

# PORTUGUESE AO PÉ DO BERIMBAU: ON CAPOEIRA AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE

## PORTUGUÊS AO PÉ DO BERIMBAU: SOBRE A CAPOEIRA COMO UMA LÍNGUA ADICIONAL

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### ABSTRACT

From its historical origins as a resistant and violently repressed bundle of music, dance and martial arts practices of the African diaspora in Brazil, capoeira has travelled, becoming a global phenomenon with groups and networks in diverse sites around the world, including London, Cape Town and Hong Kong and indeed Leeds where this research was based. We focus on the linguistic, cultural and embodied ensemble of capoeira, researching a capoeira group with diverse participants led by Sandro, a Brazilian contramestre, providing a rich laboratory for what has been called language learning “in the wild”, specifically of the Afro-Brazilian linguistic and cultural practices (music, movement, lyric, voice) that are a crucial element of the capoeira ensemble. These linguistic and cultural practices contingently bring together, in rehearsal and performance, the characteristic capoeira dance/martial arts movements, the pervasive regulation of rhythm and the apprenticeship of the body into its rhythm and movement. Seen from the perspective of informal language learning the capoeira group seems to constitute a near optimal context. We will explore the affordances of the capoeira group for linguistic/cultural/embodied learning of Afro-Brazilian Portuguese, drawing on the “maximalist” framework for translanguaging (BAYNHAM; LEE, 2019), which we extend to encompass the pervasive musical aspect of capoeira, linking these to contemporary perspectives on language learning, particularly informal language learning and language learning “in the wild”.

**Keywords:** capoeira; Afro-Brazilian Portuguese; Portuguese as an additional language, translanguaging; informal language learning

### RESUMO

A partir de suas origens históricas, como um agregado de música, dança e artes marciais de resistência da diáspora africana no Brasil que chegou a ser violentamente reprimida, a capoeira tem viajado o mundo, tornando-se um fenômeno global com grupos e redes espalhadas em diversos locais como Londres, a Cidade do Cabo, Hong Kong e também Leeds, onde esta pesquisa foi realizada. Enfocamos neste artigo o agregado linguístico, cultural e corporificado da capoeira, pesquisando um grupo de capoeira com diversos participantes, liderado por Sandro, um contramestre brasileiro, que fornece um rico laboratório para o que tem sido chamado de aprendizagem de línguas “na natureza selvagem”, neste caso envolvendo mais especificamente práticas linguísticas e culturais afro-brasileiras (voz, letra, música e movimento) que são elementos cruciais do agregado da capoeira. Essas práticas linguísticas e culturais reúnem, de forma contingente, nos treinos e nas apresentações, os movimentos característicos da dança/artes marciais da capoeira, o ritmo regulado e omnipresente e o aprendizado do corpo nestes movimentos e neste ritmo. Dessa forma, visto da perspectiva da aprendizagem informal de línguas, o grupo de capoeira parece fornecer um contexto praticamente perfeito. Exploraremos então as possibilidades do grupo de capoeira para a aprendizagem linguística/cultural/corporal do português afro-brasileiro, com base em um enquadramento “maximalista” para as translanguagens (BAYNHAM; LEE, 2019), o qual ampliamos para abranger o aspecto musical omnipresente da capoeira, vinculando-os a perspectivas contemporâneas sobre a aprendizagem de línguas, particularmente, a aprendizagem informal de línguas e a aprendizagem de línguas “na natureza selvagem”.

**Palavras-Chave:** capoeira; português afro-brasileiro; português como língua adicional; translanguagens; aprendizado informal de línguas.

### INTRODUCTION

The relationship between actual language teaching and learning (LTL) and theories of language learning, has always been an interesting one. So called structural approaches were informed by Bloomfieldian structural linguistic and behavioural theory. This paradigm was dramatically overturned by Chomsky’s mentalism and its emphasis on the mind of the learner, which has pervaded research on LTL for a number of decades. Emergent in the last two

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\*\*\* We would like to acknowledge the contribution of other members of the Leeds TLANG team, James Simpson, John Callaghan, Emilee Moore and Jessica Bradley to the research this paper draws on, as well as funding for the TLANG Project from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). For more information see <https://tlang.org.uk>.

decades or so has been a sociolinguistically informed turn considering language learning as contextual. Key moments include *The Classroom and Beyond* (WAGNER, 2004) as well as *The Social Turn in SLA* (BLOCK, 2003). As well as contextualizing the language learning process and developing a richer and more nuanced account of the learner, these approaches have drawn on developing areas such as pragmatic and discourse analysis, also on both language learning and culture learning. The focus on “authentic language” and attempts to define this for classroom purposes is an example of an issue provoked by such considerations of context. Arising out of these concerns more recently have been calls to “bring the outside in” to classroom learning (ROBERTS; BAYNHAM, 2006) along with approaches that go further and advocate taking language learning out of the classroom and into “the wild” (ESKILDSEN; THEODÓRSDOTTIR, 2015).

In this paper we examine the potential of a diasporic capoeira group, based in Leeds UK as an opportunity for Portuguese language learning. Capoeira, as we learned in our study, is a practice with a long and contested history. We will begin by outlining the history and practice of capoeira, going on to consider its potential for informal language learning, both in terms of the opportunities or affordances it offers and the evidence we have that *capoeiristas* are learning elements of Portuguese, which we might call Portuguese for Capoeira Purposes. The learning of Languages for Specific Purposes, draws on the linguistic construct of *register*. Our starting point was to ask what is the potential for Afro-Brazilian Portuguese language and culture learning of capoeira and on the other, what do apprentice *capoeiristas* need to know of Afro-Brazilian Portuguese language and culture to participate effectively in capoeira? However as our analysis progressed we found our scope expanding in significant ways.

Communication in the capoeira sessions we observed drew on the widest range of modalities: nameable languages such as English and Portuguese, distinctive varieties of Portuguese, such as Afro-Brazilian Portuguese, gesture, the body. All of these modalities interact with and are regulated and supplemented by the modality of music, whose rhythms set the pace for each strand in the capoeira session. In our study we draw on the construct of translanguageing to capture these interactions and see the whole in terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s *agencement* or assemblage (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 2013). The assemblage construct, as Canagarajah points out, helps us to account for the bringing together of different semiotic elements into activity such as capoeira.

The notion of *assemblage* helps to consider how diverse semiotic resources play a collaborative role as a spatial repertoire in accounting for the success of this activity, when language is not predefined as the sole, superior, or separate medium of consideration. Assemblage corrects the orientation to non-verbal resources in scholars addressing ‘multimodality’. From the perspective of assemblage, semiotic resources are not organized into separate modes. (CANAGARAJAH, 2018, p. 39)

The *contramestre*, the *jogadores*, the songs and sayings, the lexical framing of the event, involving shared terminology for the different elements of the capoeira assemblage, drawn from Afro-Brazilian Portuguese, the *roda*, the *berimbau* and other instruments all come together in performance which resonates with deep cultural memory. In doing so they are bringing something together in an *agencement/assemblage*, both a repetition and a novelty: the regulated improvisations of practice.

Each phase of the capoeira session exhibits different combinations of available modalities. In our ethnographic study, in the first expository phase, both English explanation and Portuguese interact with music, *contramestre* Sandro is able to take the group into the deep cultural memory embodied in apparently simple lyrics and connect them to the present. In the second practice phase, as the group practises moves singly or in pairs, Sandro circulates and uses an instructional register drawing on English, Portuguese, gesture and the body. In the *roda* phase the instructional scaffold is removed and the *jogadores* try out their moves and their *malandragem* with each other and the *contramestre*. Here the body speaks through gesture and movement, expressing itself through nuances of the moves that make up the regulated improvisation of the capoeira habitus.

The Leeds capoeira school *Guardiões Brasileiros* is a part of a larger capoeira group based in the São Paulo state in Brazil. It is extremely diverse, it comprises players from Lusophone countries such as Portugal, Brazil and Mozambique, diverse European countries such as France and the UK as well as non-Lusophone African countries. Co-author of this paper, Jolana, one of the researchers, is from the Czech Republic and fluent in Portuguese, herself an apprentice *capoeirista*. In this paper we focus on the *contramestre*, Sandro, and Sophie, French in origin but a long time resident in the UK, also a long term student both of Portuguese, more specifically Brazilian Portuguese, and capoeira. We are interested in the following questions:

- What opportunities/affordances does the capoeira group offer for the learning of Portuguese?
- How do different group members engage with these opportunities/affordances?
- Is capoeira alone enough to attain fluency in Portuguese?
- How can we understand learning through capoeira as a verbal/embodied/musical assemblage?

Sandro mediates Portuguese and capoeira practice to the group, with a distinct emphasis on capoeira history and culture. He has had an interesting trajectory into capoeira, having learnt capoeira in a tough school. It started in his early teens, when he was bullied at school in Paraná: "I was the only fat black kid" he tells Jolana. While selling ice cream in the street, he notices an informal group of youths practising capoeira moves and when he later approaches them, they let him train with them.

Sandro: I was all the time getting beaten from children at the school, and the reason erm one day I was selling ice-cream on the streets on the trolley and I saw some guys playing on, just, the neighbourhood, just the small park, just kicking around, doing some back flips, doing some cartwheels, and I asked what that was and they said, "oh this is capoeira". "But who is the teacher?" "Oh, there are no teacher, we just get together here, so a person who knows a little bit more help teach each other." Erm, it was the only group of people who actually helped me without judging me for who I was, you know.

(Interview with Sandro - audio transcription)

A few years later he joins an organized group *Guardiões Brasileiros*. His interest from the start is self-defence, street fighting and he consciously brings a flavour of this *capoeira de rua* to his practice as a *contramestre*.

Sandro: Capoeira is for everyone. You can pick what suits you in capoeira, you know, but the elements as I've mentioned, I used to be a fighter, I became a capoeirista player a few years ago because I used to fight all the time. I have marks of fight in Brazil. I've been stabbed by knife, I've been shot by gun, I've been, bottles breaking my head, and my belly being cut into the fight. So that's how I raised my style.

(Interview with Sandro - audio transcription)

When he moves to the country his new elderly *mestre*, while continuing to train him in the street fighting aspect of capoeira, also immerses him in the history and culture of capoeira, the songs, the stories, the characters, the African influences. This aspect is also very important in his practice as a *contramestre*. In his introductory sessions in Leeds he painstakingly explains in English the deep meaning and historical significance of the old songs and stories (cf. the "snake story" below). Interestingly, he doesn't particularly endorse a simple idea of Portuguese for capoeira, capoeira for learning Portuguese. For Sandro capoeira is something multilingual, with influences from Yoruba and Crioulo and beyond, not just Portuguese, in a way he is advocating the translanguaging perspective we adopt here.

Sophie is French but a long-time resident in Leeds. She has a fascination with Brazilian culture and the Portuguese language which is also long standing and goes beyond capoeira to which she is very devoted. She is one of the more able capoeiristas in the class and Sandro will often pick her to demonstrate a move for the group, with himself or Tiago, another experienced capoeirista from Mozambique. A former Brazilian boyfriend used to challenge her on why she wanted to learn this non-standard form of Brazilian Portuguese she was getting from her capoeira practice.

## 1. HISTORICAL ORIGINS: CAPOEIRA

Sandro's contextualization of capoeira practice for the group is saturated with the history of black Brazilians. It is therefore important to locate the practice historically and describe the context in which capoeira emerged and evolved, that is, the colonial period, which started with the arrival of the Portuguese in 1500 and was characterised by the use of slave labour as well as by slave resistance. What follows is a brief overview addressing a complex topic. The Portuguese started to colonize the North-Eastern coast, where the first cities and ports were established. The tropical climate of these areas was suitable for plantations of sugarcane, requiring a great deal of manual labour, scarce in the recently-discovered territory (see SKIDMORE; GREEN, 2021).

Europeans were not willing to cross the Atlantic in large numbers to provide cheap labour, and so the Portuguese started using the local indigenous population as slave labour and also to import slaves from the African continent, principally from West Central Africa (SLAVE VOYAGES, 2021). The African slaves gradually replaced indigenous workforce, which had also been submitted to slavery, after large numbers of this population died as a result of epidemics (MARQUESE, 2006). It is difficult to establish the number of Africans brought to Brazil during

the three centuries of slave traffic until 1888, when slavery was abolished, but estimates speak of around 6 million people (SLAVE VOYAGES, 2021).

The conditions on the ships were extremely harsh and around 10% of the Africans on board of ships sailing from Africa to Brazil died (COHN, 1985; see also ALENCASTRO, 2018). Once they reached their destination, the slaves were separated from their linguistic group so that they couldn't communicate amongst each other. They became the main labourers initially on plantations of sugarcane and cotton, and later also in the mines and on coffee plantations.

Not all slaves accepted their conditions passively. Rebellions occurred already on some of the slave ships, when the Africans overtook the command of the ships and steered them back to African shores. In Brazil, escapes, revolts and resistance occurred during the whole period of slavery. The fugitive slaves gathered in *quilombos*, settlements which varied in size, duration and distance from other civilizations, in which they established a political, social and cultural order based on the one in Africa (GOMES, 2015). The most famous of these was the Quilombo of Palmares, which gathered between 6,000 and 30,000 people (MARQUESE, 2006) and for a long time resisted attempts to conquer it. In terms of the routine of slaves living on agricultural properties, they were woken up by the sound of a bell and taken by the landowner to work in the fields, from where they only returned at the dusk. The slaves were exposed to corporal punishments for every minor transgression. These included lashing, marking the skin with hot iron, mutilations, rape and other often highly elaborate methods of torture (AIDOO, 2018).

It was in these conditions that capoeira emerged. It is believed to have developed in the North-eastern state of Bahia, which was the centre of the sugar-based economy, and where the capital city, Salvador da Bahia, was located. The exact time and circumstances of capoeira's origins are much disputed. The earliest mentions of capoeira date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and they have the form of chronicle articles, notices from foreign visitors to Brazil, newspaper articles as well as one engraving, possibly capturing the practice of capoeira (DE ABREU, 2005).

Uncertainties surround the origin of the word *capoeira*. It is widely thought that it comes from the indigenous Tupi word *caa-ápuamera*, denominating a young forest in a place that had previously been cleared. This was a place in which the runaway slaves practised their fight skills, as well as the place where they would ambush those sent by their master to capture them. However, there is no definite support to confirm this theory (DE ABREU, 2005).

Following a period of illegality in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of capoeira being used for fighting between street gangs known as *maltas* (PORTAL CAPOEIRA, 2022a), capoeira has undergone a transformation to become one of the symbols of Brazilian identity. Today capoeira enjoys a great popularity across Brazil as well as globally and we can find a capoeira school in every major European city.

## 2. THE PRACTICE OF CAPOEIRA

Although a game of capoeira may look like an improvised activity at first sight, it is, in fact a highly organized event, in which each participant has their defined roles. These are based on traditions of each school and may vary slightly, but the general pattern is shared across schools and styles.





Figure 1. A *roda*. Source: <http://mulheresnoaikido.blogspot.co.uk/2015/09/do-dojo-deaikido-roda-de-capoeira.html>

Capoeira is referred to as a game (*jogo* in Portuguese), therefore it is played, not fought. The participants are arranged in a circle, or *roda* in Portuguese. The word *roda* can also denominate the social gathering in which capoeira is played. Capoeira is played to music, produced by the orchestra, or *bateria* in Portuguese. The orchestra is also situated at the perimeter of the circle, and the musicians sit on chairs or a bench.

The orchestra plays instruments traditionally used in capoeira, but again, the number and type of instruments used may vary on each occasion. The most important of these instruments is the *berimbau*, originating in Africa. The other instruments used in capoeira are the *atabaque* (drum), *pandeiro* (tambourine), *reco-reco* (a wooded serrated instrument played with a stick) and *agogô* (cowbells). . People who do not have an instrument mark the rhythm by clapping their hands.

It is in front of the orchestra, *ao pé do berimbau*, that each game of capoeira starts and finishes. Two capoeiristas, usually the two people sitting nearest to the orchestra (that is, at the ends of the semi-circle formed by the people who participate in the *roda* but do not play in the orchestra), come closer to each other and squat down in front of the *gunga*, which is one of the three berimbaus normally used in the orchestra and played by the person leading the *roda*, and wait for their signal to start the game. The game generally follows the attack-dodge dynamic and the attacks usually have the form of non-contact kicks. Head-butts are also popular and highly acclaimed, while hand strikes are used rarely. The distinction between an attack and a defence is not always clear – while moving away from an attack, for example, a player may at the same time perform a *rasteira* (a sweep). This ambiguity lies at the core of *malandragem*, or trickiness, which consists in confusing the opponent by simulating a move and doing something else instead. Through the choice of their techniques, the players try to get each other into the position of disadvantage or to make them expose a vulnerable part of their body. The attack-defence dynamic of the game may be occasionally interrupted by ritualistic performances such as *chamada* or *volta ao mundo* or short spontaneous dancing or dramatic performances, often humorous.

While the game is taking place, its pace follows and is at all times regulated by the rhythm of the music produced by the orchestra. The role of the people sitting or standing at the edge of the *roda* is to maintain the energy by singing the chorus and clapping hands. In one session we observed the *mestre* berating the people around for not being energetic enough in their singing and clapping.

The duration of the individual games and of the *roda* can vary considerably. Whereas small *rodas* set up at the end of a capoeira class may last for only about 15 minutes, the *rodas* organized as autonomous events may last for over 3 hours.

### 3. CAPOEIRA IN DIASPORA

As noted above, capoeira has spread from its origins in Bahia, across Brazil and beyond. The global and local in terms of diasporic capoeira is explored by Delamont and Stephens (2008), who write about diasporic capoeira as ‘embodied habitus’. Framing their analysis within debates around ‘globalisation’ and ‘diaspora’, the authors make two very prescient points, which inform our own study:

A capoeira *discípulo* is acquiring a state of mind and a state of bodily being. The way he or she plays capoeira is shaped by the group the student belongs to and by their individual biology and biography (2008, p. 70).

Delamont and Stephens’ theoretical framing of the practice within Bourdieu’s habitus allows us to understand more about the interactions between that which is taught and that which is absorbed. As the authors explain,

*Capoeira* too is an embodied social practice that its adherents embrace as they acquire the habitus (as Achilles calls it, ‘the way *de capoeira*’) during formal pedagogic instruction (2008, p. 70).

### 4. CAPOEIRA IN AND AROUND LEEDS

In our analysis of the capoeira sessions we visited we have drawn on translinguaging (BAYNHAM, LEE, 2018), drawing out the different communication modalities that make up the capoeira space: verbal, gestural, embodied, musical and examining how they work together at different stages of the session. In fact in this paper we extend the framework proposed by Baynham and Lee, to include the role of music in our analysis, given its centrality in capoeira practice. So from this perspective the pervasive rhythmical coordination of the capoeira body with music can be understood as a form of translinguaging, with music a crucial element in the *spatial repertoire* (RYMES, 2014, PENNYCOOK, OTSUJI, 2015, CANAGARAJAH, 2018) of capoeira.

In our fieldwork we observed a total of six classes of capoeira, taking place at a community centre one evening per week, sometimes followed by a drink in a nearby social club. We also observed two capoeira workshops delivered by visiting *mestres* invited by Sandro, one of which took place in a community centre in Leeds and one in a church hall in York. These workshops occupied the whole afternoon, starting at around 2pm and lasting until approx. 6 pm. One of them was followed by a drink and a dinner in a nearby pub, the other one by a party in one of the student’s house, where Brazilian food was served. We have also observed one *roda*, organized during the weekend and attended mostly by Sandro’s students from Leeds and York. The *roda* took place in an Afro-Cuban drumming studio.

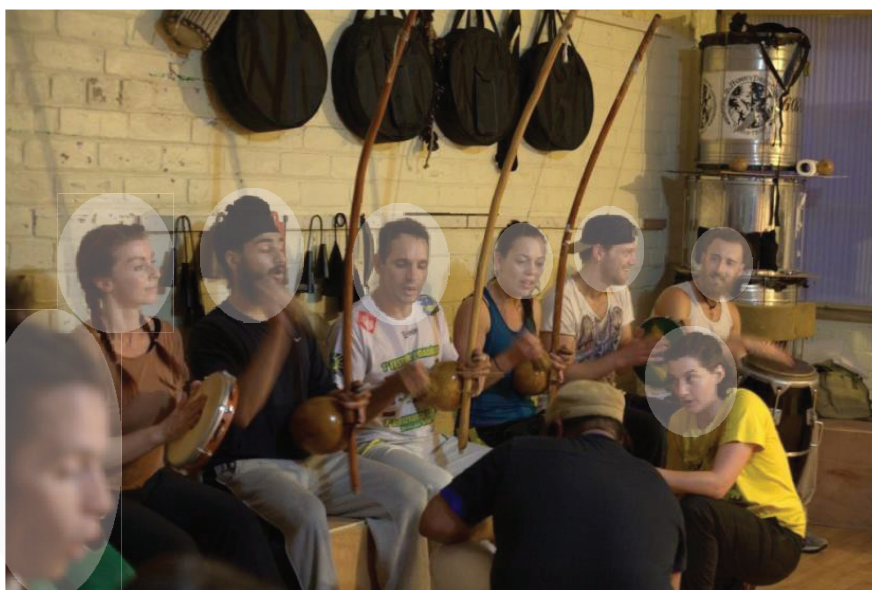


Figure 2. A *roda* at one of the venues where we observed. Source: Afro-Cuban Studio website (screenshot from a video).

## 5. CAPOEIRA AND THE ROLE OF MUSIC

Music, as suggested above, is central to the practice of capoeira: bodily movements are coordinated and regulated rhythmically through music. Capoeira *rodas* are always accompanied by live music, but even when the students were just practising isolated movements during Sandro's classes, there was always recorded music playing in the background.

Music determines not only the speed, but also the characteristic of the game to be played. For each rhythm, there is a corresponding style of capoeira to be played. For example, the rhythm called 'Angola' is played for a slow, close game practised with one hand touching the ground, and is an opportunity for the *capoeirista* to show off their skills (ESPETO CAPOEIRA, 2022b). Sandro teaches his students to recognize the type of the rhythm and to know what game corresponds to them:

Sandro explained that the next rhythm was going to be 'iuna'. I was doing my best to remember the name for the purpose of the fieldnotes, but later had to check it on the internet. S: This tune is played to experienced fighters. It is not played for a hard fight, but for a game when people should connect with each other and show respect to each other.  
(Fieldnotes)

The speed and style of the game can be also regulated through the lyrics of the song:  
Sophie: like sometimes that I was so angry to be like (JH laughs) caught in front of everybody and I started just being really fast and play very aggressive game and at this point the teacher or the master would call me with the instrument and and to the to the *pé do berimbau*, the feet of the berimbau, and sing a song which is [sings] *devagar, devagarinho*, so, slow down, slow down you know, or he has the power to also say to carry on and to xxx sing another song which is [sings] *quebra gereba, quebra* which is like about beating people up and breaking them you know  
(Interview with Sophie - audio transcription)

The tempo and style of the game are therefore in the hands of the leader of the *roda*. If a student is not in line with the style of the game that is expected of them like in Sophie's case above, he can remind them to adjust their speed through a song. He can also increase the dynamics of the game by choosing a song with a faster rhythm and a message in the lyrics inviting to a more aggressive game.

## 6. FOLLOWING THE MUSIC: CAPOEIRA AND DANCE

Capoeira can appear as a dance to an external observer due to the fact that the moves follow the music and the two players move in a synchronized way. But can we understand capoeira as a dance? The origins of capoeira are believed to lie in the African war dances, such as the *Zebra* dance (COBRA MANSA; ASSUNÇÃO, 2008). These dances contained elements of fight, such as kicks. The boundary between dance and fight is therefore not as clear-cut as it might seem. The elements of fight also survive in some styles of samba, which also have their roots on the African continent:

Sandro: Well as Mestre João Grande explained, and Mestre Ananias mentions a few times, capoeira, samba and candomblé, they work together. They are, they all came from Africa. (...). Candomblé was the religion and samba was the dance they could enjoy the time, but samba also used to be taken as a self-defence. *Samba-de-coco, samba duro*, for men *pernada*, there were some on the street and they take people down with the [*rasteiras?*].  
(Interview with Sandro - audio transcription)

According to one of the theories, in the conditions of colonial Brazil, the slaves brought from Africa disguised practices that could be used for fight as a dance, so that they could pass unnoticed by the masters:

Sandro: so, is capoeira a dance? Is it a martial art disguised as a dance? Or is it a dance disguised as other dance?  
Student: so how would you describe it?  
Sandro: it's Brazilian culture. We fight too. We pretend a fight into a dance.  
(Fieldnotes)

This notion of using the dance as a disguise is present in the present-day capoeira as well. Sandro liked to challenge the idea that capoeira is a dance by saying – 'if capoeira is a dance, then dance with me!' The difference between capoeira and a dance is the combat dimension: *capoeiristas* are in a state of alertness, they know that an attack can come at any point.

One of the dance-like moves is the three step *ginga*, performed to the rhythm of the music and shadowing the other person. However, the constant movement of the *ginga* is strategic, aiming to confuse the opponent, making it an ideal base for an attack. Although the players are moving in a synchronized way, mechanical following is not desirable in capoeira, as it leads to predictability. Experienced players will break the pattern of the *ginga* from time to time – but even then they do so rhythmically, in line with the music.

The *chamada* is another move which is performed in a synchronized way through the coordination of two players' bodies. Literally 'a call', it is a strategic, ritualistic sub-game, in which one of the players 'calls' the other one through the gesture of raising their hands. The other player joins them and they walk forwards and backwards in a close distance – which is the source of a potential danger. Although *chamada* can appear as a friendly break in the game, its purpose is to test the opponent's alertness, and either of the players may try to take their opponent down.

## 7. TEMPORAL ORGANIZATION OF CLASSES AND WORKSHOPS

We observed a total of six classes and two workshops. Both the classes and the workshops consisted of different phases. In Sandro's classes, despite certain differences, the phases can be summarized as:

1. stretching and chatting before the beginning of the class
2. theoretical part – teaching music, singing and explanations
3. practical part – practising moves individually
4. practical part – practising in pairs
5. roda (optional)
6. socializing (optional)

Below, we will look at each of these phases and the language affordances associated with them more closely.

### 7.1 Stretching and chatting before the beginning of the class

People were arriving at different times for Sandro's classes; Sandro himself was often late as he was commuting from York. For this reason, there was often a considerable amount of time before the actual beginning of the class. When the students meet before the class, they greet each other warmly, usually with a hug and a kiss on the cheek. This reflects the fact that some of them had known each other for years – however, newcomers receive a warm welcome as well. The same can be said about the workshops, where the greetings may be warmer as the students may see each other after a long time.

The students usually spend the time waiting for the beginning of the class stretching individually, some of them chat – usually catching up how they'd been since the last time. These conversations are usually in English; those who had grown up speaking Portuguese would use Portuguese to speak among themselves and with some of the students who are more fluent in Portuguese. In this way, Tiago uses Portuguese to speak to Mariana and Sandro (Brazilians) and to Sophie and Carolina (fluent speakers of Portuguese).

After Sandro arrives, he usually prepares the instruments (including the strenuous process of stringing the berimbau) and classes start shortly after. To mark the beginning of the class, Sandro usually asks the students to get a chair and sit in a circle, as a preparation for the "theoretical" part of the class.

The communication between the participants of the class at this point is therefore mostly verbal and through gestures, similar to everyday communication in an informal context, including everyday translanguaging involving Portuguese, English and potentially other shared languages, as it is a multilingual group.

### 7.2 Theoretical part – teaching music, singing and learning Afro-Brazilian culture

The class starts when Sandro gathers the students into a circle: the history and culture of capoeira is usually discussed. The songs serve as a perfect starting point as some of them had been evolving for centuries and they contain many historical and cultural references. As the songs are in Portuguese, with some African content, they also open up a discussion on language. Here Sandro explains the layered meanings of reference to snakes in this song:



Valha-me Deus, Senhor São Bento	Protect me God, St Benedict
Eu vou cantar meu Barravento	I will sing my barravento
	[a capoeira rhythm]
Valha-me Deus, Senhor São Bento	Protect me God, St Benedict
Buraco velho tem cobra dentro	There is a snake in the old hole
Valha-me Deus, Senhor São Bento	Protect me God, St Benedict
Eu vinha vindo pela Estrada	I was walking down the road
Valha-me Deus, Senhor São Bento	Protect me God, St Benedict
Quando uma cobra apareceu	When a snake appeared
Valha-me Deus, Senhor São Bento	Protect me God, St Benedict
Eu cantei São Bento Grande	I sang São Bento Grande
Valha-me Deus, Senhor São Bento	Protect me God, St Benedict
A cobra não me mordeu	The snake. didn't bite me

As Sandro explains:

If you sing a song, you need to put a fundament on the song, a meaning on that, sending a message to people on the song. A lot of people in these days they get challenged by a singer and they don't know what that means. I come to you and I sing a song to you, you don't really bother of what I'm singing, and I come to the *roda* and I kick your head. Oh, why did you kick me? I told you I would. How? I sang the song telling you I would, you didn't listen to me, you didn't pay attention on the song. You got beaten. Like one of the songs, just one of them, it says "*valha me Deus, Senhor São Bento, buraco velho tem cobra dentro.*" This is a kind of songs that, "*valha me Deus*", like, protect, kind of protect me God, and protect me Saint Benedict, "*São Bento*" is a saint who protects you against the snake bites, so snake bite or it means someone is biting, [...] *capoeirista* just gonna try to attack me. "*Buraco velho tem cobra dentro*", the old hole on the floor have a snake inside. When you sing this kind of songs, maybe, there is a really experienced guy in the *roda* playing with you, so I'm warning you, be aware because you are playing with a person with a lot of experience, so don't try him, because it may be dangerous. (Interview with Sandro - audio transcription)

Here Sandro is explaining the *fundamento*, which is a central dimension of capoeira. *Fundamento* "(capitalized) is related to how capoeira teaches you to live a life according to its ethical values (PORTAL CAPOEIRA, 2022b). This phase characteristically involves English/Portuguese translanguaging in Sandro's sessions, as always combined with music: students learn how to sing the melody as well as the lyrics in Portuguese. Sandro usually says a line of the song in Portuguese several times and the students repeat it after him. He also provides a translation and explains the meaning of the song. The translation is sometimes helpful even for expert users of Portuguese, as some of the songs contain archaisms, argot or dialect expressions:

Sandro: let's talk about old songs. There are a lot of different songs, but people don't pay attention to them. The language in them is different – when Mariana comes, and she's Brazilian, I can down the lyrics of the songs and she won't understand them. It is the language of the people from the dark side of the society. There are songs about a guy called *Pedro Mineiro*, lots of songs about him. The language is full of dialects, words with different meanings. For example "*vapor*" – for most people, it means just "steam", but the word used to mean a steamboat. People these days will think of "steam" and not "boat". People speak different than they used to. Therefore, if people don't study the meaning of the songs, they won't understand the old masters. (...) when you say "*tabibeira*" (?) "*Piauí*", and "*Piauí*" is a state in the Northeast of Brazil, people think you are speaking a different language. But that's how people really used to call a boat.

(Audio transcription)

The students then practise singing the song, sometimes accompanied by the instruments. Singing a song they have just learnt, in a language they may not be familiar with, and playing an instrument at the same time may prove a challenge. Sandro has a robust instructional style and sometimes comments in Portuguese on the process of learning to sing and play:

Sandro started playing and singing, then we joined when the moment of the chorus came, sometimes struggling with the singing and the melody, which could be quite funny. Sandro was shouting: *Tá desafinado!* it's out of tune! Or: *Tá ruim demais mas assim é que se aprende!* it's horrendous but that is the way to learn!

(Fieldnotes)

The extract above is an example of a verbal comment happening simultaneously with singing, but speaking and singing normally exclude each other in the capoeira class. When Sandro starts playing the berimbau at the beginning of the class, it serves as a signal and the students stop chatting. Soon after, he also starts singing the opening lines of the *Ladainha*, a song that is traditionally used in capoeira Angola at the beginning of the *roda*. It is therefore a part of

a ritual and it contains references to God and the great *mestres*, and the students should listen to it carefully to fully understand its message (PINHEIRO, 2022). The students join Sandro, singing the chorus. Without a pause, Sandro then moves on to another song.

### 7.3. Practical part

Before the beginning of the practical part, Sandro or one of the students turns on recorded capoeira music. The practical part sometimes starts with a warm-up, with the *ginga* moves performed individually, the students following Sandro and facing the same direction. The students also spend a lot of time practising in pairs. In the practical part of Sandro's classes we notice a shift from a predominantly verbal communication used in the theoretical part to a greater use of communication through physical movement, regulated as always by the rhythm of the music. When used, spoken communication is mostly for instruction, often accompanied by demonstration of the physical movement (language/body translanguaging) which aids comprehension. The exercise is broken down into parts to make it easier to follow and the verbal instructions follow the exercise. Sandro's first verbal instruction (*troca* – change) is followed by a pause, in which he stays for a moment in a position he wants his students to imitate. The next verbal instructions (*rolê* – roll, *troca* – change) are immediately followed by the movement. They are deictic and can be only correctly interpreted when accompanied by the action. The instructions are in Portuguese, but this does not impede understanding thanks to the fact that the movement is demonstrated as well.

Spoken language can also be substituted by the demonstration of the movement alone. On one occasion, Sandro gathers his students at one side of the room and starts performing a movement in silence, moving towards the other side of the room, with his students following him. Sandro does not need to explain verbally what he requires from his students – the activity is familiar.

Verbal communication is used mostly for instruction during the practical part, but information on the history of capoeira might get thrown in the middle of the exercises to illustrate certain moves. Here information on the historical context gives the students an idea about what the movement should look like; also illustrating the *malandragem* of the old masters:

Sandro explained that the movements should be fluid, almost as if when you are drunk. "The old *mestres* would sometimes pretend that they are drunk, that they are harmless. People would come to them and say – come and play with me, I'll give you money! So they took the money and then destroyed them." Sandro was staggering around the room, all of a sudden performing a few highly precise attacks. (Fieldnotes)

Practising in pairs typically follows the practice of individual movements, and it can be seen as a step between the exercises performed individually and the actual game in the *roda*. Unlike in a real game in the *roda*, however, practising in pairs is an opportunity to learn and practise the moves, leaving space for discussion between the two students. The exercises in pairs are usually synchronized and practised at a close distance, therefore coordination and communication are essential for the successful performance of the sequence. The students use both spoken language and body movement (language/body translanguaging) to communicate to each other. Spoken communication is likely to be significant especially when beginners are involved, whereas when Tiago is paired with another advanced student, they train mostly in silence.

Due to the fact that both *mestres* spoke limited English, Portuguese was more prominent in the workshops. Sandro typically interpreted, but there were several occasions when the translation was not provided and the students had to infer the meaning from the mestre's instructions in Portuguese, combined with gesture and body movements. Here is Mestre João demonstrating a move with capoeirista Marianne:

Video 1: Link: <https://vimeo.com/751176474> Password: TLANG

J: OK. Tá bem. Vamo terminar, vamo fechar essa sequência agora assim, ô. Erm... você... [...] tá bom? Então, ô. Vamo devagar. Meia lua de frente, rabo de arraia, rasteira, sobe, e ela sai. Você tá na minha frente, ô. Saindo (?) [...] de arraia, agora vou fazer aqui, ô, olha só, logo um, vai  
[accidentally touches Marianne's breasts with his foot]  
J: desculpa  
M: tá bom  
J: então eu vou sair [...] você vê como um a coisa não [...] se a gente quiser [...] vai fazer uma meia lua de frente eu vou sair eu vou sair aqui ô eu saio aqui ô um dois [...] desço aqui ô vou sair cabeça no chão ô um e a perna [...]. Essa é a situação do jogo de dentro. Jogo

de dentro é um jogo faz uma roda aqui fazem uma roda então tô aqui ô esse é o espaço esse é o espaço que nós temos [...] aqui ô [...] lado [...] frente [...] ela vem a chapa eu vou ter que sair [...] entendeu? É uma outra situação que eu criei. Então [...] no chão [...] uma perna [...] boto no chão então essa é habilidade tá bom? Vamo lá, troca.  
(Audio transcription)

Interestingly, Marianne, not a native speaker of Portuguese, is able to respond to the Mestre's apology appropriately in Portuguese. Mestre João speaks in Portuguese throughout the demonstration, using gestures and demonstrations to complement his verbal instructions (verbal/gestural/embodied translanguaging). The verbal element may not be understood by all the students in the class, yet all seem to 'get' the instructions, whether through the demonstration or by imitating others in the group.

#### 7.4 Roda

The *roda* typically occupied only about last 15 minutes of Sandro's class and it did not always happen due to time constraints or low numbers of people. It was, however, a prominent part of the workshops, where it also took place at the end. It is an opportunity for a spontaneous game of capoeira, not a time for learning, but putting in practice one's skills and enjoying and expressing oneself, whether through singing, playing instruments or playing capoeira.

#### 7.5 Socializing

Socializing is an inseparable part of capoeira practice. In Brazil, capoeira *rodas* often finish with dancing *samba de roda*. In a similar way, both capoeira workshops and some of the classes we observed ended with socializing, either in a bar or the house of one of the students. On those occasions, capoeira and African/ Brazilian culture is often discussed and Portuguese language spoken, therefore they represent another occasion for the students to expand their knowledge. The students also get to know each other better, which supports the cohesion and friendly atmosphere of the whole capoeira school.

### 8. FOCUS ON *RODA* PHASE

In this section of the analysis, we will focus on the *roda* phase and go into more analytic detail. The *roda*, meaning a circle, can mean a social occasion at which capoeira is played either at the end of a class/workshop or organized independently, or the actual people who form the circle.

#### 8.1 The pattern of capoeira moves in the *roda*

A game in the *roda* often has the pattern of alternating attacks and escapes. If one person attacks, it is likely that the other person will attack in the next turn. Just like in a conversation, but here a conversation between bodies, it gives both participants of the game to express themselves. Sometimes a few *gingas* are inserted. The pattern is typically as follows:

Person 1: attack  
Person 2: escape (optional: *ginga*) Person 2: attack  
Person 1: escape (optional: *ginga*)

The turn-taking is apparent from the game between Tiago and a visiting Mestre, Mestre João:

Video 2: Link: <https://vimeo.com/205044020> Password: TLANG

In a simplified way, the dynamic of the moves in the first part of the video could be annotated as follows:

T does a <i>tesoura</i> , MJ escapes	T attacks
MJ does <i>rabo de arraia</i> , T escapes with an <i>au</i>	MJ attacks
T does the <i>meia de lua de frente</i> kick, MJ avoids it, they both go to <i>ginga</i>	T attacks, <i>ginga</i>
MJ feigns a <i>meia de lua de frente</i> kick	MJ attacks
T moves away from the kick and counterattacks with <i>chapéu de couro</i> kick	T attacks
MJ avoids the kick by rolling away from it, attacks with a kick	MJ attacks
T avoids the kick, MJ moves away from him by turning around him	
T kicks ( <i>chapéu de couro</i> ), MJ feigns a <i>rasteira</i>	T attacks
MJ feigns a kick, performs <i>bananeira</i> (handstand)	MJ attacks
MJ moves away from T, does a <i>bananeira</i>	
T - <i>rabo de arraia</i>	T attacks
MJ – <i>rasteira</i>	
T moves away with an <i>au</i>	
MJ feigns a kick, a headstand	MJ attacks
T performs a kick while standing on his head	T attacks
T performs a kick while standing on his head. MJ in front of him, <i>ginga</i>	T attacks
T does <i>rabo de arraia</i>	T attacks
MJ falls into <i>negativa</i> , marks <i>rasteira</i> , feigns a kick	MJ attacks

Despite the fact that Tiago performs several attacks following each other towards the end of the extract, we can see a regular pattern. However, it needs to be observed that this pattern is simplified – for example, it does not take into account counter-attacks, such as a *rasteira* (a sweep) performed while escaping.

The *ginga* represents the moment of a relative peace, when, however, the capoeiristas are evaluating the weak points of their opponent and preparing an attack. This alternates with action – attacking or escaping the attack. When practising the movements in the class outside the *roda*, both Sandro and Mestre João like to mark the transition between the *ginga* and the action gesturally with a clap of their hands. Similarly, Mestre João likes to mark with a clap the transition between the theoretical part of the class and practical one. The action follows the music – especially in the moments between attacks, such as when performing the *ginga*.

## 8.2 Space: position of the players within the roda

It is in front of the leader, *ao pé do berimbau*, literally at the foot of the berimbau, that every game of capoeira begins:





Figure 3. beginning of the game - *ao pé do berimbau* (screenshot from a video).

It is the place where the two players greet and often embrace each other before the beginning of a game; some *capoeiristas* pray. It is the *soul* of the *roda*, and a place where the players also occasionally return during the game to re-start.

When the game begins, the two players move towards the centre of the *roda*:



Figure 4. moving towards the centre of the *roda* (screenshot from a video).

This is a tactical space, as being pushed towards the limits of the *roda* (delimited by the people sitting) puts a *capoeirista* into a disadvantageous position, as he/she is able to perform only a limited range of moves. When pushed towards the boundaries of the *roda*, a *capoeirista* will usually try to find a way to escape and find a better position.

During the actual game (which is of course non-verbal), the players are trying to find an exposed or unguarded place on the opponent's body. In this way, they might attack the exposed belly of their opponent doing an *aú* (cartwheel) with a *cabeçada* or they might try to sweep the leg of the other player while he/she is performing a kick.

Unlike in other martial arts, attacks are avoided rather than blocked. In a normal circumstance, an experienced *capoeirista* will know how to move in a way that he/she is not exposing any vital points on their body, therefore their opponent may have to perform several moves until they spot an opportunity for an attack.

Although there may be differences between styles, capoeira is played at a relatively short distance. The two players are very close to each other, however they hardly ever touch. Instead, they avoid each other's attacks, while at the same time looking to put themselves in an advantageous position from where they could perform an attack themselves. Most of the times, the attacks are deliberately unfinished.

On some occasions verbal communication intrudes on the smooth flow of movement, typically as repair. On one occasion, Sophie performs a kick which she believes has hit Mestre João. She apologises (verbally and through a gesture – a common-place gesture rather than one specific for capoeira), then offers him her hand in an invitation to perform a *volta ao mundo*, after which they crouch at the *pé do berimbau* to start a new game.

While physical contact is not desirable during the capoeira game itself, it is present in the greetings (the *capoeiristas* often embrace each other at the beginning and end of the game) and in ritualistic movements such as *volta ao mundo* and *chamada*.

### 8.3 Discussion

Although the *roda* is saturated with a culturally rich lexis it is basically a space for the conversation between bodies and is largely non-verbal, though gestural elements are involved such as the opening invitation and the closing submission stage, all involving culturally rich gestural action that *capoeiristas* must learn. Sophie's verbal and gestural apology to Mestre João is therefore relatively unusual. The other constant element of the *roda* and capoeira practice more generally is of course the interaction of bodies with music, the music setting the rhythm and pace for the embodied interaction.

## 9. USE OF PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE IN CAPOEIRA

Capoeira is a cultural practice which has spread all over the world thanks to the Brazilian diaspora. Similarly to karate, for example, the names of the techniques are in the original language, i.e. Brazilian and Afro-Brazilian Portuguese, but expressions in this language are used to denominate also other concepts related to capoeira. These include:

- Names of the techniques: *ginga* (the basic position), *negativa* (a defence position), *meia-lua* ('half-moon', a kick), *rabo de arraia* ('tail of the ray fish', a kick), *cabeçada* (a head strike), *aú* (a hand stand), *tesoura* ('scissor', a kick), *chamada* ('the call', a ritualistic sub-game)
- Names of the instruments: *berimbau*, *pandeiro* (tambourine), *atabaque* (drum), *agogô* (cowbells), *reco-reco*.
- Terms for capoeira events: *roda* (a social gathering where capoeira is played), *batizado* ('baptism', a grading ceremony), *formatura* (a graduation ceremony).
- Position within the capoeira hierarchy: *mestre* (master), *contramestre* (the stage before becoming a *mestre*), (see PORTAL CAPOEIRA 2022).
- Cultural concepts related to capoeira that are not easily translated into English:
- *malandragem* (trickery), *mandinga* (knowledge/ witchcraft).
- Nicknames: students of some, but not all, capoeira schools are given a nickname, which is generally in Portuguese. Names of most *mestres* are nicknames as well. The origin of nicknames lies in the time when capoeira was illegal and revealing the *capoeirista's* identity could lead to their arrest.

Capoeira songs represent another important area of use of Portuguese language in the context of capoeira. It needs to be observed that although most of these songs are in Portuguese, there is also, as Sandro points out, a small but significant number of songs in other languages, such as Yoruba or contain lexical elements from other languages. The students are required to sing the songs during the class, which means they need to memorize them so that they are able to actively reproduce them. The songs are also extremely rich in terms of references to the history and culture of capoeira and of Brazil, which as we have seen Sandro typically explains in English.

In terms of use of language for instruction, English language prevailed at the capoeira classes we have observed in the practice phase some of the short instructions were in Portuguese (*rolê* – roll, *troca* – change, *desce* – go down). Also, Sandro was using Portuguese to communicate with the expert users of Portuguese, and occasionally with the whole group.

In addition to regular trainings, the capoeira workshops are delivered by visiting *mestres*, usually coming either directly from Brazil or another country where they have moved to from Brazil, often with the purpose of teaching capoeira. In either case, they may not speak English or their English may be limited, so here Portuguese is likely to be the main language of communication. At the two workshops we have observed, the *mestres* communicated with the students mostly in Portuguese and Sandro interpreted some of their speech into English. As a rule, lot of socializing is taking place at the end of the workshop, and Portuguese language is often used for informal communication.

## 10. COMMUNICATION THROUGH GESTURES. GESTURES AND RITUAL

Gesture and ritual play an important part in the communication ensemble of capoeira. In the *roda*, communication through gestures plays a key role. Gestures are used to mark a transition from one thing to another (such as when starting or finishing the game) or they serve to show respect to the leader and other participants of the *roda*. Some of the gestures follow an established pattern and they resemble a ritual, believed to have origins in the Afro-Brazilian religion of candomblé. The connection with religion is also reflected in some terminology (*bênção* – lit. blessing; a name of a kick, *batizado* – lit. baptism; a grading ceremony).

In a capoeira *roda* actions follow each other in an established order. The opening song is called *ladainha*, sometimes translated as litany. It is a song praising capoeira, the old *mestres* and God. It is sung by the leader of the *roda*; the other participants of the *roda* wait and listen before joining the chorus, while the two *capoeiristas* are waiting *ao pé do berimbau*, often touching or holding each other's hands. They are waiting for his blessing to start the game, which he grants them by tilting the *berimbau* slightly over their heads. To leave a *roda*, *capoeiristas* often extend an arm towards each other, and the two players often hug before leaving the *roda*, through the same place from where they entered it.

These rituals may be interpreted in connection with candomblé, but many *capoeiristas* interpret them more broadly as a way of acknowledging the authority of the leader of the *roda* and showing respect towards each other. For Tiago, these gestures capture the spirit of respectfulness and non-competitiveness in capoeira.

Tiago: So before we play we shake our hands and after as well. It's the way to respect to, to others, you know. That's why it's it's the way as well to see how capoeira is not kind of a competition like other arts like tae-kwondo, you know where you have points, capoeira no. It is (?) fun. That's why we need to have the permission for who playing, ya.  
(Interview with Tiago - audio transcription)

There are other instances of communication through gesture, which serve to mark a transition. Apart from entering the *roda* through the space in front of the leader of the *roda*, described above, a *capoeirista* can 'buy' the game. To buy a game, any person standing in the *roda* can replace one of the players by indicating that they want to join the game by stretching out their hand towards the centre of the *roda*, with the palm facing the person they want to play with. This way of entering the game is usually used in more dynamic *rodas*. Gestures are, therefore, essential for establishing the order of action in the *roda*, as well as showing respect towards each other and are part of the linguistic and cultural learning involved in capoeira practice.

## 11. BODY COMMUNICATION DURING THE GAME

During the game of capoeira, the two adversaries watch each other closely, trying to read and predict each other's movements and to respond to them quickly – either by an attack or escape, using the techniques in their repertoire. They may also decide to perform a few *ginga* movements, when their movements are synchronized to mirror each other. However, even during this moment there is a sense of an imminent attack that may come at any point from either of the *capoeiristas*.

At other times, the players may break the attack-escape dynamic by introducing a ritualistic sub-game such as *chamada* or *volta ao mundo*, or even introduce dance or a small dramatic performance. These moments favour playfulness

and self-expression, however even a seemingly harmless and friendly gesture may serve as a guise for an attack. In fact, this ability to confuse the adversary by pretending, this is *malandragem*, highly valued in capoeira.

Just like spoken conversation is characterized by a certain tone, the same can be said about a game of capoeira. The way the game is played depends on different factors, such as occasion or personality of the players. A friendly game at the end of a class will be different from a game played in a *roda* where people may want to impress students from different schools. During public performances, there is usually a focus on non-conflictive playfulness and acrobatics. As pointed out above the tone and pace is throughout set by the music.

## IN CONCLUSION: THOUGHTS ON LEARNING PORTUGUESE THROUGH CAPOEIRA

Dialect and register typically intersect. So in capoeira the Portuguese made available involves a register richly inflected with Afro-Brazilian language and culture. This is part of the package that might attract disapproval from mainstream ideology (cf. the comments of Sophie's Brazilian ex). If apprentice *capoeiristas* are learning a register, we can, following Agha, suggest that the process is one of *enregisterment* (AGHA, 2003, RHODES; CLONAN-ROY; WORTHAM, 2020). However the idea of register here is not narrowly linguistic since it involves the coordination of visual/verbal/musical/embodied and other elements in an assemblage. Sophie's example illustrates that the requirements for the level of knowledge of Portuguese language and culture are different for a beginner and for an accomplished *capoeirista*, the demands as *capoeiristas* progress are incremental. This point is also made in the materials published by *Ministério das Relações Exteriores* for teaching Portuguese abroad through capoeira (MINISTÉRIO DAS RELAÇÕES EXTERIORES, 2020). While no initial knowledge of Portuguese is expected from new students and the language learning takes place mostly through repeating the chorus of songs and understanding simple instructions that are often accompanied by movement, advanced *capoeiristas* will be expected to perform the role of the lead singer and have an in-depth understanding of the meaning of the songs, which includes their cultural and historical connotations. They will also need to be able to use Portuguese on a communicative level, as the visiting *mestres* at capoeira workshops may have limited English or they may choose to speak Portuguese during the workshop or at informal social gatherings that are an integral part of capoeira events.

Moving from the first stage of language learning, characterised by repetition of words and phrases and passive knowledge, to the next one where a more active production of the language is required can be a challenge, and our observations suggest that this transition usually requires additional language learning outside of the capoeira space. Sophie is an example of an accomplished learner who acquired the language through a combination of learning through songs (capoeira, Brazilian music), listening to conversations between native speakers of Brazilian Portuguese and some more formal language learning strategies (using a textbook), alongside factors such as passion for capoeira and Portuguese language as well as prior knowledge of other Latin languages (she is a native French speaker and has studied Spanish). Marianne shows a knowledge of communicative Portuguese, used appropriately (i.e. beyond the knowledge of songs or isolated vocabulary). Capoeira classes then work as a starting point in learning Portuguese, and capoeira provides a strong motivation for developing this initial knowledge (as accomplished *capoeiristas* need to speak the language on a more advanced level).

An obvious consequence of our study would be to find ways of enhancing the language learning opportunities of capoeira, bringing in pedagogical strategies to make the language learning opportunities more systematic and available. The gap between the initial stage of language learning and a successful language acquisition is usually bridged by studying the language as a personal initiative. There are resources available on the internet and elsewhere to address this need, such as *Portuguese for capoeiristas* (WHYATT; BARBERIS; PASCHOAL, 2020), which claims to "teach you the most essential words, verbs, phrases and grammar in 16 comprehensive lessons based around popular Capoeira Songs," and which is available both online and as a printed publication. From our perspective however Capoeira as an Additional Language means learning capoeira as an embodied practice of which Portuguese, specifically an Afro-Brazilian variety is an essential but by no means the only element.

The possibility to integrate systematic language learning in the structure of the capoeira class has also been explored in the recent curriculum proposal by *Ministério das Relações Exteriores* (2020) of *Português para capoeiristas*. Taking a Language for Specific Purposes approach it is a part of a wider collection of curricular proposals of teaching Portuguese abroad in specific contexts, aiming at filling in the methodological gap in teaching Portuguese in cultural



centres and affiliated institutions outside Brazil. The proposal makes use of capoeira songs and texts and videos about capoeira, with references beyond capoeira (e.g. the artist Caribé; Brazilian dances samba de *roda* and frevo; singers such as Gilberto Gil, Dorival Caymmi or Caetano Veloso). It recognises that some of the language is used specifically in capoeira, with one entire unit dedicated to ‘capoeira slang’ (*Unidade 13: a gíria do capoeira*). Such an initiative to integrate Portuguese language teaching in the frame of the capoeira classes is commendable as it is a step towards a more independent use of the language, which is necessary for progressing in capoeira, but it is purely focussed on the linguistic aspect.

The approach we take here is rather different, based on our research rather than curriculum driven in that it starts with ethnographic research into capoeira, drawing on participant observation, audio and video recordings, an approach often called linguistic ethnography (cf. SNELL; COPLAND; SHAW, 2015). As suggested above, we have also taken a translanguaging approach (BAYNHAM; LEE, 2018), drawing out the different communication modalities that make up the capoeira spatial repertoire: verbal, gestural, embodied, musical and examining how they work together at different stages of the session. So in taking a translanguaging approach we are affirming that named/nameable language such as Portuguese or English are only one strand in the modalities that come together in capoeira practice. Indeed Sandro has additionally reminded us of the presence of African elements in each modality, including from languages such as Yoruba, further enriching the distinctively Afro-Brazilian synthesis.

Our observations and recordings show us that at a basic level as well as embodied practice the *capoeiristas* are learning on the one hand some quite deep elements of Afro-Brazilian language and culture through songs and sayings, through transmission of this history and the specialized register of capoeira, some of which might not be immediately available to all Brazilians. These are mediated (translanguaged) by Sandro through English. On the other hand, the learners are also exposed to instructional language in Portuguese, which is comprehensible either because it is combined with gesture and embodied action, or, in the case of the workshops is interpreted by Sandro. We saw for example how Marianne is able to respond appropriately to the Mestre’s apology with “*tudo bem*”. We conclude however that, while this is a starting point, it is not enough without the supplement of other forms of learning. We think for example that involvement with capoeira could also enrich more mainstream Portuguese learning, for example at tertiary level, where students of Portuguese could benefit from the deep engagement with Afro-Brazilian language and culture afforded by capoeira.

We started this paper with the metaphor of “language learning in the wild”. But is capoeira really “in the wild”? We see it springing up historically as a space of freedom and resistance on the periphery to the repressive norms of a slave-owning society. However as soon as you look at capoeira as practice you see how highly patterned and organized it is. Every movement is regulated by the rhythm. The songs and sayings are richly layered with cultural significances that might not be immediately available even to some Brazilians. The whole, as Sandro pointed out, is informed by the *fundamentos*: cultural values that characterize capoeira practice. Historically one of the insights of anthropology and sociology has been to uncover the logics of practice, so activities that seem to the outsider chaotic and can be dismissed as “primitive” are found to have sophisticated order. This is clearly the case with capoeira. Thus there is of course, despite its reputation, nothing wild about capoeira: practitioners are apprenticed into, adhere to and embody complex and layered logics of practice with a history. Therefore, we believe that systematised language learning understood, following Agha, as processes of enregisterment can be introduced in diasporic capoeira classes, and capoeira can be enlisted to enrich language and culture learning in mainstream Portuguese programmes. From our perspective Capoeira as an Additional Language is not just about language, but about acquiring a register that is organized as an assemblage, comprised of its verbal, visual and embodied elements. Thus the process that novice *capoeiristas* embark on is a process of enregisterment.

We started this study with a relatively simple question: how could capoeira in diaspora provide a context for Portuguese learning, in particular an Afro-Brazilian variety of Portuguese. The idea of translanguaging led us to examine the complex interaction of language and embodied action and eventually music in capoeira practice. It began to seem reductionist simply to see capoeira as an occasion for Portuguese learning. For that reason we began to see the capoeira practice as a register, assembled from the variety of semiotic modes in play including from different language varieties and from that point capoeira learning and language learning as a part of it as a form of enregisterment. Another question we asked ourselves was whether the Portuguese learnt in capoeira would be sufficient to learn Portuguese. For some of the *capoeiristas* we spoke to, capoeira was a jumping off point towards fluency in Portuguese. For others this was not the case. Nevertheless we see potential for engagement with capoeira

to deepen Portuguese learning more generally. Probably in language learning terms, a combination of exposure to Portuguese through capoeira with other ways of learning would be most effective. We started this investigation with concepts like informal learning and language learning in the wild. Again our investigation showed that capoeira is multi-layered and complexly organized. Nevertheless we would suggest that in the typical diasporic capoeira group, Portuguese language learning remains informal and incidental, that the *contramestres* don't see themselves as language teachers. We might however conclude by suggesting that the idea of language learning as enregisterment is an interesting one that could be extended more widely to more mainstream ways of language learning.

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

This paper is based on research done in Leeds by the TLANG Project, directed by Angela Creese. Fieldwork for the Capoeira phase of the project was primarily carried out by the authors Mike Baynham and Jolana Hanusova. The project report from which it draws was co-authored by the Leeds TLANG team, Mike Baynham, James Simpson, John Callaghan, Jolana Hanusova, Jessica Bradley and Emilee Moore. (<https://tlang.org.uk/open-access-publications/>) Analysis to be found in the project report was extended and revised by Baynham and Hanusova to address the focus of this paper.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

#### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Due to the original confidentiality agreements in the TLANG research, for ethical reasons raw research data is not accessible but the data this paper draws on can be found along with additional data including video clips in the project report.

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Recebido: 1/6/2022

Aceito: 5/10/2022

Publicado: 10/10/2022