

## INTERPRETERS' PERCEPTION OF QUALITY IN SONGS TRANSLATED INTO SPANISH SIGN LANGUAGE

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**ABSTRACT:** In recent years, there has been an increase in requests for professional interpreting services for the translation of songs into Spanish Sign Language (LSE), either in live performances or in musical videos. At the same time, deaf people have started to demand an improvement in the quality of these translations, both from a linguistic and cultural perspective. For this reason, and due to the scarcity of research, we set out to determine the meaning and characterisation of quality applied to the translation of songs into LSE by professional interpreters. An exploratory qualitative study was carried out in which in-depth interviews were conducted with nine LSE interpreters, both deaf and hearing. The analysis of the data revealed that the notion of quality is related to the fulfilment of a series of parameters, both linguistic and non-linguistic, such as the correct use of LSE or the attitude shown by the interpreters.

**KEYWORDS:** Spanish Sign Language, Song Translation, Sign Language Interpreters, Deaf Community, Quality

### 1. Introduction

The translation of songs has become a prominent topic in translation studies (Franzon, 2008; Gritsenko and Aleshinskaya, 2016; Cruz-Durán, 2021), although interest wanes when sign languages are involved, partly due to the persistent idea that music is distant from deaf people because of perceptual challenges (Holmes, 2017; Listman et al., 2018; Best, 2018; Otero, 2021; Willingham, 2021) and its phonocentric nature within the deaf community (Robinson, 2018). However, in contexts such as the United States, these products are popular among deaf people (Morêdo, 2021). At the same time, various authors (Thompson et al., 2005; Maler, 2013; Holmes, 2017; Cripps, 2018; Peñalba et al., 2018; Nadal et al., 2021) conceive of music as a multimodal phenomenon—visual, vibrotactile, and kinesthetic, which opens up avenues for its translation into sign languages.

This article addresses the translation of songs into sign languages, with a focus on LSE, and aims to determine how professional LSE interpreters—both deaf and hearing—understand the concept of quality as applied to these translations. To this end, the key theoretical references are first presented, with special attention to Low's Pentathlon Approach model<sup>1</sup> (2003) and the quality criteria for LSE interpreting by Bao and González-Montesino (2013). Then, a qualitative study is described, based on in-depth interviews with nine interpreters (six hearing and three deaf) with considerable experience in translating songs into LSE. Finally, results and a proposal for specific evaluation criteria for this field

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<sup>1</sup> This approach constitutes a theoretical model for song translation that posits the need to balance five fundamental criteria—sense, naturalness, rhythm, rhyme, and singability—in order to produce a translated version that is functional both from a semantic and a performance standpoint (Low, 2003).

are offered. In line with this objective, the theoretical framework is structured around three interrelated lines of inquiry: (1) research on song translation and its cross-modal challenges; (2) approaches to quality in translation and interpreting, including specific parameters of LSE; and (3) studies on the reception of signed songs by deaf audiences. Together, these strands provide the conceptual basis for analysing how LSE interpreters construct the notion of quality in this hybrid and performance modality, and for identifying the essential parameters that contribute to effective translations of songs into LSE for their target audience.

## **2. The translation of songs into sign languages**

Research on song translation is commonly framed by three complementary perspectives: linguistic/semantic (meaning transfer and semantic equivalence), functionalist (purpose, audience, reception), and semiotic/performance-based (songs as multimodal artefacts where verbal, musical, and visual codes codetermine choices). As Kaindl (2005) argues, music functions as a coequal semiotic code that constrains and guides translation choices, rather than as a merely decorative layer. Within the latter perspective, Low's Pentathlon Approach—sense, naturalness, rhythm, rhyme, singability—serves here as a heuristic for performability, noting its original grounding in phonic/prosodic parameters and the consequent limits for direct application to sign languages.

Regarding singability, we adopt Franzon's (2008) reconceptualisation as musico-textual unity, which in LSE becomes musico-kinetic feasibility: integration of text and music through body movement, use of space, and non-manual markers, while preserving semantic equivalence (López-Burgos & González-Montesino, 2024a). Low & Meller (2025) also highlight collaborative workflows as a practical means to sustain singability under real world constraints. In parallel, work on signed music shows that rhythm, intensity, and duration are rendered visually through movement, spatial patterning, and non-manuals (Maler, 2013; Cripps, 2018; Peñalba et al., 2018; Morêdo, 2021), although this literature rarely proposes operational evaluation criteria for translation.

To address this gap, the present study integrates: (1) Low's performance-oriented criteria; (2) LSE specific quality parameters for interpreting (Bao & González-Montesino, 2013); and (3) insights from research on signed music together with deaf audience perspectives (Morêdo, 2021; López-Burgos, 2024). This combined lens accommodates the plurisemiotic nature of songs and the cross-modal challenges of sign languages, which together ground an account of quality in semantic equivalence, rhythmic integration (visual rhythm), visual gestural naturalness (including gestural accent), and cultural adequacy. Accordingly, classical criteria—singability, naturalness, sense, rhythm—are reinterpreted for the expressive and performance affordances of LSE, with rhyme treated as optional where it conflicts with visual clarity or timing.

Finally, the study focuses on signed song translations produced by interpreters, encompassing both live services and recorded performances of pre-existing songs (Maler, 2015). These formats represent intermediate modalities located between translation and

interpreting, which demand meticulous preparation alongside real-time performance (Fernandes, 2020; Morêdo, 2021; Silva-Neto, 2017; Wurm, 2018). In this context, professional competence is pivotal: bilingual/linguistic (grammar, articulation, non-manual load), extralinguistic and cultural, translation/strategic, and artistic/expressive (poetic sensitivity, musical ear, movement quality and timing), as argued for the Spanish setting by López-Burgos & González-Montesino (2024b). The growing visibility of signed song translation in live and online cultural venues in Spain underscores the need for quality-oriented standards aligned with these modality specific demands (López-Burgos, 2024).

### **3. The concept of quality applied to translation and interpretation**

Quality is central to assessing the adequacy of interlinguistic mediation but remains theoretically and practically complex: it involves multiple factors (Moser-Mercer, 1996), is a multidimensional construct (Pöchhacker, 2013), and has been framed from form/content, adequacy, and pragmatic textual lenses (Newmark, 1988, cit. in Ningsih et al., 2020; Martínez & Montero, 2010; Martínez, 2014; House, 2015). In this study, we adopt a 'function first' view, according to which quality is meaningful only in relation to purpose, audience, and delivery conditions. For signed song translation aimed at Deaf audiences, reception/usability are operationalised with respect to the performance and visual gestural affordances of LSE and to the event's aims (live vs. recorded). While quality in TS is often conceptualised as reception-oriented, our data are emitter-side: we examine how interpreters conceive quality, grounding the audience link theoretically via prior Deaf reception studies (Morêdo, 2021; López-Burgos, 2024).

Against this backdrop, our approach—aligned with linguistic correctness, textual coherence, and target audience reception—does not fully coincide with Low's Pentathlon (2003, 2008, 2017). Low models optimal balance among performance constraints for singable translation, whereas we foreground parameters identified by LSE interpreters as central for signed song translation. We treat these perspectives as complementary, not equivalent. In interpreting, perceived quality depends on norms, user expectations, and audience effect (Pöchhacker, 2013), varies with the evaluator and external conditions (Moser-Mercer, 1996; Collados & García, 2015), and is often defined aspirationally as a complete and accurate rendition constrained by context (Moser-Mercer, 1996, p. 44). On a practical level, Báez (2023) recalls that, regardless of the linguistic modality involved, translation quality should be evaluated using clear and operational criteria. Drawing on Brunette's seminal proposal (2000), these include being "(1) easy to understand; (2) practical; (3) limited in number; (4) verifiable" (p. 174). To these, Martínez and Montero (2010) add a fifth parameter: "(5) flexible and customizable" (p. 4).

For LSE, quality discussions in Spain add two layers: (a) structural/occupational concerns (e.g., working conditions and experience acquisition), and (b) a parameter set for interpreting to/from LSE, distinguishing linguistic (grammaticality, oral/signed articulation, intonation/non-manuals, complete/correct transmission, oral/gestural accent) and non-linguistic factors (eye contact, professional attitude, self-evaluation, emotional stability)

(Bao & González-Montesino, 2013, p. 311). In song translation specifically, Low's Pentathlon has been applied to spoken language pairs (e.g., English → Irish Gaelic) (Ò Luasa, 2014, cit. in Low, 2017), but we find no applications to sign languages beyond the exploration of singability for LSE (López-Burgos & González-Montesino, 2024a). Consequently, we identify purpose/function as interpreters understand them for deaf audiences, and from there derive the essential aspects for effective, high quality signed song translation. Taken together, these perspectives suggest a purpose-driven, audience-anchored assessment in LSE that recalibrates linguistic correctness in terms of visual musicality and interpretive coherence, rather than treating them as separate checklists.

#### **4. Deaf audiences' perceptions of signed song translations**

This section draws on prior research into deaf reception to inform the study's theoretical framing (no audience data are collected here). Recent years have seen growing demands for quality and cultural/linguistic respect in signed song translations, linked in Spain to the increased presence of interpreters at live/televised events and to the proliferation on social media of renditions by hearing signers with limited linguistic/cultural alignment (Respeto por las LS, 2020). Comparable community criticism is reported in Portugal and the UK (Morêdo, 2021). Despite this visibility, empirical research on deaf reception of signed song translations remains scarce. Internationally, Morêdo (2021) stands out for analysing deaf made signed songs among Portuguese and British Deaf viewers, arguing that deaf performers tend to offer greater linguistic and cultural richness. In Spain, López-Burgos (2024) examines reception of LSE songs produced by Deaf and hearing translators, and both studies reinforce a multisensory conception of music—visual, vibrotactile and kinesthetic—in signed practice (Maler, 2013; Holmes, 2017; Cripps, 2018; Peñalba et al., 2018; Nadal et al., 2021).

Performance-oriented research specifies the visual cues that support musical understanding for deaf audiences. Maler (2022) shows that rhythm and melody in signed music are constructed through purposive movements of hands, body, face and head that generate visually perceivable timing and kinetic lines; Fisher (2021) conceptualises 'visual musicality' as movement encoding dynamic qualities—flow, intensity, patterning—that parallel acoustic features, bridging embodied construction and audience meaning making. With respect to perceived quality, López-Burgos (2024) concludes that translations must be fully understandable to deaf viewers—linguistically, culturally, emotionally and musically—requiring clear, fluid, natural signing, correct LSE grammar (avoiding bimodality), precise articulation, appropriate non-manuals, and the integration of classifiers, spatial structuring, role shift and idioms; crucially, these resources must be used naturally and consistently with deaf signing—gestural accent (Bao & González-Montesino, 2013). For musical adaptation, Deaf participants highlight rhythm, intensity and duration, made visible via movement, signing amplitude/speed, and facial bodily expressiveness—precisely the visual-kinetic correlates identified by Maler (2022).

Finally, process factors shape perceived quality. Participants in the López-Burgos study (2024) emphasise thorough preparation and involvement of a deaf language advisor as essential. Although no clear preference for Deaf over hearing translators is confirmed, there is a general inclination towards Deaf signers or CODAs; for his part, Morêdo (2021) notes that deaf audiences' reactions depend largely on prior experience with sign language and music. Taken together, these insights are operationalised here as evaluative parameters for signed song translation—visual rhythm (analogue of musical rhythm), non-manual load (carrier of intensity), and spatial parallelism (correlate of phrasing)—and aligned with embodied mechanisms described by Maler (2022) and Fisher (2021). Collectively, this literature situates Deaf audience perceptions vis-à-vis quality and provides a theoretical basis for our research questions on what LSE song professionals consider necessary to enhance perceived quality and how these views converge with audience expectations.

## **5. Methodology**

We conducted an exploratory qualitative study using grounded theory to model how professional LSE interpreters conceptualise quality in signed song translation. This approach—selected for an under-researched, multimodal, and context-variable domain—builds categories inductively from participants' narratives rather than imposing preset frames, thereby revealing the structure of interpreters' decision making and relations among linguistic, performance, and cultural variables (Flick, 2015). Through its iterative cycle of coding, constant comparison, and theoretical sampling, grounded theory captures the complexity of this hybrid translation-performance modality and yields a substantive, data driven model of quality. In line with Palacios (2021), the analysis approaches social reality via participants' discursive constructions—the meanings they articulate, the interpretive categories they mobilise, and the linguistic and narrative resources through which they make sense of practice.

The present study examines deaf and hearing professionals who translate songs into LSE, with the aim of elucidating their conceptualisation of quality. To isolate song-specific phenomena, the research excluded experiences unrelated to musical translation, thereby focusing participants' accounts on the multimodal demands distinctive of this genre.

Data were collected through individual, semi-structured online interviews (~90 minutes), recorded with informed consent. The interview guide underwent expert review and a pilot test. The interview guide was reviewed by a panel of seven experts with extensive experience in the fields of sign language studies, sign language linguistics, and/or the education of Deaf individuals. This group included two Deaf professionals, whose contributions ensured cultural and linguistic alignment with the Deaf community, and three experienced sign language interpreters, who provided insight into the practical and multimodal demands of translation in performance contexts. Together, these specialists contributed to validating the content, clarity, and relevance of the interview questions, ensuring that the instrument was robust and appropriate for the aims of the study.

The interview comprised five content blocks: (1) sociodemographic background; (2) translation process; (3) problems and difficulties in translating songs into LSE; (4) dissemination and impact; and (5) quality in LSE song translation. The present article draws on block (5). As detailed in Annex 1, this block consists of eight main questions and seven complementary prompts designed to achieve the required depth of analysis.

We used purposive convenience sampling (Hernández Sampieri & Mendoza, 2018) to recruit nine professionals (N=9) representing typical profiles: (1) three occasional hearing interpreters for concerts/social media; (2) three hearing interpreters regularly attached to the same artist; and (3) three deaf translators. Although the sample comprises nine interpreters, this size is appropriate for grounded theory, which prioritises conceptual saturation over statistical representativeness. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as an empirically grounded model of quality in signed song translation rather than as population level generalisations.

Using Atlas.ti, we applied open, axial, and selective coding, iterating through constant comparison to refine categories and relationships until conceptual saturation. We enhanced trustworthiness by keeping analytic memos, crosschecking code merges, and discussing category definitions in peer debriefings (San Martín, 2014). The following section presents the analysis of the data obtained. It begins with a brief account of the coding procedure and the number and type of labels and categories generated during analysis.

## **6. Results**

### **6.1. Category creation procedure**

Coding in Atlas.ti generated 284 codes, grouped into 17 categories and finally 5 core themes aligned with the study objectives. The emerging structure organizes how interpreters conceptualize quality around: (a) correctness and naturalness in LSE, (b) music-text integration through visual-gestural resources, (c) deaf preparation and advice, (d) professional skills, and (e) live event constraints.

### **6.2. Data analysis**

#### **6.2.1. Sociodemographic data**

The sample (N=9) was predominantly female (7/9), with **12–22 years** of experience in LSE interpreting; four participants reported training in music or the performing arts and four reported early contact with the deaf community (three deaf, one CODA). These characteristics make up an experienced and diverse professional group.

Once the participating sample is characterized, the data collected from the 9 interviews regarding the concept and characterization of quality will be presented in detail. To this end, literal passages taken from the interviewees' responses will be included, with the data coded as follows: interviewee 1 (I1), interviewee 2 (I2), and so on. Participants 1, 2, and 3 belong to profile 1 (occasional interpreters at concerts or on social media), 4, 5, and 6 to profile 2 (interpreters at concerts of the same group or artist), and 7, 8, and 9 to profile 3 (deaf translators).

### 6.2.2. Concept and characterization of quality

The professionals consulted consider that a song translated into LSE that can be perceived as a quality product is one that is understood by deaf people, being aware of the heterogeneity of the group, both in terms of textual and musical content. As I5 indicates: "it has to be sung in LSE" (0:54:24-0:54:34), making the rhythm, speed, intonation, and intensity of the song visible. To achieve this, interpreters must have specific skills that facilitate careful preparation using a series of LSE-specific resources.

Regarding prior preparation, all participants affirm that it is a fundamental aspect — on the one hand, because both linguistic and musical content must take center stage, and on the other, because the pieces they work with often involve poetic texts to varying degrees. Moreover, translating between two languages of different modalities and cultural backgrounds adds further complexity to achieving a functionally adequate result.

In this sense, defining the concept of equivalence is complex and, as noted by Arroyo (2025), ultimately dependent on both the receiver's interpretation and the translator's perspective, making it a relative and subjective notion. Therefore, in this article the term *equivalence* is used in a functional sense: the signed target text is considered equivalent insofar as it achieves its intended communicative purpose for the deaf audience (intelligibility, musical and textual integration, cultural naturalness) within the performance and visual-gestural affordances of LSE. This is not a claim of formal one-to-one correspondence, but rather of adequacy to purpose in context.

In order to obtain a product that can be considered high quality, priority must be given to the correct use of sign language throughout the preparation process, which I4 and I5 refer to as "respect for LSE". This correctness in the use of LSE is defined as precision in syntax, proper articulation of signs, and coherence and cohesion in the discourse.

Additionally, when reflecting on the resources that enhance the quality of songs translated into LSE, the most visual elements are highlighted, such as classifiers, facial and body expressions, and the use of space. I8 emphasizes the importance of using idioms to achieve proper cultural adaptation and naturalness in the discourse. Furthermore, I2 and I3 highlight the importance of including artistic and poetic components in translations, for example, by modifying certain phonological features of signs, such as the place of articulation.

Once the prior preparation is completed, the informants value the importance of having the translation evaluated, for which they usually consult other professional interpreters (I2, I3, I4, I5, I6 and I7) and/or deaf individuals (I1, I2, I3, I5, I7, I8 and I9). They are also based on other types of evaluation, such as those carried out after the final product has been presented to the public, asking interpreters and/or deaf people who have seen the final product for their feedback.

Similarly, it is important to consider some of the information obtained in the section on problems and difficulties, as many of these issues influence the perception of the quality of live song translations into sign language. Such is the case with the lack of knowledge about the profession and the field, which results in inadequate working conditions or

improper placement of the LSE interpreter on stage. An incorrect location can lead to not only poor visibility but also a disconnection between the professional and the artist. Participants explained that an inadequate location on stage not only limits the visual accessibility of the interpretation for deaf audiences, but also restricts the interpreter's ability to integrate the artist's musical and performance cues. Several interviewees emphasized that maintaining a clear line of sight with the interpreter and the musical ensemble is essential to accurately convey rhythm, intensity, and emotional nuances, elements they identified as fundamental to the perception of a song "sung in LSE." When interpreters are positioned at a distance, behind equipment, or in poorly lit areas, they lose access to these cues, which in turn reduces the fluidity, synchrony, and expressiveness of their signs. According to participants, these conditions directly influence whether deaf viewers perceive the translation as engaging, coherent, and musically aligned with the performance.

### 6.2.3. Competencies

The informants converge on an integrated competency profile:

- **Bilingual-linguistic:** LSE grammar, clear articulation, cohesion, and precise use of non-manuals, classifiers, roles, and space.
- **Extralinguistic-cultural and artistic:** alignment with the deaf community and cultural appropriateness of discourse (I5, I6, I7 and I8). Also have knowledge related to the performing arts: music (I9 and I4), dance (I1), theatre (I6).
- **Artistic-performance-based:** poetic sensibility, control of movement (quality, amplitude, tempo), and stage presence.
- **Strategic and experiential:** rigorous preparation and multimodal decision-making. In the words of I3, the key is to "balance content and beauty" so that musicality is perceptible in LSE.

This last skill allows the message artistically and visually, ensuring that it is understood by deaf people. This is known as finding the balance between content and beauty, between music and text. According to the interviewees, achieving this balance involves negotiation, not with the mere aim of embellishment, but rather to ensure that the visual modality can convey the emotional, rhythmic, and stylistic weight of the song. In this sense, 'beauty' refers to the expressive plasticity necessary to make rhythm, intensity, or affect perceptible in LSE, while 'content' anchors the interpretation in semantic equivalence. Therefore, the interpreters' descriptions indicate that strategic competence functions as a form of multimodal calibration, allowing them to decide when to prioritize clarity, when to amplify musicality, and how to integrate both dimensions so that the translation remains meaningful and appealing to deaf audiences.

Additionally, to achieve high-quality songs translated into LSE, the interviewees cite a series of related skills, on the one hand, with attitude: motivation for the profession and music (I3), curiosity (I4 and I9), or the desire for improvement (I3); on the other hand, with artistic and expressive elements such as sensitivity (I3) or emotion (I3, I6, and I7); and,

lastly, with elements related to live performance, such as having little embarrassment (I1 and I3) and being accustomed to going on stage (I4 and I7).

To conclude on the skills, there is one criterion that all participants consider key to the best development of all these skills and, therefore, directly linked to the achievement of a quality product: experience. Furthermore, they do not believe that experience should be limited exclusively to the field of performing arts, but should be present in interpreting services in general (I4 and I6).

#### *6.2.4. Motivations*

According to the participants, another factor that can favor the achievement of a high-quality song translated into LSE is the motivation that drives interpreters to perform this task, highlighting their vocation for music and sign language. The stated motivations focus on three areas: vocation (combining music and LSE), I4 affirms: "I am excited to convey a song so that the deaf audience feels the same way" (0:09:00–0:09:25); social impact (accessibility and enjoyment for deaf people) (I8 and I9), and expressive development (the translation of songs as a space for creativity and emotional self-regulation) (I5 and I7).

#### *6.2.5. Other parameters that improve quality*

The last question in the questionnaire was designed to analyze which elements, according to the participants, could contribute to their song translations being perceived as more appropriate or satisfactory by the deaf community. The considerations were directed, on the one hand, towards the improvement of the translation itself (profiles 1 and 2) and, on the other hand, towards technical improvements (profile 3).

The participants agree that prior preparation is crucial to perceived quality. I1 emphasizes that the time available is insufficient and can undermine the result, while I4 directly links omissions or configuration errors to poor preparation. Similarly, I5 does not point to a specific parameter, but insists that the desire for continuous improvement should guide the professional practice of all LSE interpreters.

For her part, I6 believes that in order to raise quality, the artistic component must be strengthened, particularly the way in which music is integrated, as she tends to prioritize textual content. Finally, the interviewees in profile 3 point to difficulties inherent in live work, such as the absence of a teleprompter to access the lyrics, which affects synchronization and performance during the show.

## **7. Discussion**

Our analysis shows that interpreters conceptualise quality in LSE song translation primarily as fitness for purpose—intelligibility, musico-textual unity, and cultural naturalness for deaf audiences in specific performance settings—rather than as compliance with decontextualised checklists. This emitter-side perspective converges with reception-oriented models of quality and user expectations in Interpreting Studies, while

foregrounding the constraints of a visual-gestural modality (Pöchhacker, 2013; Moser-Mercer, 1996).

The patterns identified in our data also coincide with existing research on song translation and signed music. Interpreters' emphasis on the integration of linguistic and musical codes echoes Low's fundamental parameters—in particular, meaning, naturalness, and rhythm—and coincides with Franzon's notion of musical-verbal unity. Similarly, the importance given to movement, spatial rhythm, and non-manual markers reflects the findings of studies on sign language music (Maler, 2013; Cripps, 2018), which show that deaf audiences perceive musical qualities visually. Furthermore, the importance attributed to LSE-specific correctness, gestural accent and cultural alignment directly mirrors the linguistic and non-linguistic quality parameters proposed by Bao and González-Montesino (2013). Therefore, rather than being independent, the present results converge with existing frameworks and extend them by showing how these concepts are negotiated in the hybrid context of song translation in LSE. It is important to note that the aim of this study is not to establish universal criteria, but to describe how LSE interpreters construct and negotiate the concept of quality in the specific context of song translation in sign language.

Our findings should therefore be interpreted with a focus on function: respondents describe quality as fit for purpose, i.e. intelligibility, musical and textual unity, and cultural naturalness for Deaf recipients in LSE performance settings, and only then as compliance with general checklists. In this sense, the interpreters' criteria exemplify context-specific quality rather than a universal set of characteristics.

This idea of focusing on the recipient also aligns with Low's Pentathlon Approach (2003, 2017), specifically with the parameter of meaning, which is defined as the ability to convey the meaning, content, and intention of the original text. Furthermore, it corresponds to the linguistic criterion of the correct transmission of the original discourse, as proposed by Bao and González-Montesino (2013).

Similarly, the interviewees emphasise that the target culture, in this case that of the Spanish deaf community, must be present in translations for them to be considered high quality. To achieve this, as suggested by Bao and González-Montesino (2013) when referring to gestural accent and non-manual components, they advocate the inclusion of specific LSE resources, such as classifiers, facial and bodily expressions, and the use of space. At the same time, the presence of these elements is related to the naturalness proposed by Low (2003, 2017), as they are the resources that bring the translation closer to the way deaf people express themselves, while refuting the data obtained by Morêdo (2021) and López-Burgos (2024) on the elements that are considered appropriate by deaf people. In addition, other parameters highlighted by the interviewees, as indicated by Bao and González-Montesino (2013), also contribute to achieving this naturalness, such as the coherence and cohesion of discourse, fluency in the use of sign language, correct articulation of signs, and grammaticality.

Continuing with the analysis of how quality is perceived, it can be observed that all participants agree that both codes (musical and linguistic) must appear in the translation and be harmonious. This reflection once again points to the parameter proposed by Bao and González-Montesino (2013) on the correct transmission of the source discourse and brings us closer to the criterion of complete transmission of the original discourse, given that if the music is not present in the translation, using the mechanisms indicated in the studies by Fisher (2021), Maler (2022), Morêdo (2021) and López-Burgos (2024), the text will not be offered in its entirety. Furthermore, this idea is directly related to the singability proposed by Low (2003, 2017) and redefined by Franzon (2008) for spoken languages, and to the characteristics proposed by López-Burgos and González-Montesino (2024a) for their application to sign languages.

To achieve this unity between text and music, and to enable deaf people to understand the composition, the interviewees believe that more visual resources (classifiers, use of space, facial expression, roles, etc.) should be used, as well as thorough preparation and a set of skills, as concluded by López-Burgos and González-Montesino (2024a).

As for the skills that an LSE interpreter must possess in order to translate a song in the best possible conditions, those described by the informants correspond to most of those listed by López-Burgos and González-Montesino (2024b), giving priority to bilingual, extralinguistic (cultural and artistic) and artistic and expressive skills. Similarly, according to these authors, experience and motivation also emerge in the results obtained as factors that can improve their skills and, consequently, lead to a qualitative improvement in translations.

Based on Low's proposal (2003, 2017), in addition to meaning, singability and naturalness, rhythm has also appeared in the informants' statements as something that must necessarily be present in a song translated into LSE. Therefore, we consider that Low's (2003, 2017) Pentathlon Approach fits with the perception of quality that LSE interpreters have of this type of product, since the only element that is omitted, rhyme, is the same one that Low considered dispensable.

However, it is important to note that Low (2003, 2008, 2017) explicitly describes the Pentathlon as a “juggling act” (Low, 2017, p. 79), in which the relative weight of each criterion varies depending on the type of text, context and purpose. If we extend this idea to the translation of songs into sign language, we see that the balance between the criteria is altered by the physical and performance limitations of the visual-gestural modality. In LSE, singability does not refer to vocal ease, but to the feasibility of reproducing musical form through movement, spatial modulation, and non-manual markers; rhythm must be recalibrated as visual rhythm; and naturalness depends on kinesthetic plausibility and cultural alignment with the signing styles of deaf people. Therefore, applying the pentathlon to LSE does not imply replicating its original hierarchy, but rather adapting the interaction between the criteria to a modality in which it is the body, and not the voice,

that carries the musical load. This modality-specific rebalancing constitutes an important and original extension of Low's model.

Extending Low's insight to the context of signed languages reveals that the 'juggling act' acquires a fundamentally different configuration in a visual-gestural modality. Because musical form in LSE is rendered through embodied resources—movement amplitude, sign velocity, spatial modulation, facial rhythm, and coordinated non-manual load—the balance among Pentathlon criteria shifts accordingly. 'Singability' becomes a matter of musico-kinetic feasibility, meaning the capacity of the body to enact musical timing, intensity, and phrasing, rather than vocal or prosodic ease. Rhythm must be recalibrated as visual rhythm, naturalness as kinesthetic plausibility aligned with Deaf signing styles, and meaning as the ability to integrate semantic content into coherent embodied movement. This modality-specific rebalancing demonstrates that the Pentathlon Approach not only maps onto interpreters' criteria but is transformed by the affordances and constraints of LSE, offering an original extension of Low's model to signed language song translation.

We can also confirm that informants understand quality in the translation of songs into LSE in a similar way to that proposed by Bao and González-Montesino (2013) for interpretation in other fields. Firstly, due to the presence of parameters such as those proposed by these authors, as we have already analysed, and secondly, by considering the same variables that can condition the perception of quality, such as the lack of specific training in the field of performing arts or experience. Similarly, the interviewees' characterisation of quality coincides with the perception of deaf users, as reflected in previous studies by Morêdo (2021) and López-Burgos (2024), which emphasise clarity, fluency and naturalness.

## **8. Conclusions**

To conclude this study, we will present the main conclusions drawn from the analysis of data on the concept of quality applied to the translation of songs into LSE and the factors that, according to the interpreters interviewed, influence deaf people's perception of quality. Firstly, it should be noted that the responses given by the 9 interviewees, regardless of the profile they belong to, are very similar, offering fairly homogeneous conclusions. It has been determined that a song translated into LSE with quality is one that can be understood by deaf individuals and in which the textual and musical content are harmoniously presented.

Furthermore, it has been confirmed that the parameters proposed by Low (2003, 2017) align with the criteria described by the participants and, consequently, can be applied to the concept of quality in the translation of songs into LSE, as Ó Luasa (2014, cited in Low, 2017) suggested for two spoken languages. The criteria present in the Pentathlon Approach that have been corroborated are singability, naturalness, sense, and rhythm. Similarly, it has also been confirmed that the parameters proposed by Bao and González-Montesino (2013) for interpreting into LSE can be adapted to the case of live translation into LSE.

To establish the final set of conditions that informants identified as contributing to the perceived adequacy of song translation into LSE, we integrated Low's (2003, 2017) model with that of Bao and González-Montesino (2013). The Pentathlon Approach was adopted as the primary linguistic framework, supplemented by selected components of the Bao and González-Montesino approach and by additional features that emerged during the study.

In the case of singability, the quality of the translation depends on the faithful integration of linguistic and musical parameters. This requires the preservation of the core semantic content of the source text, together with the accurate rendering of musical features—such as rhythm, duration, and intensity—and an effective alignment between text and melody. These combined conditions enable the translation to function effectively in performance within the musical structure.

For translated songs into LSE to be perceived as successful, they must also meet the criterion of naturalness, understood as the coherent integration of linguistic and discourse features such as cohesion, fluency, stylistic appropriateness, clear articulation of signs, grammatical accuracy, non-manual markers, and gestural prosody. To achieve this, it is necessary to make informed choices regarding the grammatical, spatial, and visual-gestural resources specific to LSE, enabling the effective representation of the structural properties of the language and the culturally embedded conventions that shape meaning-making within the deaf community.

Semantic equivalence is another parameter that must be considered when assessing the quality of a song translation into LSE, as it concerns the accurate preservation of the source text's meaning. Specifically, attention must be paid to ensuring that the source discourse is correctly transmitted, meaning that in the case of the type of text in question: the poetic content is visible and represented using the most appropriate resources.

The last linguistic criterion verified in this study is rhythm, understood as the visual-gestural rendering of the musical structure. Our findings align with previous research showing that rhythm in signed songs is conveyed through coordinated patterns of facial expression, body movement, sign velocity, and embodied actions. For example, Fisher's (2021) analysis of embodied songs demonstrates that signers systematically mobilize dynamic bodily movements to represent musical flow and rhythmic patterns in the absence of sound. Similarly, Maler (2022) identifies rhythm as a primarily visual-tactile construct created through purposeful movements of the hands, body, face, and head, which collectively generate a perceptible sense of musical timing in signed performances. These observations corroborate the strategies identified in our data—such as facial expression, body movement, dance, sign movement, and represented action—confirming that rhythmic adequacy in LSE song translation emerges from the integration of multimodal, visually rhythmic resources rather than from the linguistic channel alone.

Regarding non-linguistic criteria, we can conclude that to obtain a quality song translated into LSE, we must value several essential factors: thorough preparation, knowledge of the role and function of the LSE interpreter, the location of deaf individuals

and interpreters—in live events—, evaluation, and the competencies of professionals—bilingual, extralinguistic (cultural and artistic), artistic and expressive ability, strategic, and experience. As far as prior preparation is concerned, it cannot be concluded that all high-quality translations of songs necessarily involve thorough prior preparation, but it does help to obtain products with better linguistic and cultural adaptation.

To conclude this research, it is important to take into account the limitations we have faced, such as the sample size, which, although considered relevant due to the characteristics of the field addressed, is small, which may limit the generalisation of the results. Similarly, the research presents a biased view of the subject matter by not including users as part of the research.

A further methodological consideration concerns the nature of the data analysed. This study draws exclusively on interpreters' perceptions and does not include an examination of actual LSE song translations. While this choice is coherent with the exploratory aims and the grounded theory approach adopted, it inevitably limits the extent to which notions such as 'singing in LSE' or the visualisation of rhythm, speed and intonation can be connected to specific translational practices. Future research could therefore complement these findings with systematic analyses of real translated products, allowing for a more detailed comparison between practitioners' discursive constructions of quality and how such constructions materialise in practice.

Although this is a preliminary study with its restrictions, it opens a new line of research in the Spanish context that we hope will be very fruitful. Additionally, we hope to have contributed our grain of sand to the studies of translation and interpretation in signed languages and to have contributed to the visibility and dignity of this profession.

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### **Annex 1. Questions from the study on quality in song translation to LSE<sup>2</sup>**

- ¿Qué consideras que es una traducción de canciones a LSE con calidad?
- ¿Qué características debe tener?
  - o ¿Podrías citar a alguna persona que traduzca canciones y que tengas como referente en lo que a calidad se refiere? ¿Por qué?
- ¿Consideras que las traducciones de calidad se relacionan con competencias específicas de las ILS que las llevan a cabo?
- ¿Qué competencias consideras necesarias para trabajar en la traducción de canciones a LS?
  - o ¿Puede que haya ILS que, sin esas competencias, puedan desarrollar un trabajo de calidad en la traducción de canciones?
  - o ¿Crees que personas, sordas u oyentes, que no son ILS pueden traducir canciones con calidad?
- ¿Consideras la experiencia como un elemento clave en lo que a la calidad de las traducciones se refiere?
- ¿Podrías poner un ejemplo de una traducción de canción que tengas en redes sociales que represente la labor que desempeñas?
- ¿Qué crees que podrías “mejorar” en tus traducciones de canciones?
  - o ¿Tiene que ver con cómo llevas a cabo el proceso traductor?
  - o ¿Tiene que ver con los recursos elegidos para la traducción del texto?
  - o ¿Tiene que ver con la traducción de los elementos de la música?
  - o ¿Tiene que ver con cuestiones técnicas ajenas al proceso traductor?
- ¿Quieres añadir algo que crees que no ha quedado reflejado en las preguntas anteriores?

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<sup>2</sup> The questions are written in Spanish because it is the language used in the study.