

**TRANSLATING ACROSS MULTIPLE BORDERS:  
THE CONCEPT OF THE BORDER IN SINGABLE TRANSLATION EXEMPLIFIED BY A POLISH  
TRANSLATION OF THE SONG *GOOD MORNING STARSHINE***

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper mobilizes the concept of the semiotic border, as introduced by Yuri Lotman, in the analysis of the Polish singable translation of ‘Good morning, starshine’, a song from the rock musical *Hair* (1967). The border is understood here not so much as a line of demarcation, but rather as a line of connection, which creates a space of tension, and hence translatability. As translation occurs in a specific context and manifests itself through its own materiality, it is determined by multiple borders. The analysis of the case study demonstrates that the song text was reinterpreted at various levels resulting from specific sources of tension. With that in mind, the paper argues that translation is a semiotic process determined by a network of relevant borders.

**KEYWORDS:** Singable Translation; Semiotic Border; Song Text; Zeitgeist; Yuri Lotman

### **1. Introduction**

The subfield of translation and music is an area of research where multimodality is at play: translating musical texts is described as a multisemiotic, multichannel, multimedial, multisensorial and/or constrained process (see also Greenall et al, 2021). This is conspicuous specifically in the case of song translation, in which the task lies in producing a performable, i.e. *singable* version of foreign lyrics (Low, 2003, p. 93). The need for the formal requirement of singability involves semantic deviations from the original lyrics, which in most cases seem inevitable (Güven, 2025, p. 1), as what shapes the linguistic message is the material elements that accompany it (Haapaniemi and Laakkonen, 2019, p. 74) and the broad context in which the target song is to be performed (Rędzioch-Korkuz, 2024, p. 108). Therefore, in the analysis of singable translations, it is vital to adopt a framework that would allow a holistic approach that reaches outside the linguistic dimension.

Against this backdrop, I would like to bring attention to the concept of a semiotic border, which may prove a useful tool of analysis, allowing us to see translation as a process beyond interlingual transfer.<sup>1</sup> The concept of the border seems central to translation studies; however, it may be associated with unpopular binary distinctions, which include a sense of non-reciprocity and asymmetry. I would like to re-read the understanding of borders as suggested by Yuri Lotman and apply the concept to singable translation. The usefulness and universality of the concept will be exemplified by a Polish rendition of the

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<sup>1</sup> For more insights into the intersection between translation studies and semiotics see e.g. Kourdis (2023), Kourdis and Hartama-Heinonen (2023), Marais (2019), Stecconi (2007) or Torop (2008).

song 'Good morning starshine', a hit song from the famous rock musical *Hair*.<sup>2</sup> The Polish translation under the title '*Dzień dobry, gwiazdo*' (Good morning, star) was done in 1970 as part of a TV entertainment show. By adopting the concept of a semiotic border, the paper will argue that each text in the process of translation is reworked within a dynamic meaningful space that is transected by multiple borders, including the linguistic border, but also the temporal, material, pragmatic or generic borders, that generate tension that requires translation. Thus, translation becomes a multidimensional semiotic process and so does its analysis.

As the main focus of the discussion is shifted to the process of singable translation and its analysis, with an attempt made to reconstruct and explain the rationale behind the translational decisions, the paper will contribute to transfer-oriented research on song translation (Franzon, 2024, pp. 40-45), having utilised both a descriptive and an explanatory approach.

## **2. Border in general and in Lotman's semiotics**

The concept of a border presupposes specific qualities: according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it means an edge, a margin or a verge, i.e., a point at which something ends and something else begins. This is the limit that separates something from the surrounding space. A border itself may be a space that creates an outline or a wall. Then, a common understanding of the word 'border' encompasses the qualities of separating and separateness: in other words, the border isolates and is itself an isolated entity, leading to the establishment of some kind of alterity and inner identity (Puumeister, Kõvamees, and Kull, 2022, p. 116). This traditional conceptualisation has led to the creation of the supermeme-like binaries of translation, which may be visible in numerous oppositions, including the source-target dichotomy or the intra-inter one.

The border, however, is not only a line of demarcation, but also a line of connection, creating a space of tension, translatability and necessary mediation. This double nature of the concept and the paradox of separating and joining are both highlighted by Lotman (2005)<sup>3</sup> and his understanding of the concept of a border and semiosphere, i.e. the space for meaning-making, outside which semiosis is not possible. Semiosphere is a concept originally associated with Lotman and his semiotics of culture; however, the concept of the border is also central to his understanding of culture and its mechanisms of meaning-making (Vólkova Américo, 2017, p. 8). Drawing from Lotman's semiotics, Puumeister, Kõvamees and Kull (2022, p. 113) in like manner underline the role of a border, claiming that this is the point at which "possibilities emerge, [and] thus the moment of meaning-making."

Lotman claims that translatability, created by the border, is the key to the existence of meaning: he writes explicitly that "[t]he border of semiotic space is the most important

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<sup>2</sup> © 1967, Galt MacDermot, James Rado, Gerome Ragni, Net Shapiro and United Artists Music Co., Inc.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'boundary' is the one used in Lotman (2005). However, for the sake of this paper, 'border' is the preferred term.

structural and functional position” (Lotman, 2005, p. 210). He assumes that one language<sup>4</sup> (irrespective of its level of advancement) is not enough to create a meaningful structure, which means that multiple languages are a *sine qua non* of meaning-making (Łotman, 1998, pp. 28-29). This, in turn, presupposes the existence of multiple borders, hierarchies as well as mutual (un)translatability and in turn – semiotic diversity and communication. Only when there is a borderline contact between these languages, a kind of tension (i.e. there is neither full similarity or overlap nor complete separation), is communication possible, according to Lotman (Łotman, 1998, p. 33). Borders become then the most important elements in a semiosphere, “giving substance to its semiotic mechanism” and working as “a bilingual mechanism, translating external communications into the internal language of the semiosphere and vice versa” (Lotman, 2005, p. 210). It is this intermediate space, in which some entities are connected, that enables the translatability of the untranslatable (i.e. the space outside the borders of another space).

What is also important is the fact that semiotic borders are not necessarily physical boundaries (for a distinction see Puumeister, Kõvamees and Kull, 2022, pp. 118-119), which means that, from the point of view of translation studies, they are often cognitive constructions resulting from social and translational norms, conventionalised behaviour or temporary trends. This feature may be exemplified by, for instance, the tendency to inscribe the so-called ‘domestic remainder’ into the TT (Venuti, 2004). Even if intended to be presented in its maximally ‘foreign’ form, when translated into the internal language(s) of the target space, the source text is viewed from the perspective of the target internal identity created by poetics-related borders. Since borders are often cognitive constructs, it means that they are not stable, but instead are negotiable and fuzzy, which may account for the fact that there are multiple ways in which one text can be translated (see also Venuti, 2019, pp. 2-3 and 174).

We may then conclude that translation is made possible by the existence of semiotic borders, which allow for contact, exchange and negotiation. If we assume that the target context is a kind of semiosphere, then a source text may be interpreted as a source of a non-text or an extra-text, which is expressed in a language that is to some extent different from the internal language(s) of the target semiosphere. This difference, which generates tension, needs to be negotiated by means of translation, which helps to connect the two worlds by establishing some similarity. Since, as every semiosphere, the target semiosphere is defined by multiple borders, each text that is to ‘enter’ this sphere will have to face and cross different borders. This dynamic nature of translation, determined by multiple borders, is illustrated below with a comparative analysis of the English-into-Polish translation of the song ‘Good morning starshine’. The analysis demonstrates how a song text is translated into languages accepted within the target semiosphere and how the process of song translation exceeds a simple, instrumental “reproduction or transfer of an

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<sup>4</sup> The word ‘language’ is used here in a broad semiotic understanding and stands for any abstract semiotic code used for communication. As such, natural languages are examples of semiotic codes.

invariant that is contained in or caused by the source text, an invariant form, meaning, or effect” (Venuti, 2019, p. 1).

### **3. Translating across multiple borders: A Polish rendition of ‘Good morning starshine’**

#### **3.1. Context**

The analysis presented below includes two song texts: the source text is the song ‘Good morning starshine’ (Oliver, 1969). The song is part of the musical *Hair: The American tribal love-rock musical* (1967), which is a rock musical with a script and lyrics by Gerome Ragni and James Rado and music by Galt MacDermot. The song appears in the second act and is performed by one of the main characters, Sheila. The original Broadway cast included Lynn Kellogg, who performed the song. The song was subsequently made into an individual hit song thanks to William Oliver Swofford, an American pop singer known as Oliver, who owed his success mainly to this song.

The musical is considered to be a revelation for several reasons: the innovative use of rock music (cf. Wollman, 2006, p. 46-55); the elimination of the proscenium’s fourth wall<sup>5</sup> and actors’ improvisation; the inclusion of controversial themes, such as the sexual revolution, hippie movement and anti-war sentiments; scenes that verged on being seditious or even blasphemous (e.g. the stage nudity, drug use or defacing of the American flag); or the general call for racial or sexual equality (Vandevender, 2018, pp. 31-32). Despite mixed reviews, the musical was a great success and was soon performed outside the USA. Thanks mainly to its depiction of the social climate of the 60s, as well as the novel and subversive form of expression, it has become a landmark in the history of musical theatre.

In general, the music of *Hair* was a breakthrough as well, especially in the world of musical theatre. As a staple of rock musicals, *Hair* is characterised by its “amplified rock style, with prominent bass lines and strong backbeats,” capturing the vibe of the mid-60s rock (Warfield, 2017, p. 285). At the same time, MacDermot also managed to stay within the relatively safe style of Broadway music, and as a result, some of the songs, including the one discussed in this paper, have become almost timeless pop or rock standards, even though the musical “itself has aged poorly” (Warfield, 2017, p. 285; see also Wollman, 2006, p. 12).

Polish audiences, however, were unable to watch the musical until 1999, when it was staged for the first time at the musical theatre in Gdynia<sup>6</sup>. Before that, they would have

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<sup>5</sup> The actors would break the imaginary ‘fourth wall’, both physically and psychologically by interacting with the audience, addressing them directly, sitting among them or entering the auditorium.

<sup>6</sup> The Polish version of the musical, directed by Wojciech Kościelniak, was based on a slightly modified script. The director decided to introduce a character of an older hippie and present the whole plot as his memoir, which was supposed to bridge the temporal gap. Drug use was discouraged by introducing another character, i.e. a White Lady symbolizing death. What is more, music, rearranged by Leszek Możdżer, was influenced by more contemporary rock and jazz trends. Thanks to those changes, the musical did not incite any revolution, being instead a topical and universal story of the power of youth. Accordingly, it was a great success in Poland and received mostly positive reviews. For more details see e.g. Brand (1999), Fułek (1999), Kietrys (1999), Owczarek (1999) or Skutnik (1999).

had access to reviews of performances put on elsewhere in Europe, in which the subversive character of the show was somewhat diminished (Mikołajczyk, 2010, p. 92), and the filmed version from 1979, though not until 1980<sup>7</sup>. This meant that when it was finally staged in its original form, the musical may have appeared as a relic of the bygone era with not much social impact: as a time-bound musical, *Hair* is “anchored to the specific cultural moment that produced it” (Vandevender, 2018, p. 32). Not only was there a cultural difference between the Polish and American semiospheres, but there was an even more significant difference pertaining to the time span and the social relevance of the presented content.

On the other hand, the Polish version of ‘Good morning starshine’ was televised in January 1970 on Polish National Television, making it available almost in parallel with its original release. Taking into account the functional objective of the Polish context, i.e. a television show aimed at presenting current hits, both in original and in singable translation (for more details see Rędzioch-Korkuz, 2024, p. 92), it is probable that the source song was the one performed by Oliver, released as a single on the album under the same name in 1969 (Oliver, 1969). The other recordings of the song, including the original Broadway cast recording (Kellogg, 1968), are different in terms of the lyrics. Instead of two stanzas, there is only one stanza, which is repeated twice. As the Polish version has a structure similar to Oliver’s version, it is assumed here that the source text is the song marketed by him. The target song was performed by Maryla Rodowicz, a well-known Polish singer referred to as ‘the queen of Polish pop’, originally on television and then released on her 2012 album of previously unpublished songs (Rodowicz, 2012). The translation was done by Agnieszka Osiecka, a famous lyricist, poet and writer.

Despite the relatively short time span between the appearance of the source and target versions, there are some visible discrepancies between them, especially at the level of lyrics. The following analysis will indicate both similarities and differences as regards the lyrics, singability, music and performance, as well as the immediate context, which will help to address the question pertaining to the most relevant sources of tension between the two semiospheres.

### **3.2. The song text, i.e. lyrics, music, and its performance**

The English and Polish lyrics share some similarities in terms of the structural and poetic-rhetorical aspects, but are rather different in terms of purely semantic meaning (see Table 1). Both sets of lyrics follow the verse-chorus structure, a feature typical of Broadway musicals, which contributed to *Hair* being relatively easily accepted despite its otherwise creative originality (Warfield, 2017, pp. 285-286). There are two stanzas, interspersed with a chorus, with the final one followed by a reprise-like ‘outro’. As regards the poetic-rhetorical aspects, in both cases the eponymous star(shine) is apostrophised by the lyrical

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted, though, that the film version of the musical, directed by Miloš Forman, departs from the original storyline considerably. Since the main focus in the film is placed on the conscription of the main character and the irrationality of nonsense fighting, which may have been interpreted as holding the Western world up to ridicule, the film was allowed to be screened in Polish cinemas in the 80s.

subject, which is signalled in each stanza with the vocative exclamation ‘good morning.’ The dialogue with the star continues throughout the song.

Noticeable differences pertain to the perspectives used in the two lyrics: whereas in the English lines, the *I*-perspective is used interchangeably with the *we*-perspective, in the Polish lyrics, there is only the *I*-perspective. This difference may be related directly to the performance context, i.e. in the original musical it was the tribe gathering under the moon, with one member addressing the star, versus a single performer singing on television in the translation.

There are also changes connected with the key words: besides the congruence as for the vocative exclamation and the content word ‘star,’ in the case of the English lines, the key words include the concept of love, singing, twinkling, happiness and laughter as well as an early morning. The Polish lines include key words standing for singing, bell ringing/tolling, praying and a night. The choice of the key words results in changes at the semantic-reflexive level.

Table 1. Lyrics of the source and the target song text.

Source text (Oliver, 1969)	Target text (Rodowicz, 2012)	English back-translation
Good mornin', starshine The Earth says, "Hello" You twinkle above us We twinkle below	Dzień dobry, gwiazdo Złóć się dla mnie, złóć A będę ci śpiewać Przez całą tę noc	Good morning, star Turn gold for me, turn gold Then I will sing for you Throughout the night
Good mornin', starshine You lead us along My love and me as we sing Our early mornin' singin' song	Dzień dobry, gwiazdo Dzisiaj chciałabym Domodlić się, dośpiewać W niebiesko-białą tę noc	Good morning, star Today, I would like to Pray and sing Into this blue and white night
Gliddy glub gloopy, nibby nabby noopy la, la, la, lo, lo Sabba sibby sabba, nooby abba nabba, le, le, lo, lo Tooby ooby walla, nooby abba naba Early mornin' singin' song	Sama sobie śpiewaj, sama sobie śpiewaj, luli, luli, laj Sama z nami śpiewaj, sama z nami śpiewaj, luli, luli, laj Sama, gwiazdo, śpiewaj, sama, gwiazdo, śpiewaj Luli, luli, luli, lulaj	Sing for yourself, sing for yourself, hush, hush, hush Sing with us yourself, sing with us yourself, hush, hush, hush Sing for yourself, star, sing for yourself, star, sing Hush, hush, hush
Good mornin', starshine There's love in your skies Reflecting the sunlight In my lover's eyes	Dzień dobry, gwiazdo Czy to ty, czy ja Tak płynę po niebie W podróży przez noc?	Good morning, star Is it you or is it me swimming across the sky, on a journey at night?
Good mornin', starshine So happy to be My love and me as we sing Our early mornin' singin' song	Dzień dobry, gwiazdo Czy to ty, czy ja Czy dla mnie, czy dla ciebie Niebiesko-biała ta noc?	Good morning, star Is it you or is it me? Is this blue and white night

Gliddy glub gloopy, nibby nabby noopy la, la, la, lo, lo Sabba sibby sabba, nooby abba nabba, le, le, lo, lo Tooby ooby walla, nooby abba naba Early mornin' singin' song	Sama sobie śpiewaj, sama sobie śpiewaj, luli, luli, laj Sama z nami śpiewaj, sama z nami śpiewaj, luli, luli, laj Sama, gwiazdo, śpiewaj, sama, gwiazdo, śpiewaj Luli, luli, luli, lulaj	for you or for me?  Sing for yourself, sing for yourself, hush, hush, hush Sing with us yourself, sing with us yourself, hush, hush, hush Sing for yourself, star, sing for yourself, star, sing Hush, hush, hush
Can you hear me Singin' a song, Lovin' a song, Singin' a song Lovin' a song, Laughin' a song, Singin' a song Sing a song, song a sing, song, song, song, sing Sing, sing, sing song Song, song, song sing, sing, sing, sing song Sing, sing, song, sing a song (x2)	Słyszysz ten ton? Śpiewa ci dzwon I nieba skłon Ogień się tli Ptak jeszcze śpi Śpiewa ci dzwon Dzwoni dzwon, dzwoni dzwon Dzyń, dzyń, dzyń Dzwon, dzwon, dzwon Dzyń, dzyń, dzyń (x2)	Can you hear the tone? The bell is singing for you And so is the sky The fire is burning The bird is still asleep The bell is singing for you The bell is ringing, the bell is ringing Ring, ring, ring The bell, bell, bell Ring, ring, ring

The source song makes use of colloquial language and very concrete images, while at the same time having an abstract component thanks to the nonsense lines repeated in the chorus. The original is of course part of a broader context: in the musical, the members of the tribe are staring at the moon, high on drugs. Claude, one of the main characters, is about to join the army and realises that he will no longer be able to take advantage of everyday hippie life pleasures: he discourages the tribe from parting, saying that this is the last night of the world. Sheila, who intends to spread love, starts singing the song, which is meant to underline the main ideas embraced by the song: the freedom of expressing your own individuality, thoughts or feelings, as well as the idea of living your own life. The version sung by Oliver highlights similar concepts, slanted towards the sense of love and happiness. The nonsense words appearing in the chorus, which in Oliver's version sound fairly mellifluous, strengthen the positive image depicted through the lyrics.

In contrast, the Polish lyrics revolve around a personal dialogue between the lyrical subject and the eponymous star, with a special focus placed on singing into the night or even praying. What is striking is the use of the exclamatives 'luli, luli, laj' and onomatopoeias 'dzyń, dzyń, dzyń', which replace the nonsense chorus. The former are commonly used in lullabies, producing a calming and warm effect (which, interestingly, brings the Polish song potentially closer to the famous lullaby 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star'), whereas the latter depict the sound of a bell, which is one of the key words, reinforced by the sound of the tambourine. Accordingly, instead of an image of love and singing, in the Polish lyrics we have an image of a journey through the night and a bell ringing or tolling (the Polish onomatopoeia is not precise as for the size of the bell). The sound of a bell may

be associated with various concepts, most likely with an important warning, prayer or impending danger. Here, as the mention appears towards the end of the song, it may signal the end, e.g. of the night, and the beginning, e.g. of the dawn and the upcoming day, and so the end of the nightly journey of the lyrical subject.

As regards semantics, the two lyrics differ considerably in terms of not only the key concepts, but also the images and the stories told. Theoretically, from the point of view of purely linguistic translation, there are no challenging structural or culture-bound differences between the two languages, i.e. there are no sources of potential untranslatability, so it would have been possible to translate the English lyrics with a higher degree of equivalence. Even taking into consideration the technical problem of singability, we could still arrive at lines which would bear more resemblance to the source text (for instance, by including the nonsense chorus or retaining the key words).

Regarding the singability and rhythm, there are obvious similarities that outweigh minor differences. There is a prosodic match between the songs, as the Polish version is performable to the barely changed original melody: the number of syllables in particular lines is the same in most of the cases (the exception being the two final lines of each stanza, which have one syllable fewer, remedied by prolonged notes), the stress pattern is fairly natural and in general reflects the original one. The rhymes, which are rather irregular in the original lyrics, also seem accidental in the translated lyrics.

When it comes to the vocal melody, music and performance, there is a further analogy. In both cases, we are dealing with up-tempo music, with a relatively fast beat emphasised by tambourines (the sound of which is reflected verbally in the Polish lyrics by the 'dzyń, dzyń' onomatopoeia) and the vocal melody carried by acoustic guitars. The total effect is of a light and pleasant tune, which, outside its original context of the musical plot, is devoid of any psychedelic or chaotic sounds, despite the nonsense chorus in the English version.

Unlike the version of the song performed in the musical *Hair*, which had a rockier character, both Oliver's and Rodowicz's versions are more like guitar ballads, with the former having some folklore-like tunes. Both are performed in a light-hearted manner, which reinforces the images rendered in the lyrics. The main difference lies in the fact that the Polish song is performed by a female singer (with male backing vocals), which brings it closer to the musical, in which the song is performed by a female character. At the time, Rodowicz was a rising star, associated mainly with pop and folk styles, which situates her somewhere between the style of Oliver and that of hippie rock (the outfit she wore while performing could also be described as representing both the folk and hippie style).

Both of the songs share similarities mainly in terms of the formal and material aspects: there are no major departures from the original as regards the prosodic match or the media or modes used. It should be noted that Oliver made the song popular mainly by performing it on various television shows, which brings the songs even closer. The visual representation of the singers is also similar: if we watch Oliver's performances from around

the time he released the song, we see a positive image of a smiling man playing the guitar. Similarly, Rodowicz creates an optimistic image of contentment.

However, there are differences at the level of lyrics, which were changed considerably, with no retention of the key words. What makes the question even more interesting is the fact that the original lyrics contain no challenging and potentially untranslatable metaphors, language structures, etc, and that the Polish song was presented officially as a hit from the musical *Hair*. It follows, then, that in this particular case it was neither the language nor the material border that were of the greatest gravity, leading to significant re-interpretations. There was little tension at these borders, which means that there were other extratextual points of contact that could have led to the lexical re-interpretation.

### **3.3. The point in time and space, i.e. the zeitgeist**

As signalled above, both the source and the target texts were released at around the same time. This could suggest that we are dealing with similar temporal or even social conditions, which may be supported by the fact that the hippie style of living was observed also in Poland around that time exactly (Tracz, 2014, p. 14). As the hippy movement had a global impact, the song texts could theoretically reach similar addressees and provide fertile ground for similar ideas. However, it was the different ideological and socio-political environments of the two semiospheres that played the most vital role. As a result, both the ideological and the socio-political borders had a considerable bearing on the translation. The ideological border is defined here as the one pertaining to a specific set of beliefs and ideals represented by a given community, while the socio-political border is related to the overall social and political climate, connected with the sense of norms and accepted behaviours. Tension at these borders will naturally result in a manipulation of the original content, censoring or rejecting any ideals that are not in line with the dominant norms.

Poland in the 60s and 70s was under the communist regime, which means that, ideologically and politically, it was a closed system, both externally and internally. Despite this, there must have been some connection and exchange, though controlled to a great extent. In other words, whatever happened or was established in the country was somehow unique to its own mentality or zeitgeist.

Though the hippie movement<sup>8</sup> was observed in Poland, the knowledge of it the way it was manifested in was very different. In Poland, being a hippie meant a way of living or a style, rather than belonging to an organised movement with a clear agenda, similar to the ones found in the USA or Western Europe. Historians would even suggest that Polish hippies concentrated on looks only. Long hair and specific clothes, sometimes music, were more significant than the idea of rebellion against anything specific: that is to say, the whole

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<sup>8</sup> Chrobaczyński (2015, p. 312) argues that the word “movement” should not be used in the context of Polish hippies because of their accidental agenda or loose bonds within the group. He therefore suggests using the term “quasi-movement,” which can highlight the profile of the group which was different from that observed elsewhere in Europe or the USA.

community had little prominence (Chrobaczyński, 2015, p. 320). It may be argued that despite some (superficial or visual) similarities, the ideologies of both communities were significantly different. Still, Polish hippies were associated with the lifestyle typical of the Western non-communist world, which resulted in the secret police responding with brutal repressions and the authorities taking a stand against the community.

There was also an obvious clash from the point of view of the socio-political conditions. On the one hand, there was the American context of the 60s, with its sexual revolution, the Vietnam war and subsequently established anti-war movements. On the other hand, there was the Poland of the 60s with first generations of adults with no memory of the war, the authoritarian rule of the communist party that made the media censorship even tougher and the economic hardships resulting in social unrest and protests. Those circumstances shaped the profile of Polish hippies, who were not interested in protesting against any wars or calling for social equality, though they would naturally stay on the margins of society for other reasons (mainly rebelling against the system or against the omnipresent sense of precarity).

The tension at the ideological and socio-political borders was then inevitable, as there were hardly any parallels between the contexts. On the one side, there was a rock musical performed by individuals wholeheartedly embracing the hippie counterculture who called for sexual freedom, peace and social equality. That text was to be translated into the language of the Polish semiosphere, which, theoretically, was feasible, heeding the fact that the hippie cultural code was present in the target semiosphere. But the hippie codes of both communities were different enough to result in a relatively high degree of untranslatability.

The source text also had to be translated into the socio-political code of the target semiosphere, which meant using a code that was institutionally accepted. What happened was then an interesting solution: the code of the music as well as that of the performance and to some extent the visual representation was relatively easily transferred into the target context without much change. This allowed the powerful agents (including the show's production team and the censoring agency) to introduce something new and foreign into the target semiosphere, even without the need for concealing the original context. The aim of the show was then fulfilled. The English language, on the other hand, as representing the most systematised semiotic code with easily deciphered meanings, was modified in accordance with the internal zeitgeist of the target semiosphere.

It is also likely that the changes at the level of the lyrics may have resulted from idiosyncratic decisions on the part of the translator or other individuals responsible for the show. However, since the English lyrics conveyed images that could have been considered potentially dangerous or disruptive by the regime, as they promoted a hedonistic lifestyle driven by a sense of freedom, love and happiness, it may be assumed that it was the dreary reality of a communist country with a relatively strict censorship apparatus that worked as a catalyst for the observed changes.

The source song was then not so much translated into the Polish language as into the Polish zeitgeist of the early 70s, defined by its relevant borders. The semantic meaning was generated not by the meaning inherent in the original lyrics, but rather by the possibility of meaning-making created at the relevant borders. Clearly, the new possibility emerged at the ideological and socio-political border, which generated most tension. They did not allow for a more equivalent rendition in terms of the lyrics, but at least allowed for the materiality of the source text to be retained. The tensions created by the interplay of the ideological and socio-political borders led to the mediation between similarity and difference, between isolation and connection, producing a translation that can be seen as “a repository and embodiment of [the] contemporary condition in time, historical and subjective, and space, interconnected and fluid” (Bassnett and Johnston, 2025, p. 7). Indeed, the Polish translation of the original song captured a specific moment in time and space, created by the tension generated by the interplay of semiotic borders.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

A border is a substantial condition of translation, indeed of communication in general, as it creates the necessary difference. This, in turn, generates tension and the quality of translatability. For an act of translation to take place, however, there must be some similarity between at least two mutually translatable languages. In the analysis presented above, the process of translation included a number of translatable semiotic codes, such as natural languages, music, performance and the visual spectacle, as well as the code of the specific zeitgeist, including relevant ideals and socio-political circumstances. When translated, those semiotic codes came into contact with each other, creating tension at various borders. But only those borders that generated the most tension led to significant changes in relation to some levels of the source text.

Translation is then a process that takes place in a dynamic space of meaning-making, an act of interpretation of current tensions created by multiple borders. It is a hermeneutic act that “varies the source text, *generates the concept of mediation*, namely, that the linguistic and cultural differences constituting that text are not immediately accessible in a translation but always reworked to be comprehended and affective in the translating culture” (Venuti, 2019, p. 8, my emphasis). This mediation works quite cleverly in the discussed case: the material form, the genre close to folk (or hippie) music as well as the manner of delivery, were considered fairly acceptable, probably thanks to a vague signification of these semiotic codes. As there was little tension on these borders and, consequently, little untranslatability, the need for translation and mediation was rather reduced. This similarity was complemented by the necessary difference at the level of lyrics, rendered by means of a natural language, which had to go through the filter of the relevant doctrine. But it was not so much the linguistic untranslatability that required mediation: it was the socio-political and ideological borders that created the greatest tension.

The lyrics had to be re-interpreted because otherwise they would be incomprehensible from the point of view of the relevant ideology and, more importantly, the socio-political environment. It was most likely the specific target zeitgeist, i.e. the spirit of that particular time and place, that necessitated lexical reinterpretation and allowed the non-linguistic materiality of the source text to be preserved. This indicates that translation is a multidimensional process taking place across several borders, which, in turn, are flexible and changeable, proving that time and space function as 'translators' as well.

Applying the concept of the border to translation can help to fully embrace the quality of multimodality and the complexity of translation. As argued above, a text in translation passes through various types of semiotic borders, which are changeable and relative. The meaning potential of that text is generated by a tension created at relevant borders.

We might argue that it was the materiality of the musical *Hair* that has ensured its afterlife. Despite its time-boundness, the musical has been re-staged on Broadway several times with varying success, depending on how it resonated with contemporary audiences. When the musical was first made available in Poland in the 90s, it had little social impact, as it was already a thing of the past, a colourful testament to the good old days. However, the fact that it is still staged in Poland (with the most recent version premiered in Warsaw in April 2025) proves that each work may be interpreted against its time and space as long as it matches in some way the current zeitgeist.

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