fryer (2016), become essential. In the same way, concepts about subtitling will be used, from theorists such as Cintas et. al. (2014).

To complement this study, definitions on translation and social media will be addressed. In this way, the concepts and their respective authors Santos et. al.(2010), Desjardins(2016), make an effective contribution to the objectives that are expected to be achieved with this research.

### **Translation Studies**

Munday explains a little about the importance of written and spoken translations throughout history “Throughout history, written and spoken translations have played a crucial role in interhuman communication, not least in providing access to important texts for

scholarship and religious purposes.” (MUNDAY, 2010, p. 5). Spoken and written translation not only played an important role throughout history, they still play an important role today. The author (2014) also points out that translation is an activity that is centered on texts. From the considerations explained in Munday's books, as well as the influence of specialized translation courses at initiation and postgraduate levels, translation studies became more visible.

Translation Studies is an academic discipline that studies the theory and practice of translation. It is, by nature, a multilingual but also interdisciplinary field of study since it establishes relationships with linguistics, cultural studies, philosophy, the information sciences, and so forth. (TORO, 2007, p. 9-10)

Thus, it is notorious to observe that the study of translation is associated with the study of translation theory and events. Well, it encompasses languages, linguistics and a set of cultural studies. However, a distinction must be made between translation fundamentals and translation studies.

According to Toro (2007, p. 10) “Translation Studies is the discipline that deals with the study of translation. For Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997, p. 181) “One may talk of translation as a process or a product, and identify such sub-types as literary translation, technical translation.

For Baker (2019, p. 2) “Translation should be taken seriously by related disciplines such as linguistics, literary theory and cultural and communication studies, not least because these disciplines can benefit from the results of research carried out in the field of translation.” There is a prejudice against translation not only in the "academic" environment, but in society in general, Baker addresses this in his work.

According to Juci Mara Cordeiro (apud ALVES; MAGALHÃES; and PAGANO 2000, p. 38). For the authors, during the translation process, it is possible to segment the texts – source and target – in translation units, as a translation strategy.<sup>4</sup>

According to Fryer (2016, p 40), “ One principal concern of translation is how meaning carried through the words of one language or sign system can be conveyed through the words or signs of another”. It is at this moment that the work of the translator will make all the difference, because if he has knowledge of the world, of the culture of the language

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<sup>4</sup> Segundo Juci Mara Cordeiro (apud ALVES; MAGALHÃES; e PAGANO 2000, p. 38). Os autores sugerem que durante o processo tradutório, é possível segmentar os textos – fonte e alvo – em unidades de tradução, como uma estratégia de tradução.

that will be translated, the translation will be much more real and faithful, it will not be a “robotic” thing.

This topic sets out to examine what is meant by translation and translation studies. Next, we will address notions of subtitling, in the views of some theorists.

## **Subtitling**

When talking about translation one of the things that comes to mind is subtitling, because subtitling is very important in translation practice, according to Cintas et. al. (2014, p. 8), "Subtitling may be defined as a translation practice that consists of presenting a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen, that endeavours to recount the original dialogue of the speakers”.

In order to obtain a good subtitling, it is necessary to know some characteristics and some details that will make the subtitling less plastered, for Cintas et. al. (2014, p. 9), “Subtitles must appear in synchrony with the image and dialogue, provide a semantically adequate account of the SL dialogue, and remain displayed on screen long enough for the viewers to be able to read them”.

The authors cite other very important aspects regarding subtitling in this work, such as "As far as space is concerned, the dimensions of the actual screen are note and the target text will have to accommodate to the width of the screen. Although the figures vary, this means that a subtitle will have some 32 to 41 characters per line in a maximum of two lines”. Cintas et. al. (2014, p. 9).

There is the possibility for a more in-depth study on subtitling on smaller screen sizes, such as the formats that are being more consumed lately on cell phone screens, such as the Instagram reels format, which is the same format as videos from tiktok, which fill the entire cell phone screen.

## **Translation and Social Media**

Nowadays, when we have innovations in technologies at all times, it is important that the teacher is always adapting and qualifying so as not to be outdated. According to Santos et.

al. <sup>5</sup>"the process of incorporation of new educational technologies in the work of the university professor requires constant updates, as well as qualification and permanent formation."(apud Hobold, 2010). We cannot let technological tools become an obstacle for our profession, we have to use them in our favor and have them as allies in our daily lives.

For Desjardins (2016, p. 2) "If we think about how translation occurs today in professional settings, who can imagine working without a computer? Or word processing software? Or online reference materials? And yet, it is only in more recent years that researchers in TS have been considering the ways in which technology impacts how translators translate". The author warns that for the work of translation some kind of technological tool is necessary, and that only recently have researchers begun to consider these ways, and that this affects the work of the translator.

Social networks, together with translation, have a very large reach. We can currently observe on social networks where with just one click you can translate practically everything that is in another language, we are talking about collaborative translation. According to Desjardins (2013, p. 22), the author defines "contemporary collaborative translation as translation activity that occurs between any two (or more) agents involved in the translation process, from the translators themselves, to clients, to editors, to publishers, to agencies and so on". (Apud O'Brien, 2011). For Desjardins there are two examples used globally that are very important in collaborative translation, "OSM (online social media) platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are used globally and constitute two of the most important examples of crowdsourced translation". Even with the visibility and good performance of these platforms, there are still flaws and things to be adjusted.

Therefore, it is understood that technology is an ally of translation and the translator, and we must make it a practice, use technology to our advantage, and always keep up to date with what is new so that we do not fall backward.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this topic, the methodology used in this article will be presented, which is identified as an experience report and a descriptive study. According to Baker (2019) "A great deal of our experience of and knowledge about other cultures is mediated through various forms of

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<sup>5</sup>De acordo com Santos et. al. "o processo de incorporação das novas tecnologias educacionais no trabalho do professor universitário exige constantes atualizações, como também qualificação e formação permanente." (apud Hobold, 2010).

translation, including written translations, sub-titling, dubbing, and various types of interpreting activities.” and in this research we bring a possible way of learning, using translation.

### **How is done**

In the tiktok application, the song that will be translated is chosen, from the platform's own library, and then we select a video from the file gallery, usually a pre-edited video with the part of the song that will be translated, then we start adding subtitles to the video , the subtitling is done on the video while the video is playing to better understand where the translation units of each video frame should be, then the subtitles are added piece by piece, being possible at the end to adjust some units so that it is well aligned with the video, so that it is not delayed or advanced, and well centered in the video, also adjusting the font size so as not to disturb what is being shown in the video, but a size that the viewer can understand. Finally, we add a caption that will run throughout the entire video, the page watermark, which is centered at the bottom of the video, with a caption size smaller than the main caption.

### **Selection of songs**

The songs are chosen on the basis of certain criteria; songs that are currently successful, songs that have already been successful, songs that are trending within the app, songs requested by followers.

Songs that are currently successful: are songs that are number one on the charts, like the top of the billboard, the top of Spotify global, or that have a lot of views on the “tiktok” app; Songs that have already been successful: they are songs that were successful years ago, that were number 1 on the billboard chart, or that were just successful in the popular medium; Songs that are trending within the app: it's the songs that go viral, that are being used by almost all the app's users, the songs that become “popular”; Songs requested by followers: Followers can, through a question box, make requests for which songs they want to see translated on the page, or even in the comments of already published videos they can request the song they want to see translated on the page.

The songs are chosen as explained above, by songs that are currently successful, songs that have already been successful, songs that are trending within the app, songs requested by

followers. And the high part of the song is chosen, the chorus, or some other part that is making success in the famous trends of the moment, which are the dances, the tutorials or videos from any other niche.

### **Excerpt translated and subtitling**

The part chosen to be translated is usually the chorus, because it is in the chorus of the song that the main message that the artist wants to convey comes. The song is a story the singer is telling and when it hits the chorus it's the culmination of the story.

And there are some cases where followers ask to translate another specific part of some songs.

After choosing the part to be translated, the song is translated and the video is subtitled. Subtitling is a very important part, because according to Valente "Subtitling is a process that requires knowledge, technique, practice and, above all, a good sense to make the correct cuts, selections and adaptations, so that we do not have subtitles that cause strangeness, but subtitles that allow a good understanding."<sup>6</sup>

On the platform it is possible to choose some types of fonts for the subtitle, as well as choosing the font size and where you want to insert the subtitle, and you can also adjust the time the subtitle will appear in the video.

### **Video publication**

The publication of the finished video is done based on the peak times of the platform, which can change from one day to the next. On weekends, for example, we have 3 good times for publishing the video, on the other days only 2 or even only 1 good time. This "peak time" is the moment when you post a video and your publication is more likely to go viral, become a success, and thus reach more people. When you are going to publish a video, you can put a small caption with the description of the video, and you can also add hashtags to direct your video to certain niches of the platform, so when someone searches for "food" in the search option, if you've added the hashtag #food, your video will be one of the ones that pops up. After the description has been made and the hashtags added in your caption, you can select a

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<sup>6</sup> De acordo com Valente "A legendagem é um processo que exige conhecimento, técnica, prática e além de tudo isso, um bom senso para fazer os cortes, seleções e adaptações corretas, para que não tenhamos legendas que causem estranhamentos, mas sim, legendas que permitam uma boa compreensão."

cover for your video, usually you choose a part of the video that catches the attention of the followers, so that by the time they see the image in the profile layout, spark curiosity and watch the video, you can also be inserting a short description on the cover of the video. And before publishing you can also add location to your publication, manage the privacy of the post, choose if you want the platform to publish the video with a better quality, and after everything is ready you can add the publication to a draft of the platform, so the publication will be saved in the application and you will only need to enter later and select which one you want to publish.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

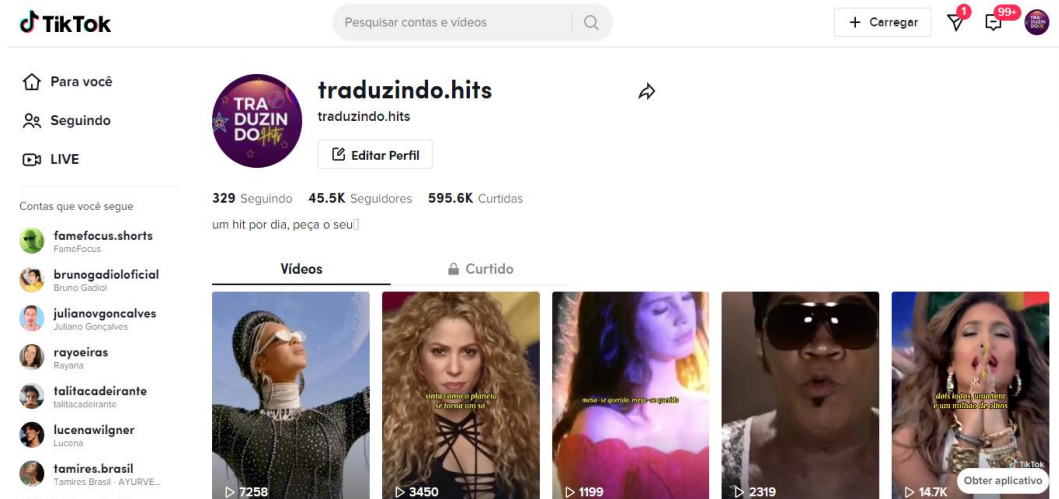
There are already more than 200 publications, with translations of artists from different musical genres from Rock to Pop, from R&B to Rap.

In November 2022, the “traduzindo.hits” page reached the impressive mark of 45 thousand followers.

The creation of the page “traduzindo hits” came from the desire to work with a translation of songs using the social network tiktok, which with the pandemic began to be used a lot. With the encouragement of the study group I belong to, ETMulti (Estudos da Tradução: Multifaces e Multisemioses) that is coordinated by Dr. Silvia Benchimol and Dr. Ewerton Branco, the idea of creating this article came up to show the possibility of using this social media “tiktok” as a tool for teaching and learning the English language, focusing on the translation and subtitling of songs.

This is the layout of the page, with information such as number of followers, number of likes, description, profile picture, and videos.

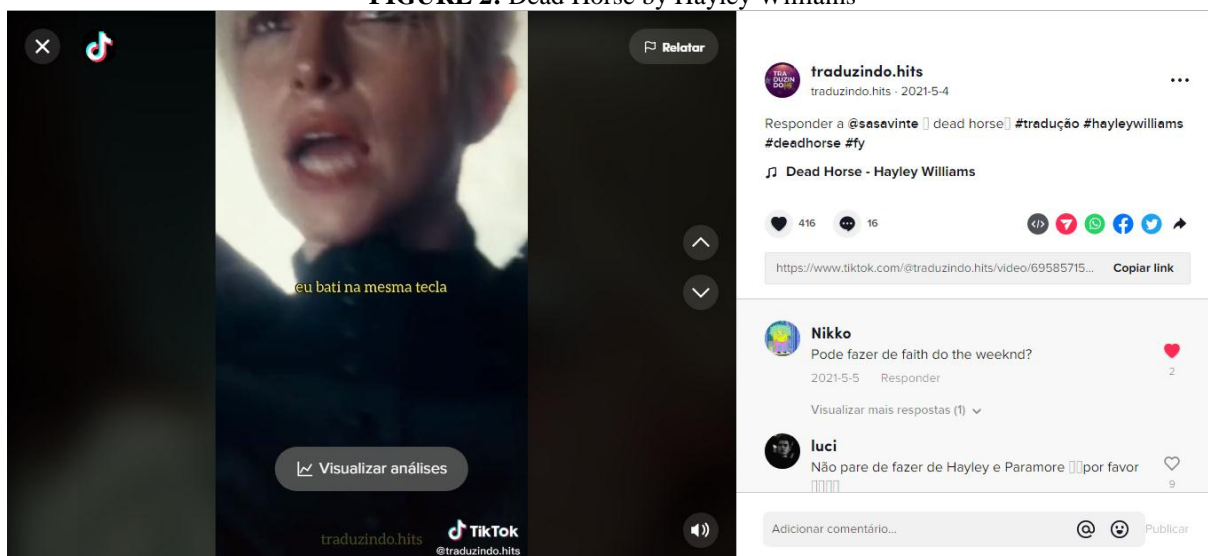
**FIGURE 1:** Layout of the page



Source: @traduzindo.hits from Tiktok App<sup>7</sup>

In the translation of some songs from English to Portuguese, some 'unusual' expressions appear, as in the lyrics of the song “Dead Horse” by singer Hayley Williams, in a certain part of the song she says the following: “*I beat like a dead horse*”. In that case the literal translation of the song would be wrong because this is an expression, like a slang. The literal translation of the song would be: “*I hit like a dead horse*” which in Portuguese would be like: “*Eu bato como um cavalo morto*”, but what the singer really meant is that she was tired of insisting on something that she knew was hopeless, like the popular Brazilian saying: “*batendo na mesma tecla*”.

FIGURE 2: Dead Horse by Hayley Williams



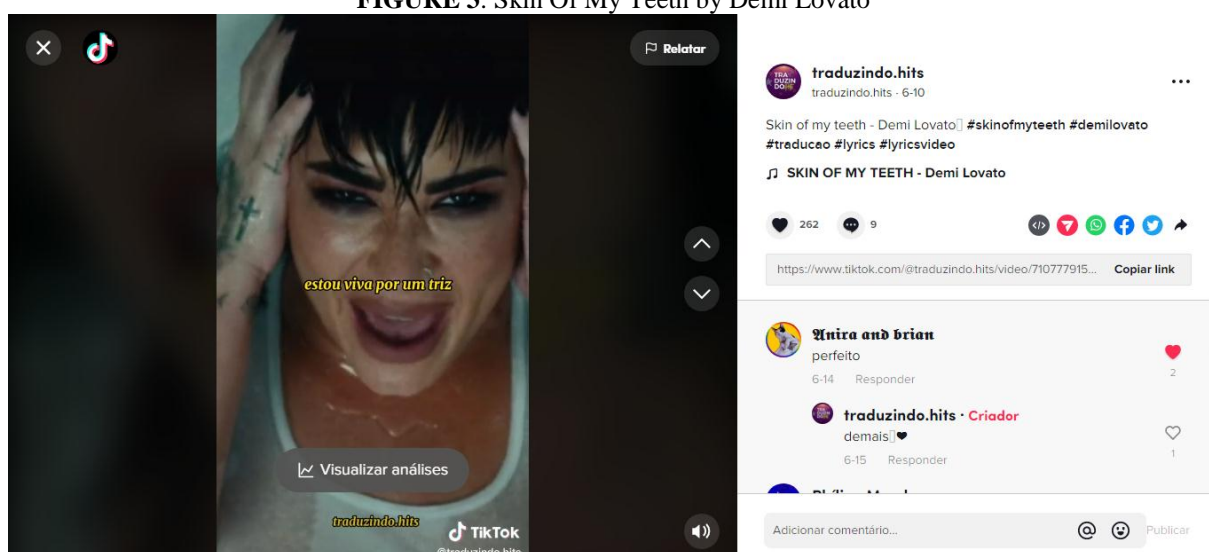
Source: @traduzindo.hits from Tiktok App<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Available at: <<https://www.tiktok.com/@traduzindo.hits>> Access in: November 30th, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Available at: <<https://www.tiktok.com/@traduzindo.hits>> Access in: November 15th, 2022.

Another case of unusual expression or slang in translation is from a song recently released by singer Demi Lovato, in the song “Skin Of My Teeth”, the passage in question is the very title of the song in which the american singer wants to say that “luckily she managed to escape something” like the popular Brazilian saying: “*por um triz*”, but the literal translation of the passage from English to Portuguese would be: “*pele dos meus dentes*”.

FIGURE 3: Skin Of My Teeth by Demi Lovato



Source: @traduzindo.hits from Tiktok App<sup>9</sup>

It is concluded that in addition to teaching translation through translated and subtitled videos, there is also learning about culture through some expressions that are easily found in song lyrics and that have a different meaning than what we literally know. For Baker (2018, p. 64) “A person's competence in actively using the idioms and fixed expressions of a foreign language hardly ever matches that of a native speaker. The majority of translators working into a foreign language cannot hope to achieve the same sensitivity that native speakers seem to have for judging when and how an idiom can be manipulated.” The author emphasizes that it is difficult for a non-native person to be able to do these translations, but not that it is impossible.

## FINAL REMARKS

<sup>9</sup> Available at: <<https://www.tiktok.com/@traduzindo.hits>> Access in: November 15th, 2022.

With this research I could see different ways of teaching English. And I believe that it is possible to use the “TikTok” application to teach about translation, or listening and speaking, and in this work we show that it is possible to learn about translation using this tool. For Baker (2019) “it is difficult to understand why translation has traditionally been viewed as a second-rate activity, not worthy of serious academic enquiry”. Like the author, I cannot believe that translation is not seen as a form of serious activity, worthy of academic investigation. I and other close friends managed to learn the English language through the translation of songs or books.

I also learned some differences, fundamentals, and teachings in the practice of subtitling that I will always put into practice, to Cintas et. al. (2014, p. 1) “most differences in subtitling practice do not really affect the fundamentals of subtitling. Students who have acquired an insight into these fundamentals and the specific challenges of subtitling practice will be able to apply this knowledge and these skills in any context”.

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