

Strategies to document the verbal content played on ‘talking’ musical instruments: methodologies at the edge of the music-language relation

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Instrumental Singing

- It is a **Verbal Art** performed with musical instruments (flute, drums, mouth archs, bamboo clarinet, etc)
- We know that an important part of the ancestral music traditions is based on songs, performed with *singing voices*
- But in several populations of the world, some songs are played directly with musical instruments instead of the voice, defining this phenomenon of *'Instrumental Singing'*

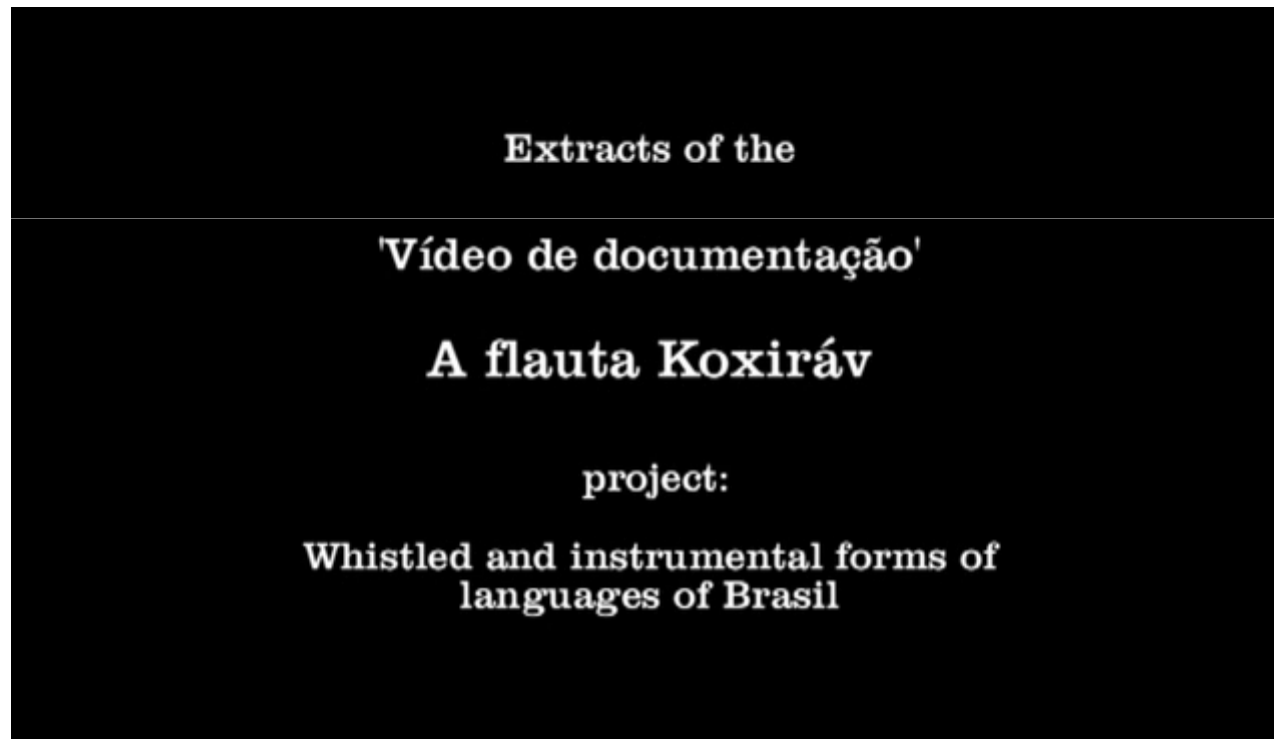
=> *Example: Singing Gavião flute.*

Example: Gavião flute *Koxiráv*

- Two video extracts:

Each song is presented performed:

- a. with the flute;
- b. with the singing voice;
- c. with the flute again



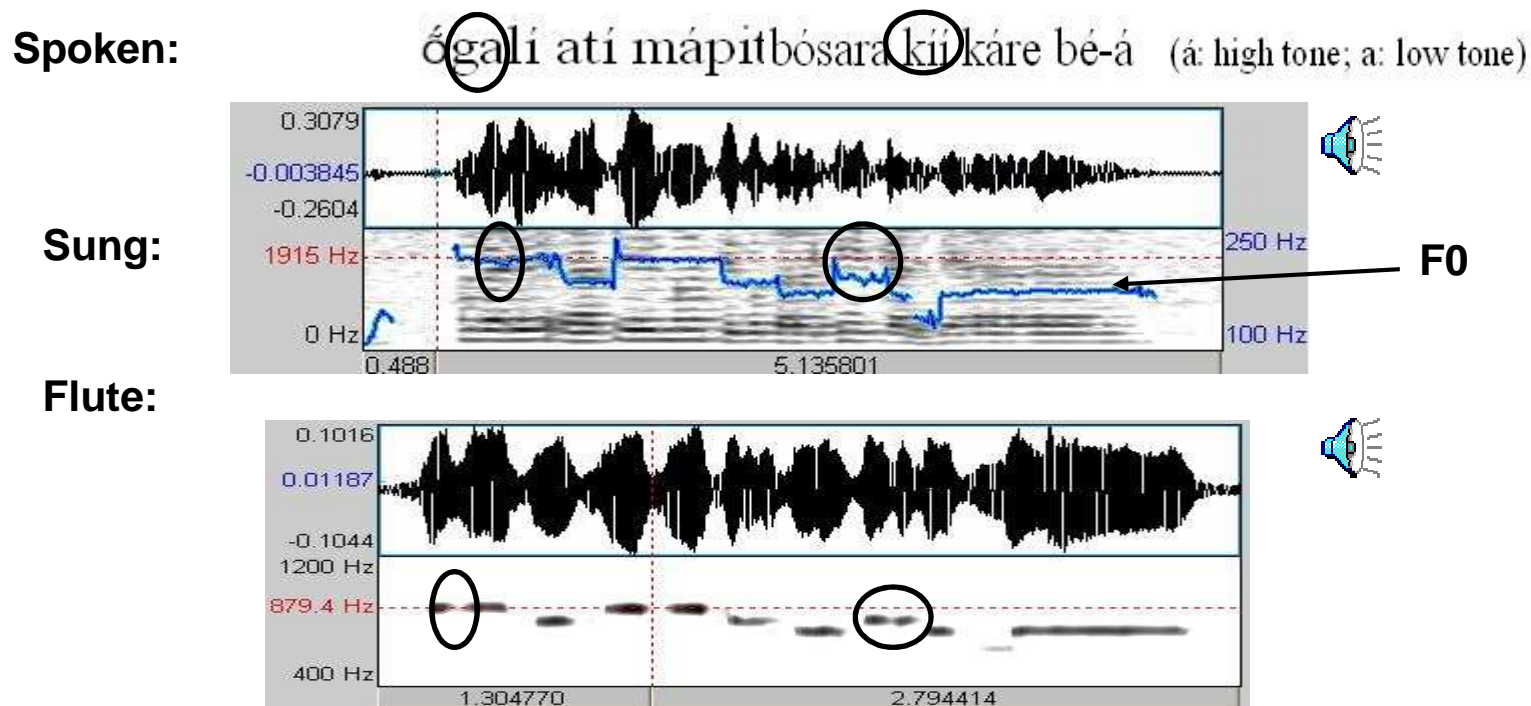
Principle

- The played melody is based on a *relation of acoustic iconicity* between the voice and the instrumental imitation.
- In the case of languages with tones and distinctive quantity, like Gavião, one obvious question is the relation between the *instrumental melody and the suprasegmental phonology* of the words.



Example: Acoustic similarity

- Some melodic and phonologic salient acoustic features of speech are selected to be transposed on the flute
- => here: pitch for tones, and rhythm principally



- There are some differences between spoken, sung and instrumental forms that must be explained (some illustrated on the sentence above)
- Some might be due to archaic forms (or loaned), other due to specific melody of sung form (rapidity, changing register of the voice...)

Overview of the terminology in the literature

- Other terms have been used to qualify such an interplay between language and music:
 - Very general terms like:
 - *Instrumental Speech Surrogates* or *Instrumental languages* (in a collection of articles edited by Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok (1976))
 - *Cultural Soundscaping* in an anthropological perspective by Hill (1993) about Wakuénai Flute Music, Venezuela.
 - But also more specific terms like:
 - *Singing mode of Instruments*: Nketia (1976), about Akan drums used in both talking mode and singing mode.
 - *Speech of a musical instrument*: for example ‘*Paroles de Balafons*’ in Zemp (2004), about the singing of Balafon (African xylophones).
 - *Musical Talking* (Hill 1993)
 - *Verbal content of music* (Poss 2005) about Hmong various musical instruments used for singing.
- The Musical Instruments used for this kind of Verbal Art have been called ‘*Talking Musical Instruments*’ (Carrington 1949).

(This denomination includes instruments like drums used sometimes for telecommunication purposes: declaimed speech and public announces - rather than songs - transposed in percussions)

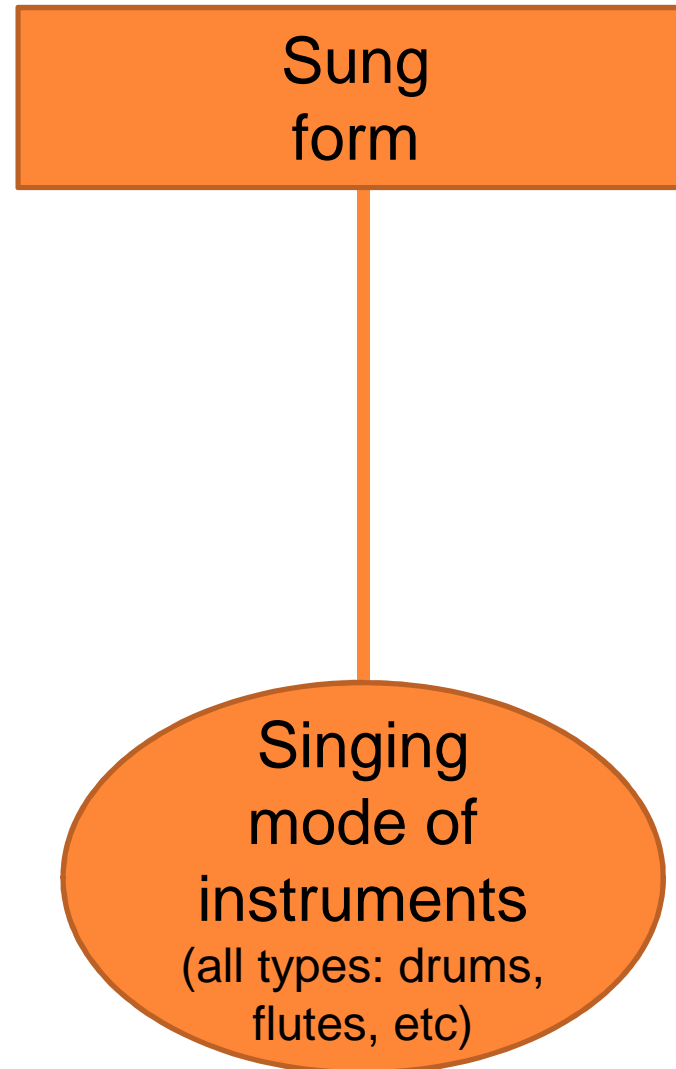
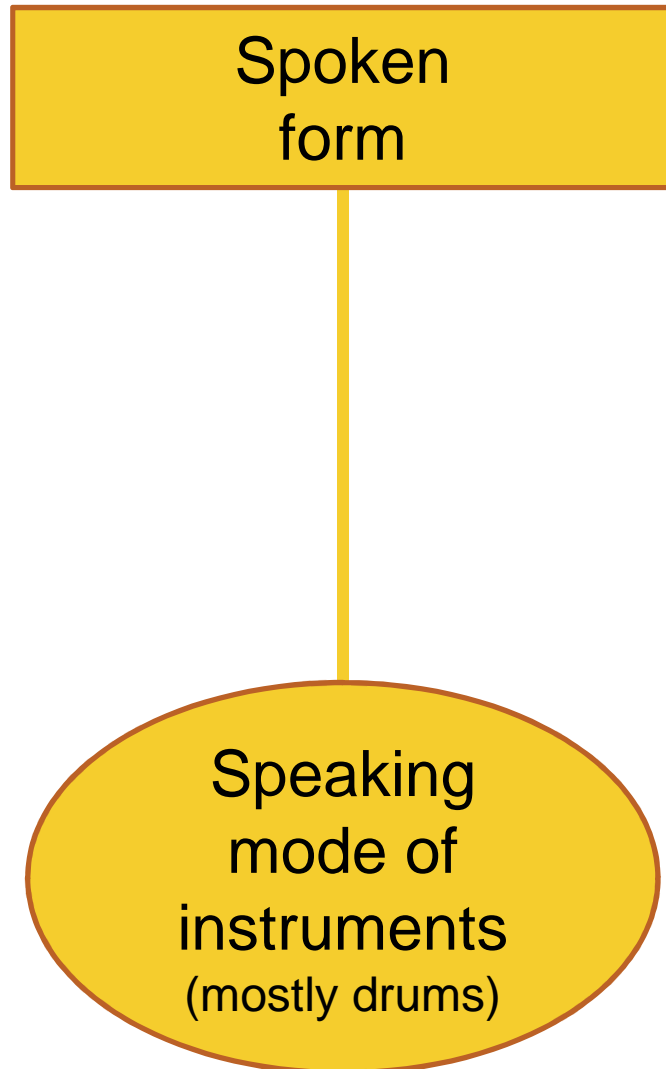


General clarification

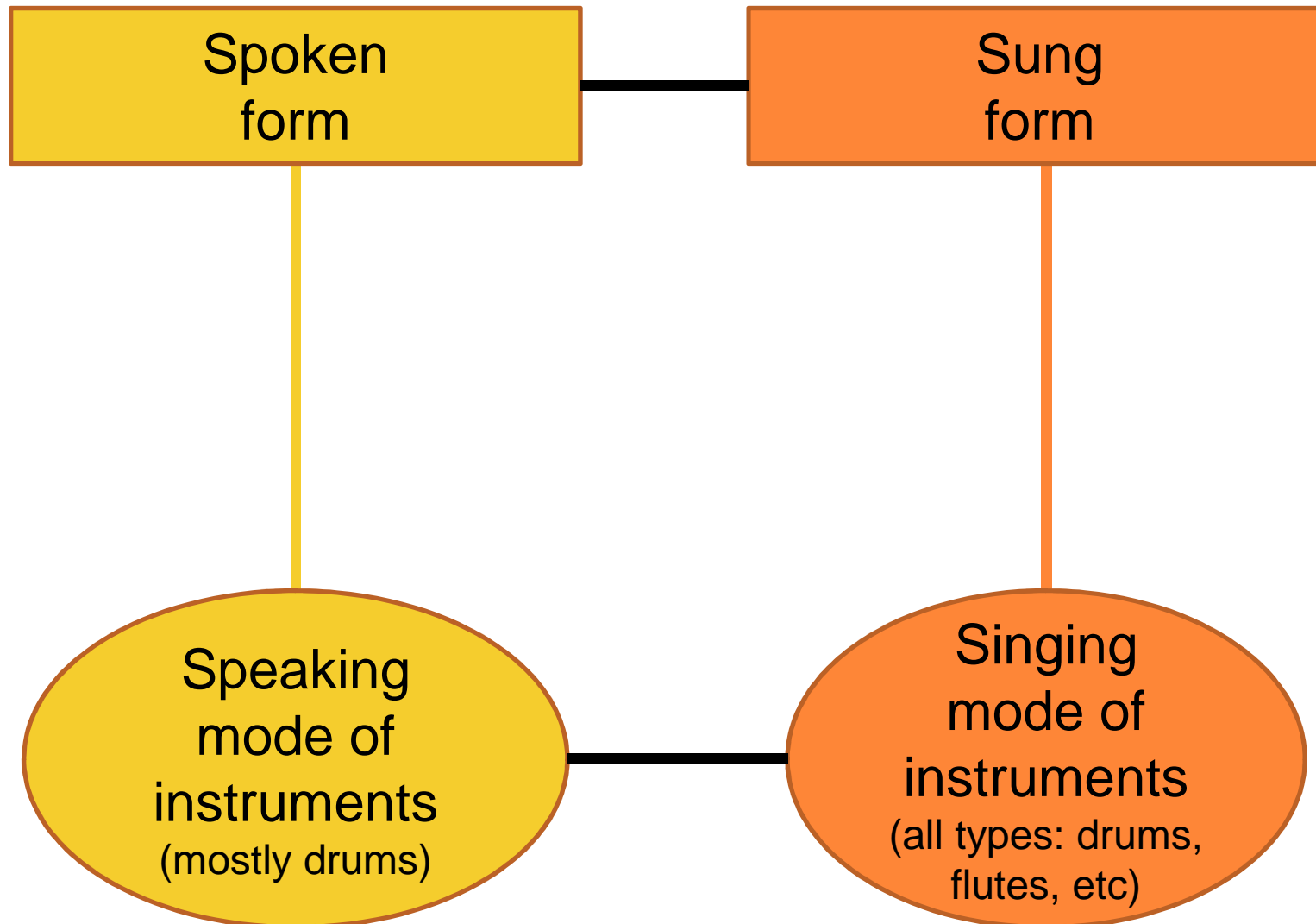
Spoken
form

Sung
form

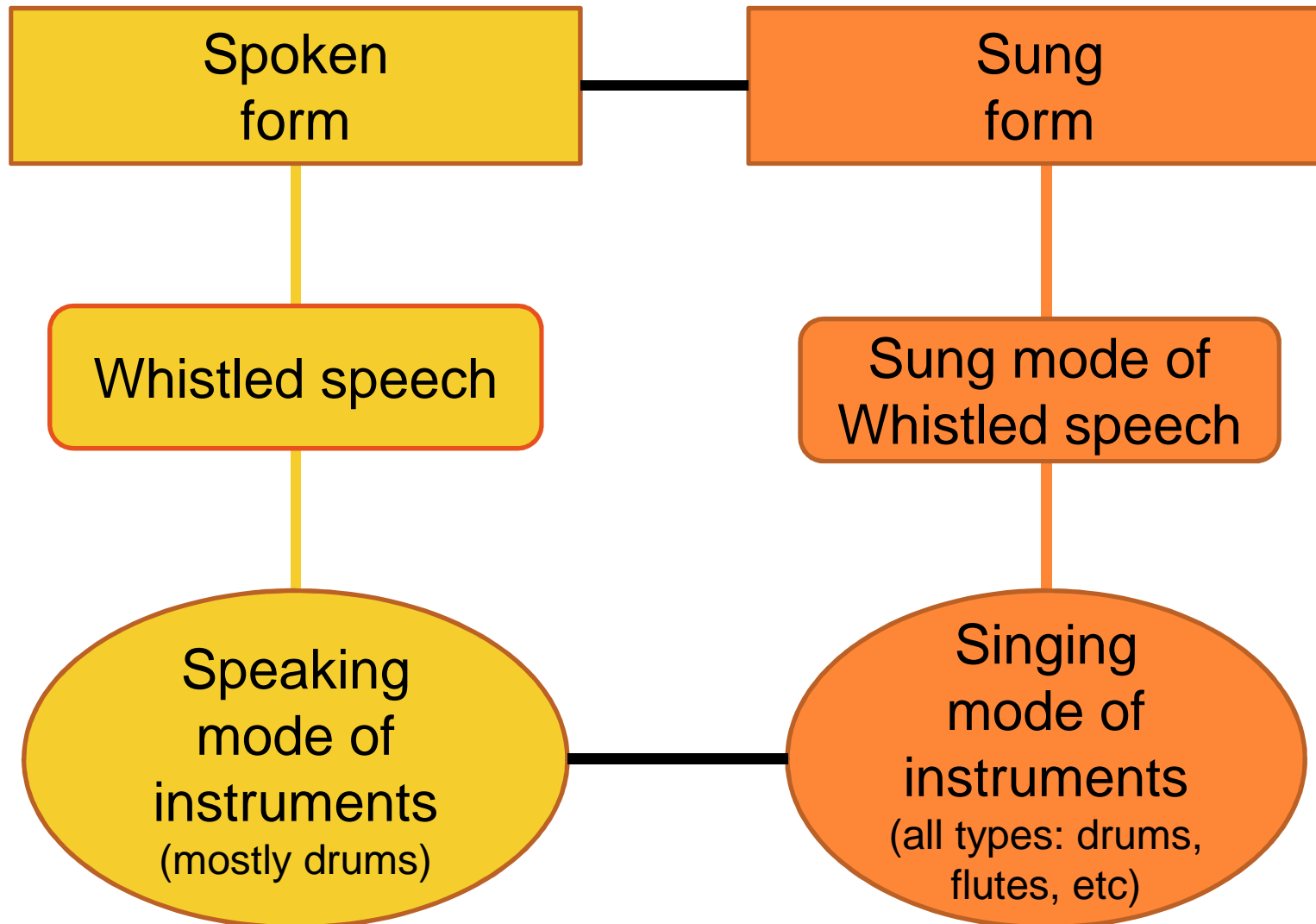
General clarification



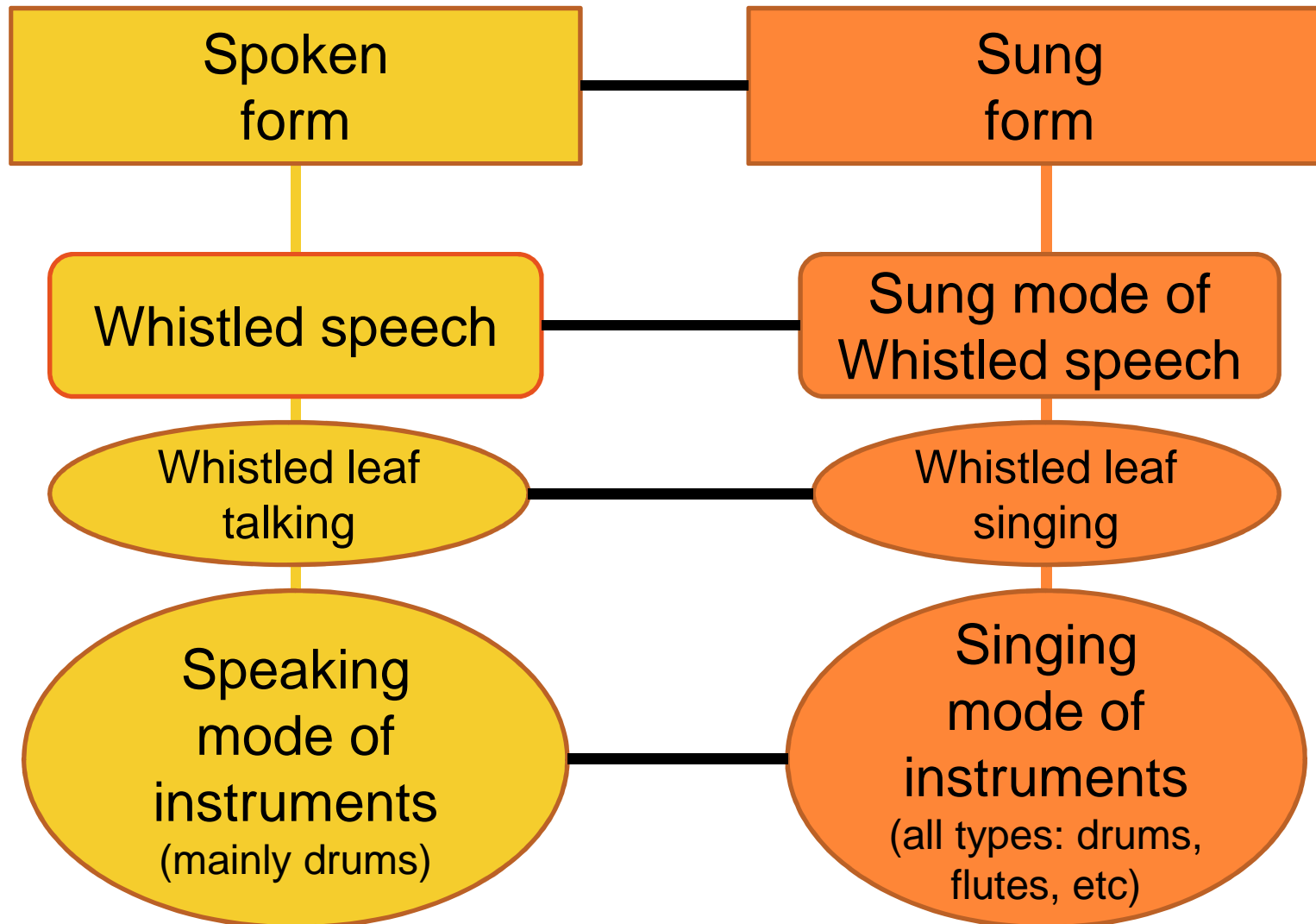
General clarification



General clarification



General clarification



Diversity, Vitality and Documentation

- **Diversity:** This phenomenon of Instrumental Singing is little known, but widely spread all over the world (Sebeok & Umiker-Sebeok 1976).
- **Endangerment:** it is identified as threatened to disappear within one or two generations in most of the concerned cultures, because it is part of the traditional substract of the oral patrimony (often linked to the traditional cosmogony and therefore diabolised by invasive religions)
- **State of Documentation:** there are very few systematic studies about these phenomena in the world.

The Amazon region is one of the rare places where a great diversity of indigenous languages are still expressed this way.



Methodology of our project (Museu Goeldi/ELDP-SOAS)

Manufacture, Music, Singing, Speech, Archiving, Publishing

- Our methodology developed the following steps:
 - 1. Preliminary enquiry and objectives of documentation with informants
 - 2. Documentation of the manufacture and tuning of the instruments.
 - 3. Different types of recording sessions for each song
 - 4. Field formation in recording, mounting and annotating audio CDs and Video DVDs for some community members (computer work in school, 'Punto de cultura', associations, laptops)
 - 5. Preliminary mounting of annotated video documentaries
 - 6. Full transcription and translation (began in the field, completed in the laboratory with invited informants)
 - 7. Formation in complete edition of DVDs of visiting informants
 - 8. Correction of videos with indigenous school professors and informants
 - 9. Final mounting of DVDs to be returned to the community
 - 10. Insertion in the digital server of the Museu Goeldi (see poster of Galucio and Costa in Hawai ICLDC)
 - 11. Deposit in the partner Archive, ELAR (SOAS)
 - 12. Detailed analysis (acoustics, phonology, and musicology) and publication
 - 13. Publication of results



First step: preliminary enquiry and description

Who, how, when, where, in which contexts?

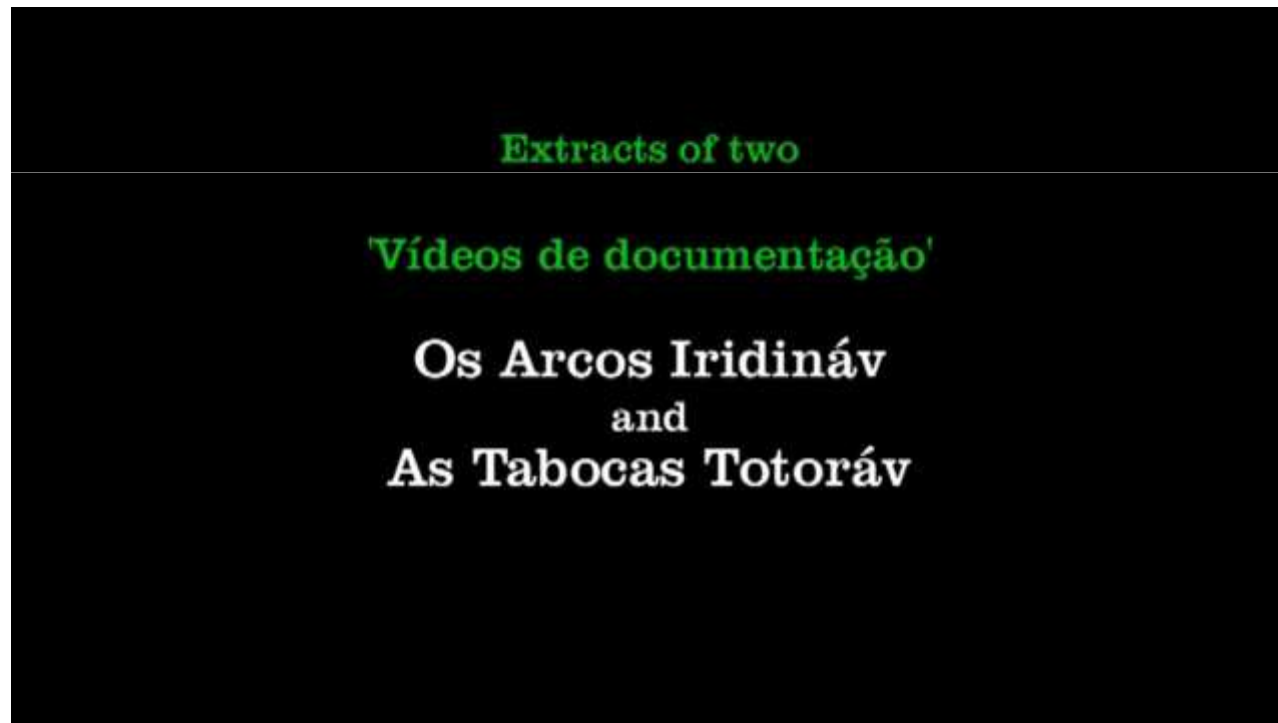
- Among the Gavião we identified three different types of instrumentos used to imitate sung speech

Koxiráv flute *Totoráv* tabocas (three) *Iridináv* double mouth arch

- Dedicated contexts of use for each instrument (courtship, festas)
- Dedicated repertoire (sung speech is only for learning and practicing)
- Popular for aesthetic qualities and poetic possibilities (artistic)
- Popular to express, memorize and teach and important part of the oral patrimony (practical)

Second step: Manufacture

- We followed the **processes of preparation of the instruments**: collect of the material (bamboo, for example), manufacture and tuning.



Third step: different types of recording sessions for each song

Recording of musical performance and its complementary forms (sung speech, singing whistling, standard spoken form, whistled speech):

- *Singing whistling* and *whistled speech* are used as sharp tools to **compare suprasegmentals of spoken and sung forms** (as they are natural for Gavião speakers)
 - ⇒ As we saw with the flute, the sessions of recording and of transcription revealed a direct prosodic similarity between the spoken, the sung and the instrumental forms. This convergence **exploits the fact that in Gavião, tone is important to understand the meaning of songs.**
- Sessions implied various performers in various villages (4 villages until now, during three fieldworks) to identify and record the **largest repertory possible with the best players**
- **For the musical performance:** various recording sessions in different contexts (depending of the instrument)
 - ⇒ **Example: a song played with three Totoráv**

Third step: example of instrumental performance and sung equivalent

- Totoráv tabocas: Various contexts but one is still missing (real traditional festa documented in live)



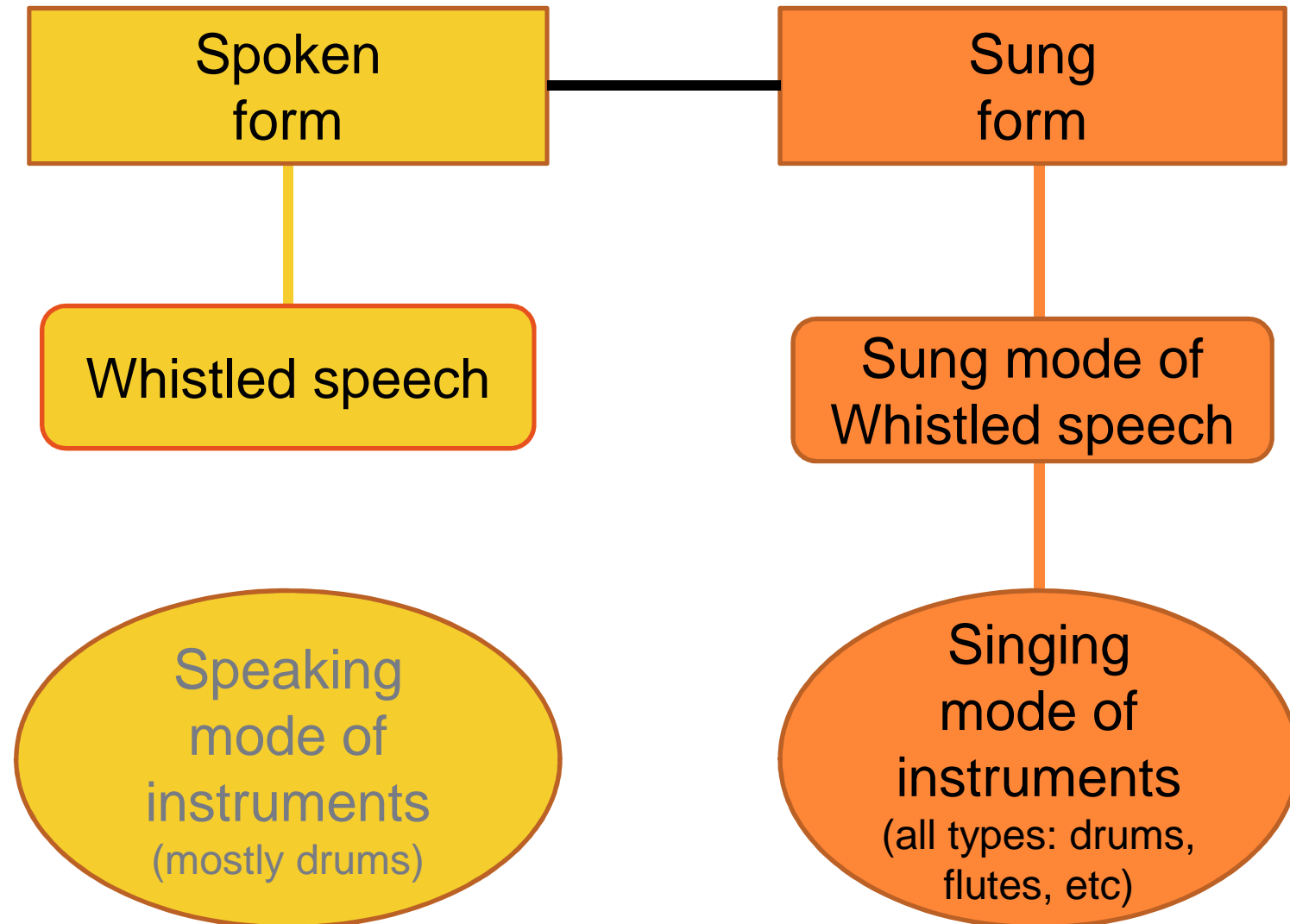
Third step: singing whistling

- Complementary work in the Museu Goeldi with invited informants:
 - Transcription and translation
 - Formation in video mounting
 - Formation in edition

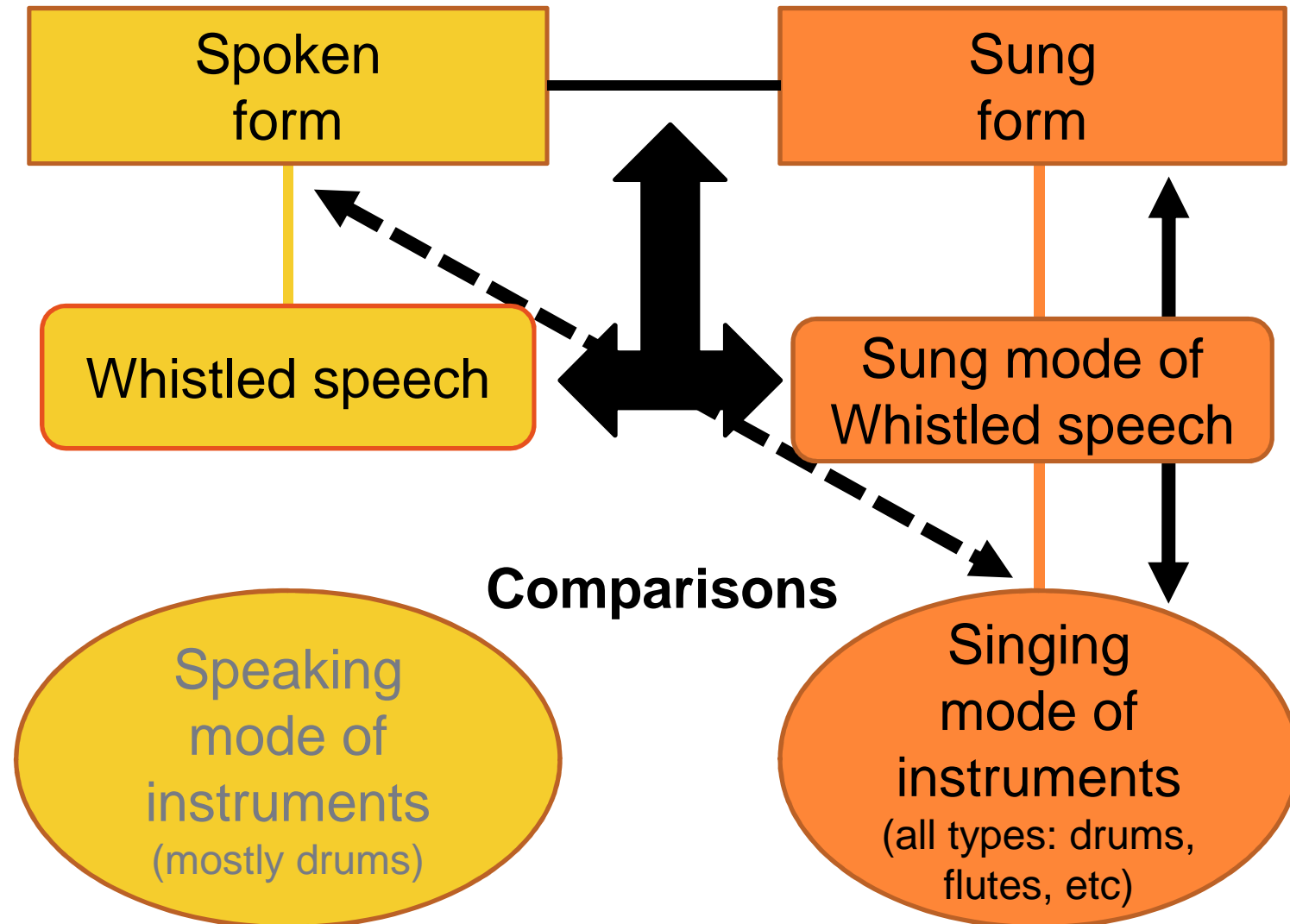
Here with an informant (left) and a young indigenous school teacher (right)



Methodology for comparing different forms



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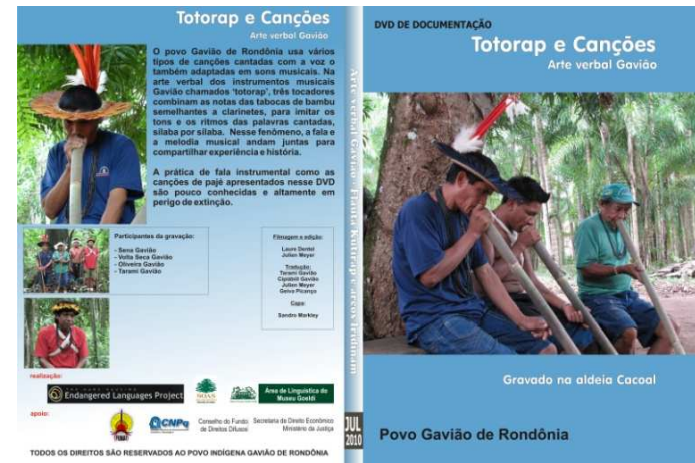


Advantages of the documentation of Instrumental Singing

- Recording musical traditions is often a priority for minority communities wishing to document their heritage, local research collaborators enjoy song documentation
- Musical repertoires and practices provide to the community a great perception of cultural vitality loss, because they often change faster and more spectacularly than do spoken performances (Barwick 2005)
- Songs may embody or refer to domains of specialist cultural knowledge and now discontinued practices (historical and mythical events, traditional activities)
- As we saw, songs may present instances of unusual or rarely-attested linguistic forms, even esoteric or archaic forms (Hill 1993, Meyer and Moore in prep.)
- It is the occasion to return well documented CD and DVDs that will be used by the community.

Some published documents

- Videos:



CONCLUSION

- These practices represent an important sociocultural patrimony which is particularly suitable for documentation
- All the more as it is very little known by linguists and musicologist (because it is at the edge of their domains)
- They promote pluri-disciplinary work.
- Great analytic perspectives (prosody, music-language relation, archaic forms, imitation, iconicity => evolution)
- Interesting material for Archives
- For informants, we produced various videos of documentation:
 - Very popular (especially among children who learned old songs)
 - Possibility to interact with school professors (written system)
 - Basis for balanced collaborations with communities (prestige of instruments and good performers)
 - Promotes intercultural musical meetings (locally, among Mondé language group (Suruí, Zoro, Cinta Larga ...))
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