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Music In/And Translation

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Translation Matters is committed to publishing articles of the highest standard, and for this, the peer review process is essential.

All published articles have been peer-reviewed by at least two external scholars, chosen because of their specialist knowledge in the field. The process is double-blind to ensure full anonymity.

However, in the interests of transparency, and out of respect for the attention and professionalism that peer reviewers bring to their task, from Spring 2025 we will be making their (anonymous) reports available on the TM website.

Translation Matters Vol. 7, No. 1, Special issue on Music In/And Translation

25 articles were submitted to this special issue. Of these, 12 were sent to peer review.

The following specialists participated in the reviewing and evaluation of those articles:

- Angela Tarantini (U. Utrecht)
- Anna Rędzioch-Korkuz (U. Warsaw)
- Daniel Galvão (U. Nova, Lisbon)
- Helen Julia Minors (U. York St John)
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- Stefania Taviano (U. Messina)
- Vicky Fisher (Max Planck Institute)

Their (anonymous) reports can be found [here](#).

It should be noted that these peer reviews relate to the author's first draft. Most articles were subsequently revised by the authors, sometimes more than once, and submitted to rigorous editing procedures under the supervision of the issue's editor, **Karen Bennett**. The final published version of the article may not, therefore, bear much resemblance to the original draft that was the target of the peer reviewers' reports.

The reviews of articles that were ultimately not published are not included.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

BEYOND THE 'VERBAL FIXATION': NEW PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSLATION AND MUSIC

The complex interface between translation and music is finally beginning to attract the attention it deserves. 2025 saw at least two interdisciplinary conferences that brought the domains together in creative ways (*Music to my Ears: Creative Practices in Music and Translation* at Goldsmiths in May; and *Translation and Music: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* at Zwickau in June/July) with a third planned for 2026 in Lodz (*Translating Music: The Musical Work and Its Transformations*). There have been some interesting publications too. Malgorzata Grajter's *Applying Translation Theory to Musicological Research* (2024), reviewed here by **Rui Pedro Almeida**, is the first truly systematic attempt to look at music through the lens of Translation Studies. Helen Minor's *Music, Dance and Translation* (2023), reviewed by **Vanessa Montesi**, uses multimodal theory to explore the relationship between dance and music, providing an interesting sequel to her equally provocative *Music, Text and Translation* (2013). And mention should of course also be made of Lucile Desblache's *Music and Translation: New Mediation in the Digital Age* (2019), which, despite being shackled by a rather limited definition of translation,¹ nevertheless provides a very thorough and far-ranging overview of the various ways in which the two domains intersect.

What is new about this latest outcrop of offerings is that they are slowly beginning to venture beyond the interlingual to consider how music translates and is translated without necessarily involving the verbal code at all. We find in them not only case studies of intersemiotic translation between music and other arts, but also reflections on how translational processes figure in different forms of musical production: how performers working from printed scores are effectively translating the composer's intentions from the written medium into sound; how old songs are retranslated in the form of jazz improvisations and cover versions; and how musical themes, works and genres are successively translated across geographic and cultural borders and adapted to suit new audiences and purposes, generating new forms and varieties. That is to say, the wealth of theoretical material that has been produced in Translation Studies about matters such as interpretation, mediation, authorship, rewriting, constraints, and more recently, ttextuality² and translationality,³ can be applied to music just as readily as to written texts.

¹ Perhaps reflecting the still dominant understanding at the time this book was written, there are repeated suggestions that 'translation proper' is verbal and that other uses of the term are merely metaphorical (for example, pp. 68-69, 110-111, 114, 221-3, 267). Near the end of the book (p. 285), however, she does acknowledge that this understanding is beginning to change.

² This is a portmanteau term, coined by researchers at the University of Turku, that combines textuality, transmission and translation, bringing together researchers working in translation studies and textual scholarship to look at how texts are transmitted across languages and cultures (<https://blogit.utu.fi/englishturku/2019/11/06/ttextuality-at-the-intersection-of-textual-scholarship-and-translation-studies/>, Accessed: 13 July 30, 2025). See Bennett (forthcoming, Chapter 3) for examples of how this can be applied in the musical context.

³ This is defined by Robinson (2017, x) as 'transformationality: the constant emergingness of everything through embodied, situated, performative interactions'.

This comes not a minute too soon. For years, the field of Translation and Music was limited by its reluctance to embrace forms of transfer that did not overtly include verbal language, and although there were a few random case studies by translation scholars of intersemiotic translation involving music,⁴ much of the interesting work dealing with musical transfers was undertaken in other disciplinary fields, such as adaptation studies, interart studies, intermediality or simply musicology.⁵

Şebnem Susam-Sarajeva's Introduction to her pioneering special issue on *Translation and Music* in 2008 suggests reasons why this might be the case:

If the researcher comes from musicology, for instance, he or she will not necessarily be familiar with the concepts, tools and models available in translation studies; the research then tends to focus on aspects other than interlingual translation. Translation scholars on the other hand feel more comfortable dealing with written texts. We often have difficulty in comprehensively discussing other mediums together with the verbal one; we then end up sliding into a predominantly textual analysis. Few of us with a background in translation studies can effectively deal with meanings derived not only from text, but also from melody, pitch, duration, loudness, timbre, dynamics, rhythm, tempo, expression, harmony, pause, stress or articulation in music. If we consider that research in translation and music may also require a background in media studies, cultural studies and/or semiotics, we can begin to appreciate the difficulties encountered by anyone who ventures into this field (2008, pp. 189-190).⁶

Thus, the long list of text types that she provides in that same Introduction (2008, pp. 191-2) of 'where translation and music might come together' is exclusively verbal in focus. Likewise, the vast majority of studies that have been published before and since that special issue of *The Translator* came out in 2008 have been overwhelmingly concerned with the verbal aspects of music translation, whether practice-oriented⁷ or descriptive.⁸ This is reflected in the overviews provided in the major TS encyclopedias and handbooks. In 2012, Marta Mateo's entry on 'Music and Translation' in Volume 3 of the *Translation Studies Handbook* was limited to opera, stage musicals and songs, and although she does distinguish translating for performance and surtitling from the translation of opera libretti for programmes or CDs, very little is made of the multimodality that is such an important

⁴ See, for example, Bennett (2003, 2007, 2019), Minors (2013b), Stones (2013), Moss (2013), Ng (2020), Takebee (2020) and Vidal (2020).

⁵ See Desblache (2019a, pp. 115-117) for an overview. Grajter (2024, p. 61) makes the point that "academic musicology, as a highly specialised and independent discipline, has developed its own vocabulary used to describe translational phenomena in music *with absolutely no connection to translation theory*" (emphasis added).

⁶ This perspective is broadly endorsed by Desblache, who points out that both musicology and translation studies are 'practice-oriented disciplines which tend to devote their theoretical explorations to their own field' (2019a, p. 58).

⁷ For example, there are works that provide advice for practitioners about producing singable translations of song lyrics or opera libretti (e.g. Franzon, 2008; Apter and Herman, 2016; Low, 2005, 2017), about the challenges involved in opera sur- or subtitling (Low, 2002; Virkkunen, 2004; Mateo, 2007; Rędzioch-Korkuz, 2016, 2018; Page, 2020) and more recently, about including music in audiodescription (e.g. Igareda, 2012).

⁸ See, for example, the studies included in Franzon et al. (2021, 2024) and selected chapters of Minors (2013, 2020) and Şerban and Chan (2020).

feature of the first two. Susam-Saraeva's entry on 'Music' in the 2020 edition of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* covers the same restricted ground, though divided according to functional rather than genre criteria (and with the addition of audiodescription in the 'Accessibility' section). Desblache's entry for the *Routledge Handbook of Literary Translation* (2019) initially seems more promising, in that its introduction briefly mentions some nonverbal forms of musical translation like score interpretation and jazz improvisation, but these are not developed further, and the body of the entry rehearses the familiar themes of song translation, sur- and subtitling, and the translation of written texts on musical subjects. As for Anna Rędzioch-Korkuz's more recent survey of the field, despite briefly gesturing towards non-linguistic transfer ("i.e. cases where natural languages are not involved", such as "translating a piano concerto into ballet" [(2024, p. 68)], she does not fully acknowledge that such studies lie within the scope of translation studies, and ultimately restricts her remarks to 'vocal translation' on the grounds that "the presence of a natural language(s) is considered here fundamental to translation studies (as opposed to translation semiotics)".

Klaus Kaindl, in a chapter advocating for a multimodal understanding of translation generally, makes clear how ludicrous this "verbal fixation" (2020, p. 54) is in the musical context. Building on his earlier work on the plurisemiotics of song translation (2005), he shows how the very shift to a new cultural and linguistic environment triggers major transformations that affect all levels of the musical text: the staging of Bizet's comic opera *Carmen* in German at the Vienna Court Opera in 1875, for example, produced a change of genre as well as other shifts on the level of 'the modal realisation and intermodal relationships associated with it' (2020, p. 58),⁹ while the translation of Elvis Presley's rock-and-roll hit 'Hound Dog' into German caused the song to mutate into the domestic *Schlager* genre of popular music, with repercussions on the level of the harmony, melody and rhythm. Such shifts are inevitable, he suggests, because:

In translation, a multimodal whole is /.../ transferred into another temporal, social, and cultural context. Assuming that the meaning of modes always depends on the specific context of use, such a transfer also means change, since the recipients and with them the social and cultural parameters change. Thus, every translation is inevitably subject to change. Fixed, rigid relational specifications, such as the relationship between source and target text, are just as obsolete as the idea that modes could pass through the process of translation without undergoing change. (Kaindl, 2020, p. 59)

⁹ The much larger dimensions of the stage created new semiotic potential, which in turn affected the use of extras, props, and stage decor as well as the verbal, vocal, and musical mode. This required a modification of the original genre, as the intimate setting of the *opéra comique* was not suitable for the Vienna Court Opera. To overcome this problem, the translator, Julius Hopp, modified his text to suit the conventions of the Romantic opera, which was reflected in the musical realisation and the relationship between spoken and sung modes. The orchestra was extended, the spoken passages were deleted, and the singing style was adapted to the conventions of the Romantic opera. This also led to dramatic changes in the realisation on stage: the choice of costumes, the number of extras, and thus also the representation of the characters had to be adapted according to the new genre and medial conditions. The medial context, the genre-specific conventions, and the modal relationships influenced each other and turned a realistic chamber play into a bourgeois Romantic opera. (Kaindl, 2020, p. 58).

Thus, if Susam-Sarajeva (2008, pp. 189-190) and Desblache (2019a, p. 58) see the “verbal fixation” as a consequence of disciplinary over-specialization, Kaindl seems to be suggesting that it is the result of an inadequate understanding of what translation truly entails.

In fact, he is not the only scholar to be making this observation. There have been signs around for a while that Translation Studies as a discipline is ripe for a paradigm shift,¹⁰ beginning with our understanding of what constitutes our object of study. Since 2017, there has been a spate of works announcing that such a shift is already under way. Some, such as Gentzler (2017), Robinson (2017), Blumczynski (2017), Marais (2019) and Bassnett & Johnston (2019) have approached this on a theoretical level, emphasising the ubiquity of translational processes and their material embedment. Others, like Lee (2022), Robinson (2023), Grass (2023), Lucas (2023), Robert-Foley (2023) and Campbell and Vidal (2024) have a more practical orientation, showing how translation can serve as the starting point for creative artistic works.¹¹ What they all have in common, however, is their willingness to go beyond the merely verbal to include translational phenomena of all kinds, and on their insistence that translation produces change.

Although a number of these works include references to music, one that has proved particularly relevant to my purposes is a short section in Piotr Blumczynski's 2023 book *Experiencing Translationality* entitled 'Translationality in music' (pp. 184-186). In it, Blumczynski discusses how “playing a familiar piece of music is an act of re-enactment, recreation and remembering” and how “all live performances of the same piece are slightly different and yet recognisable as its instantiations and versions” (p. 184). Thus, cover versions (“pieces of music transferred – or shall we say translated? – between artists” [p. 185]) offer excellent opportunities for translational analysis, as he shows in his case study of Johnny Cash's version of 'Hurt' by Nine Inch Nails.¹²

¹⁰ Thomas Kuhn (1962), the father of the term 'paradigm shift', described the way in which such major ruptures come about. There starts to be a build-up of exceptions (or 'anomalies') to the old paradigm, challenging its internal coherence, until it is no longer sustainable as a heuristic model and a crisis is provoked. This is, I believe, what we are now witnessing in our field. For years, translation was understood to be an exclusively interlingual form of transfer committed to keeping the meaning the same, but there are now so many exceptions to both of these parameters that the definition is clearly insufficient.

The first parameter was challenged in 1959 when Roman Jakobson mooted the notion of intersemiotic translation, while the second has been successively dismantled since the 1980s when Descriptivists showed how texts are often adapted, truncated, extended or altered in translation, sometimes beyond recognition, to serve some specific purpose in the target culture. Since then, the various binaries that have served as the coordinates through which particular instances of translation are plotted and discussed (i.e. original/translatum, author/translator, source language/target language) have gradually been eroded by exceptions and anomalies. The only way forward, therefore, is to acknowledge the limitations of the old understanding of translation and embrace a new paradigm once and for all.

¹¹ See Vidal (2023) for a collective review of some of these titles.

¹² Blumczynski is not the first to make this point, of course. Grajter (2024, pp. 49-53) points out that some of the most respected theorists of translation and semiotics, such as George Steiner (1998, pp. 27, 438-446) and Umberto Eco (2001, pp. 102, 104, 107, 129) had already discussed music in translational terms without receiving much uptake amongst their immediate contemporaries. Kobus Marais (2019, p. 145) also uses

Blumczynski's understanding of musical translationality has since become the starting point for other studies, most notably a short reflection by África Vidal entitled '*Allegro ma non troppo: Going out for a walk through musical translationality*' (2025), and Karen Bennett's full-length monograph *Translationality in Music* (forthcoming), which explores the issue in more depth. It is hoped that these works, together with those by Grajter (2024), Minors (2023, 2013) and Desblache (2019a) mentioned above, will help in definitively propelling the field of Translation and Music – and maybe even Translation Studies more broadly – out of its verbal fixation and into a productive new paradigm.

* * *

The call for papers for this special issue on Music in/and Translation resulted in an unprecedented number of very high-quality submissions. Our objective was to offer a representative selection of the kind of research that is currently being done in the field, with priority given to studies that extend its boundaries into previously unexplored terrains.

The issue opens with a paper that is interlingual in focus, but potentially far-reaching as regards its 'post-translation effects' (Gentzler, 2017). **Frida Lizeth Flores Moreno and Krisztina Zimányi** are concerned with the translation of Baroque musical treatises, specifically the translation from English into Spanish of *The Art of Playing on the Violin* (1751) by Francesco Geminiani, with the objective of helping Spanish-speaking musicians in Latin America to play Baroque music according to conventions of the time. Historically Informed Performance (HIP), as it is called, is itself a controversial topic in music studies with certain analogies to archaizing translation in literature,¹³ and the authors give some time to discussing this, and the way in which such translation has been approached over time. They then propose a methodology for approaching this particular translation task. The resulting paper, which reveals the complexity of trying to understand knowledge systems from the past, is thus also of interest not only to scholars of Translation and Music, but also to those involved with History and Translation.

The next three articles all deal with song translation, which, as we have seen, has been a central concern of translation scholars for a long time. The first continues the practical focus with an article by **Peter Low and Lauro Meller** describing their collaboration in the production of singable English translations of some fifty songs written by Brazilian singer-songwriter Noel Rosa. Peter Low was of course the author of the very influential 'pentathlon principle' (2005, 2008, 2017) for singable translations, and he briefly revisits this before detailing the methodology used in this specific exercise and the difficulties

examples from music in his proposal to replace the traditional categories of interlingual, intralingual and intersemiotic translation with the much broader categories of intra-, inter- and extra-systemic.

¹³ This is briefly mentioned in Desblache (2019a, p. 70) and will be explored in more depth in Chapter 2 of Bennett (forthcoming).

encountered. The results will be of interest not only to practitioners of song translation, but also to scholars working on the very topical subject of collaborative translation.

The second article of this group by **Anna Rędzioch-Korkuz** is also interesting in singable translations but is descriptive in nature and concerned with the Polish version of the song 'Good Morning Starshine' from the rock musical *Hair* (1967). Mobilising Yuri Lotman's concept of the semiotic border as a space of tension, she analyses not only what happens to the song lyric in Polish translation but also the cultural contexts of production and reception, which of course were very different: for while the English song remains irrevocably associated with a Broadway musical that was revolutionary in terms of its genre and message, the Polish version was first performed by Poland's 'queen of pop' on a TV entertainment show at a time when that country was under the communist regime. In fact, the song was not so much translated into the Polish language, Rędzioch-Korkuz observes, as into the Polish zeitgeist of the early 70s, defined by an imposed conformity and the marked absence of the protest and rebellion that so coloured American culture at that time.

The third and last paper of the group by **Iván Villanueva-Jordán** explores the topic of cover versions, with a focus on shifting gender representations. The study looks at the song '*Non sono una signora*', originally released by the Italian singer Loredana Bertè in 1982, and three Spanish-language covers recorded by different Latin American singers in 1984. Engaging with Susam-Sarajeva's (2019) concept of the interlingual cover version and Prato's (2007) theory of coverability, Villanueva-Jordán analyzes how these versions negotiate gender, societal roles, and popular music discourses, contrasting thematic and narrative shifts across the adaptations to reveal how translation and performance interact to reframe gender and sexuality.

The next three articles move into the domain of audiovisual translation to examine the complex multimodality at play in video and film. **Darryl Cameron Sterk** looks at the music videos of Formosan Indigenous diva Abao, considered within the politicized framework of a settler society. Focusing on her award-winning 2019 album *Kinakaian* 母親的舌頭, Sterk shows how translation features not only interlingually in the title (where a Paiwanese word is juxtaposed with a Chinese phrase meaning 'Mother's Tongue'), lyrics and subtitles (which are in Paiwanese, Taiwanese, Chinese, or English), but also intersemiotically in the music videos, where the lyrics are translated into dance and (in the title track) also into Taiwanese sign language. This results in a complex multimodal product in which 'everything everywhere is playing all at once'; however, instead of the expected cacophony, this produces a surprisingly harmonious whole which can serve, Sterk says, as a metaphor for democracy and indigeneity in a settler society.

The practices of sign-singing and embodied song, which involve the translation not only of song lyrics but also of specifically musical features like rhythm, tempo, pitch and timbre, are amongst the most exciting developments to have appeared in our field in recent years. **Omar Mohammad-Ameen Ahmad Hazaymeh's** paper is concerned with the way hologram technology can be used to enhance the musical experience of the deaf and hard

of hearing by enabling such interpretations to be integrated into performances. After reviewing the various ways in which digital technology has transformed our engagement with music generally, he describes the methodology used to produce life-size three-dimensional holographic projections, which allow the signs to be viewed from multiple angles. When combined with sensory systems, such as vibrating seats, wearable haptics or interactive floors (which translate rhythms and frequencies into a form that can be experienced through the body), or dynamic lighting systems synchronized with the music's tempo and emotional shifts, the technology provides the deaf and hard of hearing with a rich immersive musical experience, which approximates that enjoyed by hearing audiences. Though Hazaymeh does not explicitly focus on the technical processes used to transform audio signals into visual or kinaesthetic form, this is clearly also a translational operation, which one day might produce new studies in our field.

The next article by **Paula Igareda** continues the accessibility theme with a study of how background music in film soundtracks is dealt with in audiodescription (AD). Music plays a multiplicity of roles in film – used to set a scene, create atmosphere, build the narrative, and identify characters and themes, amongst other things; yet, in audiodescription, it is sometimes underestimated, with the result that it may be overwritten. In order to determine if the practice has become more sensitive over time, Igareda analyses the audiodescriptions of eight films in which background music is particularly important, four from the 2000s and four from the last two years (2023-2025). Her results suggest that there has been a growing respect for music in current audio-described films compared to earlier practices. The study is then complemented by a second experiment designed to assess the iconicity of music in audiovisual identification and its implications for AD. Based on these findings, the article proposes the need for greater integration of music in audiovisual accessibility studies.

Helen Julia Minors' article is also concerned with film music, but focuses upon its capacity to translate emotion, understood through the prism of cognitive metaphor theory. She begins her paper with an account of the history of music in film, from the earliest days of silent cinema, when it would be provided by a live pianist or orchestra, to the sophisticated digital soundtracks of today. Then she turns her attention to *The Shape of Water*, a 2017 film by Guillermo del Toro, which features two mute characters (one non-human) whose emotions are conveyed largely through musical means. Drawing on published interviews with the composer Alexandre Desplat, Minors analyses how the music is also used, diegetically and non-diegetically, to set the era and location, define character, and evoke the medium of water that is such a significant feature. In this particular case study, Minors concludes, music has in many ways become the main mode, no longer something that merely echoes a narrative told through verbal and visual means, but an active generator of character and plot.

The final two articles – the most adventurous of all – describe creative translations involving music, each of which sheds light on important theoretical and artistic questions through its informed practice. **Sofia Lacasta Millera** recounts the processes involved in

creating a visual translation of Leroy Anderson's famous musical piece 'The Typewriter' (1950), done in the context of the short course *Soundscapes – Translating from Music*,¹⁴ held in the Spring of 2022. After analysing the semiotic elements making up the source text and describing the various performances it has undergone in different sociocultural and audiovisual contexts, she explains how she and her collaborator, África Vidal Claramonte, approached the translation, creating visual analogies of features such as rhythm, pitch and timbre, while also recalling the office imagery evoked in some of the stage performances of the work. The resulting visual poem, which was also used as the Epigraph for Vol. 5/1 (2023) of *Translation Matters*, is then presented in two forms, one in Spanish and the other multilingual.

Though Lacasta Millera's experiment was not overtly conceived within the Practice-As-Research (PaR) paradigm, it has been implicitly labelled as such by Grajter (2024, p. 136), creating a link to the final article of the issue by **Daniel Galvão**. This views songwriting as an intrinsically translational practice and advances a PaR methodology to show how the experience of a place's atmosphere can be translated into a musicopoetic artefact. After carefully positioning his work within a theoretical framework that brings together diverse strands of the most exciting translational and arts-based research, Galvão describes how he set about adapting Barrett and Bolt's (2007) PaR model to his particular purpose, namely to render into music the atmosphere of the Brazilian peninsula of Búzios as experienced by him in 2018–2019. With a rigour worthy of the empirical sciences, the paper sheds important light on the semiotic processes through which the work's tempo, rhythm, pitch, volume, timbre and intermusical relations effectively translate his lived experience of that place. In doing so, Galvão succeeds in establishing songwriting as an embodied creative practice, through which the resulting artefact is simultaneously the subject, method, and product of research.

Taken together, all the articles in this special issue on *Music In/And Translation* will hopefully enrich Translation Studies' engagement with this art and offer new avenues for research that go beyond the 'verbal fixation' to embrace all kinds of creative semiotic processes.

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¹⁴ The purpose and results of this course are described in Bennett (2024).

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Karen Bennett

EPIGRAPH

búzios.

Ai, saí sem dizer água vai
A brisa vem e o meu corpo cai
Azul que chama e me pergunta “Oi, como vai?”
Batuque toca sedutor
Luz que me abraça com calor
Exala sabor

Ai o amor
Que faz bater cá dentro o coração
Ca cum cum ca ca
Cum cum cum ca ca
Oh, ai o amor
A Búzios cheguei na procura de o encontrar

Oh ai, a noite chega devagar
Iluminando o meu caminhar
No vai e vem das ondas
A cantar, a dançar
O mar sussurra ao luar
E traz segredos de um lugar
Que vou abraçar

búzios.

Ai, I left without saying a word
The breeze arrives, and my body yields
Blue that calls and asks, “Hi, how are you?”
The drumming plays seductively
Light that embraces me with warmth
It exhales flavour

Ai, love
That makes the heart beat within
Ca cum cum ca ca
Cum cum cum ca ca
Oh, ai, love
I arrived in Búzios in search of it

Oh ai, the night arrives slowly
Lighting my steps
In the to-and-fro of the waves
Singing, dancing
The sea whispers under the moonlight
And brings secrets from a place
That I will embrace

Daniel Galvão (2024)¹

Music, lyrics, and English translation by the author

♪ *búzios*. Available at: <https://open.spotify.com/album/4eNgfFWAcRfu3VCVS6PiiR>

¹ See Galvão, this issue, for a discussion of the song as a musicopoetic artefact through which the experience of the atmosphere of Búzios is translated, within a Practice-as-Research framework.

TRANSLATING BAROQUE MUSICAL TREATISES: A METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL USING *THE ART OF PLAYING ON THE VIOLIN (1751)* BY FRANCESCO GEMINIANI

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ABSTRACT: Translating texts from early musical periods represents a challenge, due mostly to our limited knowledge of the subject matter and historical context. Yet, the results provide clear insights into different fields, including translation, music, art history, music teaching and historical performance. This paper analyses how the translation of such musical texts has developed over time and proposes a methodology for approaching the task, exemplified through the English-to-Spanish translation of *The Art of Playing on the Violin (1751)* by Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762). **KEYWORDS:** Musical Treatise; Historically Informed Performances; Translation in Context; Term Extraction

1. Introduction

The various ways in which music and translation interact have recently become the target of much academic discussion. From song translation, opera and theatrical subtitling to musical films and singing, scholars have reported, systematized and improved techniques to adapt to the demands of these practices (Apter & Herman, 2016; Fisher, 2021; Minors, 2013). However, in addition to musical texts to be sung or read in performance, there are also written texts that discuss musical matters yet are not directly linked with performance. These include works on music theory, history and philosophy, as well as treatises and methods that combine both theory and practice in order to train instrumentalists or composers in their respective arts.

This paper explores the translation of the latter type, focusing particularly on treatises written during the Baroque era. The systematic analysis of how the translation of these works has been or might be approached is beneficial for the disciplines of both music and translation. In the first case, such explorations serve 'Historically Informed Performance' (HIP) (Bowen, 2019; Kivy, 2002), an approach that uses historical research to recreate the practices used in the place and time the works were composed. As for translation studies, the results shed light on the adaptations that are required to account for diachronic change and achieve terminological precision and pedagogical validity. In more general terms, it is also necessary to take account of the various musical ideologies or pedagogical philosophies that have influenced the way in which music skills have been acquired and taught over the years.

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Considering the above, the objective of this article is to present a methodological proposal that guides the reader through the various stages that have been or could be applied to translating, for a geographically- and culturally-specific contemporary audience, musical treatises written in a temporally distant linguistic context.

2. Translating musical treatises: a historical overview

Treatises written during the late 17th and 18th century helped teachers and theoreticians to establish and standardize their musical ideologies and methodologies. These gained particular relevance in the Baroque era due to the various transitional processes that western music was undergoing at this time. Most commonly, these treatises discussed topics such as: 1) temperaments and transitional explorations from modes to tonal centers; 2) the teaching and learning of counterpoint and composition; 3) ornaments and interpretative tendencies; and 4) performance practice and instrument techniques. Other topics mentioned in these documents include rhetoric and affect theory, styles, and aesthetics.

The French, Italian and German styles were the most prominent in western music at the time, therefore, those vernaculars were the most widely used in Baroque treatises. However, Latin was also used in scholarly and academic contexts, and this language, as well as English, was also sometimes employed by musicians in London. Authors that were fluent in more than one language sometimes translated their works and distributed the translated versions amongst various publishers. Translations might also be done by bilingual musicians, music lovers and other interested parties, who travelled and circulated certain trends in places they visited, sometimes at the request of a publishing house.

In those days, translation was a less conscious activity, at least in terms of a theoretical approach. As McMurrin (2010) states, translation in the 18th century generally followed a domesticating tendency and was not particularly 'faithful' to the source text, conforming to the *belle infidèle* stereotype.¹ However, during the 19th century, after some Romantic composers, such as Mendelssohn, revived Baroque pieces, there was a renewed interest in early music. Therefore, academics and musicologists of the time were eager to seek out or produce translated versions of treatises from bygone eras. In the following paragraphs, an exploration of some of the most common musical treatises on the relevant topics in the Baroque era and their translations will be provided.

One of the four topics most commonly explored in these texts were temperaments and tonal centers. The transition from modal to tonal music started during the Baroque era. In this transitional process, various proposals arose to make tonalities less dissonant. Treatises contributed to overcoming the need to standardize a system that made it possible to explore the colors and sentiments of wide-ranging tonal centers. Andreas

¹ *Belle infidèle* was a term originally applied by Gilles Ménage to the translations done by Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt, famous for their beautiful style but utter lack of fidelity to the source text. It has since been generalized to the style of translation done during the Baroque/Neoclassical period in France (Polizzotti, 2019).

Werckmeister's (1691) text, *Musikalische Temperatur*, alongside other publications by the same author, were fundamental in this process. Werckmeister employed different comma divisions combined with traditional tuning principals and tried to resolve uncomfortable or dissonant sounds. The system proposed by him resulted in distinct types of semitones (major and minor), providing each key with a unique color and enriching the experience of exploring keys that had usually been avoided. These works were written in German and have not been officially translated into English. However, as they later laid the foundations for equal temperament, various researchers have investigated Werckmeister's works as well as his influence and impact on later musical developments, where they offered a rendition of some extracts. For example, Bartel's (2015) article in the journal *Early Music* explores how Werckmeister arrived at equal temperament by analyzing his treatises and his conceptual evolution. Such modern explorations and discussions in English and other languages make it possible for non-German-speaking academics and musicians to familiarize themselves with the 17th musician's proposals.

Second, treatises contributed to the establishment and teaching of species in counterpoint, the fundamental compositional technique of the era. Fux's treatise on counterpoint written in Latin, *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725), is a reference in this area. The text was translated into German in 1742 by Lorenz Christof Mizier, a precursor of the Enlightenment in Poland, and then from German into English in 1943 by Alfred Mann, a German-American musicologist, conductor and professor, with the title *The Study of Counterpoint: From Johann Joseph Fux's Gradus ad Parnassum*. The cover page specifies that it is "the only English translation of the great eighteenth-century work that has been the basis for the study of counterpoint for more than 200 years". This version, however, is not complete, but rather a selective translation that focuses exclusively on the counterpoint section, leaving aside Fux's discussions of composition and fugue writing. Mann (1943/1971) offers a series of notes regarding his translation process, where he justifies some of his decisions. For example:

The choice of freely translated passages [...] has been limited to instances in which musical terms and related references are concerned. Bracketed parts of the Latin text have been omitted in the translation; bracketed parts of the English text have been added. Versions representing free translations which occur several times are always listed in the first instance only (p. 145).

Mann's translation remains the most widely read in English today. However, Fux's principles have been used by other authors to explain and teach counterpoint in a variety of other languages due to its impact and relevance. These materials contribute to Fux's international recognition in the field.

Third, ancient treatises have also been important for our understanding of ornamentation, essential for interpreting Baroque music. Ornament notation differed from one geographical area to another and even among composers from the same region. Improvisation was highly encouraged during the Baroque era, which meant that composers

found it unnecessary to record the well-known practices of the moment. Indeed, when they attempted to do so, no standardized code was available. Scholars and musicians have studied these ornaments and made attempts to better understand the notation, with a view to interpreting these pieces in the spirit of the times. In this regard, Johann Joachim Quantz's treatise *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversière zu spielen* (On playing the transverse flute: An instructional guide, 1752) offers clear guidance to ornamentation and phrasing. A German flautist, composer and theorist, Quantz provided not only instructions on how to play the instrument, but also guidance about more transversal concepts, such as tempo, counterpoint and performance. This treatise is widely used by scholars to study ornamentation because it is highly detailed in its explanation. There is an early translation in English of some extracts from the text, dating from some time in the 1770s. The cover reads:

Easy and fundamental instructions whereby either vocal or instrumental performers unacquainted with composition, may from the mere knowledge of the most common intervals in music, learn how to introduce extempore embellishments or variations; as also ornamental cadences with propriety, taste, and regularity, translated from a famous treatise on music, written by Johann Joachim Quantz, composer to his Majesty the King of Prussia. (Quantz, n.d.)

Although inspired by Quantz's principles, the text only incorporates selected passages to fulfill the intentions established in the title. Unfortunately, there is no information about the translator, but the document proves that Quantz's visions were also studied by English musicians in the late 18th century. A French version of the text also appeared as soon as the German version was published. It is, however, difficult to categorize this text as a reliable translation since it has been adapted in places to the French school of flute playing, which was stylistically different from the German. This version was very likely supervised by Quantz himself since French was the preferred language of Frederick the Great, his main patron and whose musicians-in-court were mainly French.

The official and unabridged translation of Quantz's treatise into English was completed in 1966 by Edward R. Reilly, musicologist, translator and scholar. His rendition seems to emphasize the readability of the text, using a more modern concrete style. While dealing with extensive Baroque explanations in German, Reilly's translation tends to simplify the concepts to modern readers. An example of this is shown in the title itself. Reilly decided to call the treatise *On Playing the Flute*, which contrasts with the long German title and explanation. In his translation notes, he states:

The style and language of the original German text are typical of didactic works of nearly every type appearing in Germany at the time [...]. By modern standards, this style is often redundant and wordy and frequently relies on over-long sentence structure [...]. In the translation no attempt has been made to prettify the original style: at the same time, however, it has not been made more difficult by a false literality that ignores the differences between German and English. (p. XXXVI)

Finally, and equally importantly, treatises served as tools to instruct musicians on how to play specific instruments, reflecting the various schools or traditions of playing in different regions. For example, the Italian style of violin playing was prominent during the 18th century and is known to have been inflected with distinct regional characteristics and used by figures such as Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713), Antonio Vivaldi (approx. 1675-1741), Francesco Geminiani (1680-1762) and Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770). In Germany, the heyday of violin teaching came after the publication of Leopold Mozart's *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* (1756), which provided systematic instruction in intonation, bowing and musical expression. A French version of the text became available shortly after the publication of the German original. Valentin Roeser, a significant figure in music pedagogy in France, oversaw the translation, which served to bridge the French lyrical tradition and the German tradition of systematic analysis and pedagogy. An English translation took longer to appear but also had a significant impact. Editha Knocker, an English violinist, conductor, and teacher, translated the work into English in 1948. Later, the text was re-edited, and she was given the opportunity to revise her translation and make the required adaptations. The second edition was printed in 1951, and in 1985 it was brought out in paperback by Oxford University Press.

Through these examples, it is clear that these documents and their translations played a very important role, not only at their time of publication, but also later on, when they served as guides to early performance styles, theories, and pedagogies.

New translations of early music texts are still appearing. For instance, in 2007, a new English translation of Leopold Mozart's *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* was published by Culture Publishers Polzer. This translation was done from a modernized German version penned by Gottfried Franz Kasperek, which replaced the obsolete words and grammar in the source text with more recent equivalents. The resulting translation not only renders Mozart's instructions into modern English but also provides a transcription of musical examples in modern notation, correcting apparent errors and misprints (Mozart, 2007).

In sum, treatises have been key to understanding a variety of theoretical and practical aspects of early music, and their translations have been fundamental in conveying their contents into other cultures and musical practices. However, despite this translation activity, there has been no academic consideration of the process of creating such translated versions until now.

3. Objectives and Text Selection

As an attempt to contribute to the scholarly discussion on the topic, this article will present a proposal of a systematic methodology for translating Baroque-era musical treatises, illustrating its application through a case study and identifying challenges and their solutions. To exemplify the process, *The Art of Playing on the Violin* (1751) by Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762) is presented in its translation from English into Spanish. The reasons that justify such selection are various.

First, it constitutes one of the most significant violin treatises associated with the Italian school of violin playing. Geminiani's treatises, six in total on a range of topics, provide an excellent insight into the relevant topics and pedagogical techniques practiced at the time. Second, its author, Geminiani, was considered as relevant as Handel and Corelli in 18th century London, though his name and repertoire have not achieved the same lasting recognition. Geminiani's works were written in English, regardless of his Italian nationality and playing style, because he lived in London for most of his career (from 1714 onwards), though he travelled at times to France and Dublin, where he died. In London, Geminiani was recognized as an Italian virtuoso and distinguished for having studied with Corelli. Capitalizing on this recognition, he developed his career in this country and wrote his treatises and teaching materials in the local vernacular. Some of his works were later translated into French, possibly by himself with a view to selling the text in a different language to a different publisher.

Finally, *The Art of Playing on the Violin* has been chosen for this study because it has been analyzed and translated by one of the authors of this article as her final project for the Master's in Cultural Heritage and Society. The methodology explained in the following section is based on these reflections and explorations.

4. Methodological Approach

The text was translated into Spanish with a very particular audience and purpose in mind: to help music students in Latin America (especially Mexico where the research and translation were carried out) to become more informed about the violin practices proposed by such a relevant text and author. The person responsible for the translation is a musicologist and a translator, who understands the importance of interpreting and analyzing early music texts in order to adapt them for current performance. The co-author is a translator trainer, who has had some previous musical training, although mostly in choral practice. It is worth mentioning that, to date, there are no official Spanish translations of the treatise, at least not published by recognized academic publishing houses with a wide enough distribution. This therefore represents an excellent opportunity to not only translate the text but also to systematically organize and document the process.

The methodology presented here involves a total of six stages that begin from the interpretation of the source text through to its final reconstruction. This section explores each of these stages in turn.

Stage 1. Defining the skopos

The first stage in the process is to establish the guidelines that will determine the decisions to be taken during the translation process. When working with early music texts, the translator should be aware of their own communicative intention, and the need to mediate between historical accuracy and/or readability for more modern audiences. As proposed by Vermeer (1978), translations should be guided by their *Skopos* or purpose, rather than by strict adherence to the source text. In their pivotal work first published in 1984, *Towards*

a general theory of translation action, Reiß & Vermeer (2014) define six general rules for translational action:

- (1) A *translatum* is determined by its *skopos*.
- (2) A *translatum* is an offer of information in a target culture and language about an offer of information in a source culture and language.
- (3) A *translatum* is a unique, irreversible mapping of a source-culture offer of information.
- (4) A *translatum* must be coherent in itself.
- (5) A *translatum* must be coherent with the source text.
- (6) These rules are interdependent and linked hierarchically in the order set out above. (p. 107)

Regarding the current proposal, (1) the task emerges in a contemporary, 21st century Latin-American context where musicologists as well as music students could benefit from accessing the original work in their native tongue of Spanish for educational (both teaching and learning) purposes. Thus, the target text (2) provides an insight into the source culture, taking account not only of regional differences, but also the notable time difference between the period of the source text publication and that of the target text production. Taking this contrast into account, it is hardly surprising that (3) a backtranslation into English, even if into its 18th century variety, would not result in a text identical to the source text of this translation. However, it is indispensable that (4) the target text should be internally coherent as well as (5) coherent with regard to the source text.

Furthermore, a translation brief as proposed by Christiane Nord (1997) could offer an even clearer framework to complete the translation through constant reflection as regards the following aspects:

- the target-text addressee(s),
- the prospective time and place of text reception,
- the medium over which the text will be transmitted, and
- the motive for the production or reception of the text, and this information will allow some conjectures as to the communicative function(s) the text is intended to have for the prospective receivers (Nord, 1997, pp. 47-48).

In this case, once again, the target-text addressees could include music teachers, students and musicologists in Latin America during the third decade of the 21st century, who would supposedly read the text in a hard copy or a digital format with a view to being able to play Baroque music according to conventions of the time (HIP). This, of course, is a matter of approach and interpretation and depends on the musicians' beliefs about whether early music should preserve or try to recreate the original sound, using original instruments, or if it should be updated to suit the modern ear. Translation plays a key role in allowing them the possibility of choosing among the diverse approaches available.

In sum, the translator should decide if the main goal of the translation is to preserve the archaic language, original structures and spelling conventions, or if, on the contrary, it is to adapt the terminology, grammar, phrasing and content to modern conventions, while retaining the original meaning. The methodology presented here leans more towards this

second perspective, seeking to provide a readable text for modern music students, teachers and researchers in Mexico and Latin America more broadly.

Stage 2. Transcription

English writing norms and spellings have naturally evolved throughout the ages. Old English (approx. 450-1100), for example, employed the runes þ and ð in its written system as well as other Germanic features that subsequently fell into disuse as the language acquired different communicative needs and its own character. During the second half of the 18th century, English norms started to change and became more rigid. The transitional process from what was called Early Modern English (approx. 1500-1700) to Formal Standardization (Johnson, 1755) resulted in the production of texts that reflected these adaptations to the new standards. Baroque treatises written during this period exemplify this transitional process.

Transcribing the source text into modern standardized spelling and grammar enables its comprehension, a key step for its subsequent translation. Furthermore, the transcription also makes it possible to use a Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) tool, which facilitates term extraction and consistency, the creation of a translation memory, and quality control. Some examples of the transcribed changes are shown on Table 1.

Table 1. Transcriptions²

Transcription criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Long «þ» is used in certain positions within words following conventions similar to those in Latin and earlier printed texts. This letter is marked and replaced with a regular 's' in the adapted transcription. E.g. «Muþick» changes to 'music'• Past tenses and past participles formed with the structure «[...]d» are changed to the conventional '[...]ed' used nowadays.• Proper nouns are written in accordance with modern standards.• Capitalized nouns are marked and only left unchanged in the adapted transcription when the punctuation requires a capital.• Punctuation is changed in the adapted transcription only when it generates ambiguity or in order to divide up complex compound sentences.• Archaic spellings are highlighted and a modern version is given in the adapted transcription, keeping their meaning. For example: «doth» → does, «hath» → has, «tho» → although, «flew» → show, «tis» → it is, «agreable» → agreeable, «mak» → make. «chufes» → chooses• Italianisms are marked in the regular transcription and set in italics in the adapted one. When necessary, the spelling changes to follow Italian rules.• Unjustified italics are removed and written normally in the adapted transcription.

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Transcription	Adapted transcription
<p>The Art of Playing on the V I O L I N</p> <p>Containing All the Rules necessary to attain to a Perfection on that Instrument, with great variety of Compositions, which will also be very useful to those who study the Violloncello, Harpsichord &c.</p> <p>Composed by F. Geminiani Opera. IX.</p> <p>LONDON: MDCCLI</p>	<p>The Art of Playing on the Violin</p> <p>Containing all the rules necessary to attain to a perfection on that instrument, with great variety of compositions, which will also be very useful to those who study the violoncello, harpsichord, etc.</p> <p>Composed by F. Geminiani Opera. IX.</p> <p>LONDON: MDCCLI</p>

As shown in Table 1, minimal changes were made in the adapted transcription in order to retain the source text’s archaic character. The changes in the transcription were also tracked with colors, as indicated in the table. Yellow was used for the long ‘s’, red for misspelled ‘k’ or ‘ck’ combination, pink for the simple past or past participle ‘d’, gray for proper nouns, orange for punctuation, green for early spellings, and blue for unnecessary capital letters.

Stage 3. Term extraction

Terminology is a crucial factor to consider in the translation of specialized texts. Term extraction in this work was completed adhering to the Communicative Theory of Terminology (Cabr e et al., 2023), which views terminology as dynamic and context-dependent, emphasizing how terms function in real communication rather than as fixed, isolated units. Particularly important in this task is to contemplate diachronic changes, which could lead to misunderstandings in the adaptation and/or restitution of the text. For this reason, a glossary was created and comments on diachronic changes were added so that the reader of the translation could become familiar with the unique linguistic usage when necessary. Table 2 is an example of the glossary and comments provided as well as the references that helped to get to the best translation.

Table 2. Glossary³

Term-en	Term-es	Comments
anticipation	anticipación	Nota ajena a la armonía que anticipa la armonía siguiente.
appoggiatura	apoyatura	Nota disonante por encima o por debajo de la principal que se resuelve por paso en el siguiente tiempo débil. En el Barroco, el Clasicismo y el primer Romanticismo, la apoyatura, aunque no esté anotada, se daba por supuesta en ciertos contextos, especialmente en los recitativos.
beat	mordente	No confundir el uso de la palabra en el inglés actual (beat-pulso). Para Geminiani, <i>beat</i> seguramente refiere al adorno que actualmente denominamos mordente (Neunman, 2020, p. 442).
bow	arco	El arco utilizado por Geminiani en este periodo fue diferente al actual, cuya consolidación comenzó con los esfuerzos del virtuoso violinista italiano Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755-1824) a finales del siglo XVIII. En el periodo en el que se redactó el tratado sobre el Arte de tocar el violín, el arco era más corto que el actual favoreciendo la ejecución de las piezas del periodo, pero limitando la resonancia y brillo que ofrece el arco actual por su longitud en y por el incremento en las cerdas que contiene.
bridge	puente	Parte del instrumento que se encuentra entre las cuerdas y el cuerpo. Su función principal es transmitir las vibraciones de las cuerdas al cuerpo, amplificando y proyectando el sonido. Para el siglo XVIII, el puente que utilizaba el violín de la época era más corto y menos arqueado en relación con el estándar de la actualidad. Estas características favorecían los efectos polifónicos del violín barroco, pero hacían más complejo el desarrollo melódico.
close shake	vibrato	El término <i>close shake</i> puede referirse a diferentes efectos de adornos musicales de acuerdo con el periodo y el compositor que lo utilice. Para Coleman Simpson (1659), por ejemplo, el <i>close shake</i> se interpreta como una especie de vibrato que requiere la utilización de otro dedo, es decir, su alternancia con tal suavidad que no produzca una variación del tono. Sin embargo, para Geminiani <i>close shake</i> es un vibrato que se interpreta al mover la muñeca mientras se mantiene el dedo firme sobre la nota. En ese sentido, sería un error denominar este adorno como otra especie de trino que requiera la alternancia entre dedos (Kah-Ming NG, 2001, p. 720).
diminishing the sound	diminuendo	A pesar de que Geminiani no utiliza el italianismo <i>decrescendo</i> , la traducción sí adoptó esta forma para lograr que el lector hiciera referencia al efecto sonoro deseado según la teoría musical actual.

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Stage 4. Translation

The translation of the text should take account of all the previous stages. At this point, the translator should identify the translation brief or purpose, be constantly evaluating the source text (communicative goals and styles), and take the decisions that best fulfill what the task requires. This process, rather than linear, should be perceived as a loop of constantly asked questions regarding the source text and its mediation with the target audience. Therefore, during this stage, a series of sub-stages may also be involved.

A set of tools should accompany the translator at this point. Examples include: 1) linguistic tools like dictionaries, historical and specialized glossaries and parallel texts; 2) technological tools such as CAT tools, and terminology management (TM) systems; and 3) reference and contextualization tools, such as historical and/or cultural references on early music. In our case, the entry on ‘Ornamentation’ (Sadie & Tyrrell, 2001) in the *Grove Music Online Dictionary* was particularly useful, given that it delves into various aspects of ornamentation across a variety of musical periods and regions including the Italian, English, French, and German Baroque. This text, which incorporates contributions from a variety of authors in the subsections, was frequently consulted to ascertain the ornamental terms. Some of the comments in the glossary refer to text as sources. In the following table, one of the sections of the treatise is shown as well as its translation into Spanish. The terms are put in bold to compare the equivalences.

Table 3. Translation extract⁴

Source text	Target text
(C.)	C)
C shows the 7 orders . What I mean by an order is a certain number of notes which are to be played without transposing the hand . The first order contains 17 notes , and the other six orders contain no more than sixteen.	Este apartado muestra las siete posiciones . A lo que me refiero con una posición es a un cierto número de notas que pueden tocarse sin hacer transposición con la mano . La primera posición se compone de diecisiete notas mientras que las otras seis no tienen más de dieciséis.
Under the notes of the first order you will find their names, and over the same notes figures denoting the fingers with which they are to be stopped , and the strings on which they are stopped.	Debajo de las notas de la primera posición encontrarás sus nombres y sobre las mismas notas los números para su digitación , así como las cuerdas sobre las cuales se ejecutan.
It must be observed that between the two black notes is the greater semitone , and between the others is the tone , The mark (0) denotes an open string . From the first order you are to begin to play.	Debe notarse que entre las notas negras hay un semitono diatónico y entre las demás un tono entero . La marca (0) indica cuerda al aire . Se debe empezar a tocar a partir de la primera posición .
It is necessary to place the fingers exactly upon the marks that belong to the notes ; for on this depends	Es preciso colocar los dedos exactamente sobre las marcas que pertenecen a las notas ya que de ello

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the **stopping perfectly in tune.**

After having been practiced in the **first order**, you must pass on to the second, and then to the third; in which care is to be taken that the thumb always remain farther back than the fore-finger; and the more you advance in the other **orders** the thumb must be at a greater distance till it remains almost hid under the **neck of the violin.**

It is a constant rule to keep the fingers as firm as possible, and not to raise them, till there is a necessity of doing it, to place them somewhere else; and the observance of this rule will very much facilitate the playing **double stops.**

The **fingering**, indeed, requires an earnest application, and therefore it would be most prudent to undertake it without the use of the **bow**, which you should not meddle with till you come to the 7th example, in which will be found the necessary and proper method of using it.

It cannot be supposed but that this practice without the **bow** is disagreeable, since it gives no satisfaction to the ear; but the benefit which, in time, will arise from it, will be a recompence more than adequate to the disgust it may give.

depende la **afinación adecuada.**

Una vez habiendo practicado la **primera posición**, deberá pasar a la segunda y después a la tercera, en la cual es necesario cuidar que el pulgar permanezca siempre más por detrás que el dedo índice y mientras más se avance en las posiciones, la distancia del pulgar debe ser mayor hasta que permanezca casi escondido debajo del **mango del violín.**

Es una regla constante mantener los dedos lo más firmes posible y sin levantarlos hasta que sea necesario colocarlos en algún otro lugar. Además, la observancia de esta regla facilitará en gran medida tocar **dobles cuerdas.**

La **digitación** requiere una atención rigurosa, por lo tanto, sería más prudente realizarla sin utilizar el **arco**, con el que no debe inmiscuirse hasta que llegue al séptimo ejemplo en dónde encontrará el método necesario y adecuado para usarlo.

No se puede más que suponer que la práctica sin el **arco** resulte desagradable, ya que no genera ninguna satisfacción al oído. Sin embargo, el beneficio que con el tiempo surgirá de dicha práctica, compensará el disgusto que pueda causar.



Stage 5. Review

At the review stage, expert consultation takes place. The translation of documents specialized in specific areas can either be carried out by experts in the field with training in translation or by professional translators with training in the area. The level of specialization of the source text determines the qualification and profile of the most adequate translator for the job at hand. In this case, a musician with training in translation, or a translator with musical knowledge could translate the treatise. However, it is always helpful to have a range of perspectives to guarantee that the communication goal is being

achieved. In this case, experts in the area of translation and music, particularly from the Baroque era, were involved in the review of the translation presented. Reviewers evaluated both the use of translation techniques and strategies and the functionality of the treatise as a source of musical information that can be understood and played.

Stage 6. Editorial Decisions

In accordance with 18th century publication norms, treatises were commonly divided into two sections, first the explanatory segments, and then the exercises, which were usually arranged on staves on different pages. This resulted in readers having to constantly turn pages. To enhance readability for contemporary audiences, it was possible to present the musical exercises together with their written explanations. During the archeological reconstruction of the document, the exercises are arranged in scanned form so that the target readers can consult the musical notation as it is presented in the facsimile, albeit with the explanation in the target language, in this case, Spanish. For example:

Table 4. Facsimile and delivery decisions⁵

Facsimil
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Example III.</i></p> <p>Contains 4 Scales of the <i>Diatonick Genus</i> transposed; and here, not to burthen the Memory of the Beginner, all the Flats (<i>b</i>) instead of being marked at the beginning of the Staff, are marked immediately before the Notes which they belong to ; but their true Situation may be seen at the End of the Staff.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Example IV.</i></p> <p>In this Example are contained 9 Scales transposed, and composed of the <i>Diatonick</i> and <i>Cromatic Genera</i>; I have used the same Method of marking the Flats in the first eight Scales, and the Sharp in the ninth Scale, as in the former Example.</p>
New delivery
<p>Ejemplo III</p> <p>Este ejemplo contiene cuatro escalas de género diatónico con cambios de posición y aquí, para no sobrecargar la memoria del principiante, todos los bemoles (b), en lugar de marcarse al principio del pentagrama, están indicados inmediatamente antes de las notas a los que corresponden, pero su adecuada grafía se puede observar al final.</p>

⁵ Created by the authors

Essempio III.

3

The image displays a musical score for 'Essempio III.' consisting of four staves, labeled 1^a, 2^a, 3^a, and 4^a. Each staff contains a sequence of notes with various fingerings indicated by numbers 1-4 and letters I-IV. The notation includes slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The score concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

A similar format was followed by Reilly and his translation of Quantz's treatise. In his notes to the translation, he points out:

The only point in which the translation substantially differs from the first German and French editions is in the matter of musical examples. These originally appeared in a set of numbered tables at the back of the volume. To spare the reader the cumbersome task of constantly referring from text to examples, the latter have been inserted in the text at the appropriate places. Where several references to the same example are made at different places, footnotes indicate where it is placed. (p. XXXVI)

5. Challenges and difficulties encountered during the process

Each of the aforementioned stages posed challenges that had to be overcome, always bearing in mind the *skopos* or purpose of the translation. As in any project, it is important to have a toolbox for dealing with them, always considering the particularities of the text being translated. For example: during the second stage, when effecting the changes to the spelling and punctuation conventions of the period, it was necessary to consult academic sources. In this case, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2012) and an introduction to Early Modern English by Nevalainen (2006) helped us make informed decisions in the translation. Moreover, this intralingual translation can help non-native English-speaking musicologists and musicians who wish to delve into historical performance. Other tools, as mentioned above, can include music dictionaries, CAT and Terminology extraction tools, and (as explored in the literature review) translation notes from translations of treatises undertaken at different times.

6. Conclusions

Translating early music texts is a complex task that requires a special methodological process. The systematization of the procedures used by us to translate Geminiani's *Art of Playing on the Violin* from English to Spanish helped reinforce decision-making processes, thus generating translations that effectively fulfilled the communicative and pedagogical

purposes of our present times. In terms of future research, it would be worth exploring the educational impact of these translated treatises in order to evaluate their effectiveness in pedagogical practices in Latin-American music schools. A critical engagement with source texts in local languages could help researchers, performers and teachers to incorporate new practices or proposals, such as HIP or discourse analysis.

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COLLABORATION IN MAKING SINGABLE TRANSLATIONS OF SONGS

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ABSTRACT: This article begins with general, theoretical issues on singable translations before discussing a specific project, which has produced singable translations into English of about fifty songs penned by the Brazilian singer and popular composer Noel Rosa. The theoretical issues focus on Peter Low's 'Pentathlon Principle' (2005, 2008, 2017), a set of procedures developed by the author to guide translators who venture into song translation. Throughout the paper, we comment on particular difficulties faced by the authors while translating a group of Noel Rosa songs into English as 'singable translations', and how we overcame them.

KEYWORDS: Noel Rosa; Singable Translations; Pentathlon Principle; Brazilian Popular Music; Samba.

1. Collaboration and Song

In most human endeavours it is normal for two or more people to work together. Most work is done by teams. Many books are created by collaboration, for example when sporting stars tell their stories to journalists. So are many songs (e.g. Rodgers & Hammerstein, Lennon & McCartney—or, to give a Brazilian example, Tom Jobim & Vinicius de Moraes, the authors of 'The Girl from Ipanema' (among other classics). This paper will argue that collaboration is a particularly useful approach to translating songs.

In translation practice generally, it is not uncommon for two people to collaborate, either in professional agencies or privately (see for example Cordingley & Manning, 2017). In a typical case, one is a habitual user of the source language, who can explain what the text means—we can call this the SL person. The other a skilful user of the target language, who can make the new text sound natural in that target language—we can call this the TL person.

Here are two famous cases of collaboration in translating poetry. When the Persian poetry of Omar Khayyam was translated by the English poet Robert Graves, it was acknowledged to be a collaboration. Graves, though very learned, did not claim to be an expert in classical Persian, and so both translation and commentary are also credited to his collaborator Omar Ali-shah. Neither man could have done so well by himself – they certainly outdid the well-known English version of Fitzgerald.

When the Ukrainian poems of Taras Chevchenko were translated by the French poet Eugène Guillevic, it was a different kind of collaboration. Guillevic didn't know Ukrainian, but knew the related language Russian. So he worked chiefly from a Russian version of the

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poems. Perhaps we could call this relay-translating, but if he discussed details with the Russian translator, in person or by post, we could call this collaboration.

Translating is a particularly good activity for collaboration, because the very nature of the task requires two sets of knowledge (two languages), and two dissimilar procedures: decoding and recoding. It follows that any translated text can always be criticized by reference to two dissimilar criteria: in sense–transfer and naturalness. This is true even when a single translator or interpreter does them both.

With a collaborating team, there is division of labour and there is discussion, for example one day they may discuss the semantic details of the source text (ST), with the SL person dominating, and then the next day choose to focus on the target text (TT), with the TL person viewing it as if it were originally written in the TL. In addition, translators often encounter tricky phrases where TL options need to be generated before a final choice is made. If there is a team of two, one may excel at brainstorming options, and the other may be better at selecting the optimal one.

The present article, however, focuses on song-lyrics, and on making translations that can be sung in the TL, making them by teamwork. There are many challenges in singable translating. We agree with Christiane Nord that the standard to be met in all translating is “adequacy or appropriateness with regard to the *skopos*.” (Nord, 1997, p. 33). And the goal of making a TT to be sung to a concert audience can be called a complex *skopos*. Its requirements are more numerous than (say) translating a song-lyric for mere reading—for which translators create a written text and need not think about syllable-count or the openness of vowels. A good and useful system, sometimes called the Pentathlon Approach (Low, 2005, 2008, 2017), names five criteria: physical singability, sense, naturalness, rhythm and rhyme. Now we do not deny that the challenges involved have often been met by solo translators; we simply claim that there are some which a collaborating team can surely handle better. Given the multiple criteria and the knowledge and skills required, we do not think many translators are perfectly equipped to do it alone. Collaboration has not been much discussed in the translation literature, yet it is certainly demonstrated in the work of Apter and Herman, co-translators of various operas and co-authors of *Translating for singing*.

The many challenges come not only from the *skopos*, but also from the nature of texts. Some of the problems found in song translation may be common to other forms of interlingual translation, such as metaphor. But some are found rarely outside songs and poems, such as rhyme and phonic effects like assonance (ultimately, these are oral texts, complemented by musical sounds). Other problems are more frequent in song-texts than elsewhere, such as colloquial language, even slang. In addition, there may be cultural and historical allusions; there may be puns or other forms of humour; there is often an emotional charge in the words or the subtext. Translators should not miss meanings that are present but not actually stated, what some linguists call the implicature (Baker, 2011, p. 235), where a song may say, for example, “you lost your taste for water” but implies “you

drank too much alcohol.” This makes an uncommon cluster of problems which would surely defeat many novices and many computer translating systems.

Working as collaborators gives a strategic advantage for decision-making. The two can work together to understand the exact character of the song-lyric (is it cheerful, angry, satirical, ironic, deeply felt or what?) and to identify its salient features: the elements that will absolutely need to come through in the TT. (Again, good solo translators can do this thinking, consciously or otherwise, but an overt discussion can often do it better.)

When it comes to the recoding, some *skopos* thinking is needed. Various problems arise with this *skopos*, which is the creation of a good text to sing in the TL. The TT needs to satisfy more than the common two criteria of sense and naturalness – indeed we can count five (plus a sixth one, when the song is part of a large work, such as an opera or musical, and therefore must be integrated with other elements of it).

Sense-transfer is of course a criterion in almost all translating tasks. Semantic fidelity matters. We think, however, that accurate transfer of meaning is less important with songs than with informative texts. However, we do care about sense: other people may choose to invent new lyrics in their languages, *replacement texts*—but that is not translating, because no meanings are transferred. What faithful translators hope to offer the hearers is the real verbal and cultural content of the source, without cheating, as far as is possible. Good translators are ferriers, they want to ferry or transport the real merchandise across a linguistic border.

As for naturalness, that is what we find in translations which don't seem to be translations, which could have been created in the TL. This criterion is particularly important in songs, because song lyrics need to communicate directly to the audience, and usually do this by means of everyday words. When we look at song-translations published in English long ago, we tend to find them unnatural—and we note that singers avoid them.

But there are also three further criteria that are particularly important in song translation, namely rhythm, rhyme and singability, which can be tested using the Pentathlon Approach. Rhythm is an important one, since a song-translation needs to coincide rhythmically with the pre-existing music. And rhyme counts too: it is often desirable for a singable translation to rhyme, though this may vary with the specific song or with the traditions of the target culture. Clumsy rhymes can spoil a TT.

As for singability, we use this term to focus on the use of phonetic options that match the physical needs of a singer's voice. Here we choose a narrower definition of singability than that used in the fine studies of Johan Franzon (2005, 2008). Not every sentence is easy to sing – not if it contains, for example, consonant clusters or tongue-twisters. The best singable translations win praise from singers for choosing good open vowels for long notes. And indeed this criterion is best judged by people who frequently sing in the target language.

Those five criteria could be viewed as five different judges or experts whom translators must satisfy. While some have compared the task to juggling, our favourite metaphor of the pentathlon comes from athletics: the person must compete well in five

dissimilar events, and try to achieve a high score overall. Anything weak or imperfect 'loses points'. The notion of a 'high score' is helpful in evaluating the translators' choice. The best translations are those that 'lose no points', or very few. There are at least five kinds of weakness that should be avoided if possible, for example tongue-twisters (loss of singability), howlers (errors of sense), archaisms (lack of naturalness), wrong stress on words (false rhythm) and very forced rhymes.

We have suggested above that collaboration is a particularly useful approach to translating songs, one that may work efficiently and produce good results. Although some solo translators are well equipped for the task, a pair of dissimilar collaborators may be better equipped. Ideally, the collaborators will have different, complementary linguistic and cultural skills. It is desirable that these translators, in addition to language skills, should also have some knowledge of music, the more the better. Skill in singing helps too, of course.

The SL expert needs to really understand the source-text, and this means knowing or discovering the relevant details of the song's social and literary context. Even a 'native' speaker of the SL may misunderstand a song-text—few would master all the unusual words, historical allusions, ambiguities, or ironies. Even a common word can have a depth of meaning or emotion, and a simple-sounding song may actually have a lot of subtext, so much so that only a part of that subtext can be transferred in the TL; but unless the translators understand it well their TT will not be optimally faithful to the source, and their TTs will not be able to do in the TL what the songwriter did in the SL.

Ideally both collaborators should be frequent users of both languages. The TL expert, however, needs the specific skills of a wordsmith, so as to generate a good TT that fits the music and lends itself to good performance in the TL, and that singers may want to sing. Some experience in rhyming is desirable, and so is a good sense of the kind of natural verbal phrases make for an effective song, even a passionate one.

With any kind of collaboration, the teamwork can bring benefits in quality control. This is certainly true in the case of making singable translations. It is good to judge a draft TT by a set of five questions:

- Singability—Is it easy to sing?
- Sense—Have I grasped the essential meaning?
- Naturalness—Does the target-language seem natural or not?
- Rhythm—Do the words fit well with the rhythm?
- Rhyme—Does the translation rhyme enough?

Those five questions can be put differently:

- Singability—What would singers say?
- Sense—What would truly bilingual people say?
- Naturalness—What would native speakers say?
- Rhythm—What would dancers, for example, say?
- Rhyme—What would people with good ears say?

The two collaborators can discuss these questions, and may usefully seek further advice, especially from singers.

2. The Noel Rosa project

Now let us report on a specific collaboration. Some eight years ago Lauro Meller, a Brazilian academic with expertise in popular songs, believing that Brazilian music deserves to be better known internationally, conceived a project to translate a body of songs into English. He approached Peter Low, a native speaker of English who had written articles on the theoretical issues of song-translation, and had often translated into English from French. Their discussion resulted in the choice of songs by Noel Rosa (1910–37), an innovative songwriter of Rio Janeiro, whose work was popular, accessible... and no longer under copyright. This provided a large corpus of songs from which to choose. We hoped this might result in a bilingual edition and in many songs being performed and heard in English. Some were performed already in 2023, and the book (and e-book) has now appeared: *Noel Rosa, the Master of Samba, in Singable Translations / Noel Rosa: Traduções cantáveis do mestre do Samba*¹. Noel Rosa proved a good choice, because, unlike some songwriters, he made the words an important part of his songs, notably his satirical ones. He even wrote a song in the form of an auction: ‘*Quem dá mais?*’ (‘What am I bid?’). Many hearers of his songs might enjoy dancing to their rhythms, but those unfamiliar with Portuguese would totally miss their lively verbal content.

A key part of Meller's work was identifying the key songs in a corpus of well over 100—with a special focus on those that are famous in Brazil. Then, in the early stages, he provided prose translations of the lyrics, into English, one by one. These focused on meaning, with no concern for rhythm or rhyme, and were conceived only to be useful working drafts. Meanwhile Peter Low, a New Zealander, bore the onus of manipulating the English phrases. He knew that his unfamiliarity with Portuguese was not ideal, though his knowledge of two sister languages (French and Spanish) was of some use. A key part of his work was adapting and enhancing those prose translations.

Both collaborators knew how the original songs sounded—there was a good compilation of recordings from the 1930s, re-mastered into seven CDs. There were also three volumes of sheet music, edited by Almir Chediak, which accurately transcribed the song-texts and printed the melodies with the words underlaid. Low found these very useful, because they indicated downbeats and prominent notes (though he did sometimes add or subtract a syllable in English). These resources enabled us to focus on the linguistic and social problems of the songs.

A songwriter usually has an audience in mind: it might be all the speakers of the language, or it may be a limited in-group who would fully understand the subtext (including slang words and allusions). But a song-translator always has a different audience in mind, hearers who are located in another time, place and culture, and are unable to receive the

¹ (2025) Bilingual edn. Natal: EdUFRN

words in exactly the same way. There is a need to bridge that gap, at least to an acceptable degree.

Many song-texts have specific cultural terms that are part of the social context of the songs, and that can be hard to transfer into the culture of a different language. One example is proper names. For the title '*Cidade-mulher*' we chose a title including the subtext: 'City of Woman: Rio'. But we realised that the names of city districts (Vila, Salgueiro etc.) would mean little to non-Brazilians. When we considered certain recurrent words in these songs—*samba*, *favela*, *mulata*—we quickly decided to retain these very Brazilian terms, to help retain the songs' link with Rio. That was more important than maximum clarity in English.

Some terms may be so embedded in particular time and place that they have no good equivalent in the TL. For the term '*malandro*', for example, we considered English words like 'hustler' and 'rascal' before thinking that 'spiv' is probably the closest, semantically. Yet that word is now rare in English. We know that the options we chose are not always perfect, but we hope they work for most listeners. Some other words risked being too obscure for English-speaking singers and audiences, and so we opted for intelligible words that rendered only some of the sense.

The word '*judeu*' caused some head-scratching. We thought the obvious English word 'Jew' might offend, but might be required for fidelity. Then some research revealed that in 1930's Rio the reference was less precise than that—not all money-lenders were Jewish. So we lost nothing essential when we translated it as 'money-lender', and once as 'shark'.

A different issue is tone. The repeated phrase "*Que se dane, que se dane!*" is vulgar, but it was hard to assess how vulgar or offensive was it when Rosa put it into a song, and to choose an English phrase that corresponded well. We ended up with a split translation: "What a bummer! What the hell". A similar case was the slang phrase "*Por causa duma marvada que roubou meu coração*". We deemed it acceptable to use a phrase that is non-standard, yet meets the criterion of naturalness: "ever since that no-good woman done reduce my heart to dust".

Song-translators also need to have a certain tolerance for imperfection and trade-offs, in order to acquire some elbow-room (juggling is required, and you can't juggle if you wear handcuffs). One value of collaboration is that, when considering two or three phrases, all possible but imperfect, the two minds can discuss which option to take. Often a slight tweaking makes possible a gain in overall points. Solo translators also have frequent internal debates, of course, but with collaboration the debates can be overt. Some might argue that the TL expert should have the casting vote.

As for trade-offs, this implies a compromise where one accepts losing one or two points on one criterion in order to score well on a different criterion. For example, one may translate the word for apple with the word 'pear'—not an identical fruit—which is much easier to rhyme in English. However, my collaborator may argue that an imperfect rhyme would be a better option. At times we may have to look for a third option.

In the next five paragraphs we discuss examples of tricky points by reference to the five ‘pentathlon’ criteria of singability, sense, naturalness, rhythm and rhyme:

A major issue in singability is vowel-sounds. In making versions of Noel Rosa, we found fewer vowel problems than expected, because his songs are usually conversational, with a limited compass and few long notes. We were pleased, near the start of *‘Século do Progresso’*, to place the word ‘party’ or a long high note, even if that meant rearranging the sentence. But we accepted the possibility of choosing an inferior vowel, if that helped in another way. Any cluster of consonants is certainly bad (except perhaps in Slavic languages). Fortunately, English accepts them more readily than French or Italian. One of our draft versions described a lady's jewels as “nothing but trinkets” (*“não passavam de pinóias”*). But the consonants TTR juxtaposed in that phrase would be very hard to sing clearly. We changed it to “really imitation”, with a little loss of meaning.

Whereas in informative translating the detailed meaning of a ST is crucial, with songs we sometimes we sacrificed points on sense, so as to gain on other criteria. One example is the song beginning *“Minha Viola”*—5 syllables, on the notes G-F#-E-D-D. The obvious English “My Guitar” has only three syllables. Putting two notes on ‘My’ sounded awkward, so instead we added a fourth syllable, an adjective absent from the source: “My Old Guitar”. Losing a point by adding that short neutral word was justified not semantically, but because it solved a rhythmic problem. The weak ending of *‘viola’* we simply tied into the second syllable of ‘guitar’, to make a longer D. In the song *‘Festa no Céu’*, which is a fantasy, it was more important to retain the light-hearted tone than to translate closely. Thus the phrase *“botar seu colarinho”* became “properly knot his tie”, and *“a vaca de porta-seio e corpinho”* became “the cow with a satin bodice and double bra”. Semantically these are imperfections, but they do not weaken the song, in our opinion, since we felt that they were suitably ‘Noelesque’—they met our aim of retaining the spirit of Noel Rosa. On several occasions we discussed altering a proper name. In the case of *‘Dona Araci’* (a fictional name), we first tried “Oh Mrs Randle” (name picked to rhyme with ‘handle’) before selecting ‘Senhora Randle’, thus making her a more Brazilian person. It would not be acceptable to change a non-fictional name like Getúlio Vargas.

Naturalness is highly important in songs. It matters in most translating, of course, but song-texts are oral texts and need to communicate instantly to the ear. Knowing this, songwriters tend to use common words, and song-translators should do the same. We certainly wanted our TTs to seem to have been written in easy natural English. It would be silly to render the common verb *‘melhorar’* with its cognate ‘ameliorate’, when the common English is ‘improve’. But a rare word can be chosen at times, provided the text stays fairly clear. For example our phrase “to play batucada and excellent samba” is adequate for *“matéria de samba e de batucada”* (though few English listeners would know that a *‘batucada’* is a group of percussionists). We tried to preserve the Brazilian nature of the songs while also making the TT sound natural and communicate well—and these two considerations sometimes conflict.

As for question of rhythm, we envisaged the rhythm of the translated songs to be the same as the originals, usually a samba beat. But we claimed some flexibility with the syllable–count, even in these songs with few melismas: we tweaked the number of syllables in a line, subtly, by doubling or slurring – and only if that worked with the strong stresses usually found in English. A case in point is the opening phrase “*Quando o apito*”, sung as 5 syllables, with the downbeat on the 4th. The literal English “When the whistle” has only 4. What we chose was “Whenever the whistle”, which has 6 syllables, including a short one sneaked into the third note.

The question of rhyme has led to some unusable song-translations, partly because some translators felt obliged to retain the same quantity and quality of rhymes as found in the SL. This meant a loss of sense and/or naturalness, and placed undue constraints (a bit like handcuffing themselves!). In the case of Noel Rosa, rhymes are frequent and seem to flow easily in his Brazilian Portuguese. But we claimed a right to flexibility in English. We sometimes accepted a half–rhyme or none at all. Once we rhymed ‘ice’ with ‘bike’ (to keep the right meaning), and rhymed the word ‘party’ with ‘starry’. Those options were certainly imperfect, and inferior to the ST rhymes. On another occasion we strayed from sense, introducing the word ‘*armadillo*’ to rhyme with ‘*cigarillo*’, acceptable surely in the fantasy song ‘*Festa no Céu*’. And since that translation had to end with the word ‘fools’, we threw in the rhyming word ‘mules’. After all, songwriters and other rhymesters are known to choose some words chiefly for their sounds. The most important word to rhyme is the one that ends a verse, the word that clinches it in a satisfying way. But let it not be said that we didn't *seek* perfection. In all those examples we would admit that points are lost. But imperfections are good if they make possible a better overall score.

Let us say in conclusion that this project may be viewed as a successful example of collaboration. The output is singable English versions of nearly fifty songs, now published in four groups: observations of Rio, characters of Rio, Rosa the serenader, and Rosa the satirist. Some now are being performed in English. We think our project constitutes a strong suggestion to any song-translators seeking to recreate the meaning and feeling of a group of songs: they would do well to consider working as collaborators.

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**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.¹ 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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¹ 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*.² 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)³ 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

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

³ 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 language⁴ (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

⁴ 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 wall⁵ 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 Gdynia⁶. Before that, they would have

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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 1980⁷. 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

⁷ 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 movement⁸ 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

⁸ 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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**NON SONO / UNA SEÑORA:
GENDER REPRESENTATIONS THROUGH INTERLINGUAL COVER VERSIONS**

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the song '*Non sono una signora*,' originally released by Loredana Bertè in 1982, and its three Spanish-language covers recorded by Latin American singers Lucía Méndez, Lissette, and Melisa in 1984. While several Italian pop songs from the 1980s became part of the Latin American soundscape through Spanish-language adaptations, this case stands out due to the shifting gender representations across versions. Framed within Translation Studies, this research engages with Susam-Sarajeva's (2019) concept of interlingual cover versions and Prato's (2007) theory of coverability to analyze how these versions negotiate gender, societal roles, and popular music discourses. Using a collective case study approach (Yin, 2018), the analysis contrasts thematic and narrative shifts across the adaptations, revealing how translation and performance interact to reframe gender and sexuality.

KEYWORDS: Gender; Popular Music; Sexuality; Embodiment; Affect

1. Introduction

This study is framed within the field of popular song translation—or non-canonized music genres, as categorized by Susam-Sarajeva (2020). It specifically focuses on the phenomenon of “interlingual cover versions” (Susam-Sarajeva, 2019), a term that captures not only linguistic transfer but also broader processes of adaptation and rewriting, as explored in contemporary critical theory and translation studies.

Cover versions raise compelling questions, as they exemplify what Plasketes (2010, p. 2) calls a postmodern manifestation of “rampant recontextualization”—where artists revisit, reinterpret, and reframe musical styles, eras, genres, recordings, and fellow performers.¹ This framework extends the postmodern characteristics attributed to covers—such as reinterpretation and cultural negotiation—to interlingual covers as well, allowing for a more expansive analysis within the context of song translation. For instance, Prato's (2007) theory of coverability underscores the structural reproducibility of popular songs—an idea that resonates with Benjamin's (2008) concept of aura, and its afterlife in translation studies via “The task of the translator” (Benjamin, 1996). Prato also adopts a cartographic approach, resisting unidirectional models of cultural flow. Drawing on García Canclini's (1989) notion of deterritorialization, he shows that interlingual covers circulate through complex and nonlinear cultural circuits, where identity, knowledge, entertainment, and pleasure are continually contested and redefined.

The case explored in this article is the song '*Non sono una signora*' (I Am Not a Lady), originally released by Loredana Bertè in 1982, and its three Spanish-language covers, all released in 1984 by Latin American singers Lucía Méndez, Lissette, and Melissa. The triple

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¹ For further conceptual exploration regarding the terms of 'cover' and 'cover version' based on empirical data and theoretical discussions, see Upton (2021), Magnus (2022), and Bradford (2023).

release in the same year may reflect contingent factors tied to technological and media developments, such as the central role of radio in disseminating music across Europe and the Atlantic; historical and political contexts (see Section 5 on Melissa's version); and the dynamics of the Mexican and broader Latin American music industries, which viewed Italian composers and record labels as key actors in innovating popular music globally. Indeed, the phenomenon of covering Italian songs gained momentum at the end of the 1950s and throughout the 1960s, as Italy's music industry gained global recognition through events such as the Sanremo Festival. This festival played a pivotal role in shaping the development of Italian popular music and influenced how it was conceived, received, and circulated internationally (Prato, 2007; Agostini, 2013). A key study highlighting the Italian music industry's role in generating Spanish-language covers is García-Jiménez's (2013) doctoral thesis. She shows that Italy's influence on the Spanish musical context in the 1960s became clear as Italian songs renewed traditional musical models. This influence, expressed through the translation of Italian popular music, was part of a broader cultural phenomenon shaped by economic and historical factors. Rather than a one-way flow from Italy to Spain, this exchange reflected a global soundscape in flux, where different regions actively expanded their repertoires—an argument that echoes Prato's use of deterritorialization, as discussed earlier.

Taking García-Jiménez's study as a starting point, '*Non sono una signora*' might seem like a typical case of how several Italian pop songs from the 1980s became part of the Latin American soundscape through Spanish-language cover versions.² However, in contrast to these songs—whose Spanish lyrics have remained consistent across various artists—'*Non sono una signora*' presents a particularly compelling case of how the representations of societal roles shift depending on the performer and how their respective interlingual cover version contribute to reshaping gender narratives in Latin American popular culture. This observation leads to a second theoretical assumption guiding this study: the framing of translation as a form of repetition. However, repetition should not be understood as a simple derivative act of reproducing the same. Rather, it must be seen as a historical and cultural practice—one that opens up possibilities for subverting the original/copy binary in favor of radical rewritings or contingent readings that, although rooted in specific contexts, resist the fixation of meaning (Vidal Claramonte, 2023).

Framing translation as repetition helps to clarify how each cover version has established a critical distance from Bertè's original song. Repetition includes processes such as (re)translating a source text across different times and places within the same target language. It also aligns with poststructuralist conceptions of translation as an ongoing process of endless drafts (Waisman, 2005; Borges, 2012), the Derridean notion of continuous deferral of meaning and the impossibility of a definitive target text (Derrida, 1986; Molines-Galarza, 2025), and the idea that source and target texts coexist as parallel,

² Recognizable songs include '*Maledetta Primavera*', originally released by Loretta Goggi in 1981 and covered by Yuri in Mexico in 1982, and '*Non voglio mica la luna*' by Fiordaliso, which was adapted as '*Yo no te pido la luna*' by Mexican singer Daniela Romo in 1984.

continuous, and proximate, yet always move toward vanishing points where fixed meanings remain elusive (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). Understanding translation as repetition also introduces the possibility—and even the pleasure—of discovering innovations and noticing what changes with each iteration (Hutcheon, 2006). At the same time, it invites reflection on where things begin, whether an original or source can ever truly exist outside of its rewritings, and whether anything can be repeated in exactly the same way (Vidal Claramonte, 2023). These questions resonate with gender and queer critiques of originality, particularly in how ‘original’ forms of performing gender and sex are continually repeated, contested, and reconfigured. In this sense, critically thinking repetition also becomes a way of paraphrasing Judith Butler’s (1990) theory of gender performativity, where identity does not precede performance but emerges through reiterated acts that are open to disruption and resignification.

The following sections are structured according to the key components of an empirical article. Section 2 presents the methods and a general overview of the results based on the thematic coding stage. Section 3 offers an analysis of the source song, while Section 4 examines the cover versions by Lucía Méndez and Lissette, which are discussed together due to the melodramatic themes they share. Section 5 focuses on Melissa’s song, expanding the analysis to include two later cover versions that helped transform her rendition into one more explicitly tied to representations of sexuality. These later versions illustrate how the song evolved from a rejection of traditional femininity into a piece that resonates with queer audiences, especially among gay male communities. Finally, Section 6, the concluding remarks, revisits the article’s main argument and outlines potential directions for future research.

2. Research method and overall results

The general research method follows the steps and criteria of a collective case study (Yin, 2018). This approach involves the analysis of each song individually (methodologically considering each track a case), followed by a comparison of the results and interpretations across all cases. These stages align with the overall purpose of the study, which is operationalized in two stages: first, by identifying the themes conveyed in each song, and second, by examining how the thematic configuration of each song, when placed in contrast, reveals specific coordinates of gender construction. This approach also helps avoid a unidirectional comparison between the source song and its cover versions, which would reinforce a rigid original/copy dichotomy. Instead, it allows for an exploration of how translation and repetition have facilitated the song’s transformation over time, particularly in its potential interpretations within LGBTQ+ imaginaries.

Table 1 summarizes the themes of Bertè’s song and the three cover versions, providing a general overview of how the source themes were omitted, reinterpreted, or expanded through distinct lyrical and narrative perspectives on gender, agency, and emotional struggle. Bertè’s source song, with its impressionist approach, presents themes of personal challenges, instability, and resilience, while rejecting traditional femininity

through fragmented and symbolic imagery. Regarding the cover versions in Spanish, one key difference is that Lucía Méndez and Lissette’s versions take a narrative approach, emphasizing melodrama, romantic disillusionment, and emotional suffering.³ Méndez’s cover version focuses on marriage and domestic life, depicting a woman constrained by social expectations, passivity, and forms of abuse. Lissette’s version centers on unfaithfulness and unhappiness, highlighting the pain of betrayal. Melissa’s cover also takes a narrative approach but shifts toward a more assertive perspective and incorporates themes of self-determination and aspired liberation, where desire appears both as a source of shame and of self-affirmation.

Table 1. Summary of themes in the Spanish-language cover versions of “Non sono una señora”

		Loredana Bertè	Lucía Méndez	Lissette	Melissa
	Approach	Impressionist	Narrative	Narrative	Narrative
Theme	Sub-themes				
Personal challenges	<i>Instability</i>	+			+
	<i>Resilience</i>	+	+	+	+
Agency	<i>Aspired liberation</i>		+	+	
	<i>Self-determination</i>	+			+
Melodrama	<i>Love</i>		+	+	+
	<i>Affair / unfaithfulness</i>		+	+	+
	<i>Pain / unhappiness</i>		+	+	+
Desire	<i>Self-affirmation</i>				+
	<i>Shame</i>				+
	<i>Revenge</i>				+
Gender and society	<i>Social expectations and norms</i>	+	+	+	+
	<i>Social condemn</i>	+			
	<i>Violence / abuse</i>		+		
	<i>Marriage / domestic life</i>		+	+	
	<i>Passivity</i>		+	+	

³ Bertè’s own Spanish-language version of ‘*Non sono una signora*’ appears in compilation albums from the early 2000s. However, its production seems to date back earlier, possibly around 1985, when singles by Italian artists were being produced in Mexico and Latin America. This ‘*Non sono una signora*’ retains the impressionistic style of her source song but also introduces a narrative component. In this version, the lyrical subject directly addresses a second person, with whom she identifies, recounting shared experiences of hardship. Like the Italian version, it focuses more on personal struggles within the individual sphere but also includes the theme of love, which brings it closer to the other Spanish-language cover versions.

These themes will be further explored in detail in Sections 3, 4, and 5, where each version of the song will be analyzed in relation to the themes and representations conveyed through the lyrics. While the primary focus remains on lyrical content, each analysis will also include a brief presentation of the singer's persona. In the case of Lucía Méndez, the analysis will engage with her celebrity persona, particularly her prominence in Latin American popular culture. For Melissa and Lissette, who are comparatively less known on a continental scale, the discussion will focus on their repertoire and vocal style, which contribute to how their performances shape gendered and emotional narratives. Each section will also include descriptive comments on the composition and musical arrangement to provide a clearer sense of each version's sound and style. However, since these versions are widely available online and through music streaming platforms, readers are encouraged to listen to them while reading, as the sonic dimension offers important cues that go beyond textual analysis.

3. Fragmented imagery / impressionistic soundscape

'*Non sono una signora*' (Fossati, 1982) is one of Loredana Bertè's biggest hits. Written and composed by Ivano Fossati, a pop singer-songwriter, the song was released in 1982 and became widely recognized not only for its thematic complexity, which will be explored in the following paragraphs, but above all for Bertè's fragile yet melancholic interpretation and her unmistakable vocal quality. The song is built on a steady, mid-tempo rock groove, with prominent drumming. The electric guitar has rhythmic strumming and slightly distorted sound and is noticeable in the transitions between sections. The song also incorporates synthesizers and keyboards to provide atmospheric layers and texture to the verses and instrumental sections. Bertè's voice builds emotional intensity throughout the song, with its raspy texture shifting from vulnerability in the melancholic verses to a more defiant tone in the chorus. Her vocal delivery, combined with her stage persona and performance style, infuses the song with a rock edge, despite its formal pop structure.

Fossati and Bertè's song is rich in fragmented and impressionistic imagery, evoking emotions and moods rather than following a clear narrative. The song's impressionistic style—marked by evocative yet ambiguous symbolism—allows for multiple interpretations. For instance, the opening verses (see Table 2 below) leave conceptual gaps that invite different readings depending on Bertè's emotional delivery, the melody, and the musical arrangement.

Table 2. Excerpts from '*Non sono una signora*'

'Non sono una signora'	Translation into English
[Verse 1] La fretta del cuore è già una novità che dietro un giornale sta cambiando opinioni.	The rush of the heart is already something new behind a newspaper changing opinions.
[Verse 2] E il male del giorno è pochi chilometri a sud del mio ritorno, del mio buongiorno.	And the trouble of the day is a few kilometers south of my return, of my 'good morning'

The melancholic tone of the first lines suggests a sense of detachment or alienation, as if the popular discourse shaping people's lives overlooks the complexities of the inner world, which carries its own struggles. These themes of detachment and inner turmoil appear in the pre-chorus through references to constant hardship and precariousness, as in the line "*un volo a planare / dentro il peggiore motel*" (it's a gliding flight / into the worst motel) (pre-chorus 1). Additionally, the mention of a '*carretera*' (road) suggests a sense of rootlessness and emphasizes the instability and impermanence of a woman's journey. Meanwhile, the idea of a "dance-hall life" (*vita-balera*) creates a layer of irony by opposing the chaotic and difficult path to the notion of life as a performance or spectacle.

References to falling, being nailed to the wall, or crucified symbolize the constraints imposed by societal norms and personal challenges, contrasting with the metaphor of chasing the wind but being unable to reach it, which conveys a deep yearning for freedom and liberation. Additionally, lines such as "*sono una foglia d'argento / nata da un albero abbattuto qua*" (I am a silver leaf / born from a tree felled here) (verse 3) evoke a sense of pride and resilience despite unfavorable circumstances. As the song progresses, the lyrical subject shifts from expressing constant hardship and inner conflict to embracing imperfection and ultimately rejecting traditional expectations of femininity and societal roles, as emphasized in the refrain "*Non sono una signora*" (I'm not a lady). Since gender must always be understood as an intersectional critical category, the concept of femininity—and specifically, of having an 'appropriate' demeanor or being a '*signora*'—also carries class-based connotations. The ideal of proper behavior is not only gendered but also marked as belonging to a particular social class, reinforcing expectations tied to respectability, decorum, and status. In the cover versions that follow, these norms appear again, particularly through the lens of what is expected of women within marriage, often shaped by the class positions of the characters or personas involved.

4. Narrative feminine standpoints

4.1. Lucía Méndez's '*Ella es una señora*'

Lucía Méndez is a Mexican celebrity whose career spans from the 1970s to the 2020s. She is widely recognized across Latin America, primarily for her acting roles in telenovelas over more than fifty years. Her musical career also began in the 1970s, particularly with ranchera music. Throughout the 1980s, she released eight studio albums and two compilation albums. Among these, her 1984 album, *Solo una mujer* (Just a Woman), featured a Spanish version of '*Non sono una signora*', with writing credits to Ivano Fossati, the original composer, and Honorio Herrero, a Mexican songwriter and producer.

Compared to Bertè's original version, which runs for 3 minutes and 30 seconds, Méndez's cover slows the tempo, extending the song's duration to four minutes. Unlike the source version, where electric and bass guitars play a prominent role, Méndez's rendition replaces them with an electric organ that accompanies the drums throughout the track. The saxophone sections are retained in the bridge and final section of the song. A notable innovation in Méndez's version is the addition of string elements. The sound of a violin can

be heard at various points, giving the song a more pronounced ballad-like quality that aligns with its slower tempo.

This version, titled *‘Ella es una señora’* (She is a lady) (Fossati and Herrero, 1984), introduces two key divergences from the Italian original. First, while the Italian lyrics present the lyrical subject as the protagonist, speaking in the first person, the Spanish version shifts to a third-person perspective, turning the narrator into an observer of a female character’s experiences. This perspective is then used to directly address the woman's husband in the second person, drawing his attention to his wife's suffering (see Table 3 below). Second, and most strikingly, the title of the song as well as the refrain become an affirmative statement: whereas the Italian song rejected societal roles associated with being a *‘signora’*, the lyrics in Spanish reaffirm the protagonist’s gender and social position as a *‘señora’* (She is a lady).

Table 3. Excerpts from *‘Ella es una señora’*, written by Ivanno Fossati and Honorio Herrero

‘Ella es una señora’	Translation into English
[Verse 3]	
Si no fuera porque vive asustada, no pensaría en su libertad, no pensaría en escapar de ti para poder volar.	If only she weren’t so afraid, she would think about her freedom, she would think about escaping from you, so she could finally fly.
[Pre-chorus]	
De nada le vale inventar disculpas para ti. Y en su sitio espera. De qué puede valerle ahora.	It’s no use to her, inventing excuses for you. And she waits in her place. What good can it do her now?

Méndez’s song begins with imagery of domestic life and household chores (“the empty living room” in verse one, or “dinner is cold / and the children are in their room” in verse two), already marked by the absence and lack of consideration of the husband and father of the children. The pre-chorus introduces the idea that she is no longer in love and is exhausted from enduring his actions. Verse 3 references fear, which, within the context of the song, could suggest domestic violence (see Table 3 above). This interpretation is reinforced by the expressed desire to escape—first in a literal sense and later metaphorically, through the imagery of flying away. Additionally, verse 4 hints at an abusive relationship, as the lyrical subject conveys an inability to speak or reveal what is happening, possibly due to her husband's coercive control, *“ni poder hablar / por tus lazos atada / cada vez más fuerte”* (not be able to speak / bound by your ties / each time more tightly). As previously mentioned, her role as a *‘señora’*—a devoted wife—is reaffirmed in the chorus, where it is made clear that her silence is an expectation imposed on her, even though it is destroying her.

The lyrics of Lucía Méndez’s song gain additional layers of meaning when considered in relation to her celebrity persona, which has been deeply shaped by melodrama as a

genre, particularly through the *telenovelas* that defined much of her career. Her image as a telenovela star is even referenced in Sandra Cisneros's (1992) renown short story 'Woman Hollering Creek', where Cleófilas, the Mexican immigrant and protagonist, recalls Méndez's various roles as reinforcing the idea that one must endure hardships—such as separations and betrayals—in the name of love, always loving no matter what. In Cleófilas's memories, Méndez exists both as an actress and as a character, seamlessly blending fiction and reality. This dual identity is further emphasized by the fact that Méndez was also a singer, with her songs frequently featured in the opening and closing credits of the telenovelas she starred. In Méndez's case—as with other female stars in Mexico—*telenovelas*, melodrama, and music have intertwined to construct national and regional imaginaries around her, where gender and sexuality interact in ways that shape her career and influence her rise to stardom (Paxman, 2003; Cosentino, 2018). In this context, '*Ella es una señora*' aligns with the melodramatic tradition by reaffirming the proper and devoted conduct expected of both a melodrama heroine and her transmedia persona.⁴

4.2. Lissette's '*No soy una señora*'

Also in 1984, Cuban-Puerto Rican singer Lissette Álvarez released her album *Caricatura*, which included her cover version of 'Non sono una signora'. Lissette's rendition, '*No soy una señora*' (Fossati and Álvarez, 1984), was written in Spanish by Lissette herself and takes on a narrative approach. The lyrics center on a broken marriage caused by an affair and the husband's inconsiderate behavior toward the lyrical subject. A key theme, which can be compared to the Italian source song, is the wife's inability—within the socially defined feminine role—to act with agency. The arrangement of the song prominently features the electric organ, which stands out more than the drums and bass. A guitar can be heard at certain moments, as well as a synthesizer that produces a wavering, almost spectral sound that appears a couple of times throughout the track. The saxophone remains present, though not as a defining element of a soul-inspired arrangement—except in the song's final section—but rather as a melodic accompaniment to Lissette's voice. The song also has a slower tempo compared to '*Non sono una signora*', extending its length to four minutes.

Some verse lines in Lissette's lyrics closely follow the structure of '*Non sono una signora*'. For example, in verse 2, "*lo llevaron mil kilómetros sur*" (They took him a thousand kilometers south) corresponds to "*è pochi chilometri a sud*" (it is a few kilometers south), while the pre-chorus retains the reference to the motel. Similarly, verse 4 includes "*más qué terrible fatiga*" (what a terrible burden) in place of "*ma che brutta fatica*" (what an exhausting effort), and just before the chorus, "*mas cómo recordarlo ahora*" (But how can I remember him now?) echoes "*ma come ricordarlo ora?*" (But how to remember him

⁴ As a further comment on Lucía Méndez's music and the coherence sought with her celebrity persona, '*Ella es una señora*' is part of an album that includes both ballads and high-tempo songs focused in reinforcing conventional representations of femininity. The album's themes revolve around melodrama, love, and morality. One notable example is '*Padre nuestro*', a musicalized version of the Lord's Prayer, which explicitly reflects the values Méndez's music conveys.

now?). These similarities suggest that while the Spanish version could have followed the more impressionistic style of the Italian lyrics, the cover version was carefully crafted to tell a structured narrative about a broken marriage. This calls for a more nuanced understanding of song translation as a form of constrained translation, as it highlights the various ways lyrics can be adapted beyond formal linguistic equivalence—an observation that also applies to Lucía Méndez’s cover version. The inclusion of these specific parallels may have served as a deliberate nod to the original, creating a link between both versions while reshaping the song’s meaning for a different audience.

The song begins by recalling a time in the marriage when the husband was devoted to his wife, “*la prisa [...] por llegar [...] y volar a mis brazos*” (the rush [...] to get home [...] and fly into my arms), but it quickly reveals how their relationship has deteriorated. She can no longer tolerate him, not only because of his arrogance (see verse 2 in Table 4 below) and his unconsidered attitudes (verse 3) but also due to his infidelity. This is emphasized in the pre-chorus, “*quiso escaparse / con cualquiera al peor motel*” (He wanted to run away / with just anyone to the worst motel,) and reinforced in verse 4, where she expresses exhaustion over his love affairs: “*terrible fatiga [...] con sus aventuras*” (a terrible fatigue [...] with his affairs). The husband’s actions are framed as the cause of the lyrical subject’s unhappiness and despair.

Table 4. Excerpts from ‘No soy una señora’, written by Ivanno Fossati and Lissette Álvarez

‘No soy una señora’	Translation into English
[Verse 2]	
Cómo cambia el tiempo.	How time changes things.
Lo llevaron mil kilómetros sur de mi tolerancia, con su arrogancia.	They took him a thousand kilometers south of my tolerance, with his arrogance.
[Verse 3]	
Las mil y una noches de tertulia sin final y recoger escombros de sus amigos de insomnio.	A thousand and one nights of endless conversations, and picking up the wreckage of his insomniac friends.

The pre-chorus reveals that she has attempted to leave before but was unable to do so due to her fear of being alone. However, that fear no longer holds the same power over her, implying a growing determination to break free. The chorus then suggests that she will eventually find the strength to leave the marriage, as she acknowledges that she will no longer conform to the role of the dutiful wife or the ‘*señora*’ at the expense of living life on her own terms. All these thematic components mobilize melodrama once again, reinforcing the portrayal of love relationships where the woman is largely characterized by essential passivity (see the previous section). This framework also suggests a possible connection with Lucía Méndez’s version, given the thematic similarities. However, such a link remains speculative and becomes visible only from a temporal distance. Both covers were released

in the same year and coexisted within the Latin American soundscape of the 1980s, yet there is no evidence of direct influence or interaction between the versions or their production teams. Still, since speculation is part of any research endeavor, the relationship between the two versions may be imagined or conceptualized as a palimpsest.

Susam-Sarajeva (2019) proposes the notion of the palimpsest to account for the layered and non-linear relationships between source songs and cover versions. As she notes, “covers do not necessarily replace the ‘original’” and “priority alone does not ensure absolute authority, and it certainly does not guarantee which version will be listened to first or most often” (p. 47). Without the need to account for which Spanish-language version was first, what remains is seeing them as part of a transformation process or, as said in the introduction, as repetitions carrying each its own meanings but also existing in cultural contexts with shared common beliefs about what it means being a woman, a lady, being married, all of them part of gender/sex system. Within this palimpsestic relationship, Lucía Méndez’s and Lissette’s versions appear to reference one another—not due to a shared creative origin, but through their engagement with a common cultural and gendered framework from which each draws elements that become intertextual echoes. This interrelation is most evident in their respective covers, whereas Melissa’s version departs from this shared structure and marks a significant thematic and performative shift.

5. Melissa’s ‘No soy una señora’: From gender to sexuality

Melissa Griffiths y Parra Del Riego, known artistically as Melissa, is a Peruvian Venezuelan singer who rose to fame in the 1980s. In 1983 and 1984, she released *Melissa* and *Melissa II*, respectively, both of which were primarily cover albums. Her debut album featured Spanish-language versions of songs originally performed by anglophone artists such as Pat Benatar (‘Heartbreaker’), Petula Clark (‘I Know a Place’), and Sheena Easton (‘A Little Tenderness’), as well as a Spanish cover of the Italian song ‘*Canta*’ by Drupi. Her second album, *Melissa II*, continued this trend, including Spanish versions of ‘Time After Time’ by Cyndi Lauper, ‘Sweet Dreams’ by Eurythmics, and ‘Stand Back’ by Stevie Nicks. It also featured cover versions of Italian songs, with the album’s lead single, ‘*No soy una señora*’, becoming one of the defining and most representative songs of her career. The early years of Melissa’s career must be understood within the context of Venezuela’s 1x1 Decree, implemented in the 1980s during the government of Luis Herrera Campins. This policy required radio stations to play one song by a national artist—regardless of genre—for every song by a foreign artist that was broadcast. The decree significantly boosted the local music industry, facilitating the rise of artists like Melissa at a time when there was an insufficient volume of nationally produced music to balance the influx of foreign songs.

Melissa’s version has a faster tempo than the previous two Spanish-language covers, with a length similar to Bertè’s original (3 minutes and 28 seconds). In this version, the drums are consistently accompanied by the bass and the electronic organ. Additionally, an electric guitar plays a more prominent role than in the previous versions, most notably when it replaces the saxophone—shifting the song toward a more rock-oriented sound.

Melissa’s voice also features a distinctive vibrato in the chorus, described as a “ronquito sabroso” (a slight but flavorful rasp) (Olavarrieta, 2024, 28:16), which became a signature element of her rock.

Melissa’s cover version thematically centers on a love relationship as a key element of its narrative approach, introducing passion as both desire and pain. The song engages with societal expectations, as seen in “*La gente juzgar / cruzando opiniones*” (verse 1). These themes culminate in the chorus, where gender roles are explicitly challenged: “*No soy una señora / de una conducta intachable en la vida*” (I’m not a lady / one of impeccable conduct in life). The second line underscores external judgment and the pressure to conform, while also echoing the moral tone present in Lissette’s cover version. The lyrics also depict total devotion to a lover—“*Yo creía en tus sentimientos / y vivía solo para ti*” (I believed in your feelings / I lived only for you) (verse 3)—followed by the realization of deception and betrayal—“*Preferiste seguir al viento / sin pensar en mí*” (You chose to follow the wind / without thinking of me) (verse 3) and “*Me usaste como un maniquí*” (You used me like a mannequin) (verse 4). From the start, pain is framed as an inevitable consequence of love—“*La herida de un hombre / no es una novedad*” (The wound of a man / is nothing new) (verse 1)—yet this suffering eventually gives way to resentment and disillusionment—“*Sacrificio absurdo*” (An absurd sacrifice) (pre-chorus 1) and “*una horrible aventura / una historia absurda*” (a terrible adventure [love affair] / an absurd story) (verse 4).

As previously outlined in Table 1, desire intertwines with these emotions, initially appearing as a source of downfall—leading to deception, shame, and disorientation, particularly in verse 2 and the first part of pre-chorus 1 (see Table 5 below). In these passages, desire appears to have placed the lyrical subject in a position of subjection to the other, as if surrendering to someone else’s will. This dynamic echoes Bertè’s original song, where the tone is similarly marked by lament. However, this tone quickly gives way to a stance of self-affirmation and defiance.

Table 5. Lyrics of ‘*No soy una señora*’, written by Ivanno Fossati and Peter Daniels

“No soy una señora”	Translation into English
[Verse 2]	
Empiezo otro día	I start another day,
un par de kilómetros más,	a few kilometers further,
sin horizonte,	without a horizon,
sin nadie a quien le importe.	without anyone who cares.
[Pre-chorus 1]	
Dejando mis sueños	Leaving my dreams
en el cuarto de cualquier motel,	in the room of any motel,
con la cara cubierta,	with my face covered,
con la vida revuelta.	with my life in turmoil.

The verse lines “*Dejé de ser tuya / fui de otro como fui de ti*” are particularly revealing in relation to the theme of desire—not because they state it explicitly, but because

they veil references to eroticism and sexuality. The first line translates literally as “I stopped being yours,” but it is the second—“*fui de otro como fui de ti*”—that encapsulates multiple layers of meaning:

- I belonged to someone else just as I belonged to you.
- I gave myself to someone else, just like I gave myself to you.
- I was with someone else the same way I was with you.

This line strongly implies sexual and emotional agency. The phrasing evokes the language of possession, but the speaker subverts it by applying the same logic to both partners, suggesting equivalence—or even disposability—in how love and intimacy unfold. The tone carries a sense of liberation through repetition (*fui* and *fui*), with a hint of irony. It goes beyond marking the end of one relationship and the beginning of another; it suggests a deliberate, even defiant, reclaiming of the speaker’s body and desire. In general, Melissa’s cover version hints at a past lived through secrecy or marginality, but on the speaker’s own terms—revealing that the lyrical subject was not merely acted upon, but was also a deciding and desiring figure, capable of loving furtively and intentionally.

Among the Spanish-language versions, Melissa’s cover version is the only one that has stood the test of time. Much like Bertè’s original, Melissa’s version has become a reference point for subsequent covers by Spanish-speaking singers, a sign of its cultural resonance. This endurance can be attributed to its thematic innovation at the time. On the one hand, Melissa’s cover is the only version that frames desire as a relational force beyond heteronormative institutions such as marriage and domestic life. On the other hand, desire and melodrama stand in contrast—whereas Méndez and Lissette’s versions center on heteronormative romance characterized by deep suffering, Melissa’s version overturns this by positioning desire as a pathway to self-definition and agency. Desire also expands the theme of love by introducing a more explicitly sexual dimension. In this version, the lyrical subject emerges as an active, desiring figure, which marks a distinct shift in the narrative focus of the song.

Two artists have most notably covered Melissa’s ‘*No soy una señora*’: Mexican singer María José in 2009, and Spanish drag artist Chumina Power in her 2017 album entitled *No soy una señora*, where she reinterpreted various 1980s hits with a house music twist to appeal to gay club audiences.⁵ María José, also known as La Josa, released *Amante de lo ajeno* (Lover of What is Not One’s Own), a cover album conceived as a tribute to various female artists (‘divas’) from the 1980s. Her version of ‘*No soy una señora*’ was an electropop reinterpretation that prominently showcased her vocal talent. Much like Melissa’s 1984 album, both María José’s and Chumina’s cover albums functioned as anthologies, curating

⁵ There is a compelling audiovisual link between Melissa’s cover version and queer transformation through its inclusion in the critically acclaimed Venezuelan Spanish film *Azul y no tan rosa* (My Straight Son) (2012). The film explores themes such as coming out to family, self-acceptance, homophobic violence, and trans identities. In a pivotal sequence, a gay character is brutally assaulted while, in parallel, scenes depict other characters at a gay club watching a drag queen lip-sync Melissa’s ‘*No soy una señora*’. The intercutting of these scenes weaves together queer vulnerability and resilience, suggesting that the song—performed in drag—functions as both a site of collective identification and a sonic form of resistance.

collections of songs that were emblematic of a decade. While Melissa's album represented a promise of accessing modernity through the Spanish-language reinterpretation of international music, María José and Chumina's records functioned as a nostalgic return to a past era—for example refractions of sounds, a fantasy echo, as will be explored in the final section of this paper. As a song that has traveled extensively through time, covers, and translation, multiple voices have borrowed its ownership—not by contesting originality, but by leaving space for interpretation and asserting its meanings across new contexts and audiences.

'*No soy una señora*' provides a grammatical space for play, where Spanish-speaking queer men can easily subvert the feminine marker *-a* in '*señora*'. Through a rhetorical move of camp talk or linguistic *mariconeo*, they can feminize themselves or each other, reclaiming and resignifying the phrase within queer discourse.⁶ However, the queer affordances of this cover version extend beyond its linguistic dimension. They also emerge through the embodied trajectory of María José as a singer and performer, whose nearly four-decade career has consistently appealed to queer audiences. As a performer, María José embodies the notion of a diva, whose voice serves as a semiotic anchor for resignifying songs and providing audiences with a space to explore their identities and desires (Jennex, 2013). Taking the body and performance of the diva as a sign in itself (Dyer, 2004), María José engages in her own translation work and reshapes the emotional core of Melissa and Loredana Bertè's songs through the power of her vocal expression (Smith, 2025, p. 83). María José's connection to queer performance also stems from her early career as a member of the Mexican pop group Kabah, which she was part of from its formation in 1992 until its disbandment in 2005. Kabah's queer appeal lies in its camp aesthetics, theatrical performances, and themes of self-discovery and belonging, all of which deeply resonate with LGBTQ+ audiences. The group's choreographed dance routines and gender-fluid styling further align with queer performative sensibilities, which contributed to solidify both Kabah and María José as enduring icons of self-expression and empowerment in LGBTQ+ spaces.

6. Concluding remarks: gender, fantasy, echo

This study has traced the multiple trajectories of '*Non sono una signora*' as it moved across time, languages, and cultural contexts, primarily through interlingual cover versions. Across all cover versions, societal roles remain central concerns, particularly in how social norms, condemnation, and expectations shape the lyrical subject's experience. In Bertè's song, themes of hardship in the lyrical subject's life appear more personal and confined to the private sphere. As a result, the song's affirmation of selfhood seems directed toward individuals, particularly individual women, rather than a collective. Lucía Méndez's and Lissette's covers function similarly in relation to melodrama, reinforcing the connection between personal struggles and the broader cultural frameworks that shape expectations of women's roles and lives. These themes, which reflect social structures, can be

⁶ For an exploration of how the feminine grammatical marker in Spanish can be utilized by queer audiences of popular music, see Villanueva-Jordán and Martínez Pleguezuelos (2025).

interpreted as gender representations, as they embed critiques of systemic inequalities. The imagery of the household and institutions like marriage incorporate key elements of gender critique, particularly the sexual division of labor and the embodied experience of dependency among women who dedicate themselves to domestic life as housewives.

Rather than viewing these covers as mere offshoots of an original artifact, this analysis has shown how each iteration expands the possibilities of the Italian song. The transformation of '*No soy una señora*' from a defiant rejection of traditional femininity into a song mobilizing queer relationalities is not merely a shift in lyrics or performance style; it reflects a broader cultural process of resignification, where song translation creates multiple points of encounter between gender, language, and sexuality. A key theoretical insight from this study is that repetition and translation do not simply reproduce meaning but instead decenter and destabilize it. With each version, '*No soy una señora*' has moved further from the monist logic of an original source and has shown how popular music functions as a site of gendered negotiations, where voices, performances, and meanings remain in flux.

Framing the themes of early 1980s songs within the contexts of Italy and Latin America requires questioning the relevance of a feminist stance as a prerequisite for a gender critique. This means avoiding a binary classification of the Spanish-language covers based on whether they align with a feminist perspective. Even in the case of Bertè's song, applying a feminist framework to interpret the lyrics' context can be problematic. In Italy, feminist discourse only began to gain traction in public debate in the mid-1980s with more accessible proposals, such as *affidamento*—a practice of symbolic and political alliance between women that emphasized relational authority and the transmission of knowledge between generations (Cicioni, 1989). In Latin America, women's movements initially emerged to resist dictatorships and address specific political struggles, but their connection to activist and academic feminism developed more fully over the course of the 1980s (Lux and Pérez Pérez, 2020; Fernández Anderson, 2021). While an activist perspective remains ethically and politically valid, it can introduce research methodological biases that obscure micropolitical expressions within these songs—expressions that may not have influenced translation decisions before the formation of explicitly feminist identities and subjectivities with a defined political agenda.

This analytical and theoretical distinction between gender and feminism does not negate the epistemological relationship between the two concepts, nor the connection between social movements and their gender agendas. However, it is important to recognize that not all gender constructs are inherently pro- or anti-feminist. This distinction becomes particularly relevant when considering how contemporary cultural artifacts and industries incorporate gender themes as part of their commercial appeal. These integrations often align with emerging configurations of gender discourse, such as post-feminism or broader cultural labels like 'woke' or 'culture wars', which reflect shifts in how gender is framed and marketed in popular culture. Exploring texts inductively allows for the identification of

common themes across cover versions—such as melodrama, which is not necessarily linked to feminism—that help structure narratives about gender.

One final theoretical link can be established as this study concludes. This final consideration draws from Joan Scott's (2001) concept of 'fantasy echo', which examines the limits and possibilities of imagining the past in relation to identity politics and collective belonging. Cultural artifacts contribute to the construction of a shared past, as they shape both individual and collective subjectivities. This process holds the potential for creating, recovering, and affirming identities. However, Scott reminds us that this fantasy must always be understood as an echo—something that resonates but does not originate from a fixed reality. '*Non sono una signora*' was not conceived as a feminist or queer anthem; its past did not follow a predetermined path toward cultural or social transformation. Instead, its contemporary significance has emerged through layers of resonance, as different iterations, repetitions, and recontextualizations have shaped its meaning over time. The song does not recover a queer past that was already there; rather, it has acquired its meaning through successive stages of refraction, as translation and repetition have allowed it to evolve into what it represents today for certain audiences.

Future research could further explore how translation and repetition shape queer archives, particularly in relation to popular music and non-normative affective economies. Tracing the afterlives of songs in drag performances, club cultures, and digital remixing practices could provide deeper insights into how music translation not only bridges languages but also reconfigures desires, identities, and histories across time and space.

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EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE: THE TRANSLATIONAL HARMONY IN *MOTHER'S TONGUE* BY THE FORMOSAN INDIGENOUS POP DIVA ABAO AS A METAPHOR FOR DEMOCRACY AND INDIGENEITY IN A SETTLER SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT: The Formosan Indigenous diva Abao has developed a distinctive Paiwanese-language pop over the past decade through translation. A language shift from Paiwanese to Chinese since the 1980s has made translation a necessary condition for Abao to sing in Paiwanese, but on her award-winning 2019 album *Kinakaian* 母親的舌頭 it was also a source of creative inspiration. Interlingual translation features both in the title, where a Paiwanese word is juxtaposed with a Chinese phrase meaning 'mother's tongue', and in the lyrics and subtitles, which are in Paiwanese, Taiwanese, Chinese, or English. Intersemiotic translation features in the music videos, in which the lyrics are translated into dance; in the title track, the lyrics are translated into sign language first. The translator-performers sing, sign, and dance simultaneously, not just serially. The result is not a cacophony but a harmony that can serve as a metaphor for democracy and indigeneity in a settler society.

KEYWORDS: Taiwan; Minority Translation; AV Translation; Music Videos; Embodied Song

1. Introduction

This article is a case study of Formosan Indigenous pop diva Abao's award-winning 2019 album *Kinakaian* 母親的舌頭 from the perspective of translation. Interlingual translation features in the album title, in which a Paiwanese word is juxtaposed with a Chinese phrase meaning 'mother's tongue'. It also features in the lyrics, and Abao's album is most obviously a case of the interlingual translation of endangered minority language pop song lyrics. As a result of a language shift from Indigenous languages like Paiwanese to Chinese (the language of the settler majority) since the 1980s, Indigenous divas of Abao's generation rely on interlingual translation to produce Indigenous-language pop.

A Mandopop star before she became known for Paiwanese pop, Abao had a powerful motivation to switch to singing in Paiwanese, to raise its visibility and give people a way to learn it. People were listening to Luis Fonsi's *'Despacito'* (2017) without knowing what the lyrics meant; maybe, she thought, they would listen to her songs if she wrote some in Paiwanese. She was right. She has been richly rewarded at the Golden Melodies, Taiwan's analogue to the Grammys. As an entertainer, she has been able to reinvent herself. She remains a household name.

In Abao's latest album, however, translation is not simply a means to the end of singing in Paiwanese, but also a creative inspiration. In the MV (music video in Taiwanese Mandarin) for one song, 'Tjakudain 無奈' (meaning 'How I wish I could'), Abao and a male hip-hop artist DJ Didilong engage in a bilingual duet, where he sings in Taiwanese and she in Paiwanese. Hoping to woo her, he tries translating his attraction from Taiwanese into Paiwanese and from hip hop to R&B; in the climax of the song, the pair simultaneously sing

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different lyrics in different languages to different melodies, lyrics which can nonetheless be interpreted translationally. In the MV for the title track, the singer's lyrics are simultaneously translated not just interlingually in the subtitles but also intersemiotically into Taiwan Sign Language (TSL) and modern dance. In all the MVs, the lyrics are simultaneously translated intersemiotically into video imagery. While the process that produced the songs was temporal, and therefore had to involve serial translation, the product has the effect of simultaneous translation. When everything everywhere is playing all at once, to adapt the title of the 2022 Michelle Yeoh movie, one might expect a cacophony, but the result is actually a harmony that can serve as a metaphor for democracy and indigeneity in a settler society. I will spell out how in the concluding discussion. Next, I turn to a literature review that informs the research questions I ask about Abao's album and the methods I use to answer them.

2. Literature review

Abao has attracted attention among scholars in or from Taiwan in terms of language revitalization (Huang, 2022) and cultural resilience (Lin and Lu, 2024). In my previous study of another Formosan Indigenous-language pop singer (Sterk, 2022), in which I argued for an institutional understanding of the popularity of such music, including Abao's, and proposed the category of 'pedagogical translation' (that teaches listeners words in another language), I reviewed the literature on the role of translation in the production of Indigenous minority-language hip hop. Scholars outside translation studies from Mitchell (2000) to Przybylski (2018) have contextualized the sub-genre in terms of the history of colonization and contemporary indigeneity.

Within translation studies, Klaus Kaindl's 2005 study of the plurisemiotics of song translation is extremely useful for the interpretation of Abao's MVs, even though Kaindl was studying the translation of songs rather than the role of translation in original song creation. While he only lists four sign systems in his subtitle, namely words, music, voice, and image, he also incorporates dance (p. 254) into his analysis. Using references from the descriptive and manipulation schools of translation theory, he developed his plurisemiotic approach by casting a wide net, drawing on Pierce and Jakobson as well as Levi-Strauss and Bakhtin. He also incorporates insights from (multi)cultural studies and (multi)media studies. The former gave him a feel for the inequality of cultures in a world in which minority musics are commodified into "world music" (p. 251). The latter gave him a sense of the difficulty of assigning authorship to "multiple texts that are inextricably linked up to the institutions and social settings of musical production and reception" (p. 241); it can even be hard to identify originals and translation, as contemporary production practice "renders obsolete the idea of a notated, originary text as the starting point for translation" (p. 242). Although his conclusion, that it is the song translators who domesticate who tend to score hits (p. 246), is hardly surprising, the analysis itself is excellent. He points out, for instance, a number of instances of "disjuncture" (p. 252) where visual, audible, or legible semes might undermine each other, creating an "ironic" effect (p. 254).

Kaindl found “no translation-relevant analysis” (p. 251) of MVs in the year YouTube was launched. Fourteen years later, Rebecca Johnson devoted a section of an encyclopaedia article to interlingual translation of lyrics from “music videos” (2019, pp. 419-421) on the platform. When she turned to intersemiotic translation (pp. 426-429), however, her citations show that Kaindl’s original article had not aged a bit.

Naturally, Scholars who focus on one sign system can go into more detail. Low’s ‘pentathlon’ approach (2005), of singability, sense, naturalness, rhythm and rhyme, for instance, is tailored for the translation of lyrics. With a focus on imagery in MVs, Hanke (2006) looked at “an aesthetic, expressive practice of translating the infinite possibilities of mutating, hybrid sounds into images that travel across time and space” (p. 325, cited by Johnson, 2019, p. 427). Scholars of translation have also looked at the relationship between voice and music and dance, including the way that “dance is itself a physical translation – a translation of the dancer’s body through space” (Smith, 2003, p. 33). One mode of signification that Kaindl did not consider, because of the nature of his objects of study, was translations of songs into sign language, which Mark Harrison discussed in terms of ‘sign covers’ (2013).¹ Harrison was contributing to a major development in audiovisual or media translation studies kicked off by Díaz Cintas, Orero, and Remael (2007), who promoted ‘media for all’. Accessibility remains a major theme in recent work in audiovisual or media translation studies (see Greco and Romero-Fresco, 2023).

In proposing ‘embodied song’, Vicky Fisher (2021) unites sign-singing with “a range of non-acoustic features such as gestural body movements and dance” (p. 2). She writes that her research “goes beyond the translation of lyrics, by combining poetic sign language with other bodily movements to embody the para-linguistic expressive and musical features that enhance the message of a song” (p. 1), but she clearly construes translation broadly in referring, for instance, to “translating the ‘feeling’ into movement” (p. 12). To understand how information in one sign system might translate into another, she builds an elaborate “grounded cognition framework” (p. 1), but the semiotic parallels seem intuitive: a fall in pitch can through an iconic homology get (p. 14).

In describing a song as a ‘gestalt’ (p. 2), Fisher broaches the final issue for this literature review, the effect of simultaneous translation that a contemporary MV for a pop song, particularly one that includes bilingual singing, can produce. Simultaneity is of course a basic concept in interpreting studies. Strictly speaking, a simultaneous interpreter interprets what he or she hears after a delay of a second or two, but it is also obvious that any simultaneous interpreter is listening, cognizing, speaking, and spontaneously gesturing (Zagar-Galvão, 2009), all at the same time. So it was surprising to me when, with the duet between Abao and DJ Didilong in mind, I went looking for literature on simultaneity in bilingual pop duets and found nothing. There is some literature on consecutive or serial singing in bilingual songs. Minority-language recording artists often sing the verses in the majority language and the chorus in the minority language (Sterk, 2022; Przybylski, 2018).

¹ A popular example of a sign cover that postdates the publication of Harrison’s article is Ruby’s interpretation of Joni Mitchell’s ‘Both Sides Now’ for her audition in the film ‘CODA’ (2021).

Discussions of ‘bilingual duets’ are of songs that follow the same pattern, of switching languages for the chorus. For instance, Sinik sings the verses of ‘*Je réalise*’ in French, then James Blunt sings the chorus in English (Le Nevez, 2008). But one of the distinctive features of music is that simultaneity, including verbal simultaneity, can be a virtue. Unlike in normal conversation, which descends into cacophony when two or more people are talking at the same time, in a work of music, two singers can sing different lyrics in different languages to different melodies at the same time, with harmonious effect.²

The option of simultaneity is why ‘code switching’ is inadequate as a theory of what is going on in bilingual songs. In their article on the topic, Davies and Bentahila discuss a number of fascinating examples of “the atypical use of translation to create linguistically heterogeneous texts” (2008, p. 249), thereby “breaking down barriers: the barriers between languages themselves, between song genres and between audiences” (p. 268) or, conversely, “producing effects such as alienation and exclusion” (p. 247). But their approach needs to be qualified, and not just to accommodate simultaneity. The motivations for code-switching into or out of an endangered minority language may range from breaking down barriers to exclusion, but not everyone will be capable of it. Hence, one cannot assume that “[c]ode switches within a song may ... be seen as deliberate artifices, whose authors consciously imitate the patterns used *in naturally occurring code switching*” (p. 251, italics mine). Code switches into a minority language in a song may be aspirational, reflective not of the actual situation but of one in which everyone in the community can speak the mother tongue.

Code-switching studies has clearly embraced the realization that people can multitask simultaneously in different channels for different sign systems, or even different channels for the same kind of sign system. Rudolph Troike wrote, “For speakers in code-switching mode, the evidence shows that the brain is in fact encoding the same message simultaneously in both languages, in parallel channels” (2008, p. 145). Given that code-mixing is used for code-switching within an utterance, perhaps ‘code juxtaposition’ can be used for the situation in simultaneously bilingual pop songs such as Abao and DJ Didilong’s ‘Tjakudain 無奈’.

3. Objects of study, research questions, and method

With the MVs for Abao’s 2019 Paiwanese-language album *Kinakaian* 母親的舌頭 as my objects of study, my research questions are:

1. How did interlingual and intersemiotic translation figure in the production of Abao’s MVs³ and with what motivation?

² A popular monolingual example is Snoop Dogg and Anna Kendrick singing ‘Winter Wonderland’ and ‘Here Comes Santa Claus’ in *Pitch Perfect 2* (2015).

³ I refer to Abao’s MVs with the understanding that an MV is a collective effort. Rather than trying to tease out individual contributions, particularly by the MV directors Tseng Wei-yu and Huang Chia-wen, I assume Abao has partly authored them and authorized them in their entirety.

2. What is the significance of serial and simultaneous translation in Abao's MVs in a settler society?

My method for answering these two questions is 'hermeneutic', based on semiotics. Pierce's tripartite typology of signs, namely symbol, icon, and index, applies equally well to verbal and visual systems. Pierce didn't just invent a typology of signs, he also proposed a theory of the contextual interpretation of signs in relation to other signs. As Jakobson put it, "the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign, especially a sign 'in which it is more fully developed', as Peirce, the deepest inquirer into the essence of signs, insistently stated" (2000, p. 114). I find Jakobson's own tripartite typology (2000, p. 113) of intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic translation perfectly serviceable; a language like Paiwanese is a special kind of semiotic system.⁴

To access the authorial intention behind a given sign, I watched a number of 'paravideos', including a promotional interview, a 'making-of' video, and a series of language-learning videos. I also conducted a mediated e-mail interview with Abao through her assistant Superman and asked TSL teacher Ting Li-fen questions on Facebook Messenger. To understand audience reception beyond my own idiosyncratic response, I looked at YouTube comments, though these have to be understood in the larger context of Taiwan society and culture, past and present.

4. Abao and her album '*Kinakaian* 母親的舌頭' (Mother's Tongue)

Abao was born in 1983 in Taitung County in southeastern Formosa, the main island of Taiwan, also known as the Republic of China. She grew up in a Paiwan village, where the Paiwan were one of the nine groups of 'mountain compatriots', as Indigenous peoples were called at the time. At the time, the government was still trying, under martial law and a monolingual national language policy, to forcibly integrate into a single Chinese nation different constituencies in Taiwan's multicultural society, including speakers of Austronesian languages such as Paiwanese whose ancestors had settled Formosa from about five thousand years ago and speakers of Taiwanese whose ancestors had settled the island from about four hundred years ago.⁵ Back in 1983, Paiwan cultural practices were discouraged, as was the use of Paiwanese. Although Paiwanese was forbidden at school, it was used in church, and like most of Taiwan's Indigenous people Abao is Christian; she grew up Catholic. But the use of Indigenous languages in church only delayed a language shift. By the 1980s, Indigenous children like Abao were shifting to Chinese all over the country.

The year after Abao was born, the Alliance of Taiwan Aborigines launched the local Indigenous movement, and by the time she was ready to graduate from primary school,

⁴ Kaindl has more recently (2020, p. 60) criticized Jakobson for seemingly denying that a language was also a semiotic system. He has switched to a terminology of mode, medium, and genre. The problem with those terms is that even AV translation theorists use them interchangeably with sign system (Pérez-González, 2014, p. 120).

⁵ Taiwan's settler population is more complicated than just the Taiwanese. Hakka settlers arrived during the Qing Dynasty, and Mainlanders arrived with Chiang Kai-shek after 1949.

martial law had been lifted and the first stages of an Indigenous policy, which can be described as an attempt by the ruling party, the Kuomintang, to pivot to democratic politics, were being implemented. The term ‘mountain compatriot’ was thereby purged, as was the national language policy. Abao became officially Indigenous in 1994. In 1997, her people the Paiwan were recognized as Indigenous. With official recognition has come state support for Indigenous languages and cultures. There are now weekly classes in elementary schools for languages like Paiwanese, and cultural expression is encouraged as part of government programs to support Indigenous livelihoods. However healthy such cultures are in multicultural Taiwan, the languages are not. Most people of Abao’s age – she is forty-three years old at the time of writing – do not speak their ancestral language fluently, particularly if they left home to pursue higher education, as Abao did. Abao went to nursing college in Taipei, but never worked as a nurse. Instead she became a pop star. She formed a duo with a Mandopop singer named Brandy.

Abao’s mother had been a pop star in the era of vinyl records. Itinerant producers used to visit churches in Indigenous villages like Abao’s and scout out local talent. That was how Abao’s mother was discovered. Under the stage name Wang Chiu-lan (王秋蘭), meaning ‘royal autumn orchid’, she released an LP in the 1970s. On it she sang in a combination of Chinese, Japanese, and Paiwanese, though most of the Paiwanese lyrics were non-lexical vocables.

At the time, the production of such music was purely market-led. In the 1990s, the indie record company Wind Records released CDs with less commercialized Indigenous music in a musicological attempt to represent traditions. A decade later, when Abao & Brandy won a Golden Melody for best vocal group in 2004, the government had begun to encourage the production of Indigenous-language pop music. An Indigenous recording-artist award was added in 2003, and an Indigenous-language album award in 2005. The additions did not make the Golden Melodies entirely fair; there were best male and female recording-artist awards for both Chinese and Taiwanese. But the added awards were steps in the right direction, and government initiatives: the Golden Melodies, Taiwan’s Grammys, are awarded by the Ministry of Culture.

With the growing acceptance and even embrace of Indigenous peoples in Taiwan society, Abao decided early in the 2010s to reinvent herself as an Indigenous(-language) singer. Abao 阿爆 is her stage name and an allusion to her hair (or wig) style; an ‘afro’ is literally ‘explosive head’ (*bàozhàtóu* 爆炸頭) in Chinese, where the word for ‘head’ can also mean ‘hairstyle’. While continuing to use Abao, she started introducing herself as Aljenljeng Tjaluvie, her Paiwanese name, or as A-jeng-jeng (阿仍仍), a Chinese transliteration of her Paiwanese personal name Aljenljeng. She also started covering her hair with a scarf to make herself look like a shaman.

Abao has, to date, released three Paiwanese albums. The first was an album of traditional Paiwan tunes recorded with her mother in 2014. Two years later she released her first Paiwanese pop album, which won the Indigenous-Language Album of the Year award in 2017. The tune for the R&B-themed title song ‘Vavayan 女人’, meaning ‘woman’

subtitles/CC settings in YouTube, the soft-coded English translation appears centred slightly below the middle of the screen.

The Song of the Year at the Golden Melodies in 2020, ‘Thank You’ was dedicated ‘to all of my angels’, including nurses during the pandemic but also the ancestors whose totem poles figure so prominently in the MV.⁶ The lyrics were composed and translated pedagogically (Sterk, 2022). Listening to the chorus, you cannot help learning two Paiwanese ways of saying thank you, *maljimalji* and *masalu*, through the use of rhythm and rhyme. The sentence in the soft-coded title in Figure 2 never appear in the song.



Figure 2. The climax of the chorus of ‘Thank You’

What Abao and her backup singers actually sing, in two rhythmically identical lines, is:

thank you thank you thank you
maljimalji masalu

The ‘palatalized l’ in *malji* and *masalu* as the ‘agent focus’ form of *salu*, meaning ‘to believe’, are two of the issues that Abao addresses in ten YouTube videos dedicated to the vocabulary and grammar of the Paiwanese lyrics from the ten songs on the album.

But language revitalization was only one motivation for the translation that made the album possible. As the following analyses of two singles on the album show, translation broadly construed was also a creative inspiration.

4.1. ‘*Tjakudain* 無奈 (How I wish I could)

According to the online Paiwanese dictionary, *tjakudain* is a phrase: *tja* means ‘we’ and *kudain* means ‘can’t’.⁷ The Taiwanese translation is *bô-nāi* 無奈, ‘How I wish I could’. This sentiment is explicitly expressed by Abao in the song, in reply to a boy’s attempt to woo her.

⁶ The MV was shot in the Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church in the village of Kapiyan, which is located in Pingtung County, across the mountains from Abao’s home village.

⁷ <https://e-dictionary.ilrdf.org.tw/pwn/search.htm> (Accessed: 14 July 2025).

Rebuffed, he ends up feeling the same way. The official English translation is: 'What can we do?'

Abao identifies as a Paiwan woman in the song, and her would-be loverboy is Taiwanese culturally and linguistically. Taiwanese was the language of the ancestors of over two-thirds of the people of Taiwan, and it is still widely spoken today; but a shift from Taiwanese to Chinese that began under martial law, under the same national language policy that suppressed languages like Paiwanese, is ongoing. Although it is spoken by millions, Taiwanese is, like Paiwanese, an endangered language. In this duet, Abao was making common cause with a singer from a broadly similar sociolinguistic background.

DJ Didilong 李英宏 was born in 1986 in Taipei County. Like Abao, he achieved his first success in Mandopop, as a member of the band Rock the Party 大囍門, which won the same award as Abao had won with Brandy in 2004, for best vocal group, in 2010. Like Abao, DJ Didilong switched to his ancestral language for a solo album in 2016. He was nominated for album of the year, best Taiwanese-language album, and best Taiwanese male recording artist in 2017.

The MV for 'Tjakudain 無奈' begins outside a nightclub in Taipei. In a moment of love at first sight, Abao and DJ Didilong see each other across a crowded square. They make eyes at each other and obviously agree to meet again; the MV cuts to an indoor space, and the protagonists have changed outfits. They flirt by smiling at each other and teaching each other dance moves. She would love to keep seeing him, she sings, but she is Paiwan, from the hills, and he is 'Plains'. Her reason for rejecting him is egregious in a local context. Most Indigenous people in Taiwan are open to interethnic relationships or even marriages; in fact, Abao herself married a Han Taiwanese photographer in 2017.

At any rate, the climax of the song is a simultaneous bilingual duet between the would-be lovers about whether they are different and in what cultural respects. One moment of this duet is shown in Figure 3.

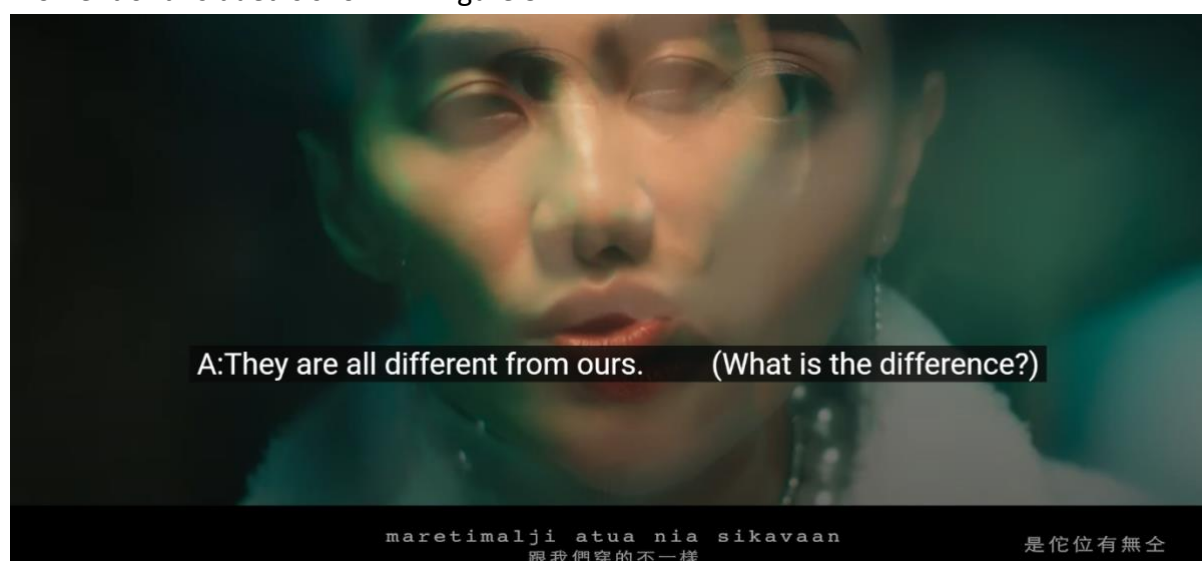


Figure 3. Simultaneous bilingual singing in 'Tjakudain 無奈'

The soft-coded title is Abao's statement with DJ Didilong's simultaneous response in brackets. The hardcoded subtitles at the bottom are in Paiwanese and Chinese, while the hardcoded subtitle at the bottom right is in Taiwanese, the language in which DJ Didilong is singing. The visuals of DJ Didilong and Abao are layered, as a graphic translation of their simultaneous singing. In this particular still, DJ Didilong is in front of Abao, but at other moments she is in front, as a way of suggesting the back and forth of their dialogue. Abao has just mentioned his shirt and shoes, and now she asserts that his attire is different from hers, while he asks what the difference is. This exchange is absurd; Abao is wearing fashionable threads in this scene, not traditional robes. She goes on to cite their difference in skin colour, which she fears her father will object to; DJ Didilong wonders what difference skin colour should make.

DJ Didilong pulls out all the stops by crossing over from Taiwanese to Paiwanese. First he rhymes *djavadjavay*, Paiwanese for 'hello', with *liáu-kái* 了解, Taiwanese for 'get to know you better', which is what he hopes to do by visiting her village. He goes on to demonstrate that he has done his homework: he can now guess her father's taste in alcohol, whether it is 58% Kinmen-brand sorghum wine or Paolyta-B, so he can bring the right gift when, or rather if, he visits her parents' home.⁸ When he realizes the situation is hopeless, he crosses over for a second time, rhyming *dja kudain*, 'we can't', with *lí m̄ tah-ìng* 你毋答應, 'you won't agree', an example of what Jeff Hilson (2013) has called 'homophonic translation'. Both crossovers can also be understood as indexical translations on the level of semantics: saying hello can mark the start of getting to know someone, and the reason why 'we can't' is that 'you won't agree'.

While the fruit translates the flower – DJ Didilong wants to give Abao 'the prettiest flower' – the flower of love does not bear fruit in this song. It implicitly does in the title track.

4.2. 'Kinakaian 母親的舌頭' (Mother's Tongue)

According to the online Paiwanese dictionary, *kina* means mother and *kai* speech; and the *-an* at the end of *kinakaian* is a 'locative focus' suffix. Literally, *kinakaian* is 'the place of mother speech' or 'where mother speech is'. The word is glossed in Chinese as *mǔqīn de shétóu* 母親的舌頭, literally 'mother's tongue', which is actually a translation of the English idiom. 'Mother tongue' is usually calqued as *mǔyǔ* 母語, literally 'mother language', which seems more abstract. Of course, if 'tongue' in 'mother tongue' simply means 'language', then it is just as abstract. But it is possible that the 'tongue' in 'mother tongue' is a metonym; the tongue is an organ of speech. Along with the lips, it is one of the two most visibly mobile of the speech organs, and the hardest to learn to use to speak a foreign language fluently. Abao commented that learning Paiwanese was like physical exercise in

⁸ One audience member on YouTube found DJ Didilong's mention of alcoholic gifts entirely relatable: "I am Plains and speak fluent Taiwanese, while my wife is Bunun and speaks her ancestral language less fluently. This song perfectly illustrates Plains-Indigenous love; there are so many difficulties to overcome. But now my parents-in-law drink red wine with me."

that she had to use her ‘tongue muscle’ in unfamiliar ways. Her literal translation of ‘mother tongue’ into ‘mother’s tongue’ draws attention to the tongue’s mobility in speech. Such mobility is translated into other modes of movement in the MV.

The MV opens with a shot of a squirming infant, a highly mobile human who has just started learning to control his or her organs of movement for communication, not just lips and tongue but also arms and legs. Adults are similar to infants with respect to languages they do not know, like Paiwanese for most of the audience. To learn to speak such languages, they have to use their whole bodies in unfamiliar ways. In other words, there is a basis for audience identification with the infant. Like anyone, the infant has a natural repertoire of movements that might be put to work in communication, as suggested by the top-left still from the MV in Figure 4.

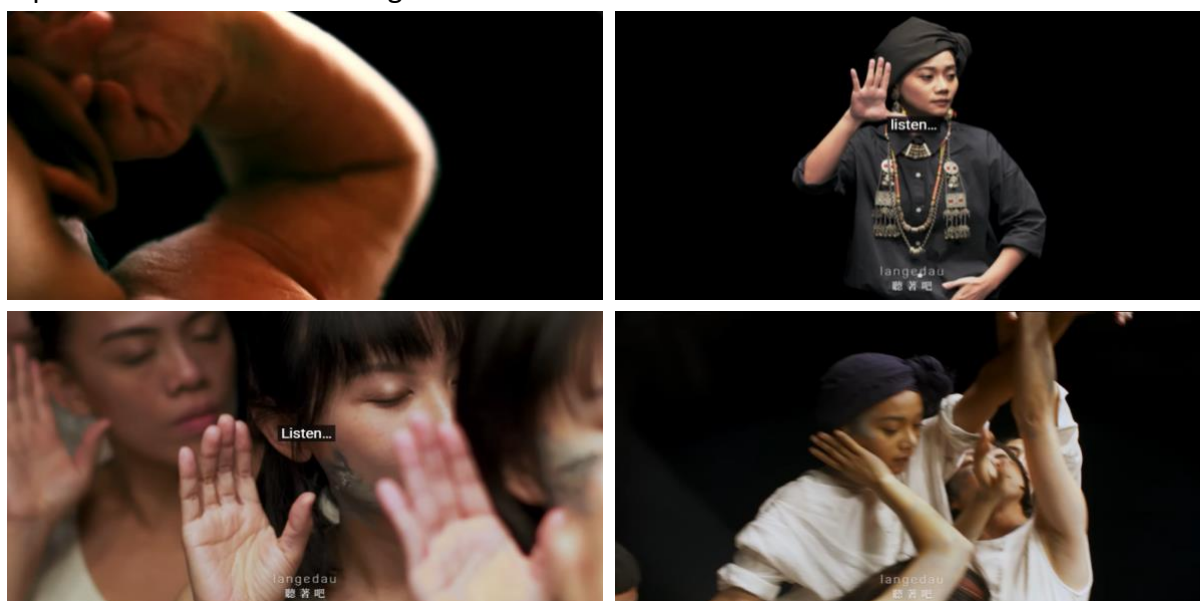


Figure 4: ‘Listen’ in Paiwanese, Chinese, English, TSL, and modern dance

The top-right still shows Abao playing the role of a Matriarch, a representative of Paiwan tradition, including the Paiwanese language, which she is teaching to anyone who will listen. You cannot see her tongue in the still, but you can see her lips move around that moment of the MV. You can also hear her sing the word for ‘listen’ in Paiwanese, read the word in the subtitles in Paiwanese, Chinese, and English, and watch her sign the word with her right hand. The TSL sign itself could be a symbol in Pierce’s sense, or an index or even an icon. That is, it could be arbitrary, it could mean ‘ear’ because the hand is placed by the ear, or it could be shaped like an ear or an extension of the ear; in the ‘making of’ ‘paravideo’, Abao jokes that she looks like Dumbo while making the sign. The translation of the sign into the three languages is unambiguously iconic, based on semantic similarity. The bottom-left still shows a line of dancers making the same sign as the word for ‘listen’ is simultaneously sung and subtitled. The dancers are in the same situation as the baby: they are learning the language by imitating the Matriarch. They may be dancing the same sign in the bottom-right still; one of the dancers has her hand next to the Matriarch’s ear.

It is significant that the Matriarch is with the dancers in the bottom-right still, because of the content of the verse that precedes the exhortation to listen.

inika sun napacun tjanuaken,
even though you've never heard of me,
ljakua a ku varung i tjanusun...
my faith and belief are with you...

In the chorus the Matriarch makes a case for why the tradition is worth learning:

azua tja kinakaian,
our language is there, so natural,
bulay aravac aia...
it is so beautiful

In the MV, the word for 'our' or 'we' is signed as it is simultaneously sung and subtitled, as shown in the top-left still of Figure 5 below.



Figure 5. 'Our' in Paiwanese, Chinese, English, TSL, and modern dance

The problem from the learner's perspective is that the utterance is more than one word, and one cannot know for sure which word the sign is a translation of, or vice versa. That is why TSL consultant Ding Li-fen did a word-by-word TSL cover video, showing that the sign is an inclusive circular motion made by a downward pointing index finger, in the top-right still. The dancers in the bottom-left still are making the same sign. Whatever kind of sign this is, it is also translated iconically, based on semantic similarity. Even though they are not pointing downwards, the dancers make the same sign with their bodies by forming a circle in the bottom-right still, in which the baby appears in the arms of Lin I-chin, the founder of

the modern dance troupe who helped make the video. The singing voice and the subtitles are no longer simultaneous translations of the sign. The effect is not one of disjuncture in Kaindl's sense; no irony is intended. The effect is rather a sense of everything everywhere all at once. Once it is processed sequentially, the Matriarch's message is understood as a gestalt, as in Figure 6.

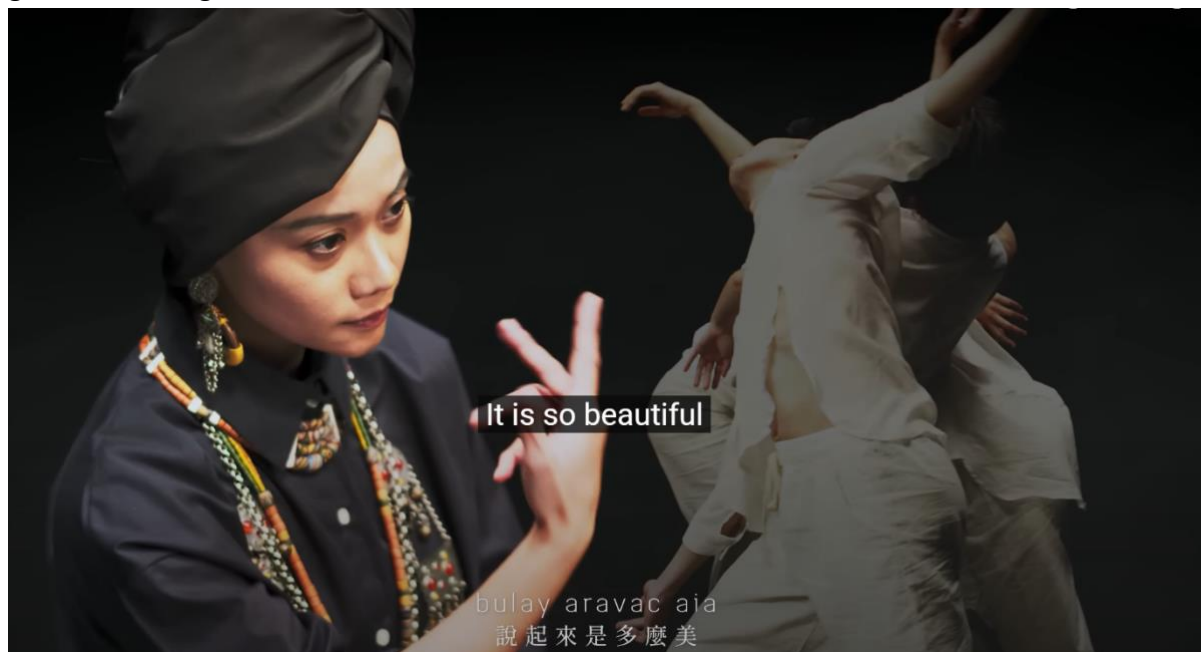


Figure 6. Simultaneous singing, signing, and dancing as a gestalt in 'Kinakaian 母親的舌頭'

The still shows how the scene has been divided through editorial layering into two spaces, a space of signing and a space of dancing. The Matriarch makes the sign for 'natural' (not 'beautiful', according to Ting Li-fen) as she sings it in her space, and the dancers dance the same sign in their space.

Abao joined the TSL teacher, Ting Li-fen, and the modern dance teacher, Lin I-chin in a 'parallel' space, a 'making-of' video that offers insight into the ways in which translation inspired the creation of the MV. Entitled 'Translating the words that my old lady (or mother) says (or said) together' (一起翻譯老媽說的話), the video makes it clear that there *was* an original, the lyrics that Abao and her mother composed. The lyrics were not, of course, original in the sense that they appeared *ex nihilo*. Abao's mother was a *bricoleur* (Kaindl, 2005, p. 242), drawing on preexisting resources, the words in her language, as was Abao, who adapted a traditional tune into the chorus.⁹ Once the lyrics were ready, they were translated into TSL by Ting Li-fen, who taught TSL to Abao, and the TSL translation was relayed into dance by Lin I-chin, who performed the dance with her Bare Feet ensemble.

In the video, Ting Li-fen describes the role of body language in sign language in terms of 'non-manual signs' (非手信號), drawing a semiotic parallel between what signers and dancers do with their bodies in space that can serve as a basis for translation between the

⁹ Kaindl acknowledges Dick Hebdige for applying these terms to the study of popular music in his 1979 book *Subculture*.

two sign systems. Inspired by German dancer and choreographer Pina Bausch, Lin I-chin adopted an iconic approach to the translation of signs into dance moves, with what Fisher called “greater use of three-dimensionality and whole-body movements” (2021, p. 15). Lin refers, for instance, to ‘using the legs to speak’, as shown in Figure 7.



Figure 7. Speaking with arm and hand (Ting Li-fen, left) and leg and foot (Lin I-chin, right)

This particular translation of a TSL sign into ‘limb language’ did not make it into the video, but nonetheless represents an attempt by Lin I-chin to ‘create a common language with Abao’, a language that can then be used, through translation, to create multilingual, multimodal, and multimedial works of art.

Abao did not, however, make ‘Kinakaian 母親的舌頭’ simply for art’s sake. In the final section of this article, I inquire into the significance of her album in a settler society context.

5. Discussion

The preceding analysis has partly answered my first research question: How did interlingual and intersemiotic translation figure in the production of Abao’s MVs and with what motivation? The motivation for their production must have been overdetermined, involving the profit motive for some of the parties involved, including Abao. Abao started out as a Mandopop singer, and while she has reinvented herself as a Paiwan(ese) singer, her songs remain mainstream. In a sense, she has domesticated the Paiwan tradition by combining elements of it with popular musical elements.

Her album, however, should not be dismissed as an exploitative example of ‘world music’, where Paiwan tradition was mined, refined, and minted. In an interview she gave to *CommonWealth Magazine*, Abao said that making music, including MVs, in a language that is usually invisible in contemporary Taiwan society, thereby making it more visible, and giving people a way of learning it, made her feel useful. Singing in Paiwanese also made her feel connected to her mother and other family members of her mother’s generation. As matriarchs, they are all representatives of Paiwan tradition, on which foundation Abao has been building not just her professional image but also her personal identity. These comments flesh out her personal motivation.

They also suggest an answer to my second research question: What is the significance of serial and simultaneous translation in Abao’s MVs in a settler society? The result of the

serial translation process that produced Abao's MVs was a harmonious simultaneous translation in the MVs. This translational harmony can serve as a metaphor for democracy and indigeneity in a settler society. Translation, as Nicole Doerr argued in *Political Translation*, can be a way of "deepening democracy" (2018, p. 8). It seems to me that deep democracy can be discussed in relation to Abao's keywords, visibility and learnability. Marginal groups in any democracy have a right to be visible in social representations like the circle of dancers in 'Kinakaian 母親的舌頭', and able to express themselves by translating their perspectives into terms that other groups can try to understand. Conversations between groups in any society can obviously be serial, but once in a while, a consensus can form, as at the end of 'Tjakudain 無奈'. This particular consensus was not what everyone wanted, but at least it is based on mutual respect.

In her interview with CommonWealth, Abao commented that if people find an unfamiliar language like Paiwanese intimidating, they can at least understand rhythm and melody. Music then opens a door to learning the language, and translation can get you through the door. Learning, in fact, can be thought of in terms of translation. Being slightly different, every repetition in the learning process is a kind of translation. At first we tend to repeat what we have observed, learning serially. When we get better at mirroring (Fisher, 2021, p. 8) a model's movements, we can 'repeat' in real time, learning simultaneously. Learnability develops on accessibility. By making her MVs with a Taiwanese singer, a TSL signer, and a modern dancer, Abao was not only giving Deaf people a chance to appreciate the title track or people who do not understand Paiwanese and Taiwanese or even Chinese to appreciate all her songs. She was also giving all sorts of people a chance to learn a new language, or two or three.

Translation is finally a metaphor for indigeneity in a settler society. For First Nations, indigeneity is a relation not just with settlers, but also with traditions that are embodied physically in elders or spiritually in ancestors. Paiwan people today are in some sense consecutive translators of that tradition, because the elders or ancestors preceded them in the world. But in 'Mother's Tongue' the past is present. The Matriarch sings from some unknown point in the past, and people in the present listen and interpret, but then she joins them in the present. For people who believe in angels, the translation of tradition is also simultaneous. This idea might have given Abao some consolation when her mother Wang Chiu-lan died in 2021, aged 66, as might one of the lyrics that she and her mother created for the title track: *Ijakua a ku varung i tjanusun*, my faith and belief are with you.

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¹⁰ This is the playlist for the 'Kinakaian 母親的舌頭' language-learning videos.

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INTERACTIVE SIGN SINGING AND EMBODIED SONG FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING USING HOLOGRAM TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the impact of hologram singing technology on the experiences of the deaf and hard of hearing. The research aims to evaluate how effectively this technology enhances understanding and interaction with musical content by integrating sign language into holographic performances. An experimental approach was employed, involving a diverse sample of deaf individuals divided into two groups: one exposed to hologram technology and another that was not. Results indicated that participants utilizing holograms demonstrated a better understanding of songs and engaged more actively with the artistic performance. The study recommends expanding the use of hologram technology in arts and music to promote inclusivity and emphasizes the necessity for developing software that improves the accuracy of converting audio signals into embodied movements. Furthermore, fostering collaboration between artists and developers is crucial for broadening future applications of this technology, ultimately enhancing the cultural quality of life for the targeted groups.

KEYWORDS: Artistic Performance; Embodied Movements; Holograms; Sign Language; Signal Conversion Accuracy; Singing Technology

1. Introduction

Hologram interactive sign singing represents an innovative advancement in the arts and music, opening new horizons for cultural interaction between deaf individuals and the hearing community. Deaf people experience rhythm through vibrations (Darrow, 2006), perceive music through visual elements like synchronized light shows, color-coded notes, and effects reflecting musical dynamics and tempo (Katan & Taibi, 2021), and engage with performances through expressive sign language. Deaf dancers rely on visual cues and movement (Bläsing et al., 2019), while tools such as haptic chairs and 'Sound Shirts' enable them to physically feel the music (Nanayakkara et al., 2009). These creative approaches demonstrate that music can be experienced in ways that extend beyond hearing.

In this context, hologram technology comes as an effective tool to enhance deaf people's experience in following musical arts, as it combines visual movement and sign language in a way that makes musical content more interactive and comprehensible.

This study seeks to explore the impact of hologram technology on the deaf audience, focusing on how to improve their musical experience by integrating visual interaction and embodied signs. The research revolves around several key aspects related to deaf people's experience with music, including social and artistic interaction, the challenges that this technology may face, and future opportunities that could contribute to the inclusion of deaf people in cultural and artistic activities in a more comprehensive manner. Many previous studies indicate the importance of integrating technology in providing musical

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experiences tailored to the deaf (Nanayakkara et al., 2009; Lamont, 2011; Kraus et al., 2014) but there is still a lack of research that focuses specifically on the use of holograms in this context.

Therefore, this study is an attempt to bridge this gap, by providing direct experiences and analytical results that illustrate the impact of this technology on the understanding and participation of deaf people in the arts. The study includes an experimental methodology that aims to evaluate the effectiveness of holograms in enhancing the interaction of deaf people with music, as it includes collecting qualitative and quantitative data through live experiences and musical performances. The study will also address the psychological and social effects resulting from this experience and how it can contribute to increasing society's awareness of the capabilities of deaf people and their contributions to culture and art.

Through this introduction, we hope to be able to shed light on the importance of innovation in the field of arts, and how modern technology can contribute to improving the quality of life for marginalized groups. This study seeks to achieve a deeper understanding of the impact of holograms on the experience of deaf people with music, paving the way for exploring new opportunities to enhance inclusivity in arts and culture.

2. Review of related literature

Cross-modal translation refers to the transformation of information from one sensory modality to another. In the case of music for deaf audiences, this means converting auditory information—such as rhythm, melody, emotion, and structure—into visual (e.g., sign language, lighting effects) and tactile (e.g., vibrotactile feedback) formats. The aim is not simply to replicate the sound but to convey its expressive and aesthetic qualities through alternative sensory experiences. The intersection of music and accessibility for the deaf and hard of hearing has garnered increasing academic interest, with recent studies investigating how technology and embodied experiences can bridge sensory gaps (Fisher, 2021; Maler, 2013). Hologram technology, as proposed in this study, represents an innovative step toward enhancing the engagement and experience of the deaf and hard of hearing in musical performances.

This review integrates critical concepts from the existing literature, focusing on the cultural and sensory dimensions of music, sign singing, and technological interventions for this specific constituency, and positions the current study within this growing body of research. Deaf culture has long maintained a unique relationship with music, where auditory experiences are translated into visual, tactile, and embodied forms. The concepts of 'corpaurality' and 'vusicality' are introduced by Brétéché (2021) to articulate how deaf people and hard-of-hearing individuals engage with music through embodied and visual modalities. According to Brétéché, 'corpaurality' refers to the physical, bodily experience of music—how vibrations and rhythms are perceived through the skin, muscles, and bones rather than through auditory channels while 'vusicality' describes the visual experience of

music—how visual cues such as movement, color, light, and rhythm allow for a non-auditory but perceptually rich engagement with musical performances.

The potential of cross-modal music experiences, where non-auditory senses are engaged to create a more holistic musical experience for the deaf and hard of hearing, has been elaborated by Choi et al. (2024) who explore how technology can be tailored to enhance personal musical preferences. This approach emphasizes the importance of individual agency in how music is perceived and enjoyed, highlighting the evolving role of technology in making music more accessible and meaningful for diverse audiences.

The present study's hologram-based approach, which integrates embodied sign language into performances, aligns with this notion of cross-modal engagement, providing a more personalized and immersive experience for the deaf and hard-of-hearing audience. Beyond cultural and sensory dimensions, music has been recognized as a valuable tool for cognitive and linguistic development in this community.

Embedding music into language and literacy instruction can benefit young deaf and hard-of-hearing learners, as it enhances cognitive development by providing a multisensory approach to learning (Nelson et al., 2016) that engages visual, tactile, and kinesthetic senses. For example, learners may see rhythm patterns through visual aids (Cacciato, 2022), feel beats and vibrations through their bodies (Hopkins et al., 2023), and move physically in rhythm, helping to reinforce language patterns, phonological awareness, and memory (Baijal et al., 2012).

Focusing on individual experiences in music education for deaf and hard-of-hearing children is crucial, with an emphasis on adaptive and inclusive methods that address diverse sensory needs. Adaptive methods involve intentional modifications to teaching strategies, tools, or environments that support meaningful participation by accommodating the specific needs and abilities of each learner. Examples of adaptive strategies include using visual cues such as hand signals or visual rhythm prompts, as well as incorporating vibration-based feedback (allowing the child to feel the beat through a resonating instrument) to help engage with musical elements like rhythm and pitch (Yennari et al., 2020). Although Yennari et al.'s research focuses on children, the principles of individualized and adaptive engagement are equally relevant to the current study's aim of enhancing musical experiences for deaf and hard-of-hearing adults through the use of advanced hologram technology.

The potential of augmented reality in training music perception for the hard of hearing is highlighted through the Holoband experience, which enables users to interact with music in a more tangible and visual way. The Holoband creates a dynamic environment where music is not only heard but also seen and felt—translating sound into visual patterns, vibrations, and interactive elements. This approach allows users to engage with music on their own terms, transforming abstract audio into a physical experience that they can connect with. Findings suggest that such technology can significantly enhance musical understanding and engagement, providing a foundation for exploring holograms as a tool

to improve musical performances for deaf people and hard-of-hearing audiences (Ivanyi et al., 2022).

The use of holographic interpreters in a mixed-reality classroom setting has been investigated to demonstrate how holograms can create more engaging and interactive learning environments for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. This study highlights the potential of holograms to offer a dynamic and immersive experience, which directly supports the focus on hologram-assisted sign-singing performances. Sign singing and song signing are closely related, but there's a fine difference. Sign singing is a more expressive, artistic performance where sign language is used to interpret a song's rhythm and emotion, often seen in deaf culture and performance settings (Yennari et al., 2020). Song signing, on the other hand, is typically more literal and used in educational contexts, where the focus is on simply signing the lyrics without necessarily capturing the full musicality (Schraer-Joiner, 2014).

Moreover, Yamamoto et al. (2024) identify challenges in lyric detection for deaf and hard -of-hearing individuals and propose technological solutions to improve accessibility. Their findings support the idea that hologram technology could enhance the clarity and accessibility of musical lyrics, an area that the current study addresses by integrating embodied sign language with holographic visuals to improve comprehension and enjoyment of musical content. The present study positions itself within this rich body of literature by addressing the gaps in how music can be made more accessible and engaging for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals through the use of hologram technology. While previous studies have explored various technological interventions, few have combined holography with embodied sign singing to create a more immersive and multisensory musical experience. By doing so, the current study contributes to the ongoing conversation about inclusivity in the arts and culture, offering a novel approach to enhancing the participation of deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals in musical performances.

Furthermore, the study adds to the understanding of how experiences, particularly through sign language, can be augmented by holograms to provide a richer, more interactive experience. This could pave the way for future innovations in both technology and performance art. By building on existing research in music accessibility, embodiment, and technological interventions, the current study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on how the arts can be made more accessible to all, regardless of sensory abilities.

3. Interacting with music through technology

Digital technology has transformed how users engage with sound, rhythm, and performance. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) allow users to immerse themselves in multisensory musical environments. These experiences are particularly valuable for the deaf and hard of hearing, enabling music to be visualized and felt through light effects, vibrations, and spatial design (Cheng, 2024). Systems like EarVR use vibromotors to convey spatial audio cues via haptic feedback, enabling deaf participants to

locate and interact with sound sources in virtual environments (Mirzaei et al., 2020), while augmented experiences integrate visual layers over real-world settings, offering an enriched connection to music beyond traditional auditory channels.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and digital platforms have also redefined music creation and consumption. Artists use AI tools for composing, interpreting, and enhancing musical expression, while platforms like RL-Duet generate real-time accompaniment based on user input (Jiang et al., 2020). These technologies expand accessibility by offering personalized, adaptive learning and performance experiences. However, it is holography—creating 3D visual images using light interference—that most directly connects to the study at hand. This leads us into a more focused exploration of holograms and their application in musical performance for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Within this expanding digital ecosystem, holography stands out as a groundbreaking technology that enables the creation of vivid, three-dimensional images using the interference of light waves. Unlike traditional visuals, holograms can appear lifelike without requiring special glasses or equipment. The origins of this technology date back to the mid-twentieth century, when physicist Dennis Gabor introduced holography as a technique for recording and reconstructing light reflected from physical objects (Huang et al., 2018; Gao et al., 2021). Since then, holography has undergone extensive development, evolving from early experiments into advanced systems capable of producing high-resolution, dynamic images. Improvements in laser technologies have led to more precise and vibrant displays, making holography applicable across a range of fields from scientific visualization to marketing, education, and, notably, the arts.

In the entertainment sector, holograms have been used to reimagine musical performances, reviving iconic figures and presenting them to modern audiences. The late singer Whitney Houston, for instance, was brought back to the stage through holographic projection, enabling posthumous live performances (BASE Hologram & Whitney Houston Estate, 2019; Gompertz, 2020). In the Arab world, the legendary Egyptian Singer Umm Kulthum appeared in concerts across Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Jordan, where audiences experienced her iconic voice accompanied by live orchestras and enhanced visual effects (Saeed, 2019). These performances transcend conventional boundaries by merging live musicians with holographic personas, offering audiences a hybrid, immersive musical encounter.

In education, holography has enabled the visualization of complex musical, scientific, or artistic concepts in a three-dimensional space, making abstract content more tangible and engaging for students. These applications have proven particularly useful in music education, where spatial and visual learning can enhance understanding of performance techniques and compositional structures.

Despite its promise, holography still faces challenges, most notably the cost of producing high-quality holograms, which can restrict their widespread adoption. However, continued innovation is gradually reducing costs and improving accessibility, paving the way for broader implementation in both educational and artistic domains.

In short, holography, along with VR, AR, and AI, exemplifies how advanced technologies are reshaping musical interaction, production, and pedagogy. These tools offer new possibilities for multisensory engagement, greater inclusivity, and cross-modal experiences especially relevant for communities such as the deaf and hard of hearing, for whom visual translation of music can provide a powerful alternative to auditory experience. As development continues, holographic technology promises to further transform the landscape of music and performance in ways previously unimaginable.

4. The concept of music for the deaf

The concept of music for the deaf goes beyond the traditional understanding that associates music with sound and rhythm to involve new aspects of the musical experience (Fulford et al., 2011). It is often assumed that music is an art form that relies primarily on the ability to hear. However, recent studies (Levänen & Hamdorf, 2001; Fulford et al., 2011; Good et al., 2014) have shown that deaf people can experience music through other senses such as sight and touch, opening new horizons for their engagement with this art form.

Deaf people have different ways of interacting with music as they can feel the rhythm through the vibrations that travel through the ground or by directly touching the instruments, which helps them relate to music in a different way than the hearing community (Palmer & Ojala, 2022). Particularly when some auditory perception is involved, in the case of hard-of-hearing individuals (Zhou et al., 2024; Sutela & Ahonen, 2024), this becomes a complete musical experience that engages the whole body and emphasizes the appreciation of movement and mobility (Sutela & Ahonen, 2024).

Sign language plays a pivotal role in deaf people's understanding of music, as it is the primary means of communication among themselves and also between them and the hearing community. Through the use of sign language, deaf people can express thoughts and feelings associated with music not only for themselves as a form of self-expression (Bauman & Murray, 2014), but also for deaf and hearing audiences.

Sign singing goes beyond simply translating lyrics into signs to include the transfer of rhythm, melody, and emotional content embedded in music (Bahan 2006). Indeed, signers can visually represent melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre, texture, and poetic features through performance (Maler 2013). The emotional dimension is communicated through facial expressions, body language, and signing style, using resources that have long been exploited by dancers and singers (Hatch, 2021; Sutela & Ahonen, 2024). As for rhythm, this comes into play as interpreters synchronize their gestures with the beat and tempo of the music, creating a visual rhythm analogous to the auditory one—a phenomenon examined by Sutela and Ahonen (2024) in studies of music sensation across the senses. The visual-aesthetic element transforms sign language into a performance art, using expressive movement and spatial dynamics, which draw upon embodied music cognition (Lim, 2022; Sutela & Ahonen, 2024). Finally, the cultural and symbolic dimension allows interpreters to creatively convey idioms, metaphors, and cultural context embedded in music, supporting

deep contextual understanding (Lim, 2022). Together, these interconnected dimensions transform music into a rich, multimodal experience for the deaf community.

It is worth noting that the musical experience is not only a personal issue for deaf people, but also reflects the comprehensiveness of art and its ability to integrate different social and artistic groups in society (Sutela & Ahonen, 2024). When music is presented in an interactive way that includes visual and tactile dimensions, this contributes to enhancing mutual understanding between the deaf and hearing communities, and also contributes to reducing the social and psychological gaps that deaf people may face (Nanayakkara et al., 2009).

Understanding music for the deaf requires us to think about how to redefine art and how to adapt artistic experiences to suit the needs of different individuals, contributing to creating a more open and diverse artistic environment. This also requires the cooperation of artists and specialists in the field of technology and arts to develop artistic content that meets the needs of all segments of society. In conclusion, it can be said that the concept of music for the deaf is a multidimensional concept that goes beyond sound and rhythm to include new senses and experiences. By integrating sign language and modern technologies, a rich and enjoyable musical experience can be provided that contributes to enhancing social and artistic interaction between the deaf and hearing communities, paving the way for a more inclusive future in the world of arts.

5. Hologram technology application in sign singing

Hologram technology has opened new horizons across various artistic fields, particularly music. Its use in sign singing represents a significant step toward integrating the deaf and hard of hearing into the musical experience. This technology enables them to interact with music in a new way relies on visual signals instead of sound alone.

Sign singing using holograms relies on a series of steps that begin with analyzing the musical texts and translating them into sign language, before converting these signals into three-dimensional displays that can be displayed using hologram technology.

Music, as we have seen, is a multisensory experience that transcends language. It combines rhythm, melody, harmony, and emotion in ways that deeply affect listeners—not only through sound, but also through movement, visual imagery, and physical sensation. Translating this rich experience into a form accessible to the deaf people community requires both artistic insight and advanced technology.

The first and most crucial step is selecting sign-language interpreters with a deep musical sensitivity. Understanding music in this context goes beyond recognizing lyrics—it involves an appreciation of rhythm, tone, tempo, mood, and emotional expression (Levitin, 2006). Interpreters must be trained not only in sign language but also in music performance or musicology. This can be assessed through auditions, musicality assessments, and prior experience interpreting live music events (Napier & Goswell, 2006).

Once the interpreter has developed their visual performance of the musical piece, the interpretation is recorded and then processed using advanced computer software to

create a three-dimensional holographic model. This model accurately replicates the interpreter's movements, allowing for a clear and engaging visual display of the musical content. Programs such as SignAll, which specialize in visual-linguistic data capture and sign translation, can support this process.

Holographic projections are created using laser-based systems with moving mirrors and precise lighting control, projecting a lifelike 3D interpreter onto a stage or screen. These holograms allow viewers to see the signs from multiple angles, creating an immersive visual experience (Gunkel, 2020).

Beyond the visual, further dimensions can be added by sensory technologies such as vibrating seats, wearable haptics (e.g., SubPac), or interactive floors—allow deaf audiences to feel the rhythm of the music. Studies show that vibrotactile feedback enables deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals to perceive aspects of musical rhythm and bass frequencies (Nanayakkara et al., 2009). Visual rhythm is reinforced through dynamic lighting systems synchronized with the music's tempo and emotional shifts, enhancing emotional impact and temporal structure (Chion, 2019).

This multimodal experience—holographic sign language, synchronized lights, and tactile feedback—creates a powerful, inclusive form of musical interaction. It transforms the traditional auditory experience into one that engages vision, touch, and movement, enabling deaf audiences to connect with music in a rich, meaningful way. Such experiences do not merely translate music—they reimagine it, making performance art accessible to a wider audience.

Integrating these technologies fosters cultural inclusion, empowering deaf individuals to participate fully in artistic and communal events. It bridges sensory gaps and affirms that music, at its core, is a universal language that can be felt, seen, and shared—whether or not one can hear it.

6. Experimental Study and Its Findings

This study represents an important step toward exploring the transformative potential of interactive sign singing using holograms for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. Recognizing that traditional audio-based musical experiences are inaccessible to this group, a new approach based on visual and sensory interaction was devised to bridge this gap and enable participants to engage with music from a rich, tangible visual perspective.

The study relied on the integration of expressive sign language and hologram technology to convey musical content, not only at the level of meaning but also at the level of aesthetics and emotional engagement. The basic hypothesis of this research was that the use of holograms could add greater depth to the musical experience through enhanced artistic expressions that touch the recipient's emotions and create a deeper connection to the artistic performance.

The study sample included 60 participants from three centers for the deaf in Jordan, 30 males and 30 females, ranging in age from 20 to 40. The participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group watched holographic performances, and a control

group watched performances in traditional song signing. The experimental play was designed using advanced 3D rendering technologies to integrate sign language performers with holographic visual effects, providing a multi-dimensional sensory experience.

The research methodology relied on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data-collection tools. A questionnaire was developed that included a set of questions measuring understanding of the musical content, the level of sensory and visual interaction, the sense of participation, and the overall aesthetic impression. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 20 participants—10 from the experimental group and 10 from the control group, to capture in-depth insights into their personal experiences and feelings during and after the performance. Questions included: “Did you feel you understood the content of the musical performance?”, “To what extent did you feel you were a part of the performance?”, “How much did you like the technology used?”, “Did you feel you were physically interacting with the performance?”. During the interviews, participants were asked to describe their feelings toward the performance and to indicate the differences they observed between traditional and holographic performances.

The results showed that 24 out of 30 participants (80%) in the experimental group reported a clearer understanding of the song's content thanks to the combination of gesture and hologram, compared to only 11 out of 30 (36.7%) in the control group. When asked about sensory engagement, 21 participants in the experimental group reported feeling like they were active participants in the performance, compared to only 10 in the control group, indicating the superiority of holographic technology in enhancing engagement.

In terms of aesthetic evaluation, 22 participants in the experimental group expressed their admiration for the fine motor details provided by the visual effects, stating that the hologram helped them grasp the expressive aspects of movement, deepening their emotional connection to the music. In contrast, the aesthetic impressions of the control group were more restrained.

29 out of 30 in the experimental group also expressed a sense of increased self-confidence during the interviews, confirming that they felt part of a cultural experience that had not previously been available to them. These responses were spontaneous and not directly questioned, reflecting the authenticity of their feelings. Some said, “For the first time, I feel like I'm experiencing the music, not just seeing it”.

Perhaps one of the new dimensions revealed by this experience is the integration of a hearing audience with the deaf in the performance. This helped enhance the concept of cultural and social interaction between the two groups, adding a new social dimension to hologram technology as a means of achieving integration and mutual understanding.

Despite these positive results, the study did not overlook the accompanying challenges, most notably the high cost of the technology, which limits its potential for widespread use. The research team also noted the need to develop more intelligent software that translates audio signals into gestures integrated with the holographic system.

This requires collaboration between programmers and experts in sign language and expressive arts.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that integrating sign singing with hologram technology not only enhances the understanding of music among the deaf and hard of hearing, but also creates a comprehensive artistic and aesthetic experience that gives them a sense of participation and belonging. It also opens new horizons for research and development in the field of technologies that support people with special needs, and enhances their opportunities for integration into public artistic and cultural life.

7. Future Applications of Hologram Singing Technology

Hologram singing technology is one of the pioneering innovations in the field of integrating arts and technology and holds tremendous potential for developing new and unique experiences for the deaf and hard-of-hearing audience. With the continuous advancement in hologram technology and display techniques, a number of future applications are emerging that can enhance the overall experience of music and art, and open up new horizons for artistic and cultural interaction. One potential future application is the use of hologram technology in education.

Holograms can be used to teach sign language in an interactive way by displaying real-time performances that incorporate signing. This approach helps deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals better understand signs and develop their communication skills through innovative ways. Integrating music with sign language education creates a dynamic learning environment that supports comprehensive development. Another impactful application is in live art performances, where music groups and artists can use holograms to deliver immersive, interactive shows that make audiences feel actively engaged in the experience.

Live interaction technologies can be incorporated so that the audience interacts with the hologram in a new way, enhancing their sense of belonging and engagement. These performances can include elements of audience engagement such as changing lighting or animations that respond to the audience's movements. Furthermore, hologram technology can contribute to the development of multimedia artistic content. With the ability to combine sound, image, and motion into a single experience, artists can produce immersive artworks that take the audience on a visual musical journey. This can have a significant impact on how art and music are experienced, as the audience becomes part of the performance rather than just a passive recipient.

This technology can be exploited in cultural and social events, such as festivals and exhibitions. Musical performances can be organized that contain holographic elements to expand the scope of the arts offered and to engage a wider audience, including the deaf and hard of hearing. These events can help raise awareness of different cultures and provide a space for communication and interaction between members of society.

It can also be used in the development of applications and digital content. Interactive applications can be designed that use hologram technology to teach music and create a new entertainment experience for the deaf and hard of hearing. These applications could

include interactive videos that explain songs using holograms, helping users better understand the lyrics and the emotions associated with them.

Additionally, hologram technology could contribute to increased awareness and social interaction between the hearing and deaf communities. By organizing joint events that include artistic performances that combine holograms and sign language, new opportunities for communication and interaction between the two groups could be created. This could help break down barriers and promote mutual understanding between different cultures. Achieving success in hologram sign singing applications requires collaboration between artists, developers, and researchers to ensure that the artistic experience is rich and inclusive for all.

8. Conclusion

In reflecting on the findings of this study, it is crucial to highlight the intersemiotic and multimodal translational operations embedded in the use of holographic sign singing for the deaf and hard of hearing. Sign singing itself can be viewed through the lens of intersemiotic translation, since it converts musical lyrics, rhythm, and emotion from auditory to visual-gestural modalities. This involves more than just translating words; it requires expressive, embodied interpretation that conveys musicality through signs, facial expressions, and movement.

Beyond the sign-singing process, hologram creation adds another layer of translation. This includes converting sign-language performance into digital data, rendering it as holographic 3D visuals using algorithms and light-based imaging. These processes represent a form of technological translation, shifting the message from human performance to machine-readable and visually rendered formats. The interplay of linguistic, sensory, and technical translations reflects the complexity of making music accessible to non-hearing audiences.

This study's contribution to Translation Studies lies in its demonstration of how translation extends beyond language to movement, embodiment, and machine-mediated expression. It opens new directions for intersemiotic translation research, showing how meaning can be transferred across semiotic systems (auditory to visual, verbal to gestural) using advanced media. Holographic sign singing thus exemplifies a hybrid translational model that aligns with evolving theories in audiovisual and performance translation. As Translation Studies continues to explore multimodal and cross-sensory domains, this work offers a case study for integrating artistic, cultural, and technological dimensions into inclusive translation practice.

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THE SOUNDTRACK OF ACCESSIBILITY: BACKGROUND MUSIC'S ROLE IN AUDIO-DESCRIBED FILMS

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ABSTRACT: Music plays a fundamental role in the audiovisual experience, influencing the viewer's perception, emotion, and memory. However, its treatment in accessibility studies, particularly in audio description (AD), still presents various challenges and approaches. This article examines the role of music in audio-described audiovisual products through two complementary studies. Firstly, it analyses how background music is treated in the AD of various films, identifying strategies and omissions that may affect the experience of visually impaired audiences. Secondly, an experiment is presented in which 80 students were exposed to musical fragments with the aim of assessing their ability to recognize the film or series they originated from. The results allow us to reflect on the degree of iconicity of music in audiovisual identification and its implications for AD. Based on these findings, the article proposes the need for greater integration of music in audiovisual accessibility studies, considering its narrative and emotional impact

KEYWORDS: Audio Description; Background Music; Audiovisual Storytelling; Accessibility; Auditory Recognition; Emotion and Music

1. Introduction

In the past century, films have undergone many changes, mainly due to new technological possibilities in production, recording, and projection. Sound, colour, Sensurround, Dolby, 3-D, and now digital recording have turned films into a very complex multisemiotic experience. Moreover, film inherently combines multiple modes and signs, integrating visual and auditory elements alongside language, gesture, imagery, and music. However, some audiences may lack direct access to content presented through either the auditory or visual channel. To ensure inclusivity, certain cinematic aspects may need to be adapted into another format (Diget, 2019). One such adaptation is audio description (AD), a verbal narration of on-screen visual elements designed for viewers with visual impairments (Braun, 2008; Holsanova, 2016; Rai et al., 2010; Remael et al., 2016).

Part of this is the enjoyment of music, an integral part of films since before the advent of sound, playing a fundamental role in the audiovisual experience, shaping perception, emotions, and memory. However, the treatment of music in accessibility studies, particularly in AD, still presents challenges that impact the experience of visually impaired audiences. Since music is a key element of films, it must also be addressed within Media Accessibility Studies.

This article explores this issue through two complementary studies: an analysis of the presence and treatment of music in the AD of eight films and an experiment to assess the ability to recognise music in an audiovisual context. The findings provide insights into the iconicity of music in audiovisual identification and its implications for AD, highlighting the need for more integrated approaches in accessibility studies. Based on these results, the

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article proposes improvements to AD practices to enhance immersion and ensure equitable access to audiovisual content, providing also an analytical tool that can be used as a preliminary exercise before the AD of the audiovisual product.

2. Making a film accessible

The current debate and concern for universal access to the media across different academic, professional, and legal fields is ongoing. In recent years, new accessibility laws and policies have been implemented at the international level. Among all the specific and possible topics, this study deals with film accessibility, focusing on the treatment of film music. The corpus and aim of this study concentrate on the AD for recorded audiovisual products for linear television, cinema, VoD, and over-the-top streaming services, although there are many other fields where AD can be applied, such as stage events –theatre, opera, ballet–, other visual arts, and live sports and events.

Regarding music, the main objective of this study is to gather conclusions from an analysis and propose ways to improve audience access to and enjoyment of film music, since film music has always been contemplated as a secondary question within AD Studies, focusing on other topics such as characters, places, actions, credits, among many others. Many scholars, professionals, and guidelines have already dealt with AD when making a film accessible, addressing priorities, elements to describe, appropriate wording, and timing for AD, among other aspects (ADP, 2009; AENOR, 2005; Dosch and Benecke, 2004; Fryer, 2016; Hörfilm, 2005; Media Access Australia, 2010; Netflix, 2023; Ofcom, 2024; Puigdomènech et al., 2010; Remael, 2005; Snyder, 2007; Vercauteren, 2007). The main idea is to describe where the scene is situated, when it takes place, what is happening and who is present, all while fitting the descriptions into the pauses and silences. This is a challenging task given the near-constant presence of sound. It is worth highlighting Netflix's (2023) specific instructions regarding the treatment of music in AD: "Allow room for dialogue, sound effects, music and intentional silence. Plot-pertinent dialogue and songs should always take priority" and later "Only interrupt music, sound effects [...], and intentional silence for vital, timely information that must be described".

3. Audio description and background music

This study is aware that it is not the first to be interested in or concerned with the treatment of music in audio-described products or in making an audiovisual product accessible. In their 2013 report for the ADLAB project, Mazur and Chmiel identified fourteen "Audio Description Crisis Points", placing music first alongside other challenges such as text-on-screen (logos, credits, captions, graphics), setting the scene, describing and introducing characters, flashbacks and scene switches, filmic language and techniques, facial expressions, complex scenes, and others. In their work, the authors stated that most describers noted that the music in the film they were analysing was an essential element of the film's soundtrack, designed to be heard and appreciated without disruption, and that it must be coordinated with the AD. Dosch and Benecke (2004, p. 27) state that noise, music,

and even moments of silence in a film should be preserved; yet, in their experience, their descriptions have become more and more detailed over the years, because their audience has asked for more information. More recently, Mazur (2020) examines the role of music in the source text. The author identifies in her study some scenes that are accompanied by instrumental music, which is traditionally a good place to insert AD, but she recommends not talking over it entirely, as the music also enriches the visual scenes. Moreover, Maszerowska et al. (2014) argued that the soundtrack of *Inglourious Basterds* presents a rich array of references and effects that enhance its potential for AD and its use of sound and silence challenges conventional relationships between audio and visuals, expanding the limits of traditional sound-image interaction. Finally, it is important to highlight the work of Fascioli Álvarez (2019), who states that AD should aim for both intermodal coherence –with dialogues– and intramodal coherence –with sound effects, music, and silence. In this regard, the placement of the description in relation to other elements becomes particularly significant. Similarly, Remael (2012) emphasises the importance of thoroughly analysing and integrating film sound, including music, into the AD process to ensure a coherent and comparable experience for visually impaired audiences.

Most of the AD guidelines consulted recommend not placing AD over dialogues, music, or any other sound relevant for the comprehension of the film, and advise looking for the pauses between them. Not many of these guidelines deal with film music, and when they do, they deal with specific types of music, such as songs with lyrics. Background music is usually defined as accompanying music and within AD studies has not been properly considered. The frequent idea is that if background music and other sounds do not represent an important function for the atmosphere of the film (Hörfilm, 2005; ADP 2009); or if they are not necessary to advance essential information to follow the plot (Benecke & Dosch, 2004; Hörfilm, 2005; Remael, 2005; Puigdomènech et al., 2010), there can be AD over them. More specifically, ADP (2009) declares that “in most instances, a describer may talk over background music” but later “if the musical scoring [...] contributes significantly to the material’s emotion, try to allow listeners to be carried along with the music without interjecting descriptions. Only interrupt for vital information that must be described during the music in order to be timely”. Along the same lines, Hörfilm (2005) states that there should never be AD over sounds and music, only when they do not mean an important function for the film atmosphere. They also say that film music should be considered as a very relevant film element. Benecke, quoted by Poethe (2005, p. 37), says that silence included should be maintained when possible, and background music, among other sounds, should be untouchable. And finally, Media Access Australia (2010, p. 12) proposes the enjoyment of the musical theme tune without any description over it: “let the music and ambient sound tell the story too”. But, in general, the best approach is to place the description within natural pauses and breaks in the dialogue, ensuring it does not disrupt speech, sound effects, or music (Benecke, 2004; Remael et al., 2014).

4. Film music and its function in films

As mentioned before (Igareda, 2012), a complete review of Film Music Studies is beyond the scope of this article, but it is worth mentioning the relevant role played by music in films, as it is stated by many experts (Cohen, 1990, 1999, 2000, 2001; Bolivar et al., 1994; Chion, 1997; Lack, 1999; Smith, 1999; Garwood, 2003; Gorbman, 2003, 2007; Wright, 2003; Lipscomb & Tolchinsky, 2004; Goldman; Kramer & Leppert, 2007; Hoeckner, 2007; Kocjančič, 2008). In the same way it was noted in relation to AD, music has also been regarded as a subordinate element in films: "it is a marginal part of the much larger field of study focused on image, narrative, the cinematic apparatus, and the history of film production" (Goldmark, Kramer & Leppert, 2007, p. 2).

This study is based on the understanding that music is an integral part of the sound film and that the soundtrack is an essential element of the narrative. Music can set the tone of a scene from the very beginning. Whether it's a soft melody accompanying a romantic scene or intense music heightening the tension in a thriller, the musical choice can transport the viewer to an entirely new world. Music creates an atmosphere that enriches the visual narrative, setting the mood and preparing the audience for what is to come (Karalavisual, 2023).

Regarding the possible functions of music in film, most scholars agree on its ability to convey emotions, build the narrative, and identify characters, times, places, and themes, among many other aspects. Particularly relevant to this study are those who assert that film music has the power to evoke a season, a historical period, a cultural coding, or even an ethnic flavour (Gorbman 2003, Wright 2003). Additionally, film music can create stylistic unity, accompany and support action, underscore dialogue, link scenes, emphasise or highlight movement, mood, or humour, show changes in emotional states, and even represent the thoughts of characters rather than their actions (Gorbman 1987; Karlin & Wright 1990; Carey & Hannan 2003). As Vernallis (2008, p. 286) puts it, "Images, music and sounds hold together through shape, movement, color, textures and expressivity."

4.1 Classification of music

Film music is typically divided into two categories: diegetic and non-diegetic music. Diegetic music is part of the narrative, while nondiegetic music serves as a layer of commentary. However, this article argues that the distinction is based more on technical placement and perception, as noted by Stilwell (2007).

Diegetic music, or source music, is produced by characters or devices within the story space, like radios, singers, or orchestras (Gorbman, 1987; Chion, 1997). Kocjančič (2008) notes that characters may identify with specific songs or radio programs, which can reflect their social life, status, or fashion. Non-diegetic music, also known as underscore or background music, is external to the story space and not audible to the characters (Gorbman, 1987; Chion, 1997). According to Nieto (2003), it serves two main functions: as a structural element to influence rhythm and continuity, and as an expressive element to convey emotions or guide the audience's perspective. Stilwell (2007) emphasises that non-

diegetic music, when in the foreground, can intensify the connection between the audience and the film. Finally, background music, often from an external source like a radio, helps set the atmosphere and can become dominant in the scene's soundscape. It can evoke various emotions, such as anticipation through crescendos or calm through decrescendos (Chion, 1997). Chion also identifies two effects: the empathic effect, where music reflects the scene's emotions, and the anempathic effect, where music continues indifferently after an emotional scene. Studies, such as those by Bolivar, Cohen and Fentress (1994), suggest that background music enhances the meaning of visual elements.

4.2 The relevance of silence and background music as a leitmotif

The role of silence in film is as crucial as that of sound, and its impact on the audience should not be underestimated. Silence can convey powerful meanings, creating moments of tension or reflection. There are different types of silence in film. Gorbman (1987) distinguishes between diegetic silence, where no music is used to highlight verbal silence, and non-diegetic silence, where the soundtrack has no sound at all. She also identifies structural silence, which occurs when sound previously present in the film is later absent at corresponding points. Silence, like music, directly affects the continuity of the film, shaping its flow and emotional tone. As Fryer (2010) questions, the way sound and silence are described may not always be necessary, as their significance often speaks for itself.

In addition to silence, background music can also play a key role in reinforcing the narrative through leitmotifs. These are repeated musical motifs or short melodic units tied to specific meanings, such as characters, emotions, or events (Dickinson, 2003; Radigales, 2007; Kocjančič, 2008). Leitmotifs can be presented in various ways: as non-diegetic music accompanying the film, as diegetic music coming from an on-screen source, or even transitioning between the two. They can also be presented as diegetically real, with characters singing or miming a song. The primary function of the leitmotif is to strengthen the connection between the music and the narrative development of the film (Kocjančič, 2008). Vilaró and Orero (2013) explore the concept of leitmotifs in film and their application in AD. The authors argue that AD can play a crucial role in the identification and understanding of leitmotifs for visually impaired audiences and propose an 'anchoring' strategy to explicitly highlight leitmotifs in AD, facilitating their recognition and retrieval in the film narrative. Orero et al. (2016) conclude that silence and leitmotifs are important elements of cinematic language that can enhance the narrative and evoke emotions and that AD should address these elements with sensitivity and understanding, weighing the benefits of providing visual information against the risks of disrupting the film's original intent.

In conclusion, and in line with Branigan's (2010) words, sound in film encompasses much more than just the physical properties of pitch, timbre, and tempo, influencing the emotional and narrative structure of the film in profound ways. Therefore, both silence and background music, when carefully used, can significantly enhance the meaning and emotional impact of a film.

5. Analysis of audio-described films with background music

The role and functions of background music have been frequently underestimated. In fact, there are films whose soundtracks consist only of this background music. This music can be either instrumental or sung, and there may be more than one composer involved in a single film. This study analyses eight (N = 8) examples where background music is the main melodic sound within the film.

5.1 Methodology

First, the selection of the works to be analysed was carried out. The choice of audio-described films with background music for this study is justified by the crucial role that music plays in shaping the audiovisual experience. In all the selected works, background music not only enhances the emotional impact of a scene, but also provides narrative cues that guide the audience's perception and interpretation of the story. In the context of AD, where visual information is conveyed through verbal narration, the interaction between music and spoken descriptions becomes particularly relevant. To observe whether the practice has evolved over time, a first block of films released in the first decade of the 2000s (N = 5), and a second block of films released in the last two years (N = 3) are analysed.

In order to conduct a qualitative analysis of the presence of music in the ADs of this film selection, an analysis tool was developed to examine the role of music in these products, focusing on the strategies used in AD to describe or integrate music, the cases in which music is not stepped on, and its possible impact on the audience's experience. It also considers the comparison between different approaches depending on the film's genre, direction, country of origin, and the period in which it was made accessible through AD.

Table 1. Analysis of music treatment in audio-described audiovisual products

1. General data	
Name of the film, genre (drama, action, comedy, romance, adventure, etc.), year of release (with AD), director, soundtrack composer, length of the film, language of AD.	
2. Characterization of the music	
Presence of music in the film	Continuous, frequent, occasional, scarce
Predominant musical genre	Orchestral, electronic, jazz, etc.
Main function of music	Ambience, emotional reinforcement, character identification, narrative development, leitmotiv
Key moments where music is prominent	Introduction, climax, resolution
3. Interaction between music and AD	
Level of overlap between AD and music	High (music and AD overlap constantly), moderate (occasional overlaps, but well-balanced), low (AD is presented in musical pauses)
Effect of music on clarity of AD	Improves understanding of the scene, does not interfere, hinders the perception of the message

Volume and mix settings	Music with reduced volume during AD, music with no volume adjustment, music that gets louder at key moments
4. Impact on the audience's experience	
Music contributes to the immersion in the story	Yes, no, partially
Music facilitates the understanding of the narrative	Yes, no, partially
Emotions evoked by the music	

5.2 Results

1. *300* (Snyder, 2006). All of the themes composed by Tyler Bates for this film have a title directly related to either the moment they are played in the film or to a message intended to be sent, as in *To Victory*, *The Wolf*, *What Must a King Do?*, *Fight in the Shade*, *Tonight We Dine in Hell*, or *Remember Us*. Some of them have choirs in the background sung in Greek and Latin (*The Agoge*, *Goodbye My Love*, *Come and Get Them* or *Message for the Queen*), which give a *crescendo* to the moment or a dramatic atmosphere. At times background music is composed of several pieces of heavy metal and rock music, especially when the Spartans are fighting (*No Mercy* or *Fever Dream*). This film contains a wide array of styles, moods and atmospheres with all the types of background music, showing a clear awareness of the role of music in shaping the viewer's emotional experience. Unfortunately, the AD allows little space for music. There are many scenes in slow motion and this effect lasts while the music is sounding where music provides the level of rhythm, it emphasises and highlights the movements supporting the action and, most of the time, it follows the movement of the camera. The only thing that can be sometimes heard by the audience is the choirs appearing in the film made up of female humming, as when the Persian messenger arrives to Sparta and it starts to snow, when the king and queen say goodbye to each other or at the end of the film together with the sound of a flute. AD respects these choirs and concedes them some space. This selective preservation of vocal tracks might suggest an intuitive recognition of their emotional weight, although the overall treatment of music is more functional than expressive.

2. *Breaking and Entering* (Minghella, 2006) has examples of background music working as dramatic intensifications of the scenes, as in the beginning of the film or when the main character ponders about his affair. Sometimes it reinforces the happy feelings of the moment, like when the autistic girl is training or when the boy is practicing his moves in the street. Other times, like when the two boys are running away from the police, it emphasizes the movement and the action in general.

Gabriel Yared is the composer of most of the music played in this film. There are two differentiated main motifs for two of the main characters of the film, Jude and Miro. In relation to AD, it allows a lot of space for the background music played during the whole length of the film. Ten key moments were detected in which the background music was related to the plot of the film, and almost all of them found their space to be heard by the audience. Piano and soft classical beats together with some male humming appear when

the main characters, Will and Amira, are together, contrasting with the electronic and drumbeats that can be heard when the background is supporting Miro's actions. This nuanced soundscape seems to be preserved in the AD, which allows audiences with visual impairments to perceive distinct emotional registers associated with each character. This suggests a more deliberate integration of music into the accessible narrative, moving beyond the purely informational purpose of the AD.

3. Something similar happens with *Déjà Vu* (Scott, 2006). The music is mainly composed by Harry Gregson-Williams and accompanies the film from the beginning to the end with different functions: linking scenes, supporting the action, emphasising movements and rhythms, among others. It is an action/thriller soundtrack that has as one of its main themes all those related to Claire's character, as *Claire's Apartment*, *You Can Save Her*, *Humvee Chase* or *Claire's Rescue*. Electronic and metallic percussions, piano sounds repeating more than once during the film, some drumbeats, etc. At least ten key moments where background music plays a relevant role for the film narrative were detected. In 6 out of 10 moments, AD partially or totally overrides the music with verbal description (some of which simply reiterates what the music already conveys, such as explosions or helicopter sounds). This substitution of musical information with redundant sonic descriptions raises questions about the AD's criteria in selecting what to describe and what to preserve. It may reflect a prioritization of clarity over emotional or narrative richness.

4. *The Last king of Scotland* (Macdonald, 2006). Most of the tracks from the soundtrack are composed by Alex Heffes. The film is divided into two parts regarding music: the first 43 minutes contain African songs with lyrics, and in the second part, more background music can be heard by the audience. More than 35 tracks were found in this film; over 25 belong to background music. In general, these tracks consist of African beats, trumpet beats, guitar beats, and some drumbeats when the atmosphere is excited and lively. Other tracks are made up of strong drumbeats covering the environment with suspense, anxiety, expectation and tension. In all these cases, AD lets some space when it's possible. A significant example is the mix between a diegetic song with English lyrics heard in a bar and intense background music around minute 54, where the AD allows no space to music due to overlapping actions. This instance shows the limitations of AD when multiple narrative elements compete for attention –music, action, and dialogue– forcing a decision that inevitably sacrifices one layer of meaning. The end of the film closes with the tracks *On the Runaway* and *Down Over Lake Victoria*. In this case, AD lets a lot of space for the music and some male chorus. This contrast between the middle and final moments illustrates the AD's flexible strategies, adapting to narrative tempo and emotional intensity, though not always consistently.

5. *Slumdog Millionaire* (Boyle, 2008). The soundtrack of this film is mostly made up of songs with lyrics, but there are also great examples from A. R. Rahman's score. The most significant of these examples is *Latika's Theme*, a recurring track with a woman humming. The AD covers almost everything in the first instance, and slightly less in the second and third. Although this repetition of a theme could function as an emotional anchor across the

film, the inconsistent space given by the AD hinders the audience's ability to perceive and emotionally connect with these narrative beats. It suggests a tension between the temporal constraints of description and the symbolic layering of sound design.

6. The soundtrack of *Barbie* (Gerwig, 2023) is largely composed of upbeat pop with lyrics, dance, synth-pop, and electro-pop tracks, with influences from disco and hyperpop, an eclectic mix of genres that complements the film's narrative and aesthetics. However, there are also significant instrumental pieces from the original score, composed by Mark Ronson and Andrew Wyatt, that play a crucial role in shaping the film's emotional tone. Apropos of the experiment described below, the first scene of this film includes the song *Creation of Barbie*, a version of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the iconic soundtrack of the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. While the AD allows the louder drums to play underneath the description and the sound mix is good, it blurs the original product's intention regarding the girls' rage as they get rid of their dolls in the presence of the first Barbie. 30 minutes later in the film, we hear a version of the same song, this time called *Ken Makes a Discovery*, as the character wanders alone through the economic centre of the city. On this occasion, AD overlaps the soundtrack entirely. One of the most distinctive examples is *Bus Stop Billie* theme, which recurs under different names. The AD constantly treads on the space for sound. The song combines synthesised and orchestral elements with a soft, melodic rhythm that evokes a nostalgic and emotional feeling. It includes ethereal keyboards, subtle strings, and a delicate rhythmic base, creating a dreamy and reflective effect. These repeated intrusions into musically rich scenes (often symbolic and emotionally significant) highlight a missed opportunity for multimodal storytelling in accessible formats. The decision to prioritise image description over music recognition may unintentionally diminish thematic cohesion. The same happens later with *Meeting Ruth*, the same whistled song.

7. *Luckiest Girl Alive* (Barker, 2022). The instrumental soundtrack was composed by Linda Perry and comprises 27 tracks. These musical pieces are characterised by their ability to fuse melodic and emotional elements, creating an atmosphere that complements the film's visual narrative, mainly exploring the emotions and experiences of the protagonist. While some scenes are overwritten by AD, others like *Ani Arrives* and *Confronting Dean* preserve the music's full emotional weight. This suggests an evolution in AD practice, allowing more nuanced integration of sound and image in moments where music is narratively dominant and visual action is less critical.

8. *The Order* (Kurzel, 2024). The soundtrack, composed by Jed Kurzel, is characterised by its tense and emotional atmosphere, music acts as another character (Tudosoundtrack, 2024). Most of the tracks use stringed instruments and synthesisers. Pieces such as *Husk* reflect the intensity and complexity of the narrative and open the first scenes of the film. In this example, the AD adapts as the film progresses: initially leaving room for music, later overlapping it as the action intensifies. Notably, the volume balance still allows music to be perceived under the AD. This compromise model (preserving emotional tone without sacrificing descriptive clarity) may offer a productive way forward.

6. Experiment on audiovisual music recognition

The hypothesis that triggered the interest in carrying out this experiment states that the average audience, due to their experience and years of consumption of audiovisual products, has a musical memory that comes from these same films and series already seen. Some findings (Dosis, 2024) support the statement that music significantly influences the viewer's perception, emotion, and memory in audiovisual contexts. Thus, in the case of fragments or complete songs that are reused in other audiovisual products or used as intertexts, the audience will recognise them. This is particularly interesting in terms of how AD should behave with this type of music or with audiovisual music in general.

To carry out this small experiment, the collaboration of 80 students from the audiovisual translation course between the years 2023 and 2025 was obtained. 70,7% of the participants are between 21 and 22 years old, and the rest are no older than 28. Of all of them, 87,3% are women, 10,1% are men, and the remaining 2,5% prefer not to say. This imbalance between men and women is characteristic of translation degree programs at Spanish universities today.

Before starting, the informed consent was explained to them verbally and collected in writing through a Google Forms document to confirm the information process. This way, the students were protected, and their voluntary participation in the study was ensured. Next, the first 20 seconds of 40 songs (including both instrumental pieces and songs with lyrics) were played. The selection of the best movie or TV series songs of all time is justified, on one hand, by their cultural and emotional impact on the audience. These songs have managed to transcend the context of the movie or series they belong to, becoming iconic pieces that evoke memories and feelings in the public. The popularity, influence, and ability of these songs to remain relevant over time are key factors that justify their inclusion in the list of songs to be selected for this experiment. On the other hand, sources such as IMDb, Spotify, Apple Music, Infobae, and Fotogramas were consulted, as they all featured lists of the 'best' soundtracks of all time.

Students were asked to write down the movie or series soundtrack they recognised from the fragment in the same Google Forms document. After all the fragments had been played, a quantitative analysis of the participants' responses was carried out. The objective was to quantify the recognition rate of the musical fragments and analyse potential differences between songs with lyrics and instrumental tracks, as well as explore variations based on the audiovisual genre (e.g. movies versus TV series).

Based on the data obtained, it can be concluded that there is a high and widespread recognition: 45% of the fragments were recognized by at least half of the participants, suggesting that a large portion of the selected fragments are quite well-known. Furthermore, 70% of the participants recognised 37,5% of the fragments, indicating that, although not all fragments are equally easy to identify, a significant percentage of participants are familiar with these musical themes.

Among the themes with the highest recognition by participants are the instrumental soundtrack of *Titanic* (96,25%), *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* (both with 88,75%), *Ghostbusters* (86,25%), *Jaws* (85%), *Game of Thrones* (81,25%), and *Rocky* (77,5%). Among the songs with lyrics, the most recognised was *The Lion King* (96,25%), followed by *Friends* (93,75%), *Dirty Dancing* (86,25%), *Stranger Things* (85%), *Pretty Little Liars* (83,75%), and *50 Shades of Grey* (78,75%). Lastly, to highlight more data, we can say that more than 50% of the participants also recognised *Mission Impossible* (70%), *The Bodyguard* (66,25%), *Jurassic Park* (50%), and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (53,25%).

Among the differences that were to be extracted, there is a higher recognition of instrumental soundtracks, such as the aforementioned *Titanic*, *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, *Ghostbusters*, and *Jaws*, which could indicate that these themes are more iconic and memorable for the participants. This phenomenon might be due to their prominence in popular culture or the recurrent use of these songs in various media, such as intertextual references. There is also a notable recognition of songs with lyrics, like in the case of *The Lion King*, *Friends*, and *Dirty Dancing*. This suggests that lyrics may be a key factor for identification, as songs associated with popular series or movies tend to leave a more lasting impression.

The most recognised soundtracks come from movies and series that have had a significant impact on popular culture, and their music is part of the collective memory of the participants. In the case of songs with lyrics, they are also products that remain widely popular, which reinforces the idea that songs can acquire additional meaning through their connection to memorable characters and scenes. The era in which these movies and series were released has a significant impact on their recognition level. Many of them come from periods when cinema and television experienced an expansion in terms of production, visual effects, and global reach, which helped their soundtracks and songs become ingrained in the collective memory. Additionally, the phenomenon of nostalgia and cultural globalisation has allowed these themes to remain relevant over time.

In conclusion, it can be said that both iconic movies and series have strong recognition, but it seems that classic films (especially those with instrumental soundtracks) have a slight advantage in terms of recognition rate, possibly due to their greater permanence in popular culture over time. As for songs with lyrics, they seem to be especially remembered if associated with popular series or highly emotional films (*The Lion King* or *Friends*), while instrumental themes have a similar impact, though perhaps more related to the visual spectacle or the epic force of the films (such as *Star Wars* or *Indiana Jones*). Additionally, iconic movies, especially epic adventures and high-budget films, tend to have a higher recognition rate compared to series.

7. Conclusions and further research

Starting with the term “background”, the role of this type of music has traditionally been relegated to a secondary category in AD. Even when it does not directly contribute to the narrative, background music often goes unnoticed by the audience. However, it can convey

a particular emotional intent that the director wishes to express –an intent frequently lost in the AD. As Branigan (2010, p. 41) suggests, “what is heard in a sound depends on how one listens, and with what purpose”, highlighting the subjective nature of musical perception. Similarly, Cohen (2001, p. 253) explains that “the audience selectively attends to only the part of the music that makes sense with the narrative,” underscoring how listeners focus on what aligns with the storyline. These nuances, which shape the viewer's emotional engagement, are often missing in AD. It is difficult to imagine a film without music, as its elements –melody, tonality, harmony, chords, intervals, rhythm, dynamics, tempo, timbre, motif, and others– are integral to the cinematic experience and should ideally be acknowledged in the description.

This article aimed to explore how AD has handled music in films from two different periods: the early 2000s and recent years, through a case study approach. Although the number of analysed cases was limited, the findings suggest a growing respect for music in current audio-described films compared to earlier practices. In the past, AD focused almost exclusively on visual content, leaving music in the background. More recently, accessibility studies and a greater awareness of music's narrative role have contributed to a shift, allowing musical elements more space within AD. Despite this progress, further work is still needed to achieve optimal integration and ensure a truly accessible and enriching experience for all audiences.

Regarding the second objective of this article, the results of the experiment support the hypothesis that musical familiarity significantly aids in the recognition of fragments within audiovisual products. The high recognition rate – 45% of fragments were identified by at least half of the participants – indicates that long-term exposure to iconic films and series strengthens musical memory. This finding highlights the relevance of familiar music in AD and reinforces the idea that such recognition can enhance narrative immersion for visually impaired audiences.

To improve the quality of future AD, it is essential to offer more specialised training to professionals, allowing them to be more specific in how to let the music breathe and incorporate AD, both technically and emotionally. In addition, work needs to be done on improving the sound mix to ensure that the music is properly balanced and not lost among other elements. According to Szarkowska and Orero (2014, p. 128), “the quality of sound missing needs to allow the audience to experience the nature of sounds in the film and to become immersed in the story world they create together with other semiotic channels of the film”. Finally, the use of music should be encouraged not only as a simple accompaniment, but as an essential narrative component that plays a key role in conveying the story, allowing for a richer and more immersive experience for visually impaired audiences. This means integrating music deliberately into AD by identifying key musical moments, timing the description accordingly, and, when possible, collaborating with sound professionals to preserve the score's narrative function. That is: treating music as a co-narrator rather than incidental sound.

As for future research on the relationship between music and audiovisual accessibility, one promising direction is the development of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies that automatically detect optimal moments for inserting ADs without disrupting the musical score. Recent studies, such as Wang et al. (2021), introduced a system that predicts AD insertion times by analysing audiovisual cues, enhancing accessibility without compromising the viewing experience. Additionally, projects like OFAI focus on the automatic segmentation and characterisation of audio streams, which could inform the timing of AD in relation to musical elements. Companies such as AI-Media UK are also actively working on automated accessibility solutions that apply machine learning to synchronise AD and captions more precisely with audio content, indicating a growing commercial interest in such technologies. These developments suggest a growing potential for AI to facilitate more nuanced and music-aware AD integration.

In addition, it would be valuable to carry out reception studies involving feedback questionnaires aimed at visually impaired audiences to assess their experience of music in audiovisual products with AD. These studies would provide valuable information on how to improve the integration of music and AD to provide a more accessible and enriching experience for visually impaired audiences.

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**TRANSLATION THROUGH MUSIC, SPEAKING THROUGH MUSIC:
THE SHAPE OF WATER (2017)**

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ABSTRACT: Ever since the translational turn, translation studies has needed to expand its reach beyond the textual focus, to engage with other modes, such as music and digital forms of communication, intercultural exchange, and not least multimodal forms of translations through film, within which we find the sub field of music and translation. This article takes the specific example of a film, *The Shape of Water*, to illustrate how music speaks on behalf of mute characters, and how music contributes to the storytelling. In analysing case studies from the film, metaphor, multimodal transfer and musical meaning are explored to show how music 'speaks' on behalf of the characters and supplements the filmic narrative.

KEYWORDS: Music; Multimodal; Meaning Transfer; Film; Storytelling

1. Introduction

This article examines the role of music in the 2017 film *The Shape of Water* to illustrate how translation between modes is possible through the notion of metaphor. The multimodal context is complex and offers a way to tackle how music is the key agent in expressing emotion through metaphor. To create emotion in the spectator one needs motion – it is perhaps no surprise that the words 'motion' and 'emotion', in English, are only one letter difference – they are intertwined. As Desblache asserts, from a translation perspective: "Music in films plays an important narrative role [...]. It has also always played a strong emotional role" (2019, p. 234).

Film music has a long history. First, the silent movies seemed artificial in their unnatural silence. Music was added in various forms, such as a live pianist improvising music appropriate to the scene (offering mimetic bar-style piano music for a social scene, or slow romantic music for a love scene). The parallelism and what became known as 'mickey-mousing' was only one way. Other live music was meticulously planned, composed and orchestrated to be played by a full orchestra. When we consider the fact that classical music has been telling stories through music without words for centuries, through opera and ballet overtures, tone poems based on often complex poems and long form narratives and other programmatic music, it is perhaps no surprise that we accepted music within this cinematic genre with ease. By the time film music was being composed and recorded to be released synchronised with the film screening, the composers had come from the classical music tradition. For example, George Auric writing music for Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (1946) had previously been part of *Les Six* writing ballets and instrumental music. His mentor, Erik Satie, had written music for the ballet *La Parade* (1917), which utilises representation of modern global trends such as skyscrapers and typewriters in a story which sells tickets to a circus performance, before going on to write cinematic music for

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En'tracte which was a prelude to the staged ballet *Relâche* (1924).¹ What this directly attests to is that film music grew from the classical orchestral tradition, with composers moving from concert hall and theatre music to film. With a tradition of telling stories through music, the capacity for music to engage audiences through metaphor to foster an emotive reaction was already attuned within the theatregoing and radio-listening culture of the developed world. As such, adding orchestral music to a visual scene, though unnatural, felt more natural than silence.² Sci-fi, fantasy and mystery films rely “more than most on music’s ability to make the unfamiliar seem familiar and therefore facilitate the expression of emotion with which the spectator can empathise” (Minors, 2023, p. 333).

Now film music has become a whole discipline of study, due to the complex ways in which music can be used. Most commonly, the composer is brought in toward the end of the process. With the film shot, usually edited, and the drama laid out in visual and verbal form, the composer is given a ‘temp track’ (temporary mock-up of the film’s soundtrack) by the director. A temp track includes the kind of sound world the director wants for the film. In essence, it is a guide to assist the director in describing to the composer what tone the music needs to set for the film. Sometimes the temp track even remains, as in the famous case of the opening of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) (Minors, 2021, p. 188). Not all films work this way though. And as the genre becomes more experimental, and more digital capabilities come into force, directors and composers are collaborating in new ways. For example, for *Oppenheimer* (2023), Christopher Nolan (director) brought Ludwig Göransson into the process at the start, to collaborate with him on identifying how music could tell the story of such a first-person narrative (see Minors forthcoming). This enables the music to more sensitively set the scene by using a style appropriate to the era, culture and heritage of the story. Music also creates the atmosphere, whether by raising tension through faster, more dissonant music, or by relaxing it through slower, consonant melodious music, or, alternatively, removing all sound to stand in stark contrast to the scene (e.g. *Oppenheimer*, when the test bomb explodes, and we know and can see it would be very loud, the film scene is initially silent, amplifying the shock of the visual scene) (Minors, forthcoming). As in opera, music can utilise specific character themes, whereby the scenes are set up to align a melody with a character or align an instrument to a character (more below). The music can be both empathetic and an-empathetic. It can both complement and contrast.

The film example chosen for this article is particular: *The Shape of Water* is a complex film in terms of genre. In one sense it is a romantic film, with the two lead characters falling in love and heading off to their happy ever after. It is also a historical drama set during the Cold War. And, significantly, it has the tone and green colour-palette of a fantasy film,

¹ The music in *En'tracte* supports a Dadaist film, shot via stop-motion capture, to show men jumping around a cannon on a Parisian roof top. Interestingly Satie himself is part of the visual scene.

² For readers new to film studies, I would recommend reading: Kathryn Kalinak (2010), *Film Music: A Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; and Mervyn Cooke (2008), *A History of Film Music*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

whose two lead characters are both mute. Removing speech from the lead roles and replacing it with physical gestures alongside diegetic music,³ the spectator is drawn to listen to the musical score in even more detail to interpret their gestural dialogue.

When we discuss music expressing meaning or the process of modal exchange, we often rely on metaphor. Not only does this remind us that we interpret one thing in terms of another (e.g. the lyrics of a song, in place of the lead mute character's speech, in this example), but it brings into stark reality that a process of translation is at the core of our verbal and textual language, in that simile, metaphor and oxymoron all require us to consider comparison of similar things. It recognises and understands difference. Difference in these cases is not a problem, but a way to bring two things together to supplement meaning. Metaphor is vital to how we are able to interpret multimodality, as it enables us to interpret through and across different modes.

"The idea of 'experiential meaning potential' is close to the view of 'metaphor' elaborated in Lakoff and Johnson (1980)" (Kress, 2010, p. 11). The point here is that we mutate or transform the action of sending a message, in and through whatever mode, into knowledge and understanding, whether that be embodied (somatic, felt, implicit), sensory, logical or emotional knowledge (Minors, 2023, pp. 332-348). We utilise what is well known in artistic research – that spectators and artists alike understand and build knowledge, in many ways (see Grierson, 2009, p. 17; Blain and Minors, 2020; Minors, Östersjö, et al 2024) through feelings, metaphors, and a wide range of sensory inputs. The spectators' feelings are important in how they experience the film. The choice of pre-composed music, brought into the sonic layer of *The Shape of Water* alongside newly composed music, is a device used to set the historical context and metaphorically give voice to the lead characters in a way that newly composed music could not. The association enables well-known songs to lend their meaning to the new setting of this film.

In what follows, I give an example of how music speaks on behalf of characters in a narrative film and how music contributes to the storytelling. By using the verb 'to speak', I deliberately play on words, in that translation studies and meaning analysis still focus heavily on verbal, textual language proper. By referring to speaking, I also wish to emphasise the need to include diverse voices and perspectives across the modes. But in writing on music and translation from a semiotic perspective, I challenge the field to consider meaning delivery more widely through all non-verbal modes and across non-verbal modes.

The multi-layered nature of film, formed from so many meaning-bearing modes (moving image, script, acting, gesture, sound design, music, dance, dialogue, silence, special effects, and so on) makes it particularly interesting to explore what music brings to its overall 'message', and how it helps to communicate that story. As there is "no shared

³ Diegetic music forms part of the filmic story with which the characters engage (e.g. the music played in a concert they are attending or on a disk they are listening to) in comparison to non-diegetic music, which is used as a background accompaniment for the spectator but of which the characters in the filmic scene are unaware.

Minors, H. J - Translation through music, speaking through music, *The Shape of Water* (2017) *Translation Matters*, 7(1), 2025, pp. 117-130, DOI: https://doi.org/10.21747/21844585/tm7_1a8

meaning resource for moving between speech and image” (Kress, 2010, p. 26) or music, the context of the work, the film, and the story, told scene by scene, becomes the context within which we can decode how the “potential for meaning” (Kress, 2010, p. 32) is realised.

Kress’s ideas (2010) around multimodality link closely to those present in film studies and media production studies, as well as musical multimodal theories and musicological literature. It should be noted, however, that there are other theoretical frameworks one could take, such as adaptation studies. Whereas adaptation emphasises change and alteration in the process of “representing the source” (Baker and Saldanha, 1998, p. 3), Kress’s notion of multimodality is much more about supplementing meaning across various modes. This view of media bringing together different ways of meaning into a cohesive work aligns closely with that of film theorists, including Gorbman’s seminal view of the interdependent necessity of the artistic modes in co-delivering meaning through metaphor (1980).

Choosing a film in which the lead two characters are mute – and in which one of the lead characters is presented to the spectator as non-human – means that the soundtrack of the film is made up of voices from the supporting actors, alongside music, breathing, sound design, and silence, and of course the sound of water, wind and nature more broadly. The film is not always language-centric or logocentric. The film, *The Shape of Water* (2017) explores through its story the need to learn how to translate between different peoples in different contexts. It also includes American sign language (specifically of the time), which the character might have learned from a book,⁴ and more universal hand gestures, which increases the accessibility of the film.⁵ In fact, it is extra-lingual forms of communication that often hit us the hardest in performative modes of expression, tugging at the metaphorical heart strings in a way that the literal impact of words cannot.

2. *The Shape of Water* (2017): speaking through gesture and music

The Shape of Water was premiered at the 74th Venice International Film Festival in 2017. Directed by Guillermo Del Toro and composed by Alexandre Desplat, the film is a blend of fantasy, romance, pseudo-historical drama and crime. However, in interviews, the composer’s description is clear: “it is a musical”, Desplat says firmly (HeyUGuys, 2018, 00:00:58). Desplat is interested in “how you use music in the film” (Ibid., 00:04:49), not only for accompanying scenes, but also as an active proponent of the storytelling. He makes clear that he writes a melody when asked to by the director but that this process does not guide his choice of instrumentation, timbre, tone and so on. He responds to the needs of the film’s message, whether atmospheric or dramatic (Ibid.)

Elisa is the lead character. She is mute and has scars on her neck that look a little like gills. She works as a cleaner in a facility that we learn is government-run, with high security.

⁴ See interview with Sally Hawkins and Octavia Spencer, FOX 5, 2018, 00:04:06-00:05:50.

⁵ A further discussion outside the scope of this article could consider this film from the viewpoint of audio-visual translation.

The story revolves around how her life changes when, cleaning a mess in one of the laboratories, she encounters a non-human creature held within a water-tank. It becomes clear that the creature (an amphibian man) is the subject a many invasive tests led by the facility director and biologist, Richard Strickland. Strickland is shown at home as a father and husband in a traditional 1960s setting, but at work he tortures the creature and displays misogynistic behaviour towards Elisa and racial prejudice to her co-worker, Zelda. Elisa forges a bond with this creature, known in the screenplay as the 'amphibian man'. She proceeds to work with her elderly artist neighbour and her co-worker Zelda (who translates her American Sign Language throughout the work scenes) to rescue the amphibian man from the laboratory. She takes him to her own flat, located above a cinema. Due to the hostility shown by the government workers, she and her neighbour then help him escape to the open sea and Elisa joins him.

The two lead characters (Elisa and the amphibian man) are agents of difference and pose threats to the norm, in that they communicate without words, and become a romantic partnership regardless of their difference. But it is more than this. Their difference, in communication, in appearance, in perspective, is used as a provocation for the spectator to think about who is right and wrong. The villains of the story are the leaders, namely the men with power, particularly Richard Strickland (played by Michael Shannon). The idea of the voiceless beauty (the Cinderella of this world) underpins Elisa Esposito's character (acted by Sally Hawkins), who is presented as the underdog. The amphibian man (acted by Doug Jones), who is nameless, represents difference and a potential threat. As Del Toro says, this amphibian man is presented as "an elemental god. He's not an animal [...] that he represents the most ancient holy past from another culture" (FOX 5, 2018, 00:02:50). In interview, it is made clear that the amphibian man comes from South America, which, considering the 1960s Cold War context of the film, seems threatening.

The film won multiple awards and nominations, including the 2018 Academy Awards for Best achievement in Directing (for Del Toro) and Best Achievement in Music Written for Motion Pictures (Original Score) for Desplat. BAFTA and the Golden Globes also recognised the music, film, sound, and directing, among other things (IMDB, 2018). It is significant that both the visual and aural elements of the film were recognised, as they coexist, in an interdependent manner.

During the film, water is used in numerous ways, not only as a symbol for life and home, but also as a mirror, and as a quasi-musical sound effect even when we cannot see water. Water's ability to move, reshape, adapt, change to different environments and be supplemented with nutrients and so on make this basic element of life into a powerful metaphoric device, used across all aspects of the film. Not only named in the title, water is also a visual and often aural element of most scenes. Water gives the universal experience of all life, connecting both the human and non-human, as shown in this film. The musical joining of the two characters ensures we can read the connections and empathise with them. Supplemented by the metaphorical reading of water, we are able to deepen our understanding and share in their experience through our mutual understanding of the

elements. Water references have occurred in music for centuries, from flowing adapting melodies composed by Handel, through to the kaleidoscopic piano melodies of Liszt, to the octatonic scales of Debussy (e.g. *Voiles*, *Reflets dans l'eau*) and Ravel (*Jeux d'eau*), and many others in 20th century European works. Indeed, one can hear the octatonic scale within the chosen movie, drawing on this long-standing tradition of symbolising water within the harmonic sound world (00:08:00). The adaptation of these musical themes throughout the film supplements the narrative, in some cases, metaphorically speaking on the characters' behalf to express their perspectives (specifically Elisa's) and share their emotional experiences.

Visually, a consistent tone is set. Green as a colour palette is used in most contexts. Green here represents the future, at a time in the 1960s when "where American is obsessed with the future" (FOX 5, 2018, 00:02:47) in its literature, its films and its aspirations (including the moon landing). Green is shown in the colour of the walls, the furniture, the soap used, the sweets that Strickland eats, the skin tone of the amphibian man, the cake, and even the car. When a black-and-white scene is used, then, it emphasises a different active 'voice' for Elisa and the amphibian man. How are Elisa's mute voice, yet active intentions, projected then through music?

3. Different 'voices'

Responding to a journalist, Desplat described how he worked with Del Toro, coming to the movie once it had been shot and edited. In describing the collaboration, he referred to Del Toro as a 'knight' leading the group, specifically leading the tone of the filmic storytelling. "Everything was open" for his compositional ideas, meaning that De Toro enabled Desplat to add his own creativity to the film, to find his own way of bringing the film to life through music, without restrictions. Desplat was firm, though, that there would have to be "lots of flutes and whistling" (Variety, 2018, 00:01:14).

To create a tone for this film, Desplat makes some particular choices regarding the instrumentation for his score. It is notable that the woodwind section is entirely made up of flutes, of all sizes, and there are no clarinets, oboes or bassoons. Working with a full string and brass section, and limited percussion (bass, timpani, tom-toms), Desplat's choice of flute for a leading melodic role gives a specifically airy timbre, which he described as bringing an organic flavour to the score, perhaps reasserting the humanity of the unknown amphibian man. Indeed, in interviews, Desplat has been quite detailed about his choice. In order to find the 'magic' of the story, "it was clear that the music should be the voice of love" (Variety, 2018, 00:20:00). Desplat refers to the 'soul' of the film, that soul being formed from the love shared by Elisa and the amphibian man. Love sets the context for the entire score. Considering that the film is set in Cold War America (conflicts are referred to by the authority leaders, and there is a role for a Russian spy), it is interesting that Desplat chooses to foreground the romance throughout the film. Through flutter-tonguing in the flutes, tremolos in the bass, and constant motion, a sense of threat is created when the Cold War elements are at the forefront of the story. Even the opening of the film, moving

from Bb minor to D major, sets the tone, effectively announcing that there will be two different core elements to the narrative: the Cold War 1960s industrial place of work with threats and unknowns; and the personal, emotional, intimate setting of the home, with the ideal of 1940s musicals, dancing and dream-like imagination.

The flute becomes a sonic voice for the emotion of the characters, but Desplat goes further in ensuring some form of sonic voice for Elisa. Perhaps in response to Del Toro's personal sonic contributions to the verbal sound effects for the amphibian man, Desplat writes into the score many melodies to be whistled. Whistling in the film was requested by Del Toro (HeyUGuys, 2018, 00:01:15). As confirmed in interviews by Del Toro and Desplat, it is the composer's own whistling which has been included in the film score. This is fascinating as it not only speaks for Elisa, but in some scenes, notably on her bus commute to work, it is Elisa who is whistling her own theme, through Desplat's whistle. In addition to the flute-dominant score, combined with whistling, Desplat uses an accordion. Creating a feel of the 'other', i.e. beyond America to another culture, the accordion is able to give a sonic cue that both Elisa and the amphibian man are not from the same area as everyone else. They are highlighted by their difference in how they communicate and also in the score that accompanies them and supplements their communication.

There is a lightness to much of the score, not only done through melodic writing for the flute and accordion, but also through quiet but constantly moving musical lines. The piano often doubles the celeste or harp in constantly flowing passages – a metaphor for water – which instantly gives a sense of motion, even when the scene is static. The constant movement in the score is matched by the constant movement of the camera, which itself reflects the tone of films shot in the 1960s. Del Toro and Desplat watched and listened to historical films in order to recreate the time period for this film. As Desplat noted in the post-Oscar Awards interview, with water always present in the film in some way, he aimed “to figure out the instrumentation, the way the melody moves in waves [...] the softness of the instrumentation [...] with flutes, the whistle and the accordion, ... it is all instruments with air, with something organic” (Variety, 00:04:24-00:04:38).

The embodied nature of the musical performance, with breath, is important to situating Elisa in the film. Giving voice to a character without speech can be done through breath and gesture: considering the range of modes able to communicate and deliver meaning, the embodied sounds of the actors are very important to the detail of the story. Linking Elisa's theme to her, not only by synchronizing the sound of it to her visuals, but by including her whistling her theme in the diegesis of the film, is assertive. It has the effect of presenting a first-person perspective on the story, whereby the viewer is invited to view everything through her experience. This is only made possible due to music, and the linking of various sound worlds to her. As I note elsewhere, the first-person perspective is still fairly unique for large-scale film works (Minors, forthcoming), but it is made possible through character themes linked to their experiences in screen, alongside bodily intimate sounds and the use of silence.

Metaphor is not a mode, but a device which all modes can use. As such, it becomes a unifying feature to link modes when they project meaning through different and often contrasting means. Voice as a concept therefore needs not be limited to language and to speaking. It becomes the expression of meaning, tone, and emotion, the delivery of someone's message and the performance of identity through a range of modes. Here, voice is also a metaphor for the mute characters' ways of communicating through music, movement, gesture and shared experiences within the water. In place of language proper, it exists across all modes.

The sound of the amphibian man is important for expressing the nature of the character, and to ensure this would be possible, Del Toro worked with the effects team for over three years to make the eyes and movement possible in the amphibian suit, shot in camera lens, with mechanisms embedded on the back of the costume. The sound of this character was recorded by Del Toro himself (FOX 5, 2018) using, particularly, analogue processes important to the embodiment of the character, such as the recording of whistling by the composer (referred to above).

Desplat notes that in the film the characters watch musicals from the 1940s and 50s, so "the score has to be near to that" (DP/30, 2018, 00:03:40). As in many films, music has the complex role of representing both the 1960s, as the present, and 1940s, as the past. Thus, the 1960s style of music is usually shown as emanating from the world outside Elisa's flat and workplace, via the radio or TV, while the music associated with her is the 1940s music she consumes through the musical theatre and cinematic choices she makes. Her nostalgia sets her apart from the present, suggesting she is a dreamer. As Elisa is watching the musicals, alongside her neighbour and the amphibian man, music enables the context to be realised.

When Desplat first heard the story summary from Del Toro, he said that "it leaves you a bit perplexed". For Desplat to understand the story, it was important for him to see Del Toro's drawings and then watching the fully edited film. "I knew that I should not do something that was too overwhelming" (GoldDerby, 2018, 00:00:48-00:00:54) in the soundtrack, he said. Instead, he "needed to find a beautiful love theme" (00:00:58-00:01:06) for Elisa and the amphibian man. In sum, the genre of the film was described as "a fairy tale for troubled times", a description one interviewer accredits to Del Toro himself (GoldDerby, 2018, 00:01:08).

4. Speaking through character themes and pre-composed and pre-recorded music (scenes 4, 5 and 6)

Though the film's pace is steady and relatively slow, its component elements are moving all the time. The camera, in particular, is rarely still. Desplat confirms that he came to the film once the entire thing was shot (DP/30, 2018, 00:01:40). It seems sensible then that he mirrors this motion with constant movement in the music, often using celeste, harp, piano combinations to accompany scenes. Though he sets specific character themes to Elisa and the amphibian man, I am not going to refer to them as leitmotifs, as the film's style and

genre do not align with the ways in which Wagner used leitmotifs in his 19th century operatic works.

We first meet the amphibian man in scene 4 (from 00:17:46). Desplat introduces him with a French horn motif (00:20:02). The spectator, at this point, does not know whether the amphibian man is friend or foe. The horn might represent him being the hunter, though as we find out later, he is in fact the hunted. It almost sounds like whale song at first, following the plucked strings, as Elisa finds Strickland's two severed fingers on the floor. The musical content in this scene emphasises the differences between Strickland and the amphibian man. The use of the horn call from 18th and 19th century opera to set the scene and associate character in specific roles subtly lays out a question: can we trust this new character that looks and sounds so different to everyone else? In the context of the '60s Cold War, there is a suggestion that the creature could be a spy or a tool for the enemy. With his amphibian hands on the glass, there is a repeated piano sequence, which situates him with specific melodic shapes in the bass. We hear D#, E, C# (semi-tone to tone). When Elisa is introduced, this motif is expanded as follows: D#, E, G, E, D#, C#, D#, E, C#. ⁶ The expansion reveals interest and begins to build their association both visually and aurally.

The uncertainty regarding this new amphibian character is continued into scene 5 (from 00:22:47) with an oscillating semitone in the French horn (00:23:18) as we see the amphibian man chained in the pool of water for the first time. The same character theme then returns, consolidating it to the amphibian man. Elisa uses American sign language, combined with the loaded symbol of a boiled egg, as the starting point for their 'conversation'. She taps the eggs with a spoon, rhythmically calling the man (00:23:42). Only then does the solo piano start to sound, playing a well-known song, 'You'll Never Know'. ⁷ With both sexual connotations and metaphors of seeding and birth, the egg symbolises the potential growth of these two leading characters, while suggesting further depth to their mutual development. They both ingest the eggs, accompanied by the flute; he takes the egg and dives into the water (00:24:56). The act of eating in this film (as at the start of scene 6, 00:28:33) becomes something that humanises the unknown creature to the spectator. The egg, in Saussurean terms, is a signifier able to carry meaning beyond itself.

Scene 6 fully associates Elisa's theme with her as she sleeps on the bus. Then, back in the green laboratory, she places an egg on the side of the pool and removes an LP player from a drawer (00:31:05). A 'conversation' between Elisa and the amphibian man is facilitated through both musical appreciation of the LP, and through signing: he signs music (00:32:15). Elisa chooses to play music to the amphibian man, and he engages, while eating to *Why do Robins Sing in December*, written by Magomayev for the musical, *My Fair Lady*

⁶ See Minors (2023, p. 344), where I discuss the limited three-note motive significance in *Arrival* and compare it briefly to this scene.

⁷ This song, with music by Harry Warren and lyrics by Mark Gordan, is used in different versions in the film. One version is sung by Randa Floney with the London Symphony orchestra, arranged by Alexandre Desplat. The other is sung by Alice Faye, and is borrowed from the motion picture *Hello, Frisco, Hello* (1943).

(1964). The use of the LP player therefore helps to situate the era of the film, but it does more than this. It reinforces the point that in an age of technological reproduction, communication beyond speech is possible and uses that reproduction in the diegesis of the film.

Desplat outlines his creative journey with this description of the key story elements: “I try to figure out what is the sound of water, the sound of love in water, with a creature that comes from South America, in the 60s, with people watching musicals on TV - how does that sound?” (DP/30, 2018, 00:09:00-00:09:58). In working out the themes, the amphibian man has the lower bass line, while Elisa has the higher register flute and whistle line. In relation to musical themes, Desplat observes: “there is the main love theme that opens the film and closes the film; there is Elisa’s theme which is connected to the love theme, so it can switch from one to the other; there’s the theme for the creature, and a theme for the Russian spy” (DP/30, 2018, 00:21:00-00:21:24). As for Strickland, his violence in torturing the amphibian man speaks for itself; there is no theme for him, he is there to represent the violent potential of humans.

The initial piano solo in scene 5 gives a sense of isolation to the man – we know from this that he feels alone. The parallelism of the rising strings, as he stands, gives gravitas to his figure and commanding presence in the room. The flute is heard as he takes the egg: that is the moment he becomes associated with Elisa, musically as well as visually. Only once the egg is taken (00:31:38) can the music grow to its full orchestration. On first watching *The Shape of Water* in final cut, Desplat was “amazed by the beauty of it” (DP/30, 2018, 00:23:25). Perhaps this is why, so early in the film, Desplat uses music prophetically. The music uses the metaphor of growth from the egg, predicting the full-blown romance of these two characters to come later, by ending the scene with a full orchestral texture.

In an interview with *Variety*, Desplat was asked about any disagreements during the creative process. Desplat notes that, ‘we never had to battle [...] all the film is flowing [...] the way the composer works for film, he works for a collective art form, not for himself [...] I have learned to live within constraints’ in this filmic setting (*Variety*, 00:05:02-00:05:51). Using music to respond to and supplement the story, and Desplat’s own interpretation of it, is central to how he created the soundtrack. Scene 6 ends on the cadence of the sound, as Eliza is nose to nose, through the glass tube, with the amphibian man (00:33:52). It leaves us wondering what is next.

5. Speaking through the immersive sounds of water (scenes 16 and 18)

The romantic arc of the story comes to a pinnacle when Elisa rushes out to find the amphibian man, who has escaped from her bathroom (where he had been living in the bath since she had saved him from Strickland). She finds him downstairs, in the cinema that is situated below her flat. In scene 16, they stand together in the middle of the theatre and embrace (01:16:24-01:16:57). It is notable that the film on the screen is a historical epic, set alongside a 3/4 dance-like whistled melody. Her finding him, at the instruction of her

neighbour, is a climactic moment in the film. The whistling is associated with her emotional joy and relief.

Scene 18 (from 01:22:34) builds the romantic relationship to its fulfilment. The underwater lovemaking is both romantic and magical. It confirms the love between Elisa and the amphibian man through the visual and musical elements. It gives hope to the Cold War context that humankind can create love, ironically shown by two beings that are respectively mute and non-human. As a spectator we are questioning her species too, as her human form is presented with scars that look like gills; we are left to question whether this is the source of her muteness, and also of her comfort at being in water for long periods of time. Most important to the success of this scene, in which music translates the message of the screenplay and conveys it to the spectator, is how Desplat combines the two characters' themes already heard in the film. The first is Elisa's melody, often set by the flute and through whistling; the second, is the bass line that accompanied the first appearance of the amphibian man. Now, they are played together, combined in the orchestral texture, through the full orchestration, in a warm timbre with luscious strings, flute line melodies, and brass-chorale supporting harmonies. Music provides a metaphor of joining and coming together. It likewise confirms Elisa as other, different from the other humans, and situates her within the amphibian man's world.

As the sink overflows in her flat following her rescuing of the amphibian man from the laboratory (01:25:50), we see a hat box of hers containing the nutrients the amphibian man needs for survival, which was given to her in the laboratory by a sympathetic scientist who understood what she was trying to do. All the visual signs are bringing them together, synchronised with their musical combination. The bathroom fills with water above the cinema (while it has been raining outside). Their union is confirmed in music and in the visuals, and is recognised as the neighbour opens the door witnessing the scene (01:28:12). As the room had filled with water the neighbour was concerned for her safety, but she does not drown and seems perfectly happy in the water. Interestingly, Del Toro shoots this 'in lens', not using CGI. The scene moves from the isolation of one piano sound to a fuller orchestration. As the cinema starts to leak with water (01:30:17), the music builds, and becomes 'their' music: character themes combined.

6. Speaking through dancing: a musical within the film (scene 20)

Both Del Toro and Desplat refer to the film as a musical, as mentioned above. It is interesting then, that they integrate a musical scene directly into the diegesis of the film. Scene 20 (from 01:33:10) sees the couple seated at the dining-room table while it is pouring with rain outside. A song is on the radio (01:34:26). The amphibian man is signing to her. She becomes emotional, and as in many musicals, when emotion is too great for words alone, there is a shift from speech (or signing in this instance) to song. She tries to make sounds to sing the recurring song, 'You'll Never Know' (01:35:13). The scene transforms itself as soon as she says that she loves him. The dining-room scene fades away, through a darker setting, and into a black and white studio set with full orchestra. She is dressed in a

flowing white virginal ballgown (01:35:41), dancing with professionalism, and singing with full voice, in a typical 40/50s musical film setting (see Figure 1).

The amphibian man remains without clothes, making clear that he does not need to change to receive her love. When she sits on his knee, the lighting fades and focuses on her face. The light goes up again and the scene returns to the dining table (01:36:29-01:36:38). At this point he is looking down at the egg, the room is quiet, and he is not seeing her sign. The impact of this emotional experience, as interior to Elisa, is impactful to heightening the understanding of the spectator, while further situating the home context within the golden age of musical cinema. It is significant then when Del Toro says that: “we tried to shoot the film like a musical, but we also tried to shoot it like a classical movie. We wanted the look to be luscious, lavish, colourful” (FOX 5, 2018, 00:03:40-00:03:52). At every level there is metaphor – through colour, combining music themes, and signifiers, such as the egg. If “all translation is a dance between commensurability and incommensurability” (Fulcher, 2011, p. 553), Del Toro’s film and Desplat’s music represents this in a multimodal temporal form.



Figure 1. Scene 20, Black and White Musical Scene, Elisa and the amphibian man, *The Shape of Water* (2017), 01:36:04. © 2017 Fox Searchlight.

Conclusion

The chosen scenes focus above all on the two lead characters, with the music metaphorically speaking on their behalf, since they are mute. In other words, translation is important to the process of how we as spectators can read across and through the multimodal content of the film to formulate a coherent understanding of something which is rather complex. Moreover, music situates the historical period of the present (1960s) and the nostalgic approach to the 1940s musical theatre Elisa chooses to listen to. Music therefore is used to set the era, the location, and to associate characters. The diegetic use, on screen, raises the profile of music to be an active agent in the story telling, while the

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non-diegetic music, heard but not directly in the visual scene, deepens the characters' relationships by sounding their associated themes, even when they are not in the visual shot.

In this case study, music in many ways becomes the main mode through which the story is told, especially where the two lead characters are concerned. As "love is the crucial element of mankind" and of this story, as Desplat put it during an interview (DP/30, 2018, 00:30:20), the composer has effectively produced a response to Del Toro's 'humanist language' (HeyUGuys, 2018, 00:00:46). The potential of film music is vast in its ability to evoke emotion and provoke visceral reactions from a spectator. I hope this particular case study shows how music has been used as an active agent, through metaphor, association, and contextual placing in the diegesis of the film, to enable the spectators to interpret the complexities of the story. Music is part of the collective experience and has a direct impact on how we are able to interpret (Minors, 2013) the long-form story of film.

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**THE INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION OF A LANDSCAPE OF SOUNDS: THE LINGUISTIC
CREATION BEHIND THE MUSICAL KEYS OF
THE TYPEWRITER (1950)**

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ABSTRACT: The latest trends of Translation Studies allow us to reconceptualize it as a transdisciplinary and multimodal phenomenon in which the translator approaches the semiotics of the original discourse through performative processes of creation and experimentation. This research paper discusses an intersemiotic translation in the form of a visual poem of the musical work *The Typewriter* (Anderson, 1950). The innovative look at the traslative procedure required a methodology structured in three aspects: first, a detailed study of all those semiotic elements that constituted the original work, specific to the musical field; second, an analysis of all the representations as a way of reinterpreting the original work in the form of rewritings that had been performed in different social and cultural contexts, as well as all those adaptations to different audiovisual media; and, finally, the possibility of combining all those elements and translating them into the form of a visual poem.

KEYWORDS: Intersemiotic Translation; Multimodality; Experimental Writing; Situated Translations; Visual Poem; Leroy Anderson.

1. Introduction

In the mid-twentieth century, Leroy Anderson composed *The Typewriter*, an original and virtuosic piece of light orchestral music in which he gave the leading role to a mechanical typewriter, functioning as an unconventional percussion instrument. Almost at the same time, Jakobson (1959 [2000], p. 114) established his famous tripartite division which included intersemiotic translation as a process of translation between two semiotic systems, not necessarily linguistic. Since then, Anderson's work has been performed and reinterpreted on stages all over the world and has served as a musical background for radio and television programmes, among other things. Meanwhile, Translation Studies has also evolved towards a more open-minded approach in which the concept of translation has become a transdisciplinary and multimodal phenomenon that has moved away from the traditional interlinguistic gaze to experiment (Robinson, 2022) with the semiotics of discourse through other artistic languages, particularly music (Minors, 2023, 2013; Desblache, 2019), by means of experimentation (Lee, 2022) and creativity (Grass, 2023; Malmkjær, 2020).

In spring 2022, CETAPS/Translationality in collaboration with the Experiential Translation Network organised the course *Soundscapes: translating from music*. These sessions, taught by Professor Karen Bennett, invited us to explore the potential of music in the creation of meaning and its subsequent translation into another medium, addressing in a theoretical and practical way the process of semiotic creation in the performing arts through concepts such as tempo, timbre, rhythm, harmony and melody, among others.

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With attention to the the universal, cultural and personal dimensions of musical meaning, its objective was to encourage the translation of a chosen piece of musical discourse into another semiotic code, such as poetry, visual art or dance.

It was in this context that, together with Professor África Vidal Claramonte, we translated the aforementioned musical work into the form of a visual poem, attempting to transfer the musical content from sound to verbal/visual language. Since then, numerous publications have echoed the proposal to delve into the translational process from the new perspectives of Translation Studies. Examples include the issue *Experiential Translation* (*Translation Matters*, 2023) or the recently published volumes *The Experience of Translation. Materiality and Play in Experiential Translation* (Routledge, 2024) and *Hypertranslation* (Cambridge University Press, 2024).

As described by Bennett, this translation

breaks down normative modes of syntax by including signs and forms which are not part of a traditional poem. In doing so, it reproduces the disruptive effect of Anderson's piece in a different medium, resulting in a typed text that can be read in many different ways. (2023, p. 2)

The process of translation thus becomes a complex amalgamation on a conceptual and formal level, in which the nature of both texts must be taken into account in order to achieve the same effect. From an intersemiotic premise, the idea was to go beyond linguistic and sensory barriers (Campbell and Vidal, 2019), leaving our personal creative trace in the work (Jackson, 2020, p. 97) without ignoring the interpretations and adaptations that served as inspiration by interrelating the translation with other moments and spaces (Vidal Claramonte, 2022, p. 9). Hence, this article focuses on the creative process followed during the intersemiotic translation itself, something that would not have been possible without the study of the original work and of the musical rewritings and multimodal adaptations that, through representations in diverse social and cultural contexts, have influenced our way of seeing the process of translation.

2. From listening to reading: translation as an interdisciplinary creative act

2.1 Anderson's *The Typewriter* (1950) as an original text

In 1950 Leroy Anderson composed *The Typewriter*, one of his most internationally acclaimed compositions. His musical training led him to complete his studies at Harvard University, where he also became the conductor of its music band. It was precisely his work in this formation that attracted the attention of Arthur Fiedler, director of the Boston Pops Orchestra, who encouraged him to make various musical arrangements, especially for orchestra, which were immediately successful. Although from a certain point in the evolution of his musical career he experimented with musical forms of longer and more elaborate structures, Anderson's most important and characteristic works were precisely the arrangements, compositions and transcriptions for light music orchestras and musical theatres. Many of them can be classified as miniatures or orchestral miniatures, such as

Jazz Pizzicato (1938), *The Syncopated Clock* (1945), *Trumpeter's Lullaby* (1949), *Plink, Plank, Plunk!* (1951) or *Forgotten Dreams* (1954), among many others examples. These successes brought him popular recognition and made him the pre-eminent composer of light music concerts in the America of the 1950s.

The vivacious composition on which the analysis of this article focuses is a simple work of barely two minutes' duration, in which the soloist's typewriter becomes an 'instrument', using all the sonorities offered by its different mechanisms in the performance. It should be noted that, although the sounds of the typewriter as a percussion instrument are those emitted naturally by the keys and carriage, and even the auxiliary bell used to mark the end of a line, the typewriter is adapted for the performance. That is to say, only two of all the keys remain active to avoid hindering the rapid keystrokes of a performer who has to demonstrate agility and flexibility.

Non-conventional instruments had already been used in orchestras and other ensembles on numerous occasions prior to this composition by Leroy Anderson. Examples include the iron chains used in Arnold Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* (1910-1913); the gun shots, rattle, roulette wheel, sirens, typewriter, water splashes and circus music in Erik Satie's *Parade* (1916-1917), or the toy piano in John Cage's *Suite for Toy Piano* (1948). Undoubtedly, the socio-cultural and aesthetic context of the transition to the twentieth century, and its first fifty years, imbued these resources with a different meaning or justification. A changing society, characterized by the advance of technology, science and the importance of machines in people's daily lives, combined with the need to leave Romanticism behind and find new forms of artistic expression, favoured the appearance of the avant-garde throughout the arts.

In music, the creation of unusual sound effects, intended to add colour and atmosphere, was achieved in a variety of ways: by using innovative sonorities produced by the voice and conventional instruments, instruments from non-Western traditions, new instruments, extra-musical sonorities (as here), and also, very significantly, with the great expansion of percussion instruments, or of percussion itself, a sign of the preoccupation with rhythm in the 20th century. The constant search for new horizons in music during this period, which began in its first decade, lasted well beyond the year of Leroy Anderson's composition.

In fact, there was also an interest in extending the static model of the classical orchestra in favour of a more flexible concept in which the different sections are substituted, disappear or change their protagonism. This is the case of *The Typewriter*, where the hegemonic role of the violins in previous orchestrations or the singer in popular song genres is taken over by the typewriter itself. In short, the piece represents what García Laborda (2000) calls a moment of emancipation – the emancipation of harmony, timbre, rhythm and metre, and also emancipation of form – which together broaden the palette of sounds usable in a musical composition, both in their sound properties and in their combination and structuring.

Thus, stylistically and structurally, *The Typewriter* presents a simple compositional scheme in keeping with the work's function and purpose. As for the harmonic language, Leroy Anderson's style explores the margins of tonality, avoiding the atonal and dodecaphonic proposals embraced by numerous composers (including his American contemporaries) within the avant-garde of the first half of the twentieth century, but instead engaging ludically with it, influenced by his contact with the light and theatrical music of the time, and also by the academic training he received at Harvard under Walter Piston.

The composition has a lighthearted feel, characterized by very recognizable melodic themes. In terms of structure, the work presents the typical verse-chorus form characteristic of many popular songs, deriving from the classical rondo: (I) - A - B - A - A - CC - (P) - A – Coda. All this is articulated by means of the classical four-, eight- or sixteen-bar sections. After a short and lively introduction in the key of G major, the orchestra makes way for the typewriter, which takes the rhythmic lead without interruption until the end of the composition. In the meantime, certain instrumental sections, such as the strings, play the main theme A of the work, before moving on to the B section. Although the thematic material in this section is largely derived from the previous one, it uses modulation into the relative minor (E minor) as a contrasting tool, before being played by the whole orchestra, providing greater timbral fullness. Following the more traditional patterns of the rondo form, once the second section is finished, section A is performed again, with the same phrasing, timbre, tonality and harmony as in the first performance. The reminder of the main theme in the melodic discourse leads directly into the new C section, which is then repeated by the whole orchestra, although using three resources for greater contrast: the modulation to C major, a figuration of the new theme less brief than in the two previous sections and a choppy character through the pizzicato of the string instruments and the notes of the rest of the orchestra. This contrast is reinforced by the complete repetition of this C section, which makes it the longest in the composition, stretching to thirty-two bars by means of the usual phrases of eight bars, structured with the typical and simple question-answer games. A short four-bar bridge, with thematic material from the initial introduction, links the previous section with the final part of the composition. This link brings us back to the main theme A with slight modifications at the end. The closing with this theme of the formal structure of the rondo is reinforced by the use of the principal key of G major. The last ten bars, as a coda, with a special liveliness, melodic directionality and the intervention of the whole orchestra, bring the composition to a close and reinforce its conclusion.

The starting point for our proposal for an intersemiotic translation into a visual poem was Theme A of the percussion score (that is, for typewriter), presented in Figure 1 below:

The Typewriter

PERCUSSION
(Bell, Typewriter)

A real typewriter, with the sound amplified, is played by one percussion player.
The typewriter bell is disconnected and the bell sound is produced on a desk bell by a second player.
As an alternative, the key clatter may be imitated on a wood block and the carriage return on a gourd.

Leroy Anderson

Allegro vivace

8

9

Typewriter keys

Bell

f

Carriage return

1-8 10 11 12

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

21 22 23 24 25 26

Fig. 1. Theme A of Leroy Anderson's *The Typewriter*, as presented in the percussion score (for mechanical typewriter)

We chose this musical work for the following reasons. Firstly, the work arose in a period of interdisciplinary artistic creation in which composers begin to experiment with form, putting in check certain pre-established notions; this invited us to play with the work, looking for parallels and analogies between musical language and the most groundbreaking literary experiments (such as the works of concrete and abstract poets). Secondly, the idea of starting from a musical work in which the solo instrument was a percussion instrument allowed us to focus on the transposition of elements such as tempo, timbre or intensity, rather than attempting to reproduce the notes in a melody. Finally, there was a convenient symbolism in the fact that a 'musical instrument' (the typewriter) was writing while the textual translation that we presented as a literary product was playing.

2.2 The Typewriter as a palimpsest: intercultural rewritings and situated translations

A score is a musical text that serves as the starting point for each individual performance, as interpreted by the conductor. On this occasion, specific performances, and thus translations, of Leroy Anderson's piece show that the typewriter types, sounds and writes in a specific way in each given context. It was necessary to understand how this meaning had been translated in each of its interpretations in order to demonstrate that it could indeed be translated. In fact, the social and cultural adaptations that a translator has to deal with in a cross-linguistic transfer are even more evident in these intersemiotic proposals in

which language is sonorous and corporeal. Given the formal restrictions of this article, it is worth listening to some of the representations mentioned by sample below.

There are several specific performances of the work that are worth mentioning in an intercultural context. In the version by the Strauss Festival Orchestra in Vienna, performed at the Concert Hall Ludwigshafen in Germany in 2008, it is the percussionist Martin Breinschmid who conducts the orchestra while performing the work at the same time.¹ Another case is the version by the orchestra and choir of *Voces de la Paz* (Músicos Solidarios), conducted by Miguel Roa at the Auditorio Nacional de Música in Madrid (Spain) in 2011;² here, the soloist, Alfredo Anaya, not only performs the musical piece, but also stages a theatrical dialogue with the conductor at the beginning, in which the latter reprimands the performer for being late saying "Come on, Fernández, you're late". This surname is one of the most common in Spain and, culturally, it is easily associated with a professional office context, so, given that the interpreter's real surname is not 'Fernández', we assume that it is an appellative created for the performance. After this brief introductory dialogue, Fernández goes as far as to tune the bell with the "A" offered to him by a fellow member of the orchestra.

Another case is the performance by the Miami Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Eduardo Marturet at the Adrienne Arscht Center - Knight Concert Hall in 2013.³ In this one, the orchestra is interrupted by the Venezuelan Raul González, who spins a narrative about being an immigrant in this land of opportunity and having had a dream of being part of this orchestra, full of ironic references to his musical instrument and his homeland. After having 'tuned' the instrument, as in the previous case, he goes as far as to call his mother to tell her about the event.

In the 2015 production by the Hallandale Symphonic Pops Orchestra, conducted by Peter P. in Hollywood (Florida),⁴ pianist Sofiya Uryvayeva appears on stage wearing a bow tie and glasses, typical of an office worker, takes a magazine out of her handbag and paints her lips before starting typing. During the break, she continues typing while taking the opportunity to eat an apple. As for the version performed in Oktyabrsky in 2016 by the percussion group Malaya Ohta,⁵ the symphony orchestra is in the orchestra pit, and a group of ten female performers appear on stage, also wearing glasses and bow ties, coordinating their respective typewriters, while letters of the Cyrillic alphabet in different colours fall in the background of the scene.

¹Strauss Festival Orchestra at the Concert Hall Ludwigshafen in Vienna in 2008, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2LJ1i7222c> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

² *Voces de la Paz* (Músicos Solidarios) at the Auditorio Nacional de Música de Madrid (España) in 2011, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4nXOXrn-wo> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

³ Miami Symphony Orchestra at the Adrienne Arscht Center – Knight Concert Hall in 2013, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1upTPepErTY> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

⁴Hallandale Symphonic Pops Orchestra in Hollywood (Florida) in 2015, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgCXogoiFFk> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

⁵ Malaya Ohta in Oktyabrsky in 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjPzx07eC8I> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

In the same year, the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Bernharour Wilkinson and with Steef van Oosterhout as soloist, performed the work in Reykjavík.⁶ On this occasion, the soloist, who was also projected on a screen in the background next to his typewriter, uses shorthand to simulate the writing of a text that the director reads to the audience at the end.

As examples of two Eastern performances, the following cases are worth mentioning. At the concert of the Nagano City Brass Band, held at the Nagano City Museum of Art in 2016,⁷ a highly concentrated soloist types out a text on a typewriter, which she copies from the papers next to her for further reading. Finally, the case of the Nanyang Polytechnic Chinese Orchestra, in the 2012 annual concert at the Nanyang Polytechnic Auditorium in Singapore, conducted by Mike Chiang,⁸ involved the performer, once again dressed in a special way, stretching before typing sections. In this version, a culturally specific element stands out, as the orchestra is made up of oriental instruments such as the *yuequin*, the *p'i p'a* and the *erhu* or *nanhu*.

Throughout these various performances, a range of different kinds of typewriters were used. In Vienna, it was a black typewriter with white keys, simpler and smaller than most of the others, with a paper already inserted, without a bell, but with carriage movement in each musical phrase. In Madrid, the machine had a more professional look, with a music stand for the sheet of paper, bell and a lighter carriage. In Miami, the bell was similar, but the machine was all black and did not stand out much, especially because the carriage was immobile; thus, the rest of the effects were produced by members of the orchestra on other percussion instruments. In Hollywood, the performer had numerous complementary articles on the table, but the machine was older and lighter, with a fast carriage and bell. In Japan, the performance featured one of the largest and most sophisticated machines, in terms of size and operation: the carriage did not move to the end, but only to the point where it stops typing, and the paper appears written with what looks like a musical score. In China, the performer used a smaller and apparently simpler machine, but which was more practical in terms of the movement of the carriage and the use of the bell, its gray color giving greater prominence to the instrument. Finally, in Russia, perhaps the most striking case in this regard, each of the ten performers used a different typewriter, varying in terms of years of manufacture, model, size, color, structure and even mobility of the carriage. While all this may seem a mere visual element for the staging, the fact is that it is closely related to a cultural component and even to the sound perception of each of the representations.

Beyond the diversity of different interpretations of the original work, it is worth noting that Anderson's musical piece has also appeared in numerous other contexts. Perhaps one

⁶ Iceland Symphony Orchestra in Reykjavík in 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVFR7wDZT9A> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

⁷ Brass Band in Nagano in 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8air7YdVKZs> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

⁸ Nanyang Polytechnic Chinese Orchestra in 2012, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yuUAXow5Oc> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

of the best known is a scene starring Jerry Lewis in the American film *Who's Minding the Store?* (1963),⁹ a comedy in which the protagonist tries to perform the tasks assigned to him in the best possible way to please his upper-class sweetheart Barbara. In this case, the character does appear as a performer, but the typewriter is imaginary.

A few years later, in the 1970s, the Puerto Rican TV comedy show *Esto no tiene nombre*¹⁰ also used the piece as a musical background. Another example is the soundtrack of the German TV series *Büro, Büro* (1982-1993),¹¹ a comedy about the day-to-day life of a small business. Similarly, the British radio programme *The News Quiz*,¹² first broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in 1977, opens with an extract from *The Typewriter*. In 1993, an adaptation of the melody accompanies the larks of the *Animaniacs*, in the Warner Bros cartoon episode *Temporary Insanity*.¹³ One of the most recent uses in Spanish popular culture was the challenge faced by multi-faceted Mario Vaquerizo in the television programme *El Desafío* on Antena 3 (2022), where the contestant, who is not a professional musician, had to be able to play the composition following the rhythm set by the orchestra.¹⁴

Through all these performances, we can see the same work interpreted in different ways. Each performance is based on the same notes but tells the story in different settings and with different instruments. The main characters vary in name, age, gender, character, costume and even linguistic expression. Sometimes they interact in a plurality as if the orchestra were an office, while other times they express themselves in an individualistic way. All these explicit and implicit references make each interpretation and staging unique, yet providing a new iteration of then original work, just like a translation.

3. Translation into a visual poem: *The Typewriter translated by Á.V.C. and S.L.M.*

The idea (Bennett, 2022, 2023) behind the above mentioned course *Soundscapes: translating from music* was to study the nature of musical meaning and its potential for transfer to other media, after which participants were invited to offer an intersemiotic translation of a piece of music of their choice into poetry, dance or visual arts. Some of these proposals, such as the one described in this study, were presented by Bennett at the conference *Performative and Experiential Translation: Meaning-Making through Language, Art and Media* at King's College London in the summer of 2022.

⁹ *Who's Minding the Store?*, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0WRfuDQHs4> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

¹⁰ *Esto no tiene nombre*, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7AkdI3qU7U> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

¹¹ *Büro, Büro*, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CgsQj4QGbTo&list=PL4QJU3nyUSFMJbPX957FPkByFb6uDvx0s> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

¹² *The News Quiz*, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006r9yq> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

¹³ *Temporary Insanity (Animaniacs)*, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KezSyQpmqHQ> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

¹⁴ *El Desafío*, available at: https://www.antena3.com/programas/el-desafio/temporada-2/invitados/homenaje-mario-vaquerizo-jerry-lewis-junto-film-symphony-orchestra_202203186234fa9af5e39e0001f9e95b.html (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

In our translation from music into experimental literature, the aim was to delve into the idea of how meaning is conceptualised through various semiotic fields that are different in nature, and more specifically to pursue “a radical resemiotization of a given work by bringing the aspect of materiality into high relief” (Lee and Vidal Claramonte, 2024, p. 35). Given the complexity of musical language, we decided to focus on elements such as timbre and rhythm in order to show which meanings are maintained, moulded or even disappear in the process of '(re)semiotisation'. Hence, our intersemiotic translation intended to demonstrate the possibility of translating a series of semiotic and formal elements from music to poetry. In this sense, Anderson's commitment to an unconventional instrument allowed us to opt for a more visual experimental literature that played with syntax, forms and space.

In the intersemiotic translation, we took the basic premise of timbre as the unique quality of a sound that distinguishes it from another sound, as it could be the case of differentiating between two instruments or voices playing or singing the same note. On the written level, our intention was to differentiate the main sound sources: on the one hand the orchestra in an ensemble, on the other hand the keys of the typewriter, and, finally, the carriage and the bell. Hence, each of them is presented through diverse visual elements, such as pictorial strokes, letters and pictograms. As for rhythm, this is visually shown by the spacing of elements on the page, more or less extensive on the white space depending on the silent parts. Given the brevity of the selected part of the original musical work, the letters are all the same size as quavers following the tempo of the first musical phrase of the original composition. The length of the words varies according to the number of bars of the musical phrases. It also allows to understand a reading from left to right and from top to bottom, as in any conventional score, which is especially evident in the case of the order of interpretation of the carriage and the bell.

Based on this conception of the score as a combination of visual elements, the idea arose of giving greater prominence to the linguistic part by offering two distinct versions (Figures 2 and 3, below). Both intersemiotic translations, which play with a “range of techniques appealing to verbal, visual, and auditory modalities simultaneously” (Vidal Claramonte and Lee, 2024, p. 37), approach the linguistic component through two different strategies. While the formal structure is analogous in both versions, the verbal material that constitutes the literary verses is monolingual in the former and multilingual in the latter, as specified below.

At a visual level, we opted for a typography typical of a traditional mechanical typewriter right from the title, which maintains the name of the musical source work. Beyond the font, the authorship of the translation appears only through the initials in a shorthand reference, making clear that it is a personal interpretation. As regards the notation system, the bass clef appears at the beginning of the visual poem. Although the typewriter and the bell are percussion instruments of indefinite pitch, we opted for the bass clef, which gives an approximate idea of the pitch of the sound made by the typewriter keys.

There is no tempo indication or rhythmic structure since at this point, our main concern was the visual poem, rather than any possible future performance.

The two rows at the top of the poem translate the introduction to the musical piece, which is played by the orchestra while the typewriter remains silent. The typewriter's silence has been represented with six semibreve rests above a blurred stave, with wavy lines that reflect the amalgam of sounds produced by the other instruments. Once the typewriter enters, each letter /t/ represents each note typed and keyed. From these letters, and in cascade, words appear as echoes of the cultural representations unleashed in (some of) the performances. All the words chosen belong to the lexical field of the office, and all begin with the letter 't'. In the first version, the words are in Spanish, and read (from left to right) 'time', 'work', 'table', 'stool', 'cup', 'telephone', 'tranquillity', 'task', 'transform', 'finish', 'text' and 'translation'. In the second version, the same elements are presented in other languages, including some with different alphabets (English, French, Italian, Greek, Russian, German and Arabic). The last of the words is a nod to the work as a translation in itself.

In the lower part of the almost pictorial poem, three very specific ideograms appear at three specific points. In this semiotic interrelation between sight, hearing and touch, the bell represents both the bell that a 1950s secretary might have had on her desk, as well as the typewriter bell that would ring as the carriage arm approached the edge of the page; the moving arrows symbolizes the movement of the carriage. Finally, the icon of the typewriter itself makes direct reference to the moment when, at the end of the performance, the percussionist stands up and shows the audience and the conductor the text metaphorically written or composed during the performance.

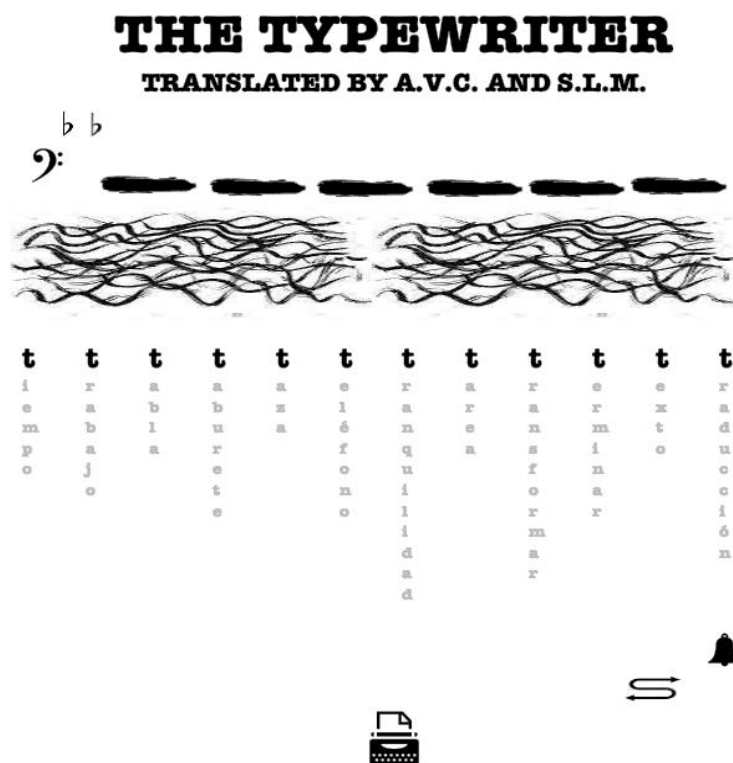


Fig. 2. 'The Typewriter', version 1 (Spanish). Intersemiotic translation of Leroy Anderson's orchestral work *The Typewriter* (2022)

formal specificities, translation followed an analogous conceptual procedure in all cases. This practical parallelism, supported by recent theoretical publications from this semiotic and experiential prism (Campbell and Vidal, 2025, 2024; Gorrée, 2023), opens a new pathway for intersemiotic and interdisciplinary experimentation in the form of translation.

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SONGWRITING AS TRANSLATION: A PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH APPROACH

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ABSTRACT: This article positions songwriting as an intrinsically translational practice and advances a Practice-as-Research (PaR) methodology to demonstrate how the experience of a place's atmosphere can be translated into a musicopoetic artefact. Grounded in Böhme's phenomenology of 'atmosphere' (2017), Vidal and Campbell's framework of 'experiential translation' (2024, 2025), and Smith's theorisation of the 'artefact' (2007), the study centres on the song *búzios*. (Galvão, 2024), which renders the atmosphere of the Brazilian peninsula of Búzios as experienced in 2018–2019. Drawing on Barrett and Bolt's PaR model (2007) and Haseman's 'performative paradigm' (2006, 2007), it details a songwriting-as-translation process that is analysed using Bennett's 'musical building blocks' (2002) and an intermusicality lens informed by Desblache (2019). The study thus establishes songwriting as an embodied creative practice through which the resulting artefact emerges as the subject, method, and evidence of research, enriching Translation Studies' engagement with the creative arts.

KEYWORDS: Songwriting; Experiential Translation; Musicopoetic form; Practice as Research (PaR); Musical Building Blocks; Intermusicality

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the “age-old notion that the process and product of translation can relate to more than interlingual translation, as well as to other disciplines” has acquired fresh momentum within Translation Studies (Vidal & Campbell, 2025, p. 1). Once marginalised within the academy, artistic practices—including music—have been progressively reframed through innovative strands of the discipline, notably its more ‘experimental’ and ‘practice-based’ approaches, which have reconceptualised translation as an “embodied creative practice” (Bennett, 2023, p. 1) and reaffirmed the epistemic value of the creative arts. Foundational studies by Marinetti (2013, 2018), Laera (2019), Desblache (2019), Tarantini (2021, 2023, 2025), and De Fransisci and Marinetti (2025), alongside the work of the Experiential Translation Network—particularly the two-volume collection *The Experience of Translation* and *The Translation of Experience* (Campbell & Vidal, 2024, 2025)—as well as the *Translation Matters* special issue on *Experiential Translation* (2023), have consolidated this ‘outward turn’, challenging paradigms that treat translation as a static, instrumental activity confined to interlingual transfer. Yet songwriting remains conspicuously under-examined, and no study has yet systematically investigated the translation of experience of place into “musicopoetic” form—a term coined by Gorlée (2005, p. 7) to describe the hybrid art form that brings together music and language as coexisting artistic media.

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Accordingly, the present study treats songwriting¹ as an intrinsically translational practice and poses the question of how the experience of a place's atmosphere may be translated into a musicopoetic artefact. The question is anchored in a case study of the song *búzios*.² (Galvão, 2024), which renders the atmosphere of the Brazilian peninsula of Búzios as experienced during fourteen visits between 4 December 2018 and 31 March 2019.

The argument is scaffolded by a tripartite theoretical matrix. First, Gernot Böhme's phenomenology of *atmosphere* (2017) identifies the pre-conceptual, affective 'feel' of place that constitutes the experiential material for translation. Second, the 'outward turn' framework of *experiential translation* advanced by Campbell and Vidal (2024, 2025) reframes translation as an in-the-moment, embodied process whose outcome is an *artefact*. Third, the artefact itself is understood via Owen F. Smith's flexible definitions (2007). To further explore the resulting artefact, I draw on Karen Bennett's analytical framework of five musical building blocks (2002), complemented by a concept I term *intermusicality*, developed in dialogue with Desblache's (2019) account of 'intertextuality in music.' These tools enable a granular examination of the song's sonic fabric alongside a close reading of its lyrics, linking the atmosphere of Búzios, the experiential translation process, and the resulting artefact within a coherent theoretical framework.

Methodologically, the study adopts a *Practice-as-Research* (PaR) approach, situated within the performative paradigm as articulated by Haseman (2006, 2007). Songwriting is treated as an embodied creative practice through which the resulting artefact emerges as the subject, method, and evidence of research—aligning with Nelson's (2013) understanding of Practice as Research as a mode of 'knowing-doing' grounded in creative practice. To structure the methodological articulation, I adapt Barrett and Bolt's medium-agnostic model of 'Materials and Methods in Creative Arts Research' (2007), reorganising it into four interrelated components tailored to the exigencies of songwriting as a translational act. This adaptation foregrounds the iterative and replicable principles central in PaR, thereby ensuring transparency and methodological rigour.

Drawing on the foregoing theoretical and methodological configuration, this article contributes to Translation Studies' outward turn by introducing songwriting—framed through experiential translation—as a communicative modality and embodied creative practice that resists monolingual paradigms and attests to the plurality of lived experience. It further articulates a methodological architecture that renders the translational

¹ In this study, 'songwriting' refers to the complete process of crafting a song, including lyric writing, musical composition, recording, production and mixing. While the term is sometimes used exclusively for lyric writing, here it encompasses the full scope of crafting both words and music, as well as the sonic and structural elements involved in producing the final piece.

² The song title *búzios*. is intentionally stylised with a lowercase initial letter and a final full stop. This follows the aesthetic convention adopted throughout the EP, *perfil.*, where all track titles, as well as the EP title itself, adhere to this stylistic choice. This decision was made for creative and conceptual reasons, contributing to the overall cohesion of the project's visual and textual identity.

operations explicit and offers a replicable Practice-as-Research model for future songwriter-researchers.

2. Atmosphere as Experiential Phenomenon

Gernot Böhme's conception of *atmosphere* in *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres* (2017) provides a phenomenological point of departure for understanding what, precisely, is to be translated when one attempts to render an experience of place into musicopoetic form. In everyday usage, Böhme notes, the expression "atmosphere of a city" is typically invoked "from or for the perspective of the stranger"; it designates those qualities that locals generate unreflectively but that a newcomer perceives with particular vividness (2017, p. 128). Moreover, the term points to something "peculiar to the city, what makes it individual and therefore cannot be communicated in general concepts" (2017, p. 128). This quality must first be sensed before it can be named; it precedes cognition and occupies a liminal zone between subject and object. In Böhme's succinct formulation, "the atmosphere of a city is precisely the way life unfolds within the city" (2017, p. 128).

Accepting this premise involves shifting attention from what a place *means* to how it *feels*. What captivates us in an urban environment, Böhme insists, "cannot be construed as language; instead, it enters our disposition as a touching character" (2017, p. 128). Yet this feeling is not confined to private sensation. Atmospheres "radiate from another person, from things, or from the surroundings", rendering them shareable and thus open to collective reflection (2017, p. 129).

Böhme further identifies an 'advantage' of the concept: atmospheres can be studied from the side of the object—that is, "from the side of the agencies by means of which they are created", including "lights, music, sound, spatial constellations, and the use of characteristic objects" (2017, p. 129). These agencies are not addressed to a detached observer but to the participants in urban life, who together produce the atmosphere through their own activity (2017, p. 129). By including music and sound among the generators of atmosphere, Böhme implicitly legitimises their use as media through which the sensed field of place can be re-articulated.

Within this conceptual horizon, the composition *búzios* functions as a concrete act of what Böhme calls "pointing out the character"—the disclosure of an environment's affective quality (2017, p. 128). Rather than fixing *Búzios* in abstract adjectives, the track allows such tonalities to emerge through musical parameters and lyrical imagery (further discussed in section 5). In this way, it translates the felt atmosphere into a sensuous configuration that listeners can inhabit bodily and recognise affectively. The composition, then, constitutes an act of translation that renders the experience of the locale's way of life unfolding into musicopoetic form.

Establishing atmosphere as the *what* to be translated is only the first analytic move. Explaining *how* that felt quality is re-configured in musicopoetic terms requires a conceptual framework of multimodal, embodied semiosis. Experiential translation theory

fulfils this role by conceiving translation as an embodied creative process whose outcome is an *artefact*—a framework that constitutes the next stage in the theoretical discussion.

3. Artefacts as Outputs of Experience

Experiential translation furnishes the conceptual tools needed to trace the translation from felt atmosphere to musicopoetic form. Vidal and Campbell (2025, p. 8) define it as a “meaning-making process which is in-the-moment, temporally contingent, relational, material, ludic, and embodied”. Emerging from the ‘outward turn’ in Translation Studies, this approach reframes the notion of ‘text’ to include all modalities of communication, “including the human beings that produce them and the natural and technological environment within which humans operate” (Campbell and Vidal, 2024, p. 2). It thereby challenges reductionist, monolingual models and asks how translation might instead reflect and sustain the plurality of experience, conferring greater agency on participants in translation events (Campbell and Vidal, 2024, p. 3).

The translation of experience, then, does not culminate in a fixed product or a definitive ‘endpoint’, but rather in what Vidal and Campbell (2025, p. 8) describe as an “outcome, output or result”—an *artefact*. While the Latin derivation of *arte* (‘by skill’) and *factum* (‘made’) is instructive (Friedman, 2007, pp. 6, 10), the term’s value here lies less in its etymology than in its processual role. Within Vidal and Campbell’s conception, the artefact signifies the result of acts of translation “which are mediated by and mediate the world around us” (2025, p. 9).

Furthermore, as Böhme observes, atmosphere—though first registered individually—quickly extends into a shared domain (2017, p. 129); the experiential translation operates in the same supra-subjective register. In Vidal and Campbell’s framework, artefacts arise from acts of translation that constitute ‘agented semiotic work’, that is, “a collective phenomenon across the animate and inanimate world, and in a constant process of reconfiguration between translating agent(s) and artefact” (2025, p. 9). This conception resonates with Marais (2019) and Blumczynski (2023), who define translation as ‘negentropic semiotic work’—reconfiguring the components or relations of a sign system, or its inscription in space-time, through the action of an agent. Because such work enlists animate and inanimate participants, agency is distributed rather than individual: translator and artefact are co-constituted within a shifting ecology of “human and more-than-human actants” (Fraunhofer, 2023, p. 42).

There is, however, considerable variation in how the concept of the artefact is understood (see also Gell, 1996; Friedman, 2007; Hagan, 2007; Brix, 2015; Miles, 2020). Nevertheless, Vidal and Campbell (2025, p. 12) highlight Owen F. Smith’s attempt—set out in his article ‘Object Artifacts, Image Artifacts and Conceptual Artifacts: Beyond the Object Into the Event’ (Smith, 2007)—to synthesise these differing viewpoints by offering a set of definitions grounded in anthropology, art history and new-media studies. For Smith (2007, p. 2), artefacts may be understood as:

- (1) an object produced or modified by human agency, especially a tool or ornament;
- (2) a creation of human conception or agency rather than an inherent element;
- (3) an erroneous effect, observation, or result, especially one generated from the technology used or from experimental error;
- (4) a structure or feature not normally present but visible because of an external agent or action.

I contend that the song *búzios*. qualifies most directly under definition (2)—a creation of human conception that did not exist in the world until composed. Yet it also resonates with definition (1) once it is fixed as a recorded track, a tangible file that can be replayed, and with definition (4) insofar as recording and playback technologies render its sonic structure audible across time and space. In Smith’s terms, the song thus operates as “artifactual mediation”—a creative event that mediates human action and interaction and, through the “relational aesthetic” it engenders, enables listeners to see and know the world differently (Smith, 2007, p. 5). In doing so, it carries the lived experience of the atmosphere of *Búzios* into a shareable event, translating it into music and lyrics, thus allowing that experience to accumulate and transform through listeners.

Framed within these converging perspectives, the composition *búzios*. addresses the question of how the experience of a place’s atmosphere may be translated into a musicopoetic artefact. Specifically, Böhme (2017) explains *what* is translated—the pre-conceptual, relational feeling of place as experienced; Campbell and Vidal (2024, 2025) outline *how* that experience is translated—through an in-the-moment, embodied creative process whose outcome results in an artefact; and Smith (2007) elucidates *what form* the artefact may assume. Together, these perspectives offer a solid theoretical underpinning that enables the positioning of *búzios*. as a musicopoetic artefact that translates the experience of atmosphere—inviting listeners into a shared, affective encounter with place that unfolds not as description but as lived experience, anew on every playback. Accordingly, this study adopts a *Practice-as-Research* (PaR) methodology, deploying the songwriting process itself as a site of inquiry to enact—and thus reveal—the procedural dynamics of experiential translation that the preceding theory has articulated in principle.

4. Practice as Research as Investigation Methodology in Songwriting as Translation

4.1. Paradigm, Terminology, and Rigour

Building on Carol Gray’s seminal definition of ‘practice-led research’—inquiry ‘initiated in practice’ and ‘carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners’ (Gray, 1996)—Brad Haseman formulates a performative paradigm in which “a dance, a novel, a contemporary performance” operate simultaneously as research question, method, and evidence (Haseman, 2006, p. 102). Set alongside quantitative and qualitative traditions, performative research is realised through symbolic data “other than words in discursive text”, including “material forms of practice, of still and moving images, of *music* and *sound*, of live action and digital code” (Haseman,

2007, p. 151); the practitioner's own techniques therefore "stand as research methods in their own right" (2007, p. 151). In light of this, this investigation adopts the performative paradigm as its point of departure and overarching framework, and does so under the designation of *Practice as Research* (PaR).

Terminology in the field is plural—*Practice as Research* (PaR), *Performance as Research*, *Research-Through-Practice*, *Practice-based* and *Practice-led Research* constitute the overlapping set catalogued by Suzanne Little (2011, p. 20) and synthesised by Angela Tiziana Tarantini (2021, p. 40). In the present inquiry, however, I adopt the term Practice as Research (hereafter PaR) for two linked reasons. First, this study adopts the term PaR in part because the model it adapts—in Barrett and Bolt's book *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (2007)—operates under the same designation. Tarantini (2021) makes a similar terminological choice when adapting Kershaw et al.'s (2011) model in her book *Theatre Translation: A Practice as Research Model*. Second, the term most fully captures what Robin Nelson describes as "the knowing-doing [that] is inherent in the practice and practice is at the heart of the inquiry and evidences it" (2013, p. 10). Moreover, PaR also legitimises "knowledge that derives from ... the senses" (Barrett & Bolt 2007, p. 1)—the very modality of knowing that Böhme characterises as sensed before it can be named (2017, p. 128), and that Vidal and Campbell (2025, p. 3) likewise locate in the sensorium through which experience is first apprehended. PaR thus provides the epistemic scaffolding required to investigate how the experience of a place's atmosphere may be translated into a musicopoetic artefact.

The PaR literature further distinguishes the 'practitioner-researcher' from the 'ordinary artist'. What differentiates the former, Suzanne Little argues, is "the depth of reflection on their art ... as a creative response to a specific investigation" (Little, 2011, cited in Tarantini, 2021, p. 41). Following Tarantini's (2021, p. 42) adaptation of this figure as the 'translator-researcher (T-R)', the present study adopts the designation *songwriter-researcher* (hereafter S-R). In line with the conceptualisation of songwriting as a translational practice outlined in the Introduction, I—as the S-R responsible for *búzios*.—approach songwriting as an embodied creative practice through which the resulting artefact emerges as the subject, method, and evidence of research (cf. Tarantini, 2021, p. 42).

Rigour, therefore, is not a function of artistic virtuosity but of methodological reflexivity: research in the performing arts must "demonstrate a rigour equivalent to that of the sciences" (Nelson, 2013, p. 39). Iterability and replicability are likewise central to PaR and, as Barrett (2007, p. 1) contends, "what constitutes robust and successful research". These qualities do not imply the reproduction of identical artistic outcomes—each composition remains irreducibly 'original'—but rather the establishment of a transparent investigative process that can be re-applied by other S-Rs, thereby contributing to the advancement of disciplinary knowledge (see Tarantini, 2021, p. 42). On this basis, the songwriting process that produced *búzios*. is examined as method of inquiry, with each

procedural stage documented to facilitate potential re-enactment—though never precise replication—by future S-Rs.

4.2. Choosing a Model in PaR for Songwriting as Translation

As outlined in the previous section, this study adopts the designation PaR and frames the songwriting process as the method of inquiry. In line with this methodological orientation, it becomes necessary to determine which PaR model best supports a songwriting-centred investigation that treats musical composition as a form of experiential translation.

While Kershaw et al.'s (2011, p. 65-67) model of the “not-without-which aspects of PaR” remains highly influential in the performing arts, its five proposed constituents—“Starting Points, Aesthetics, Locations, Transmission, and Key Issues”—were developed with theatre performance in mind. As the authors themselves note, the model arises from theatre’s ontological paradoxes and its ‘boundless specificity’, reflecting the situated, and often ephemeral nature of stage-based practice. Consequently, its structure presumes a dramaturgical arc that is not directly transferable to songwriting as a translational practice.

Tarantini (2021, pp. 44-46) adapts this model to the context of theatre translation, substituting three constituents to reflect her focus on translated texts in performance. While performance in her study serves an instrumental rather than creative role, her adaptation nonetheless remains grounded in the investigation of how translation operates in theatrical settings. In contrast, the present study treats songwriting as an embodied creative practice that is neither necessarily performance-based nor concerned with the translation of pre-existing dramatic texts. The resulting artefact may be performed, but performance is not the methodological site of the research. Rather, the focus lies in the compositional process that translates the experience of a place’s atmosphere into a musicopoetic artefact.

For these reasons, Barrett and Bolt’s model of ‘Materials and Methods in Creative Arts Research’, as outlined in the appendix to *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (2007), offers a more suitable framework. Unlike Kershaw et al.’s theatre-based model, Barrett and Bolt’s approach is medium-agnostic and structured to accommodate the methodological diversity of creative practice across disciplines. It enables a more flexible articulation of the processes, materials, and methodological choices specific to songwriting while still upholding the principles of rigour, iterability, and replicability that underpin PaR.

4.3. Adapting Barrett and Bolt’s Model

As Barrett and Bolt (2007, p. 191) observe, materials and methods in PaR are never neutral: they are “encoded with historical knowledge and conventions” and must be critically adapted by the practitioner-researcher in response to the specific demands of the inquiry. In what follows, I adopt and adapt Barrett and Bolt’s medium-agnostic model into four interrelated constituents suitable for the specificities of my inquiry as a S-R:

- (1) Materials;
- (2) Reasons and Justification for Choice;
- (3) Material Engagement;
- (4) Procedures.

This adapted structure clarifies the methodological logic of the investigation and supports the transparency and rigour expected in PaR, omitting or adapting only those components (such as ‘Genre’) not relevant to the present inquiry (see Barrett and Bolt, 2007, pp. 191-194).

4.3.1. *Materials*

In this study, I—as the S-R—mobilised field audiovisual recordings, photographic documentation, informal notes, and music recognition software.

Materials were gathered during fourteen visits to Búzios between 4 December 2018 and 31 March 2019, while I was performing as a touring vocalist along the Brazilian coast. On a mobile device I recorded six short videos (30–60s each) that captured (1) live local music; (2) ocean waves overlapping with human conversation in beachside venues; and (3) shoreline street ambience. These recordings were complemented by forty-four photographs documenting both natural scenery and informal social interactions (see Figures 2 and 3).

One photograph (see Figure 1) portrays an exchange with a coconut vendor who, when asked for permission to take the picture, replied *Ai, promove meu coco, vai* [‘*Ai*, give my coconut a shout-out, will you?’. The utterance consolidated a speech pattern I had subconsciously registered throughout my visits: the tendency to open interactions with the interjection *ai*. This discourse marker subsequently informed the song’s opening lyrical hook (see section 5.3).

Furthermore, *Shazam* (i.e., a music-recognition application), was employed to identify pieces heard in public spaces, producing a playlist that functioned as an auditory index of the local soundscape; many of these tracks later provided structural and timbral models during composition. Concurrently, I kept brief field notes, including an entry dated 13 January 2019: “Of all the places I’ve visited, Búzios has touched me the most. The local music makes me smile, and there’s this feeling of joy, love, and peace I just can’t explain. I want to write a song that captures it somehow.” Although informal, the entry constitutes an initial trace of translational intent—a first articulation of the research question that subsequently guided the study.



Figure 1. Photograph taken at Travessa dos Pescadores 31, Búzios, documenting an exchange with a coconut vendor whose speech pattern later informed the lyrical composition of the song.



Figure 2. Photograph of Avenida José Bento Ribeiro Dantas in Búzios, documenting ambient coastal scenery and informal social activity.



Figure 3. Photograph taken from the Píer de Búzios, looking onto Avenida José Bento Ribeiro Dantas and surrounding coastal scenery.

4.3.2. *Reasons and Justification for Choice*

The selection of materials in this investigation was determined by their capacity to preserve and reactivate the atmosphere of Búzios. Although not originally gathered with compositional intent, each material became integral to the songwriting process by virtue of its distinct sensory and mnemonic affordances.

The audiovisual recordings offered the most immediate route back to the atmosphere as it was originally experienced. Their multimodal character enabled me to re-enter the spatial, sonic, and affective dynamics of the locale, bridging the temporal distance between the moment of capture and the later compositional phase. Without these recordings, subtleties of atmosphere might have been lost to memory alone.

Photographs played a complementary role. Crucially, their relative incompleteness—in contrast to video—allowed them to function as prompts for embodied recall, particularly in situations where audiovisual capture would have been intrusive. For instance, still images facilitated the recollection of vulnerability in informal encounters with locals, enabling a return to these dynamics during the songwriting process.

Informal notes, written at the time of the visits, served to document the affective texture of my lived experience. These written reflections preserved the immediate phenomenological response to place, insulating it from the distortions of retrospective interpretation. Without such notes, subsequent engagement with images and recordings might have relied solely on reconstructed memory, rather than the in-the-moment impressions that underpin experiential translation.

Finally, the playlist compiled via *Shazam* provided a sonic archive of the local musical environment. These tracks—heard in beach bars, shops, and public spaces—carried with

them the power to elicit atmospheric recall. While initially assembled to preserve the memory of Búzios, the playlist later acquired a methodological function, offering structural and stylistic cues during composition. Together, these materials enabled a layered reconstruction of atmosphere that grounded the songwriting process.

4.3.3. *Material Engagement*

Material engagement began in March 2023, four years after the materials were originally collected. Over the course of a week, I systematically re-engaged with the archived materials stored on a hard drive. The process began with video analysis of live performances, where I analysed musical parameters such as tempo (measured with a BPM Tapping Tool), structure, and instruments used by local musicians. These were then cross-referenced with Logic Pro X's—a professional digital audio workstation (DAW)—instrument library, which I used throughout the compositional process to experiment with orchestration options and draft sonic layers for the composition.

Subsequent phases involved re-examining the photographs, which triggered multisensory memories of my experience of the atmosphere of Búzios, and re-listening to the playlist for tonal and structural patterns relevant to the composition. Although this engagement was concentrated into a one-week period, the materials remained in active use throughout the songwriting process. Rather than serving as a static archive, they acted as a dynamic and iterative resource, consistently revisited to inform compositional choices—particularly during the lyric-writing stage, which began only after the musical architecture had been established.

4.3.4. *Procedures*

Following the re-engagement with the field materials, the compositional process unfolded in five distinct stages:

1. *Structural design*: The narrative arc was designed to parallel the experiential rhythm of arrival, immersion, and departure from Búzios. This was rendered musically through a structure comprising: Intro (fade in), Verse 1, Chorus, Verse 2, Chorus, Bridge, Chorus, and a return to the Bridge (fade out). The gradual entrance and exit via fade-in and fade-out aimed to evoke the temporal contour of an atmospheric encounter.
2. *Musical foundation*: Using Logic Pro X, I developed the harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic scaffolding of each section. Draft melodies were initially recorded using non-lexical syllables to foreground musical contour over linguistic content. These aspects—tempo, rhythm, pitch, volume, and timbre—are thoroughly examined in section 5.1.
3. *Lyric development*: Rather than preceding the musical content, the lyrics were shaped around the pre-established melodic lines. This sequencing was intentional: for listeners unfamiliar with Portuguese, the primary mode of access to the song's affective content would be musical. Nonetheless, the lyrics were carefully crafted to

draw on the experiential materials previously gathered, functioning as a poetic vehicle through which my experience of the atmosphere of Búzios could be rendered in language. The lyric writing process and its translational implications are addressed in detail in section 5.3.

4. *Vocal layering*: This stage involved the re-recording of lead melodies and layering of background vocals. With the full musical and lyrical architecture now in place, this phase allowed for greater experimentation with melodic ornamentation and harmonic layering—dimensions further discussed in section 5.1.
5. *Iterative refinement*: This stage involved repeated listening sessions, notation of structural or textural imbalances, and subsequent adjustments to transitions, dynamics, and preliminary mixing design. Although not the focus of this article, these refinements contributed to the overall coherence of the artefact and were integral to ensuring that the composition fulfilled its translational intent.

Guided by Barrett and Bolt's adapted model (2007), the preceding discussion has delineated the methodological architecture underpinning this investigation of songwriting as a translational practice. Materials gathered during fieldwork in Búzios were selected for their capacity to conserve the locale's atmosphere. Their distinct translational affordances warranted their inclusion, and systematic re-engagement with them furnished a compositional scaffold grounded in embodied recollection of the atmosphere of Búzios. The ensuing stages—*Structural Design*, *Musical Foundation*, *Lyric Development*, *Vocal Layering*, and *Iterative Refinement*—were conceived to enact, rather than merely document, the translation of my experience of atmosphere into musicopoetic form. The following section interrogates the resulting artefact, tracing the musical and poetic component through which it renders experienced atmosphere.

5. Results

5.1. Musical Component: Musical Building Blocks

Building on the methodological framework outlined in section 4., this section draws on Karen Bennett's (2002, pp. 29–35) approach to musical meaning—specifically her analytical framework of five musical building blocks (i.e., tempo, rhythm, pitch, volume, and timbre)—to analyse the resulting musicopoetic artefact, *búzios*. Several alternative frameworks have been proposed for analysing sound, including Van Leeuwen's (1999) six domains—encompassing sound perspective, time/rhythm, interaction of voices, melody, voice quality/timbre, and modality—and Desblache's (2019, p. 36) model, which identifies nine traditional musical parameters (i.e., form, melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre/orchestration, tempo, dynamics, articulation, and texture). While both are comprehensive, these models often extend into intricate sociocultural dimensions and advanced musicological structures that lie beyond the scope of my inquiry.

By contrast, Bennett's emphasis on direct corporeal mapping—such as how “tempo and volume are increased to mark heightened emotionality” (Bennett, 2002, p. 30)—aligns

more closely with the practical aims of this analysis. Focusing on Bennett's five musical building blocks therefore allows me to demonstrate more precisely the musical techniques employed to translate the peninsula's atmosphere into the structural *DNA* of my composition.³

5.1.1. Tempo

A moderate tempo of 110 bpm in 4/4 (i.e., common time) serves as the rhythmic foundation of *búzios*. (Sound File 1).⁴ This tempo—neither excessively slow nor overly fast—was selected to capture the peninsula's dual atmosphere: the invigorating pulse of street performances and the relaxed ambiance of its beachside environment (see Figure 4). Positioned at this midpoint, the tempo facilitates seamless transitions between moments of heightened intensity (reminiscent of an elevated heart rate at live performances) and more tranquil passages (reflective of the unhurried pace of coastal life).

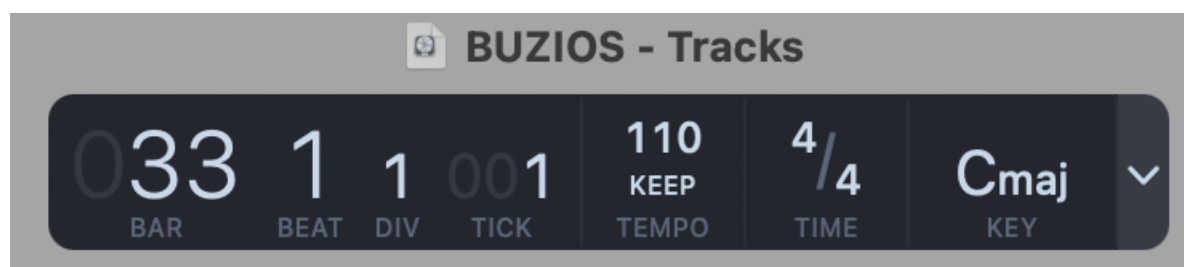


Figure 4. Logic Pro LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) showing the project tempo set at 110 bpm in 4/4.

To reinforce this subtle heartbeat undercurrent, I incorporated an 808 muted kick designed to mimic the steady thump of a physiological pulse (Sound File 2).⁵ This rhythmic foundation not only provides structural cohesion but also serves as a symbolic anchor, grounding the listener in the atmosphere of *Búzios*—a dual sensorial quality that is at once spirited yet tranquil, communal yet introspective. By situating the track's momentum within this moderate range, the composition effectively oscillates between excitement and contemplation, mirroring the dynamic interplay of festivity and relaxation that defines the peninsula's social and environmental rhythms.

5.1.2. Rhythm

Rhythm further refines the expressive potential introduced by tempo, articulating patterns that capture the peninsula's dual atmosphere. Drawing inspiration from *Búzios'* participatory music scene, I incorporated sampled percussion instruments modelled on

³ All audio illustrations referenced in this section are hosted in a dedicated Dropbox folder. Each sound file corresponds to a specific section or musical building block discussed in the text. Hyperlinked references (e.g. Sound File 2) are provided in footnotes.

⁴ Available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/vc7u7e73srxmqm8v2fg75/1.-Metronome-Click-110-BPM-4-4.mp3?rlkey=wmskug9ywz8kgh4n55u8mj2kz&e=1&st=e7bkl264&dl=0>

⁵ Available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/q3ecwq8vf4pb11xk4n88b/2.-808-muted-kick.mp3?rlkey=hqizzikhrqwdqro1yrppf8pep&e=1&st=zpir6mao&dl=0>

those played by local musicians (see Figure 5), alongside a vocalised rhythmic layer that includes inhaling and exhaling breaths, lip clicks, and consonant /k/ beats. Additionally, I recorded percussive hits on wooden surfaces such as tables, doors, and stools, crafting a tactile and organic soundscape that contrasts with the artificiality of purely electronic textures (see Figure 6). These layered rhythmic elements reflect Búzios' spirit of spontaneity and its close connection to natural elements (Sound File 3).⁶

The percussive ensemble, however, does not maintain uniform prominence throughout the song. In the verses, I opted for softer, intricately syncopated rhythms that evoke the informal conviviality of beach gatherings—unhurried yet subtly playful, mirroring the spontaneity of casual jam sessions by the shoreline (Sound File 4).⁷ By contrast, in the chorus and bridge, I introduced the full ensemble, intensifying the collective energy (Sound File 5).⁸ This escalation captures the heightened communal engagement characteristic of live performances and street parties, where locals and visitors gather spontaneously to celebrate.

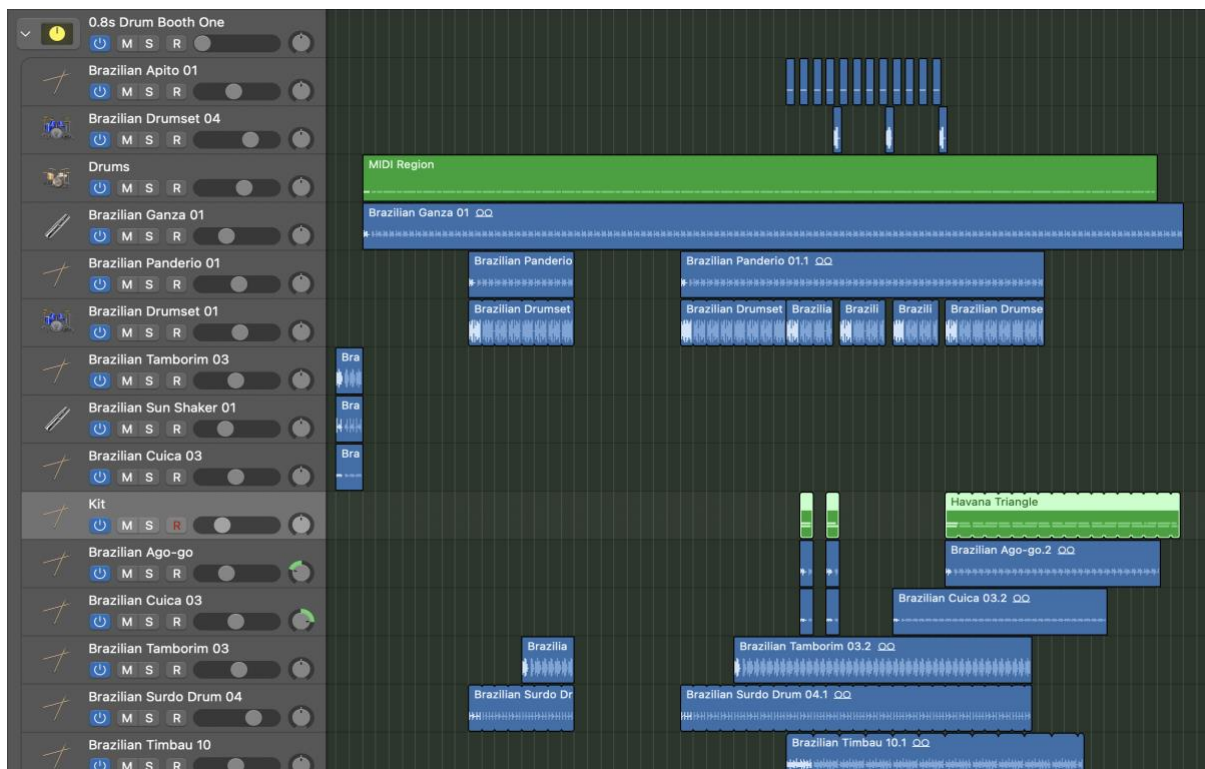


Figure 5. Screenshot of the Logic Pro project showing the percussion ensemble.

⁶ Available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/wl6yppq41ovt8nhdiw544/Vocalised-and-Object-based-Percussion.mp3?rlkey=3m5jnq6ciw041na2kj1hcsxfk&e=1&st=4ynd60wz&dl=0>

⁷ Available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/4ost8bxhz02p03f19hy50/3.-Verses-Percussion.mp3?rlkey=gn82p8jkw5tzqkjygwprda5vr&e=1&st=xo5ofxd5&dl=0>

⁸ Available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/tisrp7gyr5d02uhgduenm/5.-Chorus-and-Bridge-Percussion.mp3?rlkey=m0lhgr2f3ckt6utorcph6vtp&e=1&st=mhanm53z&dl=0>



Figure 6. Screenshot of the Logic Pro project showing vocalised and object-based percussive layers.

Moreover, the act of recording acoustic elements—vocalised rhythms, hand percussion on wooden objects, and other tangible sound-making processes—constitutes a translational practice in itself. These physical gestures, originally rooted in bodily movement, were captured and preserved through the recording process, transforming them into fixed musical components. This shift from ephemeral, performance-based actions to recorded, reproducible sounds underscores how embodied rhythms, once tied to a specific time and place, were recontextualized within the stable framework of a musical recording. In this form, they are not merely documented but embedded as sonic signifiers that shape the composition’s identity, inviting listeners to interpret them through their own experiential lenses.

5.1.3. Pitch

Pitch plays a pivotal role in conveying the *felt* atmosphere of Búzios. For the vocal lead, I sang in a register slightly above my normal speaking range, frequently transitioning between chest and head voice to evoke a sense of lightness and ethereality while simultaneously creating moments of “tension and release” (Bennett, 2002, p. 29). This choice aligns with the idea that an elevated vocal range can signify excitement, dreaminess, or transcendence, paralleling the serene landscapes and gentle ocean breezes of the peninsula (Sound File 6).⁹

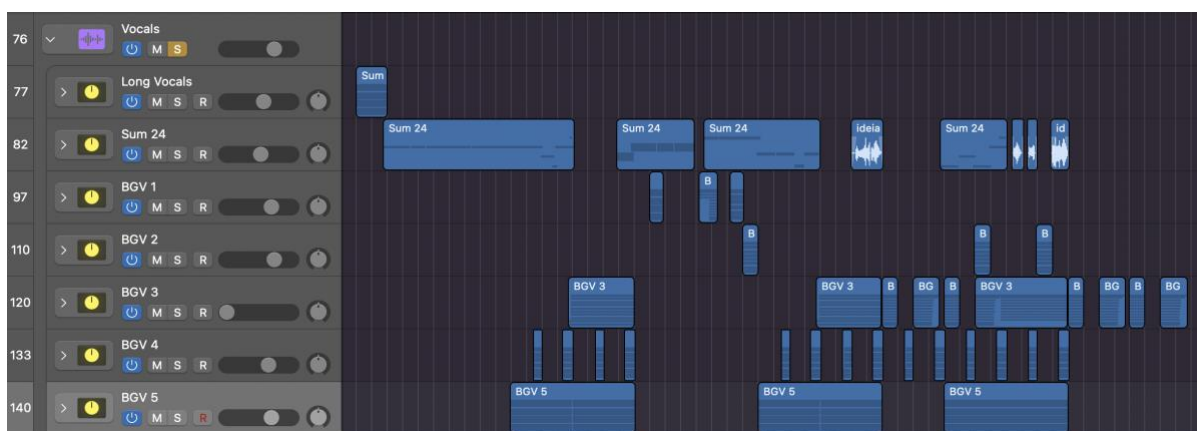


Figure 7. Screenshot of the Logic Pro project showing lead and background vocal stacks.

⁹ Available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/z6d070tdrct7xkmed8rnj/6.-Lead-BGVs.mp3?rlkey=zhbrgo6ypni4zzpmnbd20g6a2&e=1&st=i0749t0l&dl=0>

To enhance this effect, I incorporated flute-like melismatic phrases that weave fluidly through the composition, reflecting the rhythmic undulations of the coastal environment (Sound File 7).¹⁰ Ascending melodic lines in the chorus create a sense of emotional uplift and anticipation, culminating in a moment of release, whereas descending motifs provide fleeting grounding, echoing the anchoring presence of the horizon. This nuanced approach to melodic contour invites listeners to experience *búzios*. as both a space of tranquil reflection and an arena of heightened communal energy, reinforcing the dual atmosphere of the peninsula (see Figure 7).

5.1.4. Volume

Volume provides an additional layer of emotional articulation throughout the piece, shaping the dynamic interplay between moments of intimacy and communal energy. In particular, subtle dynamic shifts mirror the waxing and waning of social activity that defines the atmosphere of Búzios, a place where days begin with soft exchanges among small groups and gradually build into spirited gatherings.

This contrast is especially evident in the verses, where I maintain a more subdued dynamic level, evoking late-evening calm and intimate interactions—reminiscent of gentle rolling waves and casual beachside conversations (Sound File 8).¹¹ As the composition progresses, however, the chorus and bridge gradually expand in volume, emphasising collective outbursts of joy and reflecting the heightened excitement of live music and public celebrations (Sound File 9).¹²

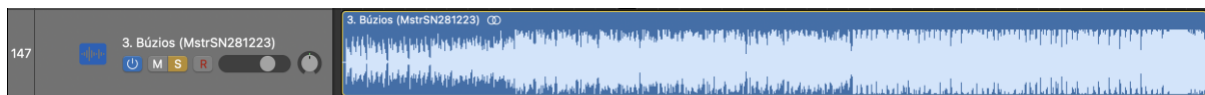


Figure 8. Screenshot of the Logic Pro project's master track, showing volume dynamics across the composition.

This progression aligns with the physiological parallel in human speech, where volume naturally increases to convey emotional intensity (Bennett, 2002, p. 30). In modulating between these dynamic shifts (see Figure 8), the composition employs amplitude as a semiotic tool, drawing the listener into reflective moments before immersing them in communal fervour. In doing so, volume not only references real-world sonic phenomena—such as speaking softly or loudly—but also constructs symbolic musical signifiers of intimacy and exuberance, reinforcing the duality of Búzios' atmosphere.

¹⁰ Available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/nszsgm8ls4m12tni4zrrt/7.-Flute-like-Melismatic-Phrases.mp3?rlkey=w3bpttgjud67r4v99qtrcykix&e=1&st=1ss687vy&dl=0>

¹¹ Available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/o686dy1k47tckabtmjk2s/8.-Volume-of-the-Verse.mp3?rlkey=jrfghuss7umbvz72mds4eqsv&e=1&st=00vt8i3c&dl=0>

¹² Available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/wlcd5rugw89ps5ykwpwjo/9.-Volume-Chorus.mp3?rlkey=r27to0pcwo81snlwh9rve5hy4&e=1&st=ruamra7t&dl=0>

5.1.5. Timbre

Finally, timbre—shaped by “choice of instrumentation” (Bennett, 2002, p. 30)—plays a crucial role in conveying the expressive essence of the artefact. To capture the peninsula’s warmth and earthiness, I centred the composition around the acoustic guitar, whose mellow resonance evokes rustic charm and the laid-back spontaneity of improvised beach gatherings. Rather than recording chordal accompaniments in a conventional manner, I recorded individual melodic lines and layered them as one might layer background vocals, experimenting with different stereo placements to create a sense of fullness (Sound File 10).¹³ This technique aims to replicate the communal nature of live performances, where multiple acoustic guitars often interweave in an organic, overlapping fashion (see Figure 9).

In contrast, I introduced strings and brass accents sparingly, allowing sweeping string lines and subtle brass flourishes to suggest fleeting images of sea breezes and shifting tides (Sound File 11).¹⁴ This combination reinforces both the sunlit serenity and the sudden exuberance of the coastal environment. By prioritising acoustic timbres over heavily synthesised textures, I sought to translate Búzios’ physical and sensory landscape—waves, sand, wind—into aural signifiers, inviting listeners to engage with the composition in a way that echoes the tangibility of the place itself.

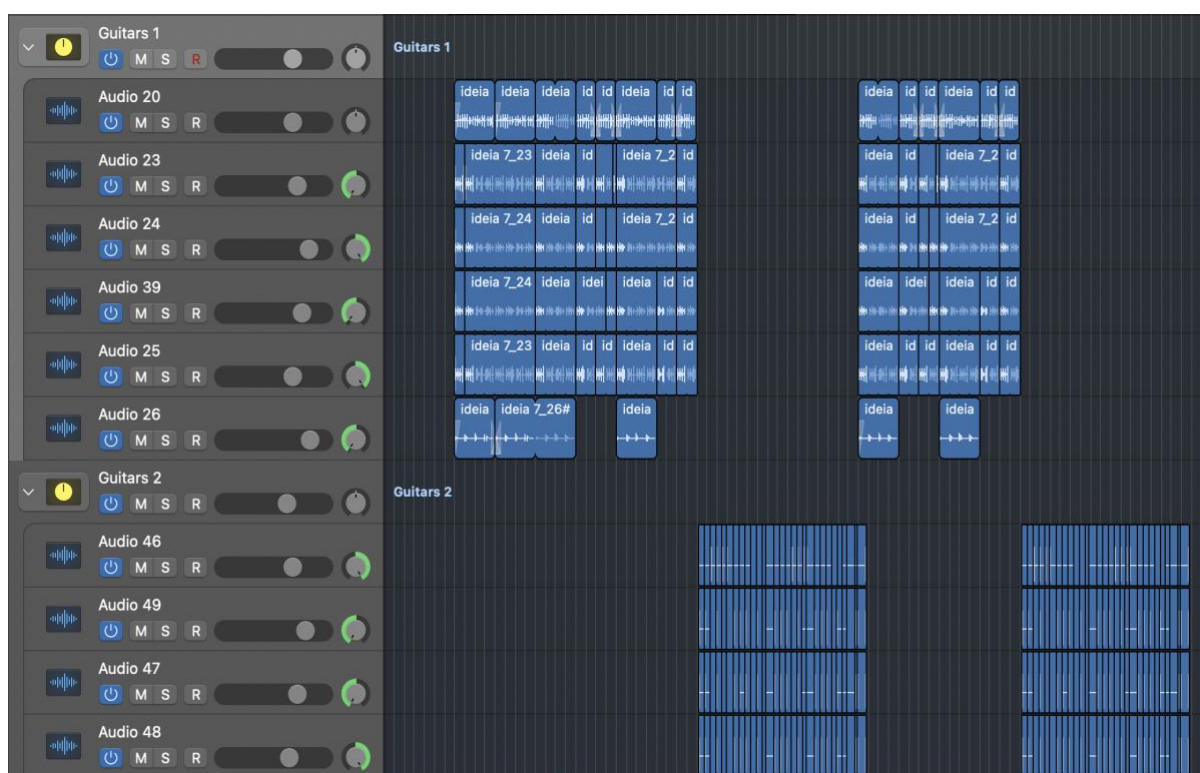


Figure 9. Screenshot of the Logic Pro project showing multiple layered acoustic guitar tracks.

¹³ Available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/k786pceg9p2t0094ks0d6/10.-Acoustic-Guitars-Timbre.mp3?rlkey=7zi7q3dfn5brnz5wpjarln93b&e=1&st=7gh86fcy&dl=0>

¹⁴ Available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/x3aa01bnc9rhvqv7dh9j/11.-Strings-and-Brass-accents-Timbre.mp3?rlkey=gturuigkwy9436qqa0ln6u2i&e=1&st=vw0l6x54&dl=0>

5.2. Musical Component: Intermusicality

The concept of intertextuality is particularly relevant when considering music’s ability to absorb and adapt prior material—a dynamic Desblache foregrounds in her assertion that “music, reliant on variations on existing content and often combined with another art form, is essentially intertextual” (2019, p. 322). While traditionally applied to verbal texts, the intertextual principle—that meaning is shaped through dialogic relations with prior works—readily applies to songwriting. Musical pieces, like texts, intersect through citation, collage, and transformation, absorbing and reconfiguring melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic elements from other works.

My songwriting process in *búzios*. exemplifies such intermusical dynamics. In line with Desblache’s observation that “intertextuality can be centred on one or several references” (2019, p. 322), I drew on a short melodic line performed by trumpets in Gal Costa’s *Aquarela do Brasil*—one of the tracks identified via *Shazam* and included in the playlist discussed in section 4.3—thereby invoking what Desblache terms a “reference to the past” (2019, p. 323). I then reworked the phrase by altering its rhythm and pitch, layering it across four vocal tracks in two different octaves (Sound File 12).¹⁵ This transformation — akin to the “variations” Desblache describes (2019, p. 323) — was intended to infuse the composition with an echo of Búzios’ atmosphere, recontextualised within a new sonic frame.

Such reconfiguration does not represent mere quotation. It constitutes a translational gesture: an effort to carry across one of the “agencies” through which atmosphere is constituted (Böhme, 2017, p. 129), by recontextualising a melodic fragment drawn from my auditory experience in Búzios. Intermusicality, in this sense, illustrates one of the translational strategies through which atmosphere was rendered into music, situating the composition within a broader web of cultural and sonic references. In other words, just as intertextuality foregrounds the dialogic interplay of texts, intermusicality highlights the relational and transformative dynamics of musical creation.

5.3. Poetic Component

Following the musical analyses in Sections 5.1 and 5.2, this section turns to the song’s lyrical content, presented below, in order to examine the poetic dimension of the musicopoetic artefact:

Ai, saí sem dizer água vai
A brisa vem e o meu corpo cai
Azul que chama e me pergunta ‘Oi, como vai?’
Batuque toca sedutor
Luz que me abraça com calor
Exala sabor

¹⁵ Available at: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/fvry5k9dckre7vy9mvmk6z/12.-Melodic-Line-Intermusicality.mp3?rlkey=f52e8pne4c7pa8z52ifawrtx6&e=1&st=55w0swjv&dl=0>

*Ai o amor
Que faz bater cá dentro o coração
Ca cum cum ca ca
Cum cum cum ca ca
Oh, ai o amor
A Búzios cheguei na procura de o encontrar*

*Oh ai, a noite chega devagar
Iluminando o meu caminhar
No vai e vem das ondas
A cantar, a dançar
O mar sussurra ao luar
E traz segredos de um lugar
Que vou abraçar¹⁶*

5.3.1. The Role of the Interjection ‘ai’

One of the linguistic features in the lyrics is the repetition of the interjection *ai*, which not only serves as a sonic element within the musical structure but also functions as a marker of affect in spoken discourse. In Brazilian Portuguese, *ai* is frequently employed to attract the listener’s attention or convey spontaneous emotions (e.g., surprise, urgency). This differs from many European Portuguese contexts, where *ai* more often denotes pain or distress.

Beyond its pragmatic function, *ai* introduces both emotional and sensory qualities to the lyrics. In the opening line—‘*Ai, saí sem dizer água vai*’—the exclamation suggests spontaneity and motion, evoking a sense of fluidity that resonates with both the oceanic setting and the process of arriving in Búzios. Similarly, in the chorus (‘*Oh, ai o amor*’), *ai* amplifies the themes of longing and discovery, punctuating the phrase in a way that captures the immediacy characteristic of spoken Brazilian Portuguese.

5.3.2. Sensory and Environmental Imagery

The lyrics draw heavily on sensory impressions to evoke Búzios’ atmosphere. The ocean is a recurring presence, appearing both in direct references (‘*No vai e vem das ondas*’) and in more abstract imagery, such as the interplay of light, wind, and motion (‘*A brisa vem e o meu corpo cai*’; ‘*Luz que me abraça com calor*’). These layers of breeze, warmth, and light establish an immersive ambiance closely tied to the lived experience of the peninsula.

Furthermore, the lyric ‘*Batuque toca sedutor*’ points to the central role of music within Búzios’ cultural identity. The term *batuque* evokes Afro-Brazilian percussive traditions that remain influential in many coastal regions of Brazil. As noted in section 5.1., these rhythms were prevalent in local gatherings, and the term itself implies a physicality

¹⁶ An English translation is provided in the Epigraph to this special issue.

of drumming that underscores the embodied nature of musical engagement. The choice of ‘*sedutor*’ emphasises that music in Búzios is not just background noise but an active, communal force inviting participation.

5.3.3. Thematic Recurrence of ‘*Amor*’

The song’s central theme revolves around the search for *amor*, a word that frequently arose in conversations with local residents. While *amor* in Portuguese can denote both romantic and platonic attachments, its usage in Búzios often emphasised community, warmth, and a shared *joie de vivre*. This resonance is reframed in the lyrics as both a personal and an existential pursuit (‘*A Búzios cheguei na procura de o encontrar*’). Although *amor* can be interpreted as romantic love, here it also signals broader notions of connection—to people, place, or experience.

The chorus (‘*Ai o amor / Que faz bater cá dentro o coração*’) highlights this idea by linking love to the physical sensation of a heartbeat—mirroring the rhythmic structures described in section 5.1., where the downbeat in local performances often recalled a steady, pulse-like foundation. The onomatopoeic vocalisation (‘*Ca cum cum ca ca / Cum cum cum ca ca*’) further embeds the sense of communal energy characteristic of live music in Búzios, where musicians commonly employ percussive vocalisations alongside instruments.

5.3.4. Temporal Fluidity: Day and Night

Finally, the structure of the lyrics reflects Búzios’ daily rhythm, transitioning between daytime vibrancy and nocturnal serenity. The first verse introduces movement and energy, featuring wind and percussive beats (‘*batuque*’), while the second verse shifts to a more introspective nighttime setting (‘*Oh ai, a noite chega devagar*’). This gradual shift mirrors the way Búzios’ communal spaces transform over the course of the day, from bustling markets and music-filled streets to a quieter but equally immersive shoreline atmosphere at night.

The concluding lines—‘*O mar sussurra ao luar / E traz segredos de um lugar / Que vou abraçar*’—encapsulate this nocturnal ambiance, portraying the ocean as both a physical entity and a carrier of symbolic meaning. The whispering sea, the moonlight, and the hint of hidden ‘secrets’ point to a sense of intimate discovery that further reinforces the song’s overarching themes of connection and place-based experience.

6. Conclusion

This study has proposed an adaptive PaR model for investigating songwriting as a translational practice. In line with Nelson’s insistence that “the articulation of a research inquiry needs to be as clear as possible” (2013, p. 10), the framework deliberately targets a single question: how can the experience of a place’s atmosphere be translated into a musicopoetic artefact? A songwriter-researcher (S-R) working with instrumental music, an acapella texture, or a different experiential source may therefore have to modify or replace

particular constituents. Such variability is both expected and desirable. As Barrett and Bolt remind us, creative-arts researchers “can adapt some of these conventions and will need to add others according to the particular nature of the studio enquiry” (2007, p. 191). The value of the present model therefore lies not in prescriptive detail but in the methodological latitude it affords future practitioners.

Furthermore, the five procedural constituents—*Structural Design*, *Musical Foundation*, *Lyric Development*, *Vocal Layering*, and *Iterative Refinement*—could each be elaborated ad infinitum; creative workflows differ markedly when, for example, lyrics precede melody, or when production is entrusted to collaborators with specialised technical skills. Such idiosyncrasies belong to the individual S-R’s craft and are best documented in project-specific accounts. What the current article offers is a transferable scaffold that identifies where methodological decisions surface and how they may be rendered explicit, thereby supporting the rigour, transparency, and replicability that PaR demands.

By situating songwriting within the outward turn of Translation Studies, the article makes an explicit disciplinary intervention: it demonstrates that translation can operate across modalities, not just as a static, instrumental interlingual transfer. Implicitly, it also equips songwriters and musicians—whether or not they are themselves researchers—with a conceptual and methodological lexicon for articulating their own creative practices. Artists such as Melody Gardot, whose album *The Absence* (2012) transposes place-based experiences into music and lyrics, exemplify a broader community that may benefit from viewing their work through a translational lens. While they may have no interest in scholarly publication, the framework presented here offers a set of terms and procedures through which they can describe, reflect upon, and potentially extend their own practice.

In short, the article contributes a theoretical and methodological framework that is both specific enough to guide a concrete case and flexible enough to invite adaptation. It invites subsequent S-Rs—working with other places, or experiential terrains—to treat the scaffold not as a template to be replicated verbatim, but as a starting point for further experimentation, thereby expanding the scope with which Translation Studies engages with the creative arts.

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BOOK REVIEW

STEPPING TOWARDS THE FUTURE OF AN EMERGENT FIELD: CONNECTING DANCE AND MUSIC THROUGH TRANSLATION

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Music, Dance and Translation, Helen Julia Minors (ed.), London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023, 216 pp., £28,99 (paperback), ISBN 9781350371606, £26,09 (e-book) ISBN 9781350175747

Readers of *Music, Text and Translation* (2013) will be delighted to learn about the publication of *Music, Dance and Translation* (2023), an edited collection that extends Minor's previous work on intermedial translation to include, and indeed prioritise, the relation between music and dance, observed and theorised through the lens of translation. This original volume follows the footsteps of recent research engaging with the challenges posed by multimodal theory to the field of translation and interpreting studies to examine the relationship between dance and music as a form of intersemiotic or intermedial translation. Grounding itself in multimodal theory and adopting Gunther Kress' (2010, p. 15) "satellite view of language", the volume represents a timely intervention in the field, further consolidating the nascent subfield of intermedial translation studies by bringing together nine scholars from diverse areas of expertise to investigate translation as a "process of communication across artistic media, between artists and across cultures" (Minors, 2023, p. 6).

Starting from the position that translation is "crucial in all forms of artistic creativity, collaboration, and performance" (Minors, 2023, p. 3), the book is divided into 4 sections. *Translation and Dance* sets the theoretical basis for the chapters to come and features an introduction and an interview with choreographer Millicent Hodson and art historian Kenneth Archer, both authored by Helen Julia Minors. In the former, Minors positions the book at the confluence of the translational turn in the arts and culture and the performative turn in translation studies, and enumerates a number of conferences, articles, volumes, and PhD theses that indicate growing interest in this area of studies. To those, we could add Bennett's articles (2007, 2008), Aguiar's thesis (2013), McCormack's (2018) and Montesi's monographs (2024), Tsiakalou's article (2018), as well as a number of edited collections emerging from Shakespearean studies (McCulloch and Shaw, 2019; Klett, 2019), and Klein's work on dance and cultural translation (2014, 2019). After a brief explanation of the intermedial theoretical basis of the volume, Minors returns to her previously formulated

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lens of language, senses and culture (2019) and her seven ‘myths’ (2022), before moving to the interview. This features extracts from a conversation with choreographer Millicent Hodson and art historian Kenneth Archer, whose collaborative work to restore lost twentieth-century masterpieces of dance and design, including choreographies by Nijinsky, Balanchine, and Börlin, is widely acclaimed. Showing rather than explaining, Minors selects and italicises parts of the conversation where dance reconstruction is described using words, expressions, and concepts that are recurrent in translation studies (to name but a few: equivalence, responsibility, authenticity, open-ended process). While this method is original and highly effective for a readership conversant in translation scholarship, a reader less aware of current debates in the field may find themselves struggling to make the necessary connections. Nonetheless, the first section leaves us with a clear understanding of the positionality of editor and contributors and a wide vocabulary of terms that will reappear throughout.

Gestures between Music and Dance includes case studies that explore the points of contact and negotiations between music and dance from the perspective of musicologists and choreo-musicologists. Zbikovski’s *Points of Contacts: Basis for Translations Between Music and Dance* argues that the equal development in time of music and dance enables the latter to become a form of music visualization. Zbikovski offers analogy as a tool to conceptualise and analyse this relation. Exploring moments where the movements of dancers correlate with series of pitches sung by the sopranos, the author’s detailed analysis shows the mapping between music and dance to be complex and multi-layered. If the excess of meaning thus produced leads the author to caution against the use of translation beyond its verbal-based tradition, it must be acknowledged that perfect equivalence has been proven to be unachievable also in interlingual translation, and that “gains and losses” have been considered part and parcel of interlingual translation processes as well as intermedial ones. While Zbikovski focuses on time development as an element shared by music and dance, Schroedter’s chapter adds the dimension of space, positing music as “closely connected to space because it expands in it and constitutes it acoustically” (2023, p. 50), and poignantly asking us, “can we understand music as movement?” Through a concise yet insightful summary of how different choreographers have “arranged time artistically through rhythm” (p. 51), including layering, collage, and immersive sound-spaces, Schroedter demonstrates that movement and music can enter into a constant mode of interaction whereby translation “unearths passages which were only implicit in the original” (p. 52). This is further exemplified by reference to an experimental contemporary performance asking dancers and musicians to continuously react to each other’s delayed propositions and make choices in the moment, and a much more detailed analysis of four works by Anne Theresa De Keersmaeker: *Violin Phase* (1981), *Piano Phase* (1982), *Drumming* (1998) and *Rain* (2001). The latter are the highlight of the chapter, brilliantly exposing De Keersmaeker’s compositional methods and signature style, and exploring how music, movement, and visual patterns are made to emphasise, compete, and interfere with each other in subtle yet mesmerising ways. This section is closed by another chapter written

by Minors, this time dealing with the collaboration between Cocteau, Massine, Satie, Picasso and Diaghilev on the occasion of the Ballet Russes' 1917 choreography *Le Parade*. Utilising methods developed in Genetic Translation Studies, this chapter draws on letters, postcards, and personal notes to illuminate the collaboration between these acclaimed figures as one of constant negotiation and analogical thinking, requiring them to "translate each other's intended meanings" and "think in terms of each other's forms" (Minors, 2023, p. 61). The chapter demonstrates how translation theory and methods of enquiry can be useful in analysing not only straightforward translations but also artistic processes displaying "a translational dimension" (Maerlaert and Marais, 2023, pp. 1, 4). Its most fascinating feature, however, lies in revealing the centrality of the lesser-known Valentine Gross and Misia Sert (the real mediators of the situation) in enabling the creative process, ensuring its financial viability, and acting as a bridge between the famous male artists, thus restoring these women's roles as creatives, producers and mentors.

The third section, *Translation through Music-Dance Performance* looks at the role of music and translation in the production of dance performances. Juliette Loesch highlights the importance of musicality in Maurice Béjart's choreographic work and explores "the dancer's body as the mediator and translator of music, Béjart's revisiting of his own body of work, and finally the ensemble's body, the corps de ballet, as yet another body created by Béjart" (2023, p. 99). This is done by analysing choreographic works that are based on, evoke, or portray the figure of Salomé (a recurring concern in Béjart's choreographic oeuvre), unearthing the importance of transmission in Béjart's work. Reflecting on the time-space focus in the second part, Leslie Main envisions translation as making sense of a map made of disparate elements (Labanotation, embodied knowledge, musical arrangements, recordings, pictures) as she describes the restaging of Doris Humphrey's *Passacaglia* (1938) and *With My Red Fires* (1936). Intermedial translation is therefore described as a navigation process informed by *the discovery of direction/directions of discovery*" (2023, p. 108). This text is followed by Anna Pomareva's exploration of the possible paratextual sources of Cranko's ballet *Onegin* (1965), with a particular focus on the use of mirrors, which she suggests comes from Nabokov's and Hofstadter's translations and prefaces to the original Russian texts as well as their correspondence. Mirrors, argues Pomareva, are used in the choreography to highlight the idea of symmetry inherent in Pushkin's text, allowing to bring out similarities and differences between the characters and simultaneously suggest what has already happened and what will happen. Although the analysis of the work is fascinating and revealing, adding the subcategory of style to the ideational, interpersonal, and textual subcategories of the functional style approach moves the chapter away from the intermedial approach generally proposed by the volume and would necessitate more contextualisation.

The last section, *Institutional Representation: Notation, Archives and the Museum* concentrates on the movement from dance to documentation (and back to dance), touching on issues of collective agency, memory, negotiation, and adaptation. Heili Einasto's chapter on two Estonian ballet translations of *Coppelia* highlights how changes in what

Lefevere would call 'poetics' and 'patronage' (Lefevere, 1985) affected these two renditions of Hoffman's *Sandman* into dance. After linking the text and its balletic translations to the concept of cultivated nature as visible in the geometric shaping of gardens that became popular around the time the text was written, Einasto criticises the lack of engagement with meta-criticism and self-censorship that made both choreographers ignore the way in which ballet similarly moulds bodies and presents itself as shaping culture out of nature, which ends up weakening the feminist critique they could have delivered. Denise Merkle's following chapter offers another contribution to the burgeoning area of Shakespeare and dance, focussing on the transmission of Cranko's *Romeo and Juliet* (1964) through the dancers' muscle, memory, Benesh notation, and videos. The author then explores the influence of music and collaboration with musicians as being at the basis of Ratmanski's version (2011) of the ballet using the same musical score as Cranko's. The section closes with Mary Wardle's chapter *Movement Notation as a Form of Translation*, an in-depth discussion of dance notation, touching on what it comprises, why it is still to be considered useful and how it intersects concepts that are central to translation studies, before asking the question: what is the identity of dance? In recognising that notation systems are not neutral objects but rather instruments that privilege particular aspects (e.g. end positions in Benesh, movement and transition itself in Labanotation) and need to be interpreted by users, Wardle assimilates notators to translators. While this hugely informative article concentrates on the use of notation in dance, the reader might also be interested in recent discussions on the use of Laban's work and notation systems to maximise workers efficiency and productivity, showing a less romantic view of these tools, and the collusion of art and capitalism in the factory worker's body (Jeffrey, forthcoming).

In conclusion, while the works explored remain prevalently Eurocentric and inclusion of contemporary dance works could have increased the reach and diversity of the collection, Helen Julia Minor's edited volume is a much-needed, thought-provoking contribution to the fields of choreomusicology, translation and dance studies. In gathering texts from authors based in different countries and fields of expertise, the editor manages to convey the richness and potential of this growing area of research, consolidating its value, connecting some of its actors, and indicating its future directions. This book is both a building block of a subfield in development and a springboard for future investigations.

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BOOK REVIEW

TRANSLATION IN MUSIC: FROM METAPHOR TO METHOD

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Applying Translation Studies Methodology to Musicological Research, Małgorzata Grajter, Switzerland: Springer Cham, 2024, 153 pp., 102,71€, ISBN 978-3-031-56630-1 (eBook).

Małgorzata Grajter's *Applying Translation Studies Methodology to Musicological Research* is a rich and essential read for all those interested in translation and Translation Studies (TS), especially the processes of meaning-making, mutation and movement. Its substantiated and concrete juxtaposition of TS and musicology opens up an interdisciplinary world of epistemic, hermeneutic and practical possibilities.

Chapter 1 includes a comprehensive introduction to and overview of the history of translation and translation theory—one quite robust on its own that could be used as a pedagogic resource in undergraduate, master's or doctoral courses. This overview is carried in a narrative of an apparent pattern of resonance, in which the perspectives of earlier thinkers, diachronically expanding and merging in the analyses and interpretations of future TS thinkers, create a pattern of interference to be decoded in light of a new context; this gives way to new and more concrete theories—as though ever-expanding three-dimensional ripples, intersecting in a spatial-temporal continuum, manifesting an ongoing theoretical legacy of shared objective interest.

In this chapter, understandably, Herder's music-translation comparison is emphasized, so as to lay a prolegomenal bridge between music and translation. The discussion of this chapter culminates in the introduction of TS as an interdiscipline, transitioning to the next chapter, thus maintaining a historical point-of-view but focussing on more recent approaches and methodologies.

To further open the discussion on the applicability of TS methodology to musicological research, **Chapter 2** draws on Jakobson's seminal essay *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation* (1959) to provide the broader concepts of a multi-scope perspective on translation (intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic). This broadening of scope shows translation's potential for a more interdisciplinary interaction as a "composite, hybrid configuration", and therefore "not a monolithic work but an interpermeation, a conglomerate of two structures" (Levý *apud* Grajter, 2024, p. 30). It also helps the author portray overlapping areas and interests between translation and musicology. To do so, Grajter draws on important methodologies and topics in TS, such as equivalence, invariance, expressive shifts, and the cultural turn.

The key discussion in **Chapter 3** revolves around musical processes of transference and transformation—*bearbeitung* (adaptation or a kind of reworking), palimpsest, arrangement and transcription—so as to evince their translational nature. This discussion and comparison strives to further legitimize and concretise the use of TS methodology and terminology, beyond the metaphor. Thus, in going “[f]rom metaphor to methodology” (Grajter, 2024, p. 73) to establish the term “musical translation” (*idem*, 2024, p. 59), the author provides a series of musicological theoretical perspectives, as well as attempts by other musicologists to import terminology and methodology from TS (though sometimes unsuccessfully) to provide her own definition:

The discussion on the topic of musical arrangements, transcriptions, and cover versions, taking their similarities and differences into account, analysing terminology, strategies, and experiences of the arrangers, should lead us now to the attempt to formulate an umbrella term: *musical translation*, defined as a rendition of the work in its entirety, which involves necessary changes and transformations resulting from the time, place, and purpose of the new version (*idem*, 2024, p. 76).

The chapter ends by converging both of the semiospheres in focus (TS and Musicology) by combining music and the notion of extra-systemic translation. Realigning with Helen Julia Minors, who considers that, since “music functions as metaphor, the case for translation to extend to music seems logical, on this basis alone” (Minors, 2021, p. 178), the author sheds light onto how the concept of translation is very much applicable to music and its meta-reflection and, therefore, the use of TS methodological approaches in music is not only justifiable but advantageous. One key element in this comparison is the virtual potential for ever-emerging new versions and renditions of source-texts and of target-texts to become new sources:

Since, as Balcerzan wrote, translation is a renewable process that can be repeated without end, various arrangements and performances of the same musical piece can therefore be analysed as series of translations (Grajter, 2024, p. 101).

Chapter 4 takes on the responsibility of bringing together all the previous overlapping considerations on translation theory and musicological theory/perspectives. This is done through concrete examples, wherein TS methodology is applied in instances of what the author defines as ‘musical translation’. This concept encompasses processes and products of arrangements, cover songs, transduction and *ekphrasis*. Chapter 4 is the book’s longest and most exploratory one; its structure contemplates Marai’s (2019) distinction of semiotic division and interaction (intra-, inter- and extra-). A relevant distinction pertains to the different relation between syntax and semantics (form and content) that exists in music (in comparison to verbal language), and how they are somewhat more indissociable. This distinction is important for differentiating music from language within Marai’s division (the elements differ, as does their articulation on different layers of analysis).

According to Grajter, ‘intra-musical’ comprehends translations between the same instruments, style or genre of music. One of the translational methodologies the author uses is that of invariance and variability. The example provided is a comparative analysis of Liszt, Thalberg and Maylath piano transcriptions of Beethoven’s *Adelaide* op. 46 (Grajter, 2024, p. 94). This overlap can reveal what each transcriber deemed to be the core of the ST. In addition, the ‘invariant’ core changes in line with style, period, author, etc.—as one could see, for example, by comparing de la Motte’s 16th century translations of the *Iliad* into French (Lefevre, 1992) with more contemporary French translations of the same classic.

In inter-musical translation—translation across different instruments, style or genre of music—Grajter presents TS methods like Popovič’s categories of adaptation modernization/archaization, and localization, or Venuti’s concept of domestication vs. foreignization, with the added notion of micro and macro scales. At the micro-scale, for example, a comparison is established between Busoni’s arrangement of the “*Chaconne* from the *Partita for Solo violin in D minor*” (Grajter, 2024, p. 114) for piano—two-handed and accommodating idiomatic additions (domestication)—as opposed to Brahms’ piano version, using the left hand only—thus closer to “a violinist’s experience” (foreignization) (*idem, ibidem*). At the macro-scale, Debussy’s import of the uncommonly used castanets and tambourine in *Iberia* is seen as a foreignization in that period and style—as opposed to using only instruments that are common in one temporal and cultural/stylistic context (*idem, ibidem*). This is comparable, in interlingual translation, to either replacing all the references (names of places, people, and cultural-bound elements) or maintaining the references but domesticating on the syntactic or lexical level. All interactions between these two scales can also lean towards the foreign manifestation.

Extra-musical is established by the author as translation between music and other semiotic expressions/systems—e.g. the visual arts in general, or literature. A lot of these instances accommodate moments of multimodality, which render translational activities all the more complex. Grajter then draws on Calabrese (2000) to evince how different semiotic systems may establish specific interactions—a sort of translational particularism. In this case, Grajter gives the example of Schubert’s *Erkönig* piano translations by Liszt.

At the end of this chapter, the author discusses possible “future directions”, thereby proposing practice as an experiential research model into the intersemiotic aspects of musical performance (Grajter, 2024, p. 136). This culminates in the importance of the gestural and visual dimensions of musical performativity—especially considering the multimodal nature of opera or ballet—and the advantages of applying translational methodology to this analysis. Grajter here gives the example of Claudia Fischer’s translation of Debussy’s *Iberia* into a poem, during *Sound-scapes: translating from music*—a project held by CETAPS at Universidade Nova de Lisboa.

In a final comment, the book is permeated by a recurring problem pertaining to the broadness of the concept of translation—and of which the author makes successful use. This problem concerns the division or distinction of the following transdisciplinary duality:

either translation goes beyond its established linguistic nature—but encompassing other areas of human expression and knowledge, such as painting, the theatre, chess, or music, by lending its methodologies as metaphors—or everything is language, and translation is an all-encompassing analysis, practice and mediator of the processes of meaning making, mutation and movement.

Lastly, the book is, in itself, a successful translation exercise: Grajter continuously translates the concepts therein into words and terms that may be more comprehensible to those with a looser command of TS theory, while doing the same for the musicological part. Małgorzata Grajter puts one more robust and well-grounded foot in the door of the cutting-edge interdisciplinary perspective of modern-day Translation Studies.

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