

# Terminology (and) Translation: the transdisciplinary dialogue in Intermediality\*

*Tradução (d)e terminologia: o diálogo transdisciplinar nos estudos sobre intermedialidade*  
*Traducción de/y Terminología: un diálogo transdisciplinario de la Intermedialidad*

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## ABSTRACT

The task of translation, although enriched by different experiences, can often lead to conflicting choices, which hinder communication between academics who come from different fields of research, giving rise to reasons for divergences. In this paper, we will present some elements from the experience of translating the terminology proposed by Lars Elleström, for example, of concepts related to the transfer of media characteristics between different media, comparing and contrasting them with other familiar terminologies, such as the notions of “transmediality”, by Irina Rajewsky, “transmedia storytelling”, by Henry Jenkins, and “remediation”, by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. Our objective is to present some of the possibilities of finding common ground for the terminology on Intermediality in Portuguese, enabling a more productive interdisciplinarity.

**Keywords:** Terminology; Intermediality; Transmediality; Translation; Lars Elleström.

## Combining theory and translation

This paper is the partial result of an encounter among researchers with common interests and emerged from the creation of the Intermedia Research Group: studies on intermediality<sup>1</sup>, founded in 2005 by Professor Thaís Flores Nogueira Diniz, from the Graduate Program in Letters: Literary Studies (Poslit/Fale) at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais; and Professor emeritus Claus Clüver (University of Indiana, USA), which today is a consolidated group with CNPq. Some of the members of this group, from different areas in the Liberal Arts, Cinema, Arts, Music, among others, are also part of the Anpoll working group Intermediality: Literature, Arts and Media<sup>2</sup> which began its activities in 2014.

The Intermedia Group is made up of 60 members, among which are instructors, researchers and students in scientific initiation, master’s and doctoral programs from different regions and universities in this country, as well as foreign collaborators. According to information on the site, the group is committed to studying “contemporary works made up of texts from different media, including theatrical presentations, films that are considered ‘adaptations’, comics, ekphrasis, installations, songs, among others”. The analysis of these objects and cultural processes stems from the central concept of intermediality, briefly defined as “(1) a phenomenon that occurs among media and (2) a category of critical analysis” (Group, undated). Hence, intermediality is both the phenomenon among media and the study of these interactions. Since it is invested in the most diverse means and forms of communication and

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1 Available on: <http://www.letras.ufmg.br/nucleos/intermedia/>

2 Available on: <https://anpoll.org.br/gt/intermedialidade-literaturas-artes-e-midias/>

signification, the group is formed by researchers from several areas of knowledge such as Letters (Linguistics and Literature), Fine Arts, Music and Communication.

Among the many activities the Intermedia Group takes on, one is the dissemination of the field of Studies on Intermediality in Brazil<sup>3</sup> by compiling, organizing and publishing seminal theoretical texts translated to Brazilian Portuguese and, hence, making them accessible to a broader public of students and researchers. Among these titles we would like to call attention to *Poéticas do visível: ensaios sobre a escrita e a imagem* (2006), *Intermedialidade e estudos interartes: desafios da arte contemporânea* (2012), *Intermedialidade e estudos interartes: desafios da arte contemporânea 2* (2012), *A intermedialidade e os estudos interartes na arte contemporânea* (2020), *Intermedialidade: cinema e adaptação – palavra e imagem – transmidia(lidade)* (2024) and *Entre textos, entre artes, entre mídias: ensaios de Claus Clüver* (2024).

One of the authors of this paper, Ana Cláudia Munari Domingos, organized a compilation of seven essays by the researcher Lars Elleström (1960-2021) in the volume *Midialidades: ensaios sobre Comunicação, Semiótica, Intermedialidade*, published in 2017 by EDIPUCRS. Also, along with Camila Figueiredo and Elaine Indrusiak, the latter a professor at the Graduate Program in Letters at UFRGS, Professor Domingos organized the translation of the updated version of one of Elleström's most important models, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2020, *As modalidades das mídias II* (EDIPUCRS, 2021).

The constant and integrated task of translation promoted by the group is divided among several translators in different parts of the world. Thus, although there is a wealth of different experiences, conflicting choices often arise that hinder communication among academic professionals in different research fields which, in itself, fuels divergence. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to present some possibilities for the construction of a common ground for discussing intermediality in Portuguese. First, we shall contextualize the issues that lead to the discussion that resulted in this paper; second, we will present some elements regarding the problems of translation in intermediality, such as the use of prefixes and suffixes in the terminology, for example, the -inter and -ático or -al in *intermediático* and *intermedial*; and finally, we will provide some solutions we found to, let's say, make the use of the language or the discourse on media more transdisciplinary.

### **Intermediality: model, explanation and discourse**

In this section we will briefly present our understanding of Intermediality as a field of research. The term appeared within discussions about interart studies, an area with a broader tradition in English-speaking countries and in Germany. The problem arose here due to the existence of theories and methodologies that derived not only from different disciplines, but also from different areas and even fields of knowledge that often set “places of speech” on the axis of the works being developed to the detriment of their own research. Within the field of Comparative Literature, also an interdisciplinary space, studies on Intermediality developed from the connections with cinema studies, especially from the idea of adaptation, theater, performances; as well as music, digital games and other cultural practices that required theoretical-methodological perspectives that literary studies could not provide. With Comparative Literature, the concept of intertextuality, and later multimodality, is expanded, eliciting the perspectives of the term “media”, its modalities and modes, as an alternative to the term “text”, which is considerably rooted in the concept of verbal writing not only among linguists but also in literary studies.

The term “intermediality”, coined at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The term “intermedium” was borrowed from Chemistry and used for the first time by the poet Samuel Coleridge (1772-1834) to refer to rhetorical figures and literary phenomena. The term *intermedia*, on the other hand, which is being used here in the sense proposed by Dick Higgins in the 1960s, and published in 1984, refers to that which produces an intermediary effect and suggests transformation, process and reception (Glaser, 2009, p. 13-14). According to Claus Clüver, intermediality is “a relatively recent term to speak of a phenomenon that can be found in every culture and period, both in daily life and in the cultural activities we call ‘art’” (Clüver, 2008, p. 9). Solange Oliveira (2012, p. 16), moreover, posits that the relationship between the arts always involves intermedial issues, even when they are not made explicit, since all art includes “mediality”, although the reverse is not necessarily true: the interaction between media can occur without the arts being thus involved. In a broad sense, intermediality is understood today as the interdisciplinary and comparative study of the inter-relations and interactions among different forms of communication. This means,

<sup>3</sup> For information about other intermediality groups or studies in Brazil, we suggest reading “Intermediality in Brasil: A Diachronic Survey”, published in the *The Palgrave Handbook of Intermediality* (2023), which presents a general overview of the research in our country. In 2021, at the *II International Meeting of Researchers in Intermediality*, groups from different parts of the world came together to present their research in the field. Some of the videos can be seen on the PPGL Unisc channel on YouTube: [www.https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMKVGB96ZXzXzunbtsf0e\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMKVGB96ZXzXzunbtsf0e_g).

from a certain perspective, that the field has expanded beyond the Arts and Comparative Literature and therefore is no longer an area or subarea or even a component of those disciplines. The very nature of Intermedial Studies allows it to be a model for research and an interdisciplinary and comparative explanation based on the evolution and human social-cultural experiences. Hence, it is a discourse of and about media, allowing communication between its researchers.

At the end of 2019, the members of the group saw the need to both clarify and unify the terminology being used and decided to create a theoretical glossary. During the first phase of the development of the glossary, a set of what was considered the most relevant terms was mapped out, among which those that also caused the greatest division in understanding among researchers from different areas. The intention was to make the glossary available online and for free so other Brazilian researchers could also benefit. The project involves the research of entries that are pre-selected by the group based on common parameters. For example, Equivalent Terms in other languages; Definition; Background; Main Approaches and Related Concepts. The results have been presented and discussed at monthly meetings. After every presentation in group meetings, while those in charge of writing up the entries are working, a production team is put together to work on the creation of capsule-videos – short videos that synthesize the entry and work as a teaser. Until now, of the thirty terms that were charted, twenty-eight have been presented. We can say that this project, which now has an identity, has instigated a number of productive theoretical discussions, since defining a concept always means finding a zone of reasonable balance that demands comparisons and considerations.

As we have already made clear, the intention of this paper is to present a synthesis of one aspect of the Intermedia Group that aims to disseminate and make available - with free access - precepts regarding Intermediality to speakers of Brazilian Portuguese. Since we are in charge of the entries of the terminology proposed by the Swede Lars Elleström, within the glossary project, we will present some aspects of our experience in reading and organizing the translation of the terminology Elleström proposed. These entries refer to concepts related to the transference of the characteristics of media between different media, which we compared and contrasted with other familiar terminologies, such as the notion of “transmediality”, by Rajewsky, “transmedia storytelling”, by Jenkins, and “remediation”, by Bolter & Grusin.

### Building and adapting words

One of the issues of the research on Intermediality, as we have already mentioned, is its interdisciplinary nature, which involves gathering concepts from other areas that see these phenomena from different perspectives. This is the case of the prefix *inter*, which both in Portuguese and in English means “between”. Still concerning the singularities of translation, problems arise when other prefixes are related, such as “multi”, “trans” and “mix”, and also “cross”, which, in this case, is different in Portuguese: “cross” is equivalent to “cruz” in Portuguese, as in *cruz cristã* (Christian cross), but is not used as a prefix beyond the verb to cross and its derivatives. Thus, instead of “cruzmidia”, we use “crossmidia”. Besides this, there is the prefix “pluri”, which in Portuguese means almost the same - if not exactly the same - as “multi”.

“Multi”, “pluri”, “inter” and “trans” have been classified from the least to the most complex by studies in the field of the relations between disciplines. “Multi” would be a combination of disciplines without any integration, while “trans” would be a cross between disciplines in which there no longer is a center or any separability between them. Among these we have pluridisciplinarity, in which the same object is seen from different perspectives; and interdisciplinarity, which is based on the interchange of knowledge. This leads us to our first question. In Intermedial Studies, the concept of Intermediality encompasses all others, i.e., the very notion of “inter” in “intermedia”. Therefore, in a narrow sense, in parallel to “multimedia”, “mixmedia” and “transmedia” (as Clüver suggests in his division of the types of combinations between media), these belong to the concept of “inter” in a broad sense. This draws attention to the derivation of the term “inter” as an adjective, for example, in *intermedial* and *intermediático*.

Among the first texts translated by the group is “Intermediality, intertextuality and ‘remediation’: a literary perspective on intermediality”, by Irina O. Rajewsky (2005), translated to Portuguese by Thaïs Flores Nogueira Diniz and Eliana Lourenço de Lima Reis, and published in the collection *Intermedialidade e estudos interartes* in 2012. In this translation, one of the categories proposed by Rajewsky, *intermedial reference*, was translated to Portuguese as “referência intermediática”. *Intermediática*, translated from intermedial, functions as an adjective and could correspond to intermediatic, as in pragmatic and schematic. Although we could suppose that the translation of intermedial in intermedial reference should be *intermedial*, the term, as suggested by Rajewsky, has acquired a fixed connotation, going beyond the idea of an adjective and becoming a noun, a part of the name that it gives to the concept. Thus, in the translation of Elleström’s texts, whenever the term medial and its derivatives

intermedial or transmedia and multimedia are adjectives, they were translated as *intermedial*, *transmedial* and *multimedial*, as well as *multimodal*. We can also observe that the option *multimodático* is nonexistent, as well as *intertextuático*, both derivations that sounded wrong to us. It is also important to point out that we chose to use an “i”, instead of an “e” for the derivatives of *media*, differently from the translation made in Portugal which uses the term *media* and its derivatives with an “e”. In Brazilian Portuguese, the plural of *mídia* (medium) is *mídias* (media). In Portugal, where the original term in Latin is used, the plural is *media*. Hence, the Portuguese say “os media”, plural and masculine, while we Brazilians say “as mídias”, in the feminine and plural.

### Terms are imported<sup>4TN</sup>

Another example of some problems in translating terms in the interdisciplinary field of Intermediality (although the ones mentioned above are far from resolved) we have Elleström’s concept of cognitive import (2017, 2021). In this case, we have a matter of semantic choice. As for the adjective cognitive, in Portuguese it is translated to *cognitivo*, with the reminder that adjectives vary in gender and number, i.e., there are terminations for feminine and plural: *cognitiva*, *cognitivas*, *cognitivos*. The term import, however, is quite problematic. Import is a Latin term joining *in* – inside, and *port* – passage. In Portuguese, door is *porta*, gate is *portão*, and *port* or harbor is *porto*. All are derived from the Latin term. Hence, import, *importar* in Portuguese, is to bring, to pass through the door. So, import is in English and adopted by many languages, such as Russian, as a term often used in the field of foreign trade, with the opposite being export, from the Latin *ex*, to go out. In English, Elleström’s concept of cognitive import means a cognitive “entry”, something that is potentially there both in the mind of the producers and of the perceivers and which is carried out by means of the media product. Although it evokes the idea of movement, since it is fulfilled between the minds through media – which then functions as a vehicle – this cognitive import is neither the message nor what has “left” the mind of the perceiver, since it is influenced by the media itself, by the context of communication, by the receptor’s repertoire and by the interpretation of what was previously in the perceiver’s mind.

Notice that Elleström did not use “entry”, since this would be a very conditioning term, suggesting that it is something that (leaves and) enters and stays there (inside the mind). Because the term has the sense of something “virtual” – a potential meaning -, that not only depends on the elements already there but is also fluid, changing in the course of communication, we chose the word “valor” (which in English is value): *valor cognitivo* (cognitive value) refers to what is transferred between the minds of the producer and the perceiver through a product of media. *Valor* encompasses both the aspect of having “something” that resided in one mind and can be perceived by another, such as the idea of virtuality. Although we are satisfied with this choice, we know that it is not perfect, since value is something that normally can be calculated objectively, while cognitive value is subjective and cannot be measured precisely.

In his model, Elleström also developed some categorizations. One of them establishes the different types of phenomena which he called *media representation* (2010, 2020), translated as *representação de mídia* (2017, 2021):

I suggest three terms to denote the processes of iconic, indexical and symbolic representation. Although these terms are widely used for different purposes in diverse contexts, they fit the rationale of this study. Hence, I propose calling iconic representation depiction, referring to indexical representation as deiction, and denoting the process of symbolic representation with the term description. (Elleström, 2020, p. 51)

In the translation of the terms that define this type of media representation, based on the Peircean trichotomy of the sign - *depiction*, *deiction* and *description* – we needed to consider both the semiotic aspect denoted by the definition of the concepts associated with them and the meaning of the terms in English. For *depiction*, we could not use the word in Portuguese that most directly translates it, *representação*, since it would clash with the other two which are also types of representation. The term chosen, *ilustração* (illustration) is within the semantic field in which depiction is used, the arts, especially graphic arts. The meaning of illustrate brings with it this feature of representing “by similarity”, which has a correspondence in iconicity. As for the term deiction, the decision was made with the Peircean base directly in mind: indication, which adapts well to the context of index. Finally, the term description was translated to the phonic and semantic equivalent in Portuguese, *descrição*. What is lost in these choices is the detail that, in English, all of the terms begin with the letter D, forming an interesting triad. It is important to underline that although Elleström did not speak Portuguese, he did know Spanish and French and actively participated in the

<sup>4</sup> <sup>TN</sup> This section in Portuguese is *Termos (se) importam*, in other words, terms matter (if we read without considering the *se*) or terms are imported (if we read with the *se*).

discussions, agreeing with all of them. The changes made to promote agreements took place via email and in person meetings or online videoconferences.

### Traversing media

Although he did not coin the term, “transmedia storytelling” was popularized by Henry Jenkins, especially after his book *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, published in 2006 which was translated to Brazilian Portuguese by Susana Alexandria and published in 2009 with the title *Cultura da convergência*. The term transmedia storytelling was then translated as “narrativa transmídia”, where *transmídia* is the adjective for *narrativa*, the same occurring in English. Due to the book’s popularity, the word “transmídia” became a common adjective in Portuguese for related expressions, such as *franquia transmídia* (transmedia franchise); *projeto transmídia* (transmedia project); *educação transmídia* (transmedia education). Later on, however, both on his blog and in other books (2009, 2011, 2013), Jenkins expanded the notion, examining transmedia beyond storytelling. He then began to refer to the phenomenon simply as transmedia. In this case, the word became a noun. In Portuguese, the word is used in the same way.

In both languages, an interesting situation is established since the same word is in some cases being used as an adjective and in others as a noun. A more natural use of the word as an adjective in Portuguese would perhaps be “transmidial” (in parallel with *midial*, *intermidial*, *modal*, *multimodal*), which would result in “narrativa transmidial”, “franquias transmidiais”, etc. Besides this, in Portuguese, both suffixes -al and -ático are commonly used in other related terms in the field: for example, *midiatático e intermidiatático*, on the one hand; *modal* and *multimodal* on the other. Therefore, a more adequate solution to Jenkin’s term would be “narrativa transmedial” (a better fit for Portuguese from Portugal) or “narrativa transmidiática” (a better fit for Brazilians) instead of “narrativa transmídia”.

Another choice that needs to be examined is a result of the term storytelling, strictly speaking, not having a single equivalent word in Portuguese. The closest meaning literally would perhaps be “contar histórias” or maybe “contação de histórias”, resulting in an altogether strange expression for the term composed and adjectivized by Jenkins. It is curious that we use the word “narrativa” corresponding to *storytelling* in Portuguese, especially since in English there is the term narrative, a commonly used word. Hence, we could question if the term “narrativa” would adequately encompass Jenkin’s understanding, since the author did prefer *storytelling* to *narrative*.<sup>5</sup>

When we consider that the term storytelling refers to the action of someone telling a story, it seemed important to us that the idea of an agent also be present in the translation of the term. This would place the term “narração” as a viable alternative since it emphasizes the agent that narrates. A translation of Jenkin’s term would therefore be “narração transmídia” ou “narração transmidial” or “narração transmidiática”. From this perspective, a story or narrative may not necessarily be characterized as transmedia or transmedial but will be configured as such if it is narrated on different platforms. Going back to Jenkin’s base-text, we find support for this argument when the author explains how the story of the *Matrix* should be told: “The Wachowskis wanted to disseminate the *Matrix* story throughout all these media and bring everything together in an engaging whole.” (2009, p. 144).

Another observation is that in Portuguese, storytelling has been used in its foreign form as a noun, especially in Marketing, to designate the art or technique of telling a good story, one that will capture the public’s attention. We believe that this is mostly due to the applicability of Jenkin’s concept to this particular field of studies and practices. Based on this use, that has been disseminated in Brazil, another possibility for the terminology could be explored: storytelling *transmídia* or *transmidial* or *transmidiática*.

Although it is not as extensive as the field of research that deals with transmedia storytelling and transmedia franchises, the study of transmedia phenomenon from the perspective of transmediality mainly emphasize the presence of certain characteristics in several media. Transmediality, in the sense used by Irina O. Rajewsky (2002), and, in a very similar form, by Werner Wolf (2005), refers to the presence of specific motives, aesthetics, or discourses through media. In Portuguese, the word was translated as “transmidialidade”, with the suffix -dade as the usual translation of words ending in -ty in English.

A term that is sometimes confused with transmediality is transmediation. According to Kathy A. Mills (2011), the term in English was used for the first time by Charles Suhr in 1984 meaning the translation of the content of one system of signs into another. Although it is often used in semiotic studies, multimodality and literacy, the term was gradually replaced by transduction as the work by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) became more popular.

In Intermedial Studies, transmediation is used by some researchers, mainly Lars Elleström, who mentions the term for the first time in 2013. For the author, the term designates a process of transformation in which “(...) media content is mediated for a second (or third or fourth) time by another technical medium” (2013, p. 119), in

5 It is worth mentioning that there is a dissension between Jenkin’s terminology and the area of narratology. As explained by Marie-Laure Ryan (2016), transmedia narratology goes beyond the notion of transmedia storytelling which is focused on the entertainment business.

other words, it is the mediation of an already mediated content. In 2017, the term transmediation was translated into “transmídiação” after a discussion among translators and with the author’s consent. This choice follows the tendency of using the letter “i” for the Brazilian version of words like *mídia*, *intermídia*, *multimídia*, *transmídia*; while maintaining the more usual suffix for -ation, which is -ação.

Nevertheless, when doing a quick search on the internet in Portuguese, curiously, the term *transmídiação* has been more used in the sense of Jenkin’s transmedia storytelling than in English. In English, it is more common to find Rajewsky and Wolf’s term “transmediality”, related to transmedia storytelling than transmediation. Therefore, this reinforces the premise that the debate concerning terminology is far from over even among researchers in the same area and, at times, even among those who speak the same language.

### Transitory crossing

In this paper we have presented some terminological solutions found by the member of the Intermedia Group for the translation of the work by the Swedish theoretician Lars Elleström. Special attention was given to solutions (a) for the use of prefixes and suffixes, (b) for the translation of the complex term cognitive import and the categorization of media representation, and (c) to avoid confusion between terms whose use are very different according to each of the proposals coined by different authors, i.e., transmedia (Jenkins), transmediality (Rajewsky, Wolf) and transmediation (Elleström). The systematization of the theoretical lexicon used by Intermedial Studies, an interdisciplinary line of research, also demonstrates the importance of the polysemic character of the scientific studies in Terminology in relation to Translation.

The translation of terminology, especially when it is considerably aligned with conceptual constructions that are fundamental for specific fields, certainly demands a great deal of knowledge of the basic and source languages. However, our paper focuses mainly on the semantic issue: it is important to know the theory one intends to translate. Furthermore, it is paramount to predict conflicts with other terminologies and conserve the meaning of words toward their pragmatic use. If the idea is to promote interdisciplinary communication – perhaps intermedial communication, to relate to the field – it is not desirable to go directly against choices made in other disciplines, areas, and fields of knowledge. On the contrary, it is advantageous when the choices allow one to see their underlying intentions. Hence, in the search for common ground regarding terminology in Portuguese, we have pinpointed here mere traces of this task, which is of prime importance for research in intermediality in Brazil.

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