



Use of Linkage Technique in Johannes Brahms' Op.78 and Leopoldo Miguéz's Op.14 Violin Sonatas

MODALIDADE: COMUNICAÇÃO

SUBÁREA: TEORIA E ANÁLISE MUSICAL

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Abstract: This paper specifically addresses *linkage*, a characteristically Brahmsian technique (SMITH, 2007:109), employed in the formation of musical ideas through the gradual transformation of precedent elements, being considered as an indicator of the use of developing variation (FRISCH, 1984:120). After being given its definition, typology and exemplification, a case of linkage in Brahms' Sonata for Violin Op. 78 is comparatively analyzed with two similar occurrences in the work of the same genre by Leopoldo Miguéz. The results reinforce the hypothesis that Miguéz would have employed organic constructive processes in his sonata.

Keywords: *Linkage*. Violin sonatas Op.78 by Brahms and Op.14 by Miguéz. Developing variation.

Uso da técnica de *linkage* nas sonatas para violino op.78, de Johannes Brahms, e op.14, de Leopoldo Miguéz

Abstract: Este artigo aborda especificamente a técnica de *linkage*, caracteristicamente brahmsiana (SMITH, 2007: 109), empregada na formação de ideias musicais através de transformações graduais de elementos precedentes, sendo considerada como indicadora do emprego de variação progressiva (FRISCH, 1984: 120). Após definição, tipologia e exemplificações, um caso de *linkage* na *Sonata para Violino* op.78 de Brahms é analisado comparativamente com duas ocorrências semelhantes na obra de mesmo gênero de Leopoldo Miguéz. Os resultados reforçam a hipótese de que Miguéz teria empregado processos construtivos orgânicos em sua sonata.

Palavras-chave: *Linkage*. Sonatas para violino op.78 de Brahms e op.14 de Miguéz. Variação progressiva.

1. Introduction

This paper integrates an ongoing PhD research intended to comparatively analyze the thematic structures of two almost exactly contemporary violin sonatas: Brahms' Op.78 (composed in 1878) and the first work of this genre written by the Brazilian composer, Leopoldo Miguéz (1850-1902), cataloged as Op.14. A previous study (MAYR, 2015) has found the presence of strong affinity correlations between the eight themes of Op.14's first movement (organized in sonata form). Moreover, it was demonstrated that most of their structures could be analytically explained as having derived from the gradual transformation of a group of six basic elements present in the first four bars. This constructive procedure can be associated to two principles elaborated by Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951), considering

the organic musical creation: developing variation and *Grundgestalt*. The latter, generally translated as “basic shape”, corresponds to a kind of seed from which, in an ideal case, all the material of a composition could be extracted, through intense use of derivative processes, named developing variation. One special use of developing variation is in the construction of the thematic structure of a musical piece, in such way that all the main themes are mutually related by “parenthood” links derived from the basic motives (forming the *Grundgestalt*), through gradual and progressive transformation. Considering that this is precisely what occurs in the thematic structure of Op.14’s first movement, one can speculate on how Miguéz acquired this special economic and organic *modus operandi*. In spite of his main influences being normally attributed to Wagner and Liszt,¹ the presence of developing variation (at least in his violin sonata) may imply that in some way he could also have been influenced by Brahms, notoriously a master in thematic development.² Although the confirmation of this hypothesis is not a central objective of the present research, the fact that Brahms had a violin sonata published just six years before Miguéz ended his Op.14³ seems to be an extraordinary and convenient opportunity for comparing the derivative procedures employed in their composition. The sonata Op.78, pointed by Frisch (1984: 120) as one of the most sophisticated example of developing variation employment in Brahms’ mature phase, can therefore provide the parameters for a proper investigation on the presence of organic construction in Miguéz’s piece.

According to this, the present paper specifically addresses the linkage technique, considered as a characteristically Brahmsian thematic developmental procedure (FRISCH, op.cit; SMITH, 2007). Besides definitions, typology, and exemplification, two selected excerpts of Miguéz’s piece and one from Brahms’ are analyzed. By hypothesis, the unequivocal analytical identification of the presence of linkage in a given musical passage may constitute a concrete evidence of developing variation, as opposed to a mere superficial transformation without further structural consequences.

2. Linkage

According to Peter Smith, the linkage technique (in German, *Knüpftechnik*), originally one of the elements of Schenkerian analysis, “reflects the theorist’s [i.e., Schenker’s] penetrating insight into the motivic dimension of tonal music” and consists of the “transformation of a gesture of conclusion into one of initiation” (SMITH, 2007: 109). In an alternative definition, linkage occurs when “a ‘new’ idea evolves spontaneously from a preceding one” (FRISCH, 1984: 15-16), which can be associated to the concept of gradual

development. Considered by both authors as a distinctly Brahmsian constructive procedure, the employment of linkage for generating new themes from preceding motives is one of the most efficient manners to provide a continuous and organic growth in a musical piece. Figure 1 presents a graphical representation of the use of linkage: the motivic element X that ends the musical idea *a* serves as basis for the beginning of the musical idea *b*. In general, the element X' suffers some kind of transformation, for example, melodic variation or metrical displacement. Anyhow, the new context provides sufficient contrast for both ideas, while the strong similarity between X and X' creates a unity of its own and grants continuity to the musical flux.

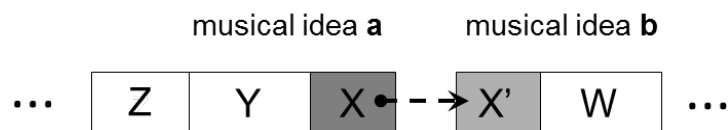


Figure 1: Graphical representation of linkage in the connection of two musical ideas.

3. Types and levels of linkage

Based on the above mentioned studies of Frisch and Smith, we propose a classification for cases of linkage, considering three types and two levels. The types are: (a) melodic; (b) harmonic; and (c) rhythmic/metrical. Although two of the three types can act simultaneously combined in some situations, normally one of them (in general, the melodic), the most salient, will conduct the process. In terms of levels, linkage application can occur externally, between formal boundaries (level 1) or internally, connecting subsections of a theme (level 2). Some examples are given as follows:

Figure 2 (adapted from Frisch's example 40) presents a case of linkage type (a), level (1) in the recapitulation of the second movement of Brahms' *Third Symphony*. The passage shows how the motivic fragment that ends the transition section is employed to start a new theme which was not present in the Exposition.



Figure 2: Brahms – *Third Symphony* / 2nd mov. / Recapitulation (m.108-111) (reduction):
Example of linkage, type (a) / level (1) (adapted from FRISCH, 1984:140).

A case of linkage acting within a theme (level 2) is present in Schoenberg's *Chamber Symphony* (Figure 3). The fragment that ends the phrase 4 is restated in a different metrical context forming the beginning of phrase 5.⁴

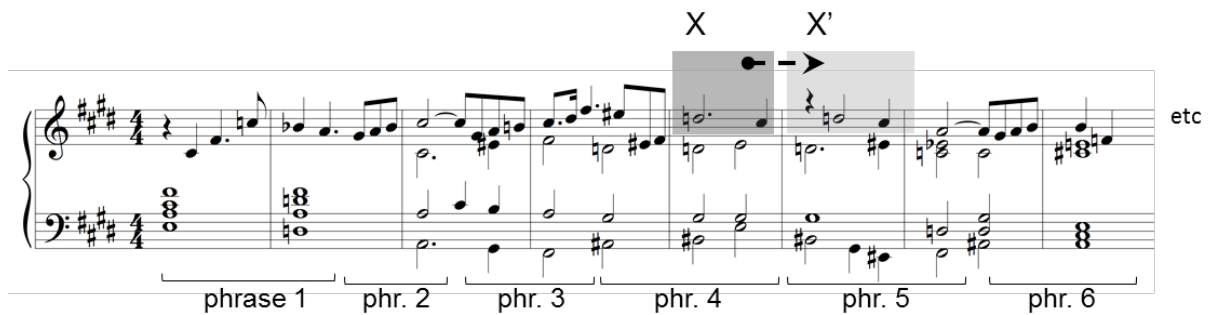


Figure 3: Schoenberg – *Chamber Symphony* Op.9 / Part I: Secondary theme (m.55-62) (reduction): Example of linkage, types (a) + (c) / level (2).

Figure 4 (an adaptation of Smith's example 6) illustrates the use of harmonic linkage (type c) in Beethoven's *Piano Sonata* Op.90. As it can be observed in the passage that antecedes the recapitulation of the main theme (m.138-143), the resolution of the cadential $I_{6/4}$ (i.e., the expected $V_{5/3}$) is elided, in some way harmonically fusing both sections. This contributes to the fluency of the musical narrative, being therefore perfectly adjusted to the idea of linkage. In addition, the almost obsessive repetition of the melodic fragment (G-F#-E) properly prepares the entry of the main theme of the exposition.

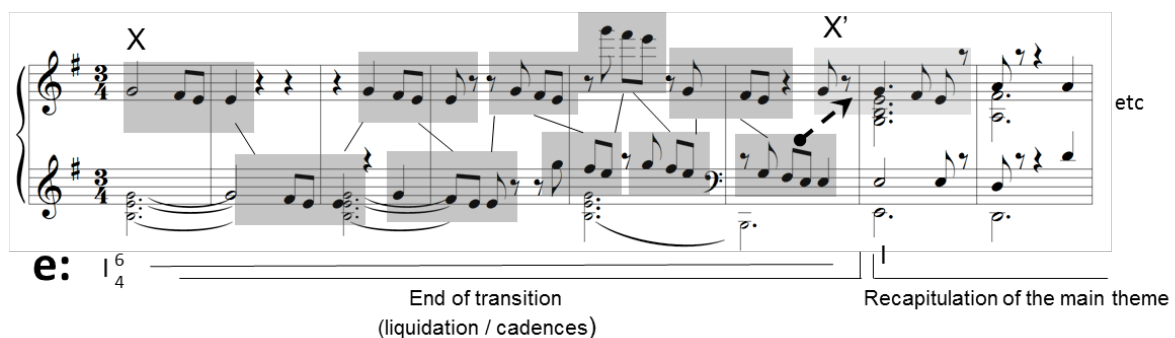
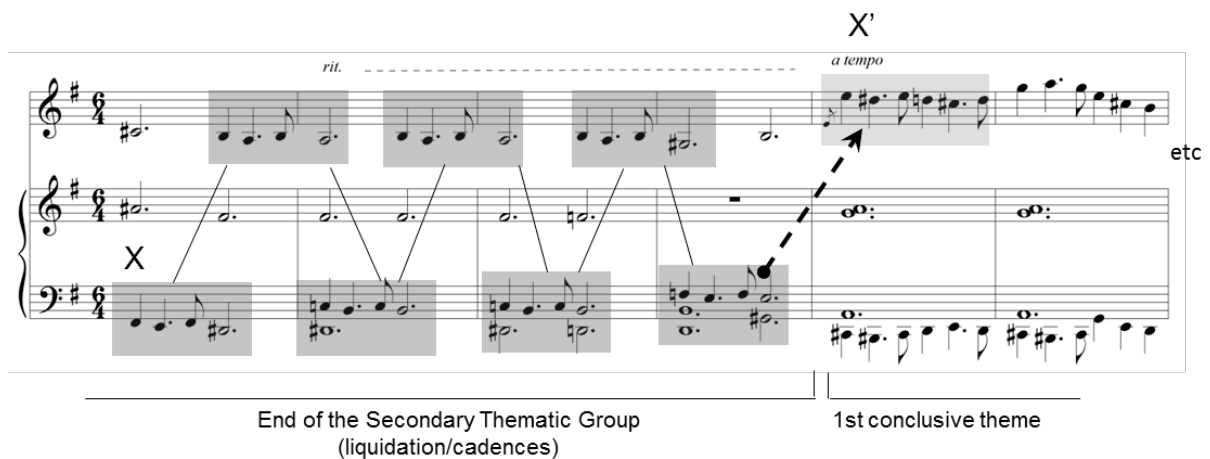


Figure 4: Beethoven – *Piano Sonata* Op.90 / 1st mov. / Recapitulation (m.138-145) (reduction): Example of linkage, types (a) + (c) / level (1). (adapted from SMITH, 2007: 118).

4. Linkage in Brahms' Op. 78 and Miguéz's Op.14

As mentioned above, the sonata Op.78 is a very representative piece of Brahms' mature phase concerning the developmental thematic treatment. Because of that, it would not be surprising to find in it plenty of occurrences of the linkage technique, one of the most characteristic and powerful procedures for producing developing variation, according to

Walter Frisch. In fact, we have already detected a considerable number of cases of linkage in the Op.78's first movement, which are invariably employed to introduce new thematic ideas from transformation of precedent motives. However, in order to highlight the comparative nature of the analysis, we selected a special passage that resembles the melodic strategy employed by Beethoven in his Op.90 (see Fig.4). As shown in Figure 5, this case involves sectional boundaries (level 1) and is essentially based on the melodic parameter (type a). An imitative dialogue between violin and piano based on a motivic fragment at the end of the secondary thematic group prepares the entry of the first concluding theme of the exposition.



End of the Secondary Thematic Group
(liquidation/cadences)
1st conclusive theme

Figure 5: Brahms – *Violin Sonata* Op.78 / 1st mov. / Exposition (m.66-71) (reduction):
Example of linkage, type (a) / level (1).

Similar constructive procedures are found in two places in Miguéz's Op.14. The first case (Figure 6), located in the third movement between themes 2 and 3 of the scherzo section, may be considered a kind of simplified version of the Brahms' example, in which only the imitations of the main motive are absent.



Sch: transition between the 2nd and 3rd themes
(liquidation/cadences)
3rd theme

Figure 6: Miguéz – *Violin Sonata* Op.14 / 3rd mov. / Scherzo (m.135-144) (reduction):
Example of linkage, type (a) / level (1).

The same strategy is also present in the first movement, although in a somewhat more sophisticated way (Figure 7): like in the precedent cases, we here observe the repetition of the linking fragment X. Then, a reduced version of it (m.43-44) seems to introduce the beginning of a new thematic idea, but the return to X one bar later implies that the process had not yet finished. A new transformation of the motive, this time by a subtle expansion of the duration of its penultimate note (C#) brings finally the “real” X’ and, consequently, the entry of the new theme. Moreover, this point coincides with the return of the tonic (A major) after a relatively long digressive passage on the diatonic mediant regions, reinforcing the sense of presence of a formal boundary.

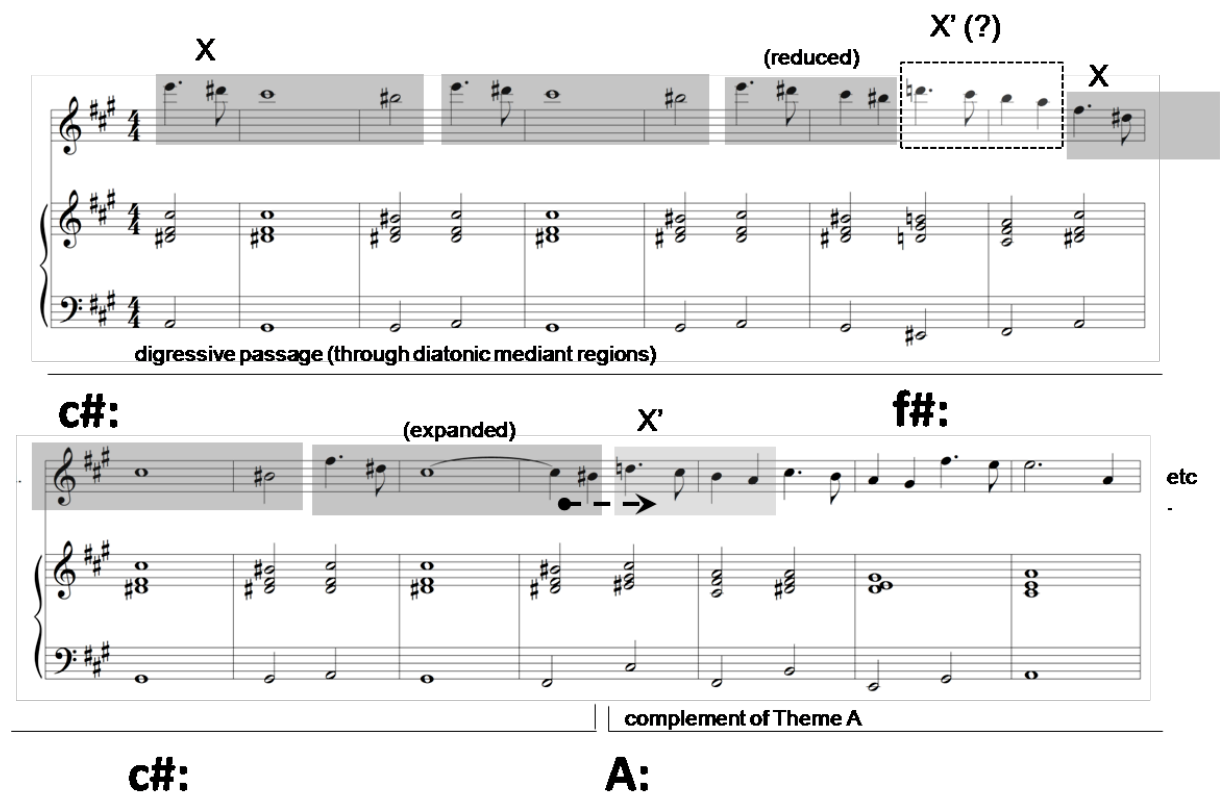


Figure 7: Miguéz – *Violin Sonata* Op.14 / 1st mov. / Exposition (m.40-52) (reduction):
Example of linkage, type (a) / level (1).

Conclusion

This paper addressed the concept of linkage, a compositional technique intended to provide a fluent connection of musical ideas, which is firmly associated to organic musical construction and, consequently, to the principle of developing variation. A case of its application in Brahms’ Op.78 was selected as a model for comparison with two similar occurrences (of the same type and level, according to the proposed typology) in two different movements of Miguéz’s violin sonata. The analysis of these cases suggests that Miguéz has in

some way assimilated this distinctive Brahmsian procedure in the construction of at least two of his themes. Probably this assimilation, like in Schoenberg's case, may have resulted from a combination of pure intuition and analytical observation of Brahms' *modus operandi*. It is important to add that until the present moment the analysis has found a considerable number and diversity of cases of linkage in the Op.78 and just the two in Op.14 presented in this study. In spite of this asymmetry, the results contribute to reinforce the hypothesis that Miguéz employed organic constructive procedures in the composition of his violin sonata. Evidently, the analysis will be continued, in the search to identify and classify other cases of linkage, aiming at presenting a complete panel of the use of this constructive technique in the both sonatas.

This systematic search for evidences of the use of organic thematic construction in these pieces will be expanded in the next stage of the research through a similar analytical examination considering other procedures listed by Walter Frisch (1984: 170) as unequivocal indicators of developing variation: the metrical manipulation and the thematic transformation.

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Notes

¹ See, among others, ANDRADE (2013) and DUDEQUE (2014). It is important to register that we do not intend here to deny this traditional view, since it is true that some of Miguéz's works (like his symphonic poems) present clear evidences of Wagnerian or Lisztian influences. What we argue in this study is just that other sources of inspiration – namely, from Brahms – could be also considered.

² In 1933 Schoenberg presented a broadcast conference entitled “Brahms the progressive” (later published in his book *Style and idea* – SCHOENBERG, 1984: 398-441) in which was specially highlighted the Brahmsian sophisticated use of variation for creation of new musical ideas in a musical piece. Recently, since the publication of the influent book *Brahms and the principle of developing variation* (FRISCH, 1984), several academic works have examined Brahms' music on the aspect of thematic derivation. See, for example, LEIGH (1998), BURTS (2004), and EMBRY (2007).

³ Miguéz was also a violinist.

⁴ In spite of never explicitly being mentioned in Schoenberg's theoretical writings, the basic idea of the technique of linkage seemed to be intuitively assimilated by the composer. This can be inferred not only through analyzes of his works (including serial ones), but also in at least one of his instructional books. As pointed by Frisch (1984:15-16), in *Fundamentals of musical composition*, Schoenberg proposes a practical exercise for the construction of a sentence “in the style of Brahms”, in which there is clearly a case of linkage in the connection of the segments (c.f. SCHOENBERG, 1990: 65-66).