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Song and translation – song translation studies

ABSTRACT

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The article overviews recent research in song translation studies. A growing interest and the not-too-coherent wealth of case studies need to be made relatable to one another. The article asks what makes song a special object for translation studies and what a map of song translation studies should encompass. The answer suggests three cornerstones: source-oriented, transfer-oriented and target-oriented studies. The first would need some acquaintance with musical verse and a fluid definition of song; the second some kind of multimodal conceptualization – one that allows both plain prose translation of song lyrics, such as in for example subtitling, and much variable audiovisual adaptations, such as, for example, the many YouTube videos of Shervin Hajipour's "Baraye"; and the third would need to chart the long-term afterlives of songs, conceptualizing their post-translation use in manifold ways. The discussion is exemplified by translations of Bertolt Brecht and Pete Seeger's "My rainbow race".

Keywords: song, song translation, multimodality, tradaptation, transcreation

1. Multifaceted song

Songs are paradoxical in many ways. Music is a universal language (of sorts), but songs are quick to split into particular, culture-bound styles, genres and sub-genres. Songs live on ethereal sound waves but cling tightly to the corporeal: moving vocal cords, hands and bodies as well as global dance trends. People enjoy them collectively, but just as often, just as deeply, in emotional, personal ways. Songs are made for sharing: having written them, composers and song-writers want them heard by many, but when used, some are strictly guarded by

copyright laws. Textually, they are essentially lyrical, flying on the wings of music, but also vernacular, made to fit into singers' mouths. They enable individual expression but depend on intertextual cues and clues. They can be subtly or highly original or (enjoyably) clichéd. Singers are sometimes asked to imitate another singer and sometimes told to "make the song your own". A song's form is made for easy, exact recollection, but songs also invite to be changed: through reinterpreting performances, rearranged covers, medleys, mashups, parodies and response songs. Some songs are tied to specific times, actual places and timeworn traditions, some transport us to timeless fantasy worlds. Songs can be stories told to audiences, props in dramatic or ritual enactments, or fragments of abstract mental states. They can be folk songs, pop songs or art songs, and many blends between them. Influences may flow between songs in oral tradition and songs fixed on printed paper or (since 1857) phonic recordings. Songs are oral and aural, poetic and onomatopoetic, somehow verse-shaped, prosodic and rhetoric, pragmatic instruments – malleable to any context: musical, performative, visual, technological, socio-cultural, historical – or any function: to celebrate, consecrate, bemoan or protest, heal or hurt, calm or activate, or simply amuse and pass time.

Songs can be all these things in different cases to varying degrees. This collection of truisms is meant to sketch the outlines of the territory that song translation studies must somehow map. Must a study of Beethoven's musical intentions in his settings of Scottish folk songs relate to a K-pop music video reworking Mariah Carey's "We belong together"? Not as individual case studies, but a useful conceptualization of song translation should at least make widely different approaches, in terms of topic and study object, relatable to each other. Another dicey question is this one: on account of all these multifaceted aspects and uses, can we state that songs are a different object of study than most other kinds of text normally studied in translation studies? To make generalizations in terms of a simplified dichotomy is often tempting, in order to highlight how songs differ from "other texts" – but of course, just as song is not one and the same thing, neither are "other texts". Nevertheless, for half a century or so, translation studies has had the bulk of its theories built on the solid ground of printed prose texts and literary or institutional contexts, where consistent translation norms can be found. Those are contexts into which songs do not always fit. This article is an attempt to address these two questions: What makes song a special object for translation studies? What must a map of song translation studies encompass? The provisional answers offered here are based on a review of recent writings on topics that I would place under the rubric of song translation studies. What are the achievements? Which are the needs?

In the early 2000s, it was normal for papers on song translation to begin by stating that this field of study was forgotten or neglected in translation studies.

That claim no longer holds. In a recent essay attempting to survey most previous research (Greenall et al 2021), the bibliography contains 84 works specifically about songs in translation (in some respect), mostly articles written in the last decade or so. A list including Master's theses published online could be twice as long. However, most are case studies, focused on one single genre or medium, songwriter or song, and often do not relate to one another in a coherent way.[1] The wealth of study and breadth of topics grow, but so does the problem of overviewing the field.

The body of work gives the impression that song translation studies has retraced the stages translation studies went through, only more rapidly. It began with testimonies and policy proclamations from practicing translators (some more objective than others: for example Drinker 1950 on opera, Grandmont 1978 on musicals, Rodda 1980 on art song), which grew into a prescriptive-instructive phase, focusing on discussing the practical problem of writing singable lyrics that were also (faithful) translations. Most notable are Apter and Herman (2016) and Low (2017), whose books systematized views they had presented in several, previous articles. After that, a "cultural turn", possibly spearheaded by Susam-Saraeva (2015), opened up for descriptive song translation studies: various kinds of empirical exploration of songs crossing language borders. But the breakthrough of song translation studies getting noticed by translation studies seems to have come with the audiovisual-technological turn of this new millennium. AVT (audiovisual translation) is a field where songs are unignorable; some action must be chosen, and will be noticed: dub, subtitle or send them off untranslated. Likewise, papers on opera surtitling (also moving from practitioners' reports to more systematic study such as Rędzioch-Korkuz 2016) have merged into a wealth of analyses of song subtitling strategies, dubbing of songs in animated films and audience satisfaction surveys.

Can all of this be put under the heading of song translation studies? Other superordinate names have been suggested for largely the same field of study: vocal translation, music-linked translation, music translation, melic translation, and a few more. The quickest response is to observe that most current researchers (writing in English) use the phrase "song translation" (for example Low 2003; Kaindl 2005; Franzon 2008; Cintrão 2009; Greenall 2015; García Jiménez 2017; Carpi 2017; Haapaniemi/ Laakkonen 2019; Aleksandrowicz 2019; Fochi 2019; Treece 2019). A more diplomatic discussion may get a grasp based on Snell-Hornby's application of prototype theory (1988: 26–37), used then to

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1| If a coherent conceptualization is something to be expected. I would compare it to another field of study that similarly, and slowly, grew into a recognized subdiscipline: drama translation studies. Though fragmented and diverse, the many unconnected papers and approaches that shaped it still share, somewhere, a natural connection to theatre work and staged productions.

address differences between academic approaches in relation to text types and translational equivalence. Different prototype concepts may exist on a spectrum. A general, popular or simplified idea can form the center of a concept, but the borders to less typical, less obvious phenomena and subcategories must be permeable. It seems fair to claim, judging from the body of work presented, that the majority of researchers in music and translation choose to study songs – and even more: songs translated as songs (as defined below). There are other topics that are certainly relevant, such as (purely) vocal qualities of song, musical pieces without lyrics, or prose translations of song lyrics (which are neither vocal nor necessarily musical); they are clearly part of the field but will perhaps be found each on their own separate side of it.

And what heading can song translation studies be placed under besides translation studies? Multimodality studies and adaptation studies seem like natural candidates, but similarly to translation studies, most theory in those fields was developed for other media products than song. There are highly relevant concepts, suggested by many: multimodality, remediation, intermedial/plurisemiotic/multi-channel text, syncretic semiotics, constrained translation, audiovisual translation, and transcreation/tradaptation. They can certainly bring fruitful discussion and interesting comparisons, but everything done to songs in translation can probably not be equated with or subsumed under a single one theoretical construct. In the following, I will discuss how song translation studies might benefit from recognizing not one, but three cornerstones (prototype concepts): verse translation, with some measure of fluidity; multimodal texts, variable as to which modes are present and relevant for the translator; and songs as multivalent cultural items, with a view on long-term use or function in target language cultures. The existent research in the field has touched upon all three, which may roughly be labeled as source-oriented, transfer-oriented and target-oriented approaches. And as is inevitable with any interdisciplinary study, one will find prototypically fuzzy boundaries, and cases where ideas and methods combine in different proportions.

2. Three approaches in song translation

2.1. Source-oriented approaches

2.1.1. Songs as fluid source texts

Does *song* in song translation mean translational activity using songs as source texts or delivering songs as target texts? It is often both, but it must also sometimes be either/or: anything translational happening to a song, or something translated ending up in a song form. Songs are less fixed – and often shorter – than printed texts, their forms may change over time, and source songs can

exist in different guises that are in circulation simultaneously. A simple example is offered by Mus' studies (2018; 2019) of translations of Leonard Cohen. Cohen first published some of his song lyrics as poems in his poetry books, and translations into French could be made for inlays to LP albums, for sung cover recordings, as part of anthologies of poems and lyrics, or when reproduced and discussed in music magazines. This last kind of publication was an even more widespread practice in Brazil, as described by Kaross (2013): close translations of lyrics to foreign hit tunes were read on radio shows, published in several kinds of magazines and, later still, made and shared by fans on websites. The paths of print and song intertwine in various ways.

Descriptive translation studies relies for its definition of translation on Toury's (1995: 33–34) three postulates, two of which assume that a (retrievable) source text exists and that it was actually used by the translator in question. With songs, the sources used can vary. When Kvam (2021) studies the German-language publications of the songs of Edvard Grieg, we assume that both the input and output for the translators consisted of music printed on paper. However, when Greenall (2015) looks for translators' "voices" in three Norwegian poet-authors' translations of Bob Dylan's songs, a major part of the process will also be the singing voices of both Dylan and the three cover artists. We will not always know if the TT lyricist wrote the TT song lyrics after just listening to a recording, by just reading sheet music, or doing both – but different processes may leave different traces in the target product. Sometimes, a canonical, recorded version will be the obvious source. In other cases, there may be both studio and live recordings, cover versions and songs learned by ear. As Smith-Sivertsen (2014) shows, not seldom will a more high-profiled, same-language cover be the basis for cover versions in other languages, not the first one (because it was covered, meaning 'hid', by a more successful later production). There is also the phenomenon of self-covers, which put Meunier (2023) before the problem of deciding which one(s) of Dylan's changing versions of his songs served as a source for any particular French cover.

Toury's second postulate, the transfer postulate, also crashes with cases more variable than the printed text. With singable target lyrics, a researcher may prototypically assume that the source text were the song lyrics, as tied to the given piece of music. Could other sources have been involved as well? Kaindl (2005: 242) was the first to describe song translation as a kind of *bricolage*, a free mix – listing "a number of elements" that might act as potential sources for both target lyrics and the musical, physical, visual presentation of the target song: "music, language, vocal style, instrumentation, but also values, ideology, culture, etc." For theatrical songs, Carpi (2017: 78–95) makes an even more detailed itemization of source material to observe: "repetitions, evocative meaning, key clusters, expressive meaning, intratextuality, music, interludes, pauses, sound

effects, paralinguistic features, dancing, embodied behaviour, stage props" – all properties that can sometimes be read, sometimes just inferred from the source lyrics, at least in musicals. Both listings list "music" as a singular thing, but as a source for target lyrics, it can also be subdivided – for example as a prosodic-phonetic template, a pattern for a verse form, or inspiration for the semantic-narrative substance of (both source and target) song lyrics (Franzon 2008).

All this will influence which elements are seen as indispensable in a definition of song: music, lyrics, voice, genre, accompaniment, performance or the total presentation. In her review of theoretical works within this field, Rędzioch--Korkuz (2023: 70) points out inconsistencies in how the object of study is identified or named: lyrics, song, song-text or musical text. I have myself suggested a definition of song based on three elements: music and lyrics combined and intended for performance (Franzon 2008: 376). In his definition of song, Meunier (2023: 65–75) instead includes four modes: text, music, voice and (sound) production, which serves the purpose when the study object is cover recordings. Rędzioch-Korkuz (2023: 69) suggests two: "a text set to music" as a minimal entity, but there are definitions of song that do not even include lyrics: "**Song.** A piece of music for voice or voices, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, or the act or art of singing" (Chew 1980: 510). Naturally in opera, "voice or voices" get the highest priority (not equal but comparable to the prime importance of lip sync in film song dubbing). With pop songs, the intended target presentations matter more but may also vary more (if made for a local cover band, TV show, music video, etc.). With a *skopos* more similar to transcription of folk song (oral epic poetry), there is interest in documenting the whole original context of performance, but less so in voice, sound production or a fixed text, because they may not exist in the sources. What connects all these is the concept or phenomenon of song, but what goes into that concept must probably be allowed to be a little fluid.

The most stable point, from which one might resolve differing definitions or conceptualizations, may be the concept of *genre*. A minimal requirement of a musical genre is that it has a name and some actual content – a musical expression, style or form – that some people associate with the name.[2] As such, genres are imprecise and changeable constructs, but they are central factors in the ecosystems that develop around ever-changing musical practices, each with their own history, supporters, performance ideals, means of financing, and other circumstances: who the driving agents and initiators are (the composers or artists or producers) and how the listeners prefer to receive what they (may) pay for.

2| This web site: https://everynoise.com is the result of a project to generate a genre map from Spotify classifications. So far, one finds well over 6000 genre names listed and linked, from *pop* and *rap* to *grunge brasileiro* and *schrammelmusik*.

The shape of the ecosystem determines how the translation norms affect the texts. There are several genres that – for different reasons – stick to the principle that "the original tune which fitted the original words, will be re-used, virtually unchanged" and require a translator to follow it closely (Low 2017: 78). But empirical studies may reveal how some genres do it differently. Haapaniemi and Laakkonen (2019) describe an American country song ("Ramblin' man") translated as a Finnish blues rock song. The cover recording shows rhythmic variations, clearly made to accommodate the multisyllabic words and phrasal forms of the Finnish target lyrics. But the source song by Hank Williams does similar things – in a folksy, improvisatory style, his strophes do not follow a strict meter. Another genre is "jazz song translation", whose rhythmic and syllabic freedom is described in a Master's thesis (Schreuder 2023) comparing translations into and from several languages.

Another common denominator is the concept of *verse*. Unlike many specimens of modern poetry, verse is identified by a form that derives from being intended to be recited – or sung. Normally or essentially, song lyrics are verse-shaped. In a prototypical conceptualization, this text type, too, can be placed in a spectrum – consisting of at least four types: spontaneous, spoken language – written prose – rhetoric art – poetry with fixed meters. In a time when metered poetry was common, an encyclopedic description could simply offer a list of textual properties: "some form of regular occurrence, whether meter, accent, vowel quantity, rhyme, alliteration, parallelism, or any combination of these, and which we may call *verse*" (Frye 1965: 885). What matters in this context is that all these and suchlike properties carry a natural, age-old relation to music. Any "regular occurrence" found in song lyrics naturally or potentially matches the regularity of the melodic phrases and harmonic-rhythmic form of a (traditional) musical composition. (Whether a definition of music as "sound organized in space and time" (Morehead 1993: 359) is sufficient is another question, but "regular occurrence" is the essence of it.) In translation, a text form similar to verse may thus arise from both slavishly following a given rhyme scheme and just listening to a source piece of music. Verse translation has eternally grappled with the problem of following both form and content and solved it by combining and compromising. In Polish translation studies, various notions of verse translation seem to have gathered under the concept of *melic translation* (see Szota 2018), but their integration with international concepts requires further research. But because there are natural links between "language-in-song, language-as-song", they will constantly be rediscovered, as for example by Treece (2019), who translated a body of Brazilian political songs into English for the purpose of a touring exhibition and workshop project. He found that he combined everything there was: "sonic, melodic, prosodic, rhythmic and phonological features" in order "to enact, in a new linguistic and cultural setting, its

integral meaning as a musically intoned utterance", everything pointed towards "the core": perhaps best understood as the harmonic structure and movement of the musical composition (Treece 2019: 2 and 11).

Elements such as vocal style, embodied behaviour and a perceived, musico--textual "core" direct attention to a sung performance. Song translation can be compared to metered poetry, but it can also be compared to verbal art as performance, which has been described from an ethnological point of view: "Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of expression and gives license to the audience to regard the act of expression and the performer with special intensity" (Bauman 1977: 11). The point is that acts of expression in front of an audience favor certain formal and framing devices. Bauman (1977: 16) goes on to sketch a list of often observed devices: "special codes; figurative language; parallelism; special paralinguistic features; special formulae; appeal to tradition; disclaimer of performance". Common for most or all cultures and genres, the list describes features typical of verse and song – special codes such as a lyrical register, paralinguistic features such as vocal ornamentation. (Though, more often than disclaimers of performance: denying the fact the text is not spontaneous, one finds the opposite. Many a song mentions, even highlights, the act of singing – for instance the children's song that begins: "Sing. Sing a song. Sing it loud. Sing it strong"[3].)

2.1.2. "An die Nachgeborenen" and "My rainbow race"

Two brief examples will serve just to demonstrate how song translation studies must negotiate quite different source text situations – in terms of music, lyrics, genre and verse forms. It must contain both Bertolt Brecht and Pete Seeger but will in reality have to be wider still. In his exile from Nazi Germany, Brecht wrote a long poem in three parts, "An die Nachgeborenen", which was set to music by Hanns Eisler around 1939. In 1967, a music book of "singable English translations" of Brecht's songs, made by Eric Bentley, was published in New York. As the source text here is a prose poem, the verse characteristics lay not in rhymes and meter but a more subtle rhetoric structure that utilized repeated and varied key words and lines. Translating into English, the primary concern would be the prosodic matching of English sentences to melodic lines designed for German. Presumably driven by the wish to present this piece of work in Finnish to equivalent effect, in 1969, the theatre composer Kai Chydenius instead took a Finnish translation of Brecht's poem, by Brita Polttila, and set it to music of his own. Bentley, faced with this line in the song: "weil es Schweigen über so viel Untat einschließt", decided upon: "we are silent about atrocities". The word "silent" takes the same, prominent place as "Schweigen", but the rest of the

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3| "Sing" by Joe Raposo (1971), written for the television show *Sesame Street*.

sentence becomes tangled in added and deleted unstressed notes (trickily indicated with double musical notation in the American publication's display of both language versions), also unnaturally stressing the "-cit-" in "atrocities".[4] Chydenius made his music fit the natural rhythms of Finnish prosody, its multisyllabic words always stressing the first syllable: "koska siinä vaietaan niin monista rikoksista"[5].

Looking at the Norwegian song "Barn av regnbuen", translated by Lillebjørn Nilsen (1973) after Pete Seeger's song "My rainbow race" (1968), we have a simpler target–source relation: both of the songs were evidently made primarily to be sung and spread live and on vinyl recordings, with hardly any printed text involved at all. Perhaps indicating that Nilsen translated by ear, there is much variable fidelity in terms of the syllable count, but a good match of the basic rhythm and phrasal melody, as laid out in Seeger's chords and song structure (chorus – verse – chorus). The alliteration of the title phrase "[To show my] rainbow race" seems to have mattered to Nilsen, because he recreates it in his title phrase: "Små barn av regnbuen" – though the /b/:s fall on different notes than the /r/:s.

A key question is what "rainbow" means. Seeger is not too specific, but a fair assumption – given that he called his song a "love song to the earth" and that he was engaged in the civil rights movement of the 1960s – is that he meant the human race: humanity as a whole, all skin colors and races. Nilsen changes the metaphor when he states, abstractly but plainly, that we are all 'small children of the rainbow and a lush earth'. This veers toward an ecological reading, supported in the verse that follows: 'someone steals from the young' and 'someone steals from the many who come after us'[6]. Nilsen added that to replace some words he left out: Seeger's stabs at capitalism ("greedy hands") and warfare ("Poison, bombs"). Such changes and shifts – Nilsen downshifting the character of a political song and upshifting the character of a children's song, further evidenced by the addition of a children's choir to his 1973 recording – are often occurring, workaday phenomena in song translation: such as preserving the exact word – stated in the song title – but manipulating its implications. Textual comparisons can lead to interesting conclusions about the cultural context of the two languages and song traditions, but must also take the concrete target situation and medium into account.

4| Bentley's English language version has in fact been sung in concert. To explain, one may perhaps raise the concept of genre: concert singing within this genre of music in English seems able to accommodate some unnatural phrasal intonation and syllabic stress.

5| Literally: 'because in [doing] that, one shushes about so many crimes'. Lyrics quoted from the publications *The Brecht–Eisler song book* (1967: 52) and Chydenius (2002: 36).

6| In Norwegian: "noen stjeler fra de unge" and "noen stjeler fra de mange".

To sum up, source-text oriented approaches can reveal much of great interest to song translation studies. A verse translation will unavoidably make changes in exact wordings, and these changes will offer clues – often very visible ones – about how either the song's themes, use or genre have been viewed or understood (or not) by the translator or the receiving culture. The fact that a song is meant to be performed places an even greater emphasis on the need to be coherent and comprehensible. Given the inherent difficulties of form-bound verse translation, technical or practical singability as such may motivate close scrutiny as a tool of quality control. For the same reason, a traditional focus on verbal fidelity can be motivated, but it should be tempered by a consciousness of style and genre – a dramatist like Brecht expresses his views rather plainly, while songwriters like Seeger rely on metaphor, implication and association. Many songs are short – most perhaps between fifty and a hundred words, which means that just a single word, kept or changed, can matter much in regard to what impression it makes. Both a changeable oral text and one fixed in print, both respect for authors and less-than-close reworkings of songs, and both good and not-so-good ears for musical prosody, may be objects of study in song translation studies. Verse translation and verbal art in performance, often following patterns of genres, seem like the most natural contexts of comparison in this respect.

2.2. Transfer-oriented approaches

2.2.1. Texts in variable modes and media

Songs are naturally multimodal. Songs are the original multimodal human product. Anthropologically, before grammatical language, but perhaps after body language, intoning vocables must have been a way of expressing oneself, communicating and creating culture. The essence of song must therefore be the act of singing, producing a somehow memorable and repeatable text. Everything that comes after is technology: musical instruments, notation, and media of dissemination. Much later still came the ideas that translation, understood as transfer of meaning between languages, rests on a fixed understanding of what constitutes 'meaning' and 'translation', or even 'language'. Cross-cultural transfer of sung language has to be more flexible than that.

To begin with the obvious, it is a fact that not all song translations are made for singing. But as Aleksandrowicz (2019) shows, subtitlers for songs in musical films may devise variable attempts at singability, through experiments with rhythm and rhyme, though inconsistently applied. Regarding singable translations printed in music books ostensibly made for singing, at least in the genre of art song, *Lieder* or opera arias, for example Pernod (2017) shows that the printed target song lyrics are not always as easily singable or comprehensible for

listeners as they purport to be. Very ambitious subtitlers, literary art song translators lacking somewhat in skill – both these cases of conflicting translation norms can perhaps be understood as differently balanced negotiations of the eternal, multimodal nature of song (cf. Low 2017: 65–69).

A basic division among researchers may be whether they see translation from the perspective of the text production or of the song as presented and received. Low (2003) focused on the former when he described *skopoi* and text strategies for translated song lyrics printed in programs, librettos, etc., or in spoken summaries at concerts, etc. From the latter point of view, Susam-Saraeva (2015) charted four options (for receiving Greeks songs in Turkey): importing songs and singers without translating lyrics at all, supplementing vinyls and CDs with translations and explanations on inner sleeves, inlays, etc., making cover versions with target language lyrics (often far from faithful), and lastly, the depositing, requesting, discussing and revising of amateur translations of songs on web forums. The inclusion of non-singable translations connects to the field of audiovisual translation, which provides a steady flow of studies of dubbing, subtitling and surtitling of songs, in films, theatre, opera, internet videos (García Jiménez 2017; Reus 2020; Rędzioch-Korkuz 2021; Khoshsalighe/ Sravghadi/ Mohammad-Alizadeh 2022; Abu-Rayyash/ Haider 2023). The idea of song translation as a customer or community service is present here, especially in surveys of audience satisfaction with the subtitling both of musical films (Aleksandrowicz 2019) and on the classical music concert scene (Campbell 2023).

The basic division can most simply be understood as one between auxiliary and artistic song translations. The difference in method is clear in theory but not always in practice. This may explain why the use of the term *translation* easily gets confusing. Susam-Saraeva (2018: 47) writes about interlingual cover versions, that they "act as 'translations', as can be seen in the Youtube comments invoking the word", but when looking closer, "one finds only partial translations, usually a line or two". She takes the fair enough measure of using apostrophes to indicate an alleged or perceived 'translation', and reserves the unmarked term to denote semantic likeness. Describing much the same phenomenon – the unfaithfulness of pop song covers, Franzon (2021: 118), however, mixes perhaps three meanings of the term: "the liberal mixture of translation and non-translation in song translation is a universal tendency, somehow part of the essence of song tradition itself". Despite the term having been thoroughly defined and debated for decades, translation studies harbors different understandings of its fundamental concept.

Going by a pragmatic principle, many use translation as a general cover term for 'translational action' or 'translingual exchange'. But a literary application is likely to see translation in a more exact sense of 'close approximation': rendering meaning, emulating stylistic effects, narrative intentions, etc. A multimodal

approach may treat any transmedial transfer as translation – wherever a text (liberally defined as any combination of sensory signs carrying communicative intention) "is replaced by another text reflecting, or inspired by, the original entity" (Gottlieb 2017: 50). Confusion among these conflicting views is avoided when research communities focus on different objects of study: all language services given by professional translators and interpreters (according to a *skopos* at hand, see Nord 1997; Reiss/ Vermeer 2014, etc.), ideals and norms in literary publishing (see for example Boase-Beier 2020), or multimodal products – and the ones most often studied are iconotextual or audiovisual rather than sung. These differing views can co-exist peacefully, but with song, all three perspectives can be equally relevant. With the very same song translation assignment, one may need to ponder all three things: its practical use, its stylistic (music-linked) intricacies, and also how music makes meaningful contributions as both the input and outcome of the text made from sensory signs.

Table 1: Fictitious examples of different uses of the term translation

About…	…some people might say:
the subtitling of a song,	I am not going to write singable lyrics here. I will just do a straight translation.
translating a high-profile songwriter such as Brel or Cohen,	My lyrics are just a pale copy of the powerful poetry of this genius. I dare not call it translation, so let's just say I made a version, an adaptation.
the rewriting of "First we take Manhattan" as 'First we take Pest – then we take Buda' (in Hungarian) or "Raindrops keep fallin' on my head" as 'Snowflakes fall in my hair' (in Swedish) [Both exist.],	Song translations cannot be literal translations. Here is something that evokes the same meaning and values for a domestic (Hungarian/Swedish) audience. A true song translation must mind sound and feeling just as much as sense.
a singer who himself translates and performs foreign songs,	He hasn't written any songs himself. He just sings translations. He is a bit of a fake.
opera or art song,	No need to have the words translated. Puccini/Schubert already translated them into music in a most eloquent way.

More difficult to apply is the fourth, classic definition of translation, which covers "all utterances which are presented or regarded as such within the target culture, on no matter what grounds" (Toury 1995: 32). This practical dictum to start with alleged translations and then find out what made them acceptable as

such can be applied to song translation only with some modification. Translation and song have mostly combined in vague, inconsistent and contradictory ways. (Not accounting for all languages, of course, but the term is avoided by calling it *lyric adaptation* in copyright contexts and using blanket phrases like *cover* or "sung in English/Swedish/Polish" in other contexts). For lack of an extensive, multilingual investigation, I here take the liberty of constructing examples to demonstrate how song translation can be "presented or regarded as such" in quite different ways (see Table 1, p. 42).

As long as there are stylistically sensitive song lyric translators who hesitate to call their work translation (because of the small changes they make), and others who gladly use the word even where linguistic aspects play just a peripheral role, it will not help however clear and precise the definitions or categorizations provided by translation scholars are. Working with a variably multimodal text type such as song, pragmatic, literary and intersemiotic perspectives will simply have to co-exist.

A temptation to achieve more precision is by introducing alternative terms such as *transcreation*, *transadaptation* or *tradaptation* (used by both some literary translators and language service companies; regarding song translation, see Guillemain 2019). If understood as a general description, explaining how target lyric writing will necessarily involve some artistic deliberations or reworking, it can be helpful when discussing singular cases or strategies, but again, no matter how precise the academic definition, the risk for confusion remains. Are singable song translations transcreative by definition? Can tradaptations be both of a freer and a more faithful variety? Will changes involve both the music and lyrics – or just lyrics? Isn't the singer's interpretation another transcreation? Can you transadapt just a line or two, as a micro-strategy, or is it always a macro-strategy, a total characterization of one person's method or approach? The problem is much the same with the term *adaptation* – even more difficult because it has been used longer, in very many ways. It may be useful to characterize an otherwise well-described case, but as discussed in a comparison between the two disciplines of translation and adaptation studies, the uses of the word in both disciplines are ambiguous and diverse (Doorslaer/ Raw 2016). But is a uniform terminology a necessity?

Lucile Desblache instead suggests a broader use of the concept of translation. In her book *Music and translation* (2019: 4), she explores at least three understandings: as "the process of transferring a text from one language, be it verbal or not, into another", but also the transfer (or transmutation) of musical forms and ideas into other musical forms, as well as music manifesting abstract things: human activities, ideologies, emotions and phenomena from the natural world. Using both terms: *song translation* and *music translation*, she includes within this realm of interest opera surtitles, accessibility provisions for young or

novice audiences, and the deaf or blind, film dubbing, video games, and all genres of music. And besides the well-established semiotic triad of intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic modes of meaning transfer (Jakobson 1959), she suggests that we also take interest in intersensorial and interspecies translation – animal communication which (rightfully or not) is music to our ears. One is tempted to travesty Toury's basic tenet: take any utterances which are presented or regarded as song, and then investigate how translators make use of them in their work.

2.2.2. "My rainbow race" and "Baraye"

When exploring song translation, we are bound to find cases where many aspects of a potentially limitless multimodal, plurisemiotic situation come into play. Then again, there are situations where all that is needed is a plain report on the meaning of the lyrics. In April 2012, "My rainbow race" gained new attention as it was called out by Anders Behring Breivik, at his trial following the Utøya murders. He accused it of being "cultural marxist propaganda" and part of what motivated his terrorist acts. As this was discussed in worldwide news reports, lines from Nilsen's Norwegian song lyrics – not identical with Seeger's – were quoted and translated many times over.[7] And apparently, despite Nilsen's different framing of the 'rainbow' metaphor, it seemed enough that the specific word was kept as such for all the political ideas of the early 1970s – multiculturalism, pacifism, feminism and gay rights – to somehow stick to it and be a trigger for anti-liberalism, anti-Islamism and homophobia.

Some songs resurface as emblems of ideas, as much as forty years after they were written. In the digital age, it can go much faster and involve a greater palette of multimodal resources. In September 2022, the Iranian musician Shervin Hajipour posted a video of his song "Baraye" on his Instagram account, with lyrics based on tweets (shown in the video in captions marked "#MahsaAmini") from Iranians telling of their hopes and sorrows about the situation in Iran – and in general. It disappeared, was reposted, and spread virally.[8] Remarkably soon, all sorts of translations began to appear (here I restrict myself to YouTube videos): most multimodally interesting perhaps, on October 4, a video combined the original film and musical track with photos showing some of the events, places and

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7| Some web pages quoting and explaining the Norwegian target song may still remain: https://www.tampabay.com/incoming/thousands-defy-accused-norway-mass-killer-breivik-in-song/1227109/; https://www.mic.com/articles/7556/how-to-upset-a-terrorist-sing-a-song-of-peace-with-40-000-loud-enough-for-him-to-hear; https://humanrightswarrior.com/2012/04/26/children-of-the-rainbow-v-anders-breivik-and-charles-taylor/ (all accessed: 6.06.2024).

8| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmHpGpcADbI (released: 2 October 2022, accessed: 6.06.2024).

people referred to, with English subtitles and captions giving facts to unpack the implicit references.[9] On October 6 came a cover version in English, by the translator Rana Mansour accompanying herself on the piano.[10] On October 15, there was an Italian cover to a pre-recorded musical track.[11] And on October 19, a pronunciation tutorial, with a rough phonetic transcription and subtitles in Farsi and English.[12] On October 30, it was sung in Swedish to a live band at a televised concert.[13] On November 3, a prose translation was read by Senator Ratna Omidvar in the Canadian Senate.[14] On November 30, there was a guitar accompanied Spanish cover.[15] A bit later there appeared more elaborate versions: sung in Farsi by an opera singer to a full orchestra, subtitled in English,[16] and sung in a mix of Farsi and English by a German a cappella choir[17] – plus several intralingual covers, a piano tutorial, instrumental versions, danced versions, AI-created music videos as well as plain "reaction videos". Such manifestations and translations may not give freedom to the people or direct aid to the suffering, but at least it shows how when historical events occur, there are almost always songs there, somewhere, somehow taking part in the events. And in a digitally interconnected world, song translation is a more varied and widespread phenomenon than ever before.

The key questions to conclude this chapter are the following: What meaning in the song or sung material is (to be) transmitted, recreated or preserved (or lost/sacrificed)? Is the analysis (made by a translator or a researcher) focused on music, lyrics or performance, on the whole of all three, on the text in itself or the cultural implications or resonance of either music, lyrics or the whole? How does the medium or reception situation affect the functionality of the translation? Song translation studies must be open to explore whatever meaning the multimodality of a song contains, and whatever part of it passed through the translational filter. The most important or helpful measure may be to be as explicit as possible about how the particular translation was brought about, through what means, using what form of source and target material, in what medium or language, and for which purpose and use.

9| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jApvQCo4HDk (accessed: 6.06.2024).

10| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCUfgHHkLcA (accessed: 6.06.2024).

11| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AZTDWQO77s (accessed: 6.06.2024).

12| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdpfahGeFJg (accessed: 6.06.2024).

13| By Carola Häggkvist: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RI0ERyzBuc (accessed: 6.06.2024).

14| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgH6u9T1KkY (accessed: 6.06.2024).

15| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qzyoRwAUPo (accessed: 6.06.2024).

16| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0olLYq0vvk (released: 7 December 2022, accessed: 6.06.2024).

17| https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07oFqGIL2lE (released: 8 March 2023, accessed: 6.06.2024).

2.3. Target-oriented approaches

2.3.1. Empirical post-translation studies

Translated songs can have a long and varied afterlife. This chapter will be shorter because there has not been quite as much research in this direction. The full realization of Toury's dictum of studying translations as "facts of a target culture" may need to have first gone through the other two stages: analyzing target texts in relation to sources and as variable products of working translators. Of course, in translation studies the idea has been present ever since the concept of *refraction* was presented in literary studies, for example in Lefevere (1993) and Bassnett and Lefevere (1998). Still, attempting a seminal study, Gentzler (2016: 18 and 23) calls for a turn towards "post-translation studies": an expanded focus on not merely translated texts but "the post-translation repercussions generated in the receiving culture over subsequent years" as well as "transnational migrations" of texts and ideas, recognizing hybridization and mutual appropriations, multimedia adaptations, metropoles and peripheries, or any inspiration taken from abroad. To demonstrate his proposed integration between national literary canons and the modern, multisemiotic world of cross-pollination, he naturally turns to high-profile classics: productions of Shakespeare plays and re-writings of Goethe's *Faust* and Marcel Proust, on stage and film, classical music pieces and book publishing in China.

There is room for similar empirical investigations of target musical cultures and the roles or functions that imported and translated songs perform in them. As examples of works operating from broader, target-oriented approaches I will just mention a few: Fochi (2019) studied the Napolitan song "O sole mio" and its migration to the international hit market in several American versions – and back again to Italy. Hava and Yildirim (2016) charted the place of imported song on the Turkish popular music market through the concept of *aranjman* – roughly meaning 'imported pop songs sung in Turkish'. (Taken from the English word *arrangement*, it hardly denotes faithful reproduction.) Greenall (2014: 99) gathered a large corpus of singer-songwriter songs in Scandinavian languages and identified four *skopoi* in effect: "tribute, pedagogical, language-political, and artistic". Another in-depth analysis of a large corpus is Meunier (2023), whose study of all French-language covers of Dylan's songs integrates both source text analysis and their long-term presence on the French music scene. What seems to remain a methodological difficulty is to extend a corpus analysis beyond a specific genre or type of song.

2.3.2. "Air des bijoux", "My rainbow race", "Stille Nacht"

Such approaches, if expanded and integrated – ideally also with each other – are steps in the way of realizing Gentzler's dictum (2016: 86) of seeing translation

as "a form of double writing: domesticated and resistant, Eurocentric and indigenous, global and local, appropriating and expropriating, elite and popular" – both things at once, in different proportions. Post-translation repercussions of songs are wide and manifold; songs live and function as cultural items in multivalent ways. They can appear and reappear in unexpected places and forms, in large theatrical productions or brief references. Gentzler (2016: 122) mentions how Goethe's *Faust* lived on in French as the opera *Faust* (1859, by Charles Gounod) and how the "Air des bijoux" from it became well-known from being repeatedly 'sung' in Hergé's *Tintin* albums (starting in 1938). Besides creating a translation problem for translators, the quoted aria lyrics form an intersemiotic joke: Hergé portrays the sound of singing as the most horrible thing, but it happens in a graphic medium, which is modally incapable of conveying (understanding, translating) sound.

What makes song a special object for translation studies? Besides tracing the long afterlife of songs in descriptive studies, it should be possible to explore the essential functionality of songs. Translation analysis may help to identify unique features that make them, to some extent, different from "other texts". A list of likely candidates include: phonic values, links to dance and physicality, what singers may bring and inspire translators to do, mixed-language songs, or obscure or implicit cultural resonance. There is the big question about music genre and intertextuality, and the occasional presence of a metatextual dimension, brought into play by the performance situation: if song lyrics can betray awareness of being sung ("Sing it loud. Sing it strong"), perhaps song translations are sometimes aware of being translations.

Susam-Saraeva (2018: 8) brings up *iterability* as an essential characteristic of songs; they exist for and function by being played or sung over and over again. This means that originals and translations easily appear side by side. As a response to Breivik's attack on "Barn av regnbuen" in April 2012, many thousands of Norwegians (and Lillebjørn Nilsen too) gathered in public spaces and sang the song together, in both Norwegian and English. It is somewhat similar to the legendary event at Christmas in 1914, when the soldiers on both sides in the First World War started singing the hymn "Stille Nacht" and its translation into English, "Silent night", stepped out of the trenches, and made peace with each other in no man's land. Though certainly some words in these songs – Seeger's, Nilsen's, Joseph Mohr's and John Freeman Young's words – must have reverberated especially strongly in the emotionally fraught situation, the reason they worked was probably not the fidelity of the translations, perhaps not even the quality or coherence of the lyrics, but the fact that a song existed in several languages. Whatever the effect was – comfort, hope, shared grief, longing for peace, international understanding, humane values, friendship despite religious differences – what mattered was the mere fact that songs have always been shared over language borders.

3. What is song translation studies?

Song translation studies can be simply defined as the study of song as affected by translation. On the strength of at least a few hundred research contributions in the new millennium, song translation studies has established itself as a special field of study. What remains is for these multivarious research efforts to communicate with each other to at least be able to present their choices and approaches in relation to other possible research schemes and cases. To be a legitimate subdiscipline of translation studies, a uniform theoretical framework may not necessarily be expected. Despite the risk of confusion and criss-crossing definitions, the multifaceted, interdisciplinary and multilingual nature of song translation studies can perhaps be seen as an advantage. It mirrors the complex functionality of song.

Song translation at best would harbor three approaches and allow investigation in every one of these directions without excluding others: source-oriented, exploring the genius of songwriters and qualities of songs through how they have been understood or misunderstood in translation; transfer-oriented, describing the affordances, needs and effects of different translation modes and media; and target-oriented, studying the long-term effects and afterlives of songs and sharing of music in cultural, national or global perspectives. All would be wise to keep in mind the fluidity and instability of the sung source text, the variability of the translation situation, and the diverse use of song in cultures of all kinds.

Three cornerstones on the map of song translation studies might be pinned upon songs as verse, as multimedial entities and as cultural items. Studies can investigate the products, processes and effects of song translation, and focus on songs having form, carrying meaning, or performing a function. Following the line of analysis a bit further, it might link to a Peircean semiotic notion of song as iconic, indexical and symbolic entities. Translated song is iconic in the immediate, sensory state of being a song; indexical as it represents or refers to its source song (its original context or performance – or not); and symbolic when it inspires new interpretations in ever new contexts.

Songs will go on being sung, played and translated. Songs have been studied in a great number of academic disciplines for a long time. Translation studies is late on the ball. For songs in translation, there remains a lot of languages, song genres, media of transference and unique features and cases to be explored.

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