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Singing within constraints: Strategies of translating songs on early Polish National Television

ABSTRACT

Singing within constraints:
Strategies of translating songs on early Polish National Television

The relationship between the word and sound seems best exemplified in song. The indefinite and semantically broad meaning of music becomes more specific and precise thanks to words, which are believed to belong to a more conventionalised semiotic system. However, in the process of singable translation this intrinsic connection between the word and sound may become distorted because of various reasons, including the question of the target context or the profile of target audiences and their expectations. This paper presents a descriptive analysis of strategies used in translating foreign songs presented in four early episodes of the entertainment show *Muzyka lekka, łatwa i przyjemna*, aired on Polish National Television since the 1960s. Apart from global observations drawn from the overview of translation strategies across the analysed episodes, the paper presents also a more explanatory and multimodal analysis of singable translations of English-language songs and highlights the problem of context-driven constraints.

Keywords: translation and music, singability, song text, translation strategy, multimodality, constraints

1. Constrained song translation

A song is generally defined as words with some type of melody, i.e. a combination of words sung with or without instrumental accompaniment (see *Oxford English Dictionary*). Naturally, such a general definition does not include important

criteria of genre-related features or the performance context and as such may not be appropriate in the case of translation, since there is no universal strategy of translating song. If needed to be translated, a pop song would require a different approach and strategy when compared to, for instance, an art song. Accordingly, a full singable translation may be juxtaposed with a prose translation intended for reading and both will represent viable options or choices within the field of translation and music determined by a relevant purpose (see the classification by Franzon 2008: 376 or the approach represented by Low 2013a: 72 and 2017: 40–41).

The *skopos* of song translation has been one of the main problems discussed within the field of translation and music. Some scholars clearly see the need to underline the function of a target song text and the context in which it is to appear, claiming that the functionalist framework may prove efficient in this type of translational action (see e.g. Greenall et al. 2021: 17). Apart from the fairly obvious benefit of shifting the attention towards the target context, functionalist approaches seem helpful because of another reason: namely, they help to move the debate beyond the “translation vs. adaptation” dichotomy, which is especially helpful in the case of singable translation.

Indeed, singable translation has been considered challenging, as it is beset with plentiful difficulties. For instance, Gorfée (1997: 235) claims that translating song texts is “a complex enterprise subject to multiple constraints”. This claim is supported by Apter and Herman (2016: 2), who write that:

[b]ecause singable translations are almost always designed to fit the original music, they face a constraint beyond those imposed on other translations. No translation is ever “perfect,” but this constraint [...] perhaps renders singable translations even less “perfect.”

The main source of difficulty in singable translation is then the semiotic complexity of the source text, as translating requires that target lyrics fit the source melody to a desired extent. It follows that in the case of singable translation, changes to the original source text, especially to lyrics, may be inevitable. Desblache (2004: 28) states firmly that in singable translation equivalence is “doomed” or is simply “not desirable”. Apter and Herman (2016: 14) contend that “in order to fit the music, a singable translation must sacrifice some literalness, some meaning”. Low argues that translating songs is impossible unless we accept the fact that taking some liberties is a necessary procedure (2003: 92, also Low 2017: 63–64). Franzon (2022: 38) echoes the claim, writing that studies of song translation may fall under the label of restricted translation, since specific constraints would mean that a song translation “will approximate certain properties of its source song, but also differ from it [...] because of the need to appropriate the song for use as a song”.

Although the constraint of singability resulting from the semiotic make-up of the text is undeniable, translating song texts (as translation in general) takes place in a wide context of a specific time and locale, users, translators or regimes. In other words, some translational decisions may not necessarily result from the singability-related and textual constraints, but rather from deliberate decisions made because of some extratextual constraints.

The aim of the paper is to present a descriptive analysis of singable translation strategies used across four early episodes of the show *Muzyka lekka, łatwa i przyjemna* ('Light, easy and entertaining music'), aired on Polish National Television in 1963 and 1970. The analysis includes two episodes from 1963, i.e. the carnival episode from January (Rzeszewski 1963a) and the summer episode from August (Rzeszewski 1963b), both of which are the oldest and the only ones from the 1960s available in the archives of Polish Television. Two subsequent episodes from the archives, i.e. the New Year episode (Rzeszewski 1970a) and the subsequent January episode (Rzeszewski 1970b), were also analysed for the sake of diachronic comparison.

The discussion consists of two parts. Firstly, it provides a systematic overview of choices in song translation and indicates the predominant strategies of singable translation. To this end, the paper utilises the classification of five choices introduced by Franzon (2008) as well as the classification of strategies¹ by the same author (Franzon 2021). Apart from global observations concerning the overall shape of the episodes, the paper offers a more explanatory and multimodal analysis of singable translations of the English-language songs, following the framework put forward by Kaindl (2020). A special focus is placed on the question concerning the influence of the specific target context (including the question of the educational role of television or the profile of the target audience). Accordingly, translation is understood here as a semiotic process, which results in changes made to the text and its materiality, including linguistic, generic, medial and/or modal modifications, all of which are constraint-driven.

It is assumed here that a song text (used interchangeably with the word "song") is an integral composition based on words and music which is delivered by means of specific modes and media (Rędzioch-Korkuz 2023: 223). In other words, a song text (either source or target) consists of lyrics, vocal melody, often with instrumental music, and (vocal) performance. Additionally, a song text may include the visual element (e.g. as is the case with stage productions, video clips or TV shows). A song text is then a plurisemiotic and multimedial composition.

1| Franzon uses the term "translation method"; however, for the sake of terminological consistency, I use the term "translation strategy", which means here a global approach to the translation process and the translated text.

2. Light and entertaining songs

The analysis included four early episodes of the entertainment show *Muzyka lekka, łatwa i przyjemna*, which started to be broadcast on Polish National Television at the beginning of the 1960s. As the name indicates, the main aim of the show was to present music and melodies that were light and entertaining. All of the analysed episodes were directed by Janusz Rzeszewski, an experienced film director, who was responsible for entertainment television shows, and anchored by Lucjan Kydryński, a well-known music journalist and radio host, who was also the author of scripts. Music was arranged by Tadeusz Suchocki in the 1960s episodes and by Leszek Bogdanowicz in the 1970s ones.

The show was one of the few programmes offered by television at the time and, initially, was aired once a month, with episodes lasting for approximately 40 minutes. Both the number of episodes per month and their duration increased with time. The shift towards light music was driven by the fact that classical pieces were not popular with the new television audience: the medium of television proved inappropriate in this case, as the visual element became more powerful and desirable than the subtle sound (and the rather still image) of orchestral music (see e.g. Kofin 1980: 50–51 or Kurek 1986: 89–90). As a result, the show featured some of the latest hits of popular music performed by both Polish and overseas artists. As such, it was the only TV production presenting foreign songs to the Polish audience, which were sung both in original languages and in translation. That fact, along with the charisma of the host, the skilful directing of Rzeszewski and performances delivered by some of the best singers, contributed to the great popularity of the show.

Songs that were presented in the show were not random: the choices made by Kydryński and Rzeszewski were to be accepted by the artistic editorial office and the chief TV director. It was a form of institutional censorship, i.e. control exercised by the authority, which in this case was motivated mainly by the political context. Most of the foreign songs presented in the analysed episodes were performed either in original by singers coming from the Eastern Bloc states or in translation by Polish singers. Both of the options allowed for a certain degree of control: it pertained to the presented content as well as to the mode in which it was used. Not only was censorship present at the initial stage of choosing the songs, but it also shone through some of the singable translations presented in the episodes.

3. Choices and strategies: descriptive analysis

The following section discusses the four episodes in the chronological order. Each episode is briefly presented, with particular reference to singable translations.

3.1. Carnival episode

The carnival episode (Rzeszewski 1963a) featured twelve foreign songs, including nine songs originally performed in English and three in French. Viewers were presented with post-synchronised performances recorded in the studio. In this case, there were no singable translations, which means that the songs were original lyrics-, music- and performance-wise (the overall choice was to leave the lyrics untranslated; see Franzon 2008: 376). Translation was observed at the level of the non-linguistic visual dimension, which was added as a result of the so-called medial translation. According to Kaindl (2020: 60), medial translation may be defined as transfer within and between media of communication, including, for instance, a shift from the medium of an LP recording to a television performance observed in the episode. Performers in the studio wore masks that resembled the performers of the STs (by referring to distinctive hairstyles or facial expressions). Additionally, they wore clothes that could be linked to the looks of the foreign singers pictured, e.g. on LP covers (as was the case with the Peters Sisters, where the actors wore distinctive shawls and had characteristic hairstyles visible on one of the album covers), and moved in a manner typical of the foreign performers' demeanour (e.g. in the case of Edith Piaf's 'performance' with her typical gestures and intense facial expressions). The similarity at the visual level was based on some kind of iconicity that was supposed to direct viewers' attention to specific performers. Otherwise, linguistic translation was observed only at the level of the song titles presented by the host.

3.2. Summer episode

The summer episode (Rzeszewski 1963b), on the other hand, followed a different line of presenting the songs: there were eleven song texts, including four originally performed in English, two in Hungarian, two in Italian, and one performed in French, in German and in Polish. The main mode of presenting the songs was playback singing; however, in two cases, viewers could watch performances recorded directly in the studio (the songs by Manfred Krug and Perry Friedman, both arriving from East Germany). As for the foreign songs, four were performed in their original languages and modified by the obvious procedure of medial translation, as the visual dimension was added to the otherwise original performance. Six songs were presented as singable translations.

Generally, in the case of song translation, Franzon (2008: 376) lists five choices, i.e. leaving the song untranslated, translating the lyrics without considering the melody, writing new lyrics, translating the lyrics and adapting the melody as well as preparing a fully singable translation. It follows then that in the summer episode there were two choices representing the opposing ends of

the spectrum, i.e. leaving the song untranslated² and singable translation³. Franzone (2021: 91–116) provides also a typology of singable translation strategies, which he situates along a scale of semantic fidelity:

- near-enough translation with the highest degree of semantic fidelity;
- perspective-shift, i.e. a translation with some significant changes resulting from modulating the perspective;
- lyric hook transposition, in which the main characteristics of the song (i.e. the hook) are retained, but which otherwise includes more changes at the level of semantic meaning;
- single-phrase spinoff, a relatively free translation, in which the similarity is based on a specific phrase or leitmotiv;
- phonetic calque, i.e. a translation aimed at rendering similarities at the level of phonetics rather than semantics;
- all-new target lyrics, i.e. writing new lyrics.

As is the case with most equivalence-based typologies, applying the labels in practice may prove problematic, especially that the difference between particular strategies, e.g. perspective-shift and lyric hook transposition, may not be distinct. So may be the distinction between what is significant and what is less significant as regards lyrics⁴. However, the typology works as a kind of approximation or continuum, which at least in this paper helps to indicate some tendencies. Accordingly, Table 1 presents the singable translation strategies used in each song from the episode.

What seems striking is the differences in terms of singable translation strategies across the language pairs and genres. The English-language songs were rendered by means of strategies which allow for more liberties, whereas the Italian songs and the French one were translated more closely to the original. Both of the Italian songs were originally performed by the band led by Marino Marini, who had already toured Poland several times and was generally well-received (he even released a song in Polish under the title “Nie płacz, kiedy odjadę”, which became a great success). Apart from that, the songs performed by the band represented a relatively ‘safe’ style of Italian song with light content devoid of any dangerous political agitation. The French song was presented by means of the near-enough translation strategy combined with a perspective-shift.

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- 2| The main focus of this classification is placed on the linguistic and musical dimensions and therefore medial or modal translation is not considered here.
 - 3| The singable translations exemplified in the paper fall within two choices from Franzone’s list, namely translating the lyrics and adapting the original music as well as translating the lyrics to match the original melody.
 - 4| For similar reasons, the distinction between song translations, adaptations and replacement texts founded on the (im)possibility of translating significant elements and put forward by Low (2013b: 237) seems also rather problematic.

Table 1: Singable translation strategies in the summer episode

ST/ TT title	Source language	ST/ TT performer(s)	Singable translation strategy
“Tanta innamorata twist”/ “Taki jestem zakochany”	Italian	Marino Marini/ Tadeusz Woźniakowski	near-enough translation
“Happy birthday sweet sixteen”/ “Szesnaste urodziny”	English	Neil Sedaka/ Irena Santor	single-phrase spinoff
“Johnny one note”/ “Johnny jedna nutka”	English	e.g. Judy Garland/ Bohdan Łazuka	perspective-shift
“Are you lonesome tonight”/ “Pierwszy deszcz”	English	Elvis Presley/ Irena Santor	lyric hook transposition
“Les boîtes à musique”/ “Pozytywka”	French	Les Frères Jacques/ Krystyna Sienkiewicz	near-enough translation/ perspective-shift
“Mille luci”/ “Tysiące światel”	Italian	Marino Marini/ Tadeusz Woźniakowski	near-enough translation

In the original, the song could have been meant as a satire on French society and an irony-filled comment on fleeting beauty. The TT text was consequently adapted to a certain degree (or appropriated to use another term; see Franzon 2022: 26) to fit the Polish context and modified into a light story sung by a petite ‘mascot of the show’⁵ imitating a figure in the eponymous music box. The English-language songs, on the other hand, were imported from a more distant locale and therefore translated in a more adapting/appropriating manner (see Section 4). A similar tendency was observed also in the 1970s episodes discussed below.

3.3. New Year episode

The New Year episode (Rzeszewski 1970a) aired at the beginning of 1970 proves the rapid development of television in Poland: not only was the episode longer and more advanced in terms of the sound and image quality, but it was also more elaborate in terms of the content. Kydryński explained in the opening sequence that the show would be based on a new convention of a current-affairs programme rather than an entertainment show. From then on, the aim of the show was to present the current developments in song, both Polish and foreign.

5| Originally, Krystyna Sienkiewicz, who performed the target song, was referred to by the host as “maskotka programu”.

As a result, viewers were presented not only with post-synchronised or live sung performances, but also with dance performances delivered by some of the best dancers at the time (including e.g. Gerard Wilk, a great ballet dancer) or child actors lip-synching short extracts of Polish songs as well as with puppet shows.

The episode featured seventeen songs, including six performed originally in Polish, one performed in a foreign language (Russian), seven performed in translation and three presented in their original language versions as soundtrack to dance performances. Again, in terms of the lyrics, the overall choice was to either leave the song untranslated or translate it singably. Table 2 presents the strategies of singable translation.

Table 2: Singable translation strategies in the New Year episode⁶

ST/ TT title	Source language	ST/ TT performer(s)	Singable translation strategy
“Can’t take my eyes off you”/ ---	English	Frankie Valli and The 4 Seasons/ Irena Santor, Halina Kunicka and a ladies’ choir	single-phrase spinoff
“La table habituelle”/ “Jej stolik”	French	Henri Tachan/ Tadeusz Ross	near-enough translation
“My way”/ “Inaczej niż wy”	English	Frank Sinatra/ Jerzy Połomski	lyric hook transposition
“La première étoile”/ “Gwiazda naszej miłości”	French	Mireille Mathieu/ Halina Kunicka	near-enough translation/ perspective-shift
“Noch einen Tanz”/ “Jeszcze jeden taniec”	German	Esther & Abi Ofarim/ Ewa Wiśniewska and Mieczysław Czechowicz	near-enough translation/ perspective-shift (at the end)
“A boy named Sue”/ “Chłopiec zwany Zuzią”	English	Johnny Cash/ Mieczysław Czechowicz	lyric hook transposition
“Au bal du grand amour”/ “Bał wielkiej miłości”	French	Mireille Mathieu/ Irena Santor	???

6] Unfortunately, the final song has been cut from the retained copy. It was also impossible to find the recording of the performance elsewhere.

In this case, there seems to be more consistency as for the translation strategy, which may be connected with the fact that all of the translations may have been done by the same translators. In the New Year episode, as opposed to the earlier ones, in which translators are not named, the host boasted that the programme team included two great translators, namely Agnieszka Osiecka and Wojciech Młynarski. However, it is still not fully clear which translations were done by them (their names are mentioned in the opening scene and subsequently in the context of only two target songs).

The English-language songs were again translated with more liberties, though the French song “*La première étoile*” represents a perspective-shift to a certain extent, as the role of the eponymous star is slightly changed and so are the perspectives of the lyrical subjects (in the ST the star is meant to be a kind of medium that will connect the beloved irrespective of the distance or time, whereas in the TT the lyrical subject reminisces about her past and the boy that once loved her, with the star of love meant to travel back to her hometown to tell him about her). In the case of the German song, the perspective-shift is visible in the final lines, which is also made clear by the host, who explained that the punchline of the song was modified by Młynarski to make it fit the Polish context (in the TT, the female lyrical subject intends to kill not only her husband, but also her lover, which is meant to highlight the perfidy of women). Otherwise, both of the songs were translated fairly faithfully.

3.4. January episode

The January episode (Rzeszewski 1970b) was a follow-up to the New Year episode convention-wise, with sixteen songs presented along with sung opening and closing verses in Polish (the “*Dobry wieczór*” and “*Do widzenia*” songs performed by the Partita band). There were three songs originally performed in Polish, six performed in their original languages (including three cases of puppet shows), four performed in translation and three presented in the original language versions as soundtrack to dance performances. The overall choice was then to either leave the lyrics untranslated or translate them singably. The strategies used in the episode are demonstrated in Table 3 (p. 98).

In this episode the departures from the source text lyrics in the case of English-language songs are even more glaring. The Italian song, on the other hand, represents the strategy of perspective-shift because of the gender shift: instead of a perspective of a male lyrical subject, in the TT we deal with a female perspective, with the lyrical subject wishing her beloved one would work. In addition, there is also another salient change in the TT lyrics, as they do not contain any allusions to striking, which, most likely, was a decision resulting from the socio-political context. The work-related theme was retained, as it was considered one of the pillars of communism, whereas the potentially harmful details were removed.

Table 3: Singable translation strategies in the January episode⁷

ST/ TT title	Source language	ST/ TT performer(s)	Singable translation strategy
“Gentle on my mind”/ “Łagodnie tak jak ja”	English	Glen Campbell/ Bohdan Łazuka	single-phrase spinoff
“Chi non lavora non fa l’amore”/ “Gdybyś pracował”	Italian	Adriano Celentano/ Halina Kunicka and a male-voiced choir	perspective-shift
“A boy named Sue”/ “Felieton chłopca zwanego Zuzią” ⁷	English	Johnny Cash/ Mieczysław Czechowicz	single-phrase spinoff
“Good morning starshine”/ “Dzień dobry, gwiazdo”	English	<i>Hair</i> musical cast/ Maryla Rodowicz with a male-voice choir	lyric hook transposition

The Italian example indicates that the lyrics of the analysed songs were subject to context-based censorship, which was used only in some cases. As exemplified above, these were mainly English-language songs. The question is then why those songs tended to be translated in a less faithful manner. To provide an answer to this question it is crucial to present a more detailed and explanatory analysis and examine all of the dimensions of these songs.

4. Beyond lyrics: explanatory analysis

In order to address the question posed in the previous paragraph, it is necessary to move beyond the level of lyrics, analyse the other song text dimensions and consider the socio-cultural context. In addition to the changes introduced at the linguistic level (signalled in the previous section by indicating relevant singable translation strategies), the target songs presented in the episodes were subject to generic, modal and medial translation, as exemplified in Table 4. It presents the most distinctive differences between the target texts and the versions of the source texts retrieved from the sources listed in the footnotes.⁸

7| This is actually a follow-up story of the boy named Sue, which may be considered a spin-off of the first performance from the New Year episode. The two target texts are similar music- and performance-wise, but there is a substantial difference in what kind of story is presented in the lyrics, with the female name being the only element they have in common.

8| Generally, even the songs presented in their original language, music and performance versions were subject to medial translation, as the visual dimension offered by the

Table 4: Translation processes in the case of English-to-Polish singable translations⁹¹⁰

ST/ TT title	Translation			
	linguistic	generic	modal	medial
“Happy birthday sweet sixteen” ⁹⁹ / “Szesnaste urodziny” (1963b)	teen love vs. a desire to dance during the 16 th birthday	pop song – pop song	instrumentation (percussion vs. trumpet) voice qualities (female voice in the TT)	additional visual dimension (hand painted images corresponding to the TT lyrics)
“Johnny one note” ¹⁰ / “Johnny jedna nutka” (1963b)	the TT lyrics clearly changed by omitting crucial instruments and details	show tune – actor-performed song	instrumentation (fewer distinctive sounds in the TT) visual modes (in the TT hand painted images of instruments and a stave) voice qualities (male voice in the TT)	intramedial switch (cinema – television)

medium of television would often supplement the original ST that had been previously known to the audience mainly as a radio or LP song, or to modal translation in cases where the original ST was accompanied by dance performances or the visual performance was arranged anew. However, the aim of this paper is to discuss singable translations and that is why these cases are only signalled marginally. Nevertheless, they prove that a song text is indeed a multimodal composition and translating it is not restricted to linguistic operations. There is an important caveat concerning the comparison, as the target songs were compared with versions of the source songs that are currently available. It was not possible to determine which versions of the original songs were used as the actual source texts.

- 9| The source song was retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFns51r4BU> (accessed: 6.09.2023).
 10| The source song was retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxJlcVYBvOY> (accessed: 6.09.2023).

ST/ TT title	Translation			
	linguistic	generic	modal	medial
“Are you lonesome tonight” ¹¹ / “Pierwszy deszcz” (1963b)	a series of questions vs. a confession of confidence founded on faithful love	traditional pop – pop song	instrumentation (more instruments in the TT) singing (no background humming and spoken bridge in the TT) voice qualities (female voice in the TT)	additional visual dimension (hand painted images corresponding to the TT lyrics)
“Can’t take my eyes off you” ¹² — (1970a)	the TT lyrics as New Year wishes centred around the ST title	pop soul – pop song	singing (choir in the TT chorus) voice qualities (female voices in the TT)	additional visual dimension
“My way” ¹³ / “Inaczej niż wy” (1970a)	an ideal of a self-made man and expression of determination vs. a confession of an adult referring to a love relation	traditional pop – pop song	instrumentation (fewer instruments and less audible trumpets in the TT)	additional visual dimension

11] The source song was retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XVdtX7uSnk> (accessed: 6.09.2023).

12] The source song was retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J36z7AnhvOM> (accessed: 6.09.2023).

13] The source song was retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQzdAsjWGPg> (accessed: 6.09.2023).

ST/ TT title	Translation			
	linguistic	generic	modal	medial
“A boy named Sue” ¹⁴ / “Chłopiec zwany Zuzią” (1970a)	both stories revolve around the name, but in the TT the lyrical subject does not dislike his name	country song/ talking blues – actor-performed song	instrumentation (more “exotic” instruments in the TT) singing (in the TT more spoken-like interrupted with laughter)	additional visual dimension (props corresponding to the TT lyrics)
“Gentle on my mind” ¹⁵ / “Łagodnie tak jak ja” (1970b)	a story of a lyrical subject who cannot settle down, but keeps in the memory an image of a beloved person vs. a gentle approach to meeting a lady	country pop – actor-performed song	instrumentation (more instruments in the TT) singing (more gentle and less dynamic in the TT)	additional visual dimension (acting corresponding to the lyrics of the TT)
“A boy named Sue” ¹⁶ / “Felieton chłopca zwanego Zuzią” (1970b)	the TT lyrics tell a story of a comic train journey	country song/ talking blues – actor-performed song	instrumentation (more “exotic” instruments in the TT) singing (in the TT more spoken-like interrupted with laughter)	additional visual dimension (props corresponding to the TT lyrics)

14| The source song was retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOHPuY88Ry4> (accessed: 6.09.2023).

15| The source song was retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfMnNqn-hKg> (accessed: 6.09.2023).

16| See footnote 11.

ST/ TT title	Translation			
	linguistic	generic	modal	medial
“Good morning starshine” ¹⁷ / “Dzień dobry, gwiazdo” (1970b)	a positive song about love and happiness vs. a prayer-like dialogue to a star	pop song/ psychedelic pop – pop ballad	instrumentation (fewer instruments in the TT and more audible acoustic guitars)	additional visual dimension

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In the English-language songs the changes at the linguistic level were quite significant, representing mostly less faithful strategies. In the case of the non-English-language songs, a tendency to introduce noticeable changes was observed mainly in the case of a slight perspective shift (Section 3.3) or single culture-specific items which were adapted for the sake of target viewers (e.g. in the song “La table habituelle”, where French food was replaced with more common Polish dishes). However, in the songs indicated in Table 4 (p. 99), the departures from the ST lyrics seem to have been more regular and integral, as they included the whole lexical layer rather than single lexical items or themes (as was the case with the theme of striking mentioned in Section 3.4). Apparently, specific themes could have been considered inappropriate (see also Wesley, this issue), and therefore, were subject to the institutional censorship mentioned in Section 2. For instance, most likely because of social conventions, the theme of being infatuated with a sixteen-year-old girl was modulated and presented as a social gathering, as demonstrated in Table 5.

Table 5: “Happy birthday sweet sixteen” and its Polish version “Szesnaste urodziny”¹⁸

ST: “Happy birthday” ¹⁸ sweet sixteen”	TT: “Szesnaste urodziny”	English gloss translation
Tonight’s the night I’ve waited for Because you’re not a baby anymore You’ve turned into the prettiest girl I’ve ever seen, Happy birthday sweet sixteen [...]	Przybrany stół i radio gra Janina urodziny dzisiaj ma Co chwila nowi goście dzwonią do jej drzwi Jeden z najpiękniejszych dni [...]	The table is laid and the radio is on It’s Janina’s birthday today New guests are ringing her doorbell all the time It’s one of the most beautiful days [...]

17| The source song was retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u0LW8dfq910> (accessed: 6.09.2023).

18| Lyrics Howard Greenfield and music Neil Sedaka (© Aldon Music).

A similar type of change in the lyrics could have resulted also from socio-political reasons, which may be illustrated by examples in Table 6 and 7, where expressing strong self-confidence was replaced with an obscure image of giving up, whereas praising freedom and sheer love was rendered as a series of innocent questions, respectively.

Table 6: “My way”¹⁹ and its Polish version “Inaczej niż wy”

ST: “My way”	TT: “Inaczej niż wy”	English gloss translation
[...]	[...]	[...]
Yes, there were times I’m sure you knew When I bit off more than I could chew But through it all when there was doubt I ate it up and spit it out	Był taki czas, ty o tym wiesz, Że chciałem mieć więcej niż plan Był oczu blask i dłonie dwie, I chłodny głos, i słowa złe	There was a time, you know it well when I wanted to have more than I had planned There were sparkling eyes and two hands And a cold voice and wrong words
I faced it all and I stood tall And did it my way	Odszedłem więc, zamkną- łem drzwi, Lecz nie tak jak wy	So I left and closed the door But not like you
[...]	[...]	[...]

Table 7: “Good morning starshine”²⁰ and its Polish version “Dzień dobry, gwiazdo”²¹

ST: “Good morning starshine”	TT: “Dzień dobry, gwiazdo”	English gloss translation
[...]	[...]	[...]
Good mornin’, starshine There’s love in your skies Reflecting the sunlight In my lover’s eyes Good mornin’, starshine So happy to be My love and me as we singing Our early mornin’ singin’ song	Dzień dobry, gwiazdo Czy to ty, czy ja Tak płynę po niebie W podróży przez noc? 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 swimming across the sky, on a journey at night? Good morning, star Is it you or is it me? Is this blue-white night for you or for me?
[...]	[...]	[...]

19| English lyrics Paul Anka and music Jacques Revaux (© Chrysalis Standards, Inc., Iway Holdings Sas c/o Concord Copyrights).

20| Lyrics James Rado and Gerome Ragni and music Galt MacDermot (© EMI U Catalog Inc.).

21| Polish lyrics Agnieszka Osiecka (© Universal Music).

In general, the lyrics of the TTs in all the cases presented in Table 4 (p. 99) revolved around relatively neutral themes, including the theme of a generation gap defined by new music styles (“Szesnaste urodziny”), faithful love (“Pierwszy deszcz”), features of a real gentleman (“Łagodnie tak jak ja”), a story and advice given by an experienced man (“Inaczej niż wy”) or happiness caused by singing to a star (“Dzień dobry, gwiazdo”). In addition, some of the songs embraced the comic element (“Chłopiec zwany Zuzią”/ “Felieton chłopca zwanego Zuzią” or “Johnny jedna nutka”), which was even strengthened in the Polish songs, or fulfilled the situational needs of the production team (the opening Polish version of “Can’t take my eyes off you”).

The changes in the linguistic dimension were reinforced by other modifications, which helped to create coherent texts that would fit the target context. As regards generic translation, which here means a shift in the music genre, most visible changes were observed in the cases where the source genre did not seem to be very popular. This may be illustrated by the songs “A boy named Sue” or “Gentle on my mind”, both of which represented country, a music genre common to specific regions in the USA. The target songs were presented as actor-performed songs, which is a specific song genre combining music, vocal and acting skills that has been relatively popular in Poland. The TTs were performed by character actors, who highlighted the main features of the songs and reinforced the lyrics: Czechowicz’s acting highlighted the comic element of the TTs, whereas Łazuka’s exemplified the quality of gentleness. Another glaring example is the song “Good morning starshine”. Even though the song was presented by the host as a hit from the rock musical *Hair* (most probably viewers did not know the musical, as it was staged in Poland only after 1989), its controversial character was hidden behind a common guitar ballad with no nonsense lyrics or rapid percussion sounds. Otherwise, generic changes seemed to be justified by the immediate context of the show and available modes of expression (meaning both the performers and instruments). Overall, the music presented in the episodes was arranged to fit a small orchestra and/or specific instruments used by the individual performers.

Accordingly, there were specific changes in the modes used, understood as means of expressing the semantic meaning of the text. A case in point is the song “Good morning, starshine”, where in the TT the main instrument is the acoustic guitar, or “My way”, which was modified into a more ‘modest’ genre of a pop song with less audible trumpet sounds signalling a triumphant chorus of the ST. In some cases, there was also a change of the key, which naturally may be connected with the voice qualities and preferences of the singer (e.g. a switch in the case of the “Are you lonesome tonight”/ “Pierwszy deszcz” song pair from C major in the ST to E flat major and then E major in the TT). In the case of the song “A boy named Sue” there was also a visible change in the tempo: both of the TTs were slower (100 bpm in the ST and 88 in the TTs), which contributed

to the image of a drunken man and matched the spoken-like performance and acting. Modal translation also included changes in the manner of singing, which in most of the cases were connected with the presence or absence of additional voices, the overall character and genre of the song or the switch between male and female singers.

Medial translation is understood here as a switch across or between media, defined as the manner through which a text is communicated to its intended audiences (including auditory, visual, tactile, olfactory and gustatory media; see Kaindl 2020 for a slightly different definition). It was assumed that in most of the cases, viewers could have previously known the songs mainly through the auditory medium, so in a majority of cases there was an additional dimension of a visual medium (one exception could be the song “Johnny one note”, which was included in the 1948 musical film *Words and music*, and hence the changes in the visual dimension could have been of modal rather than medial character). The visual dimension of the episodes was generally modest with few props. In earlier episodes, those were drawings, including the ones drawn live during the performance (e.g. in the “Pierwszy deszcz” song), that would correspond to the lyrics, thus underlining the dominant theme. In the later episodes, the stage sets were simple and minimalist, often including only single items (e.g. a bottle and a guitar in “Chłopiec zwany Zuzią”/ “Felieton chłopca zwanego Zuzią”) or large letters that would make up the name of the performer (e.g. in the New Year episode). In this way, the visual dimension either reinforced the semantic meaning of the lyrics and their effect or drew attention to the performance of the song.

5. Discussion: revisiting the constraint of singability

It is clear that the process of translating the songs involved modifications at all levels of the song text, which confirms the fact that a song is a multimodal and plurisemiotic composition. One of the reasons for these changes was the meta-translational constraint of singability: the songs analysed in the paper were to be performable. However, in addition to this constraint, there were also other factors that altogether determined the shape of the target texts.

To start with, there was the technical constraint of the immediate context of the show, which meant that there were specific modes of presentation available at the time. Due to time constraints, in some of the analysed TTs there were matricial changes, which made them fit particular time sequences (e.g. as was the case with “Pierwszy deszcz” with no spoken bridge or the abridged Polish version of “Can’t take my eyes off you” used in the New Year episode opening scene). The profile of the television orchestra resulted in necessary intra- and intermodal changes observed mainly at the level of instrumental music. The time of broadcasting the episode was another factor, as it influenced the choice

of the songs to be translated (usually following the recent events in the song world or song festivals) as well as the translation strategy (e.g. as was the case with “Can’t take my eyes off you” rendered in Polish as New Year wishes).

Another important constraint was the user of the TT, i.e. the prospective performer. The translations were done for particular individuals, which resulted in required linguistic changes, including intrasystem shifts (e.g. one music box instead of several in “Les boîtes à musique” or the change of the grammatical gender in “Tanta innamorata twist”) or a switch between male-female (and *vice versa*) perspectives. At the level of modal translation, the changes would include mainly musical keys and styles of singing and performing. The power of the performers was visible also in the choice of the song or theme, which frequently matched their repertoires (e.g. “Good morning starshine” performed by Maryla Rodowicz, as it corresponded to her musical style; see also Rędziuch-Korkuz 2023: 230).

Then, there was the constraint of the target audience, for whom the STs were adapted to a certain extent. As already mentioned, noticeable changes were observed mainly in the case of single culture-specific items, which, generally, made the TTs more local. Most of the TTs, though, still retained their intended foreignness, which was signalled mainly by the host presenting the TT as a Polish version of a *foreign* song²². As indicated in Section 2, the show was a window to the world at the time of communism: the mission of the national television was then to open this window in an educational and controlled manner, granting its viewers, who frequently represented mainly affluent intelligentsia (as few could afford a TV set at the time), access to the western side of the Iron Curtain. The singable translations analysed in the paper were officially presented as translations, or rather adaptations²³. However, they were examples of covert translation, since the original lyrics had been replaced with the target version in a way similar to dubbing (Gottlieb 1994: 102; cf. House 1997: 69). The translations were covert not only because there was no direct access to the source lyrics, but also because of the obvious language barrier²⁴. This in turn seemed to help to choose the appropriate level of semantic fidelity and translation strategy: in the case of less acceptable content, there was the possibility to decrease the level of

22] An interesting exception was the Polish version of “A boy named Sue”, which was a foreignised translation, with phrases borrowed directly from English, references to cowboy culture, both linguistic and visual, as well as instruments that would produce a ‘foreign’ sound (a banjo, clarinet and double bass).

23] Kodyński often referred to the songs as ‘adapted for the sake of the target context’ or said that those were songs ‘in adaptation’ rather than in translation.

24] Few citizens at the time had the ability to speak foreign languages other than Russian, which means that even the lyrics of the songs presented in original languages were most frequently inaccessible to an average viewer. For the same reasons, getting access to the original lyrics of the translated songs would be of little help as well.

faithfulness and control both the message which was to be presented to the audience and the way it was presented to them, moving beyond the strategy of adapting only culture-specific items and instead rearranging the whole source song.

The reasons for that were mainly socio-cultural and political circumstances, which altogether acted as a powerful ideology-based constraint. Censorship in Poland at the time of communism was institutional and preventive, which means that each episode of the show had been approved by authorities (including TV editors as well as the so-called Main Office of Controlling Press, Publications and Shows operating between 1946 and 1990) before it was broadcast. The translations discussed in the paper must have been put through the filter of the dominant ideology and modified accordingly. As indicated above, this was visible mostly in the case of the English-language songs, which were too distant from the desired viewpoint, as they could have represented a culture that was 'too western' and liberal. A striking example was the song "My way", which was initially translated by Młynarski, but turned out to be too subversive (the initial TT presented an image of a strong independent individual who was not afraid to walk his own path; see Rędzioch-Korkuz 2023) and was subsequently replaced by Osiecka's 'safer' translation. Another example was the song "Good morning starshine", which was transformed into a pleasant guitar ballad with no features of the hippie movement. In line with the title of the show, the presented songs had to be light, easy and pleasant, also for the dominant power.

What is more, the changes aimed at making the songs lighter, easier and more pleasant (i.e. more acceptable in the local context) were observed also at the levels of the genre, modes and media. The lesser-known genres would become more familiar and modest; the music would be usually more subtle, impeccably rearranged and conducted, with fewer instruments heard in the background; the performance of the singers would be of the highest quality, with either skilful acting or the best vocals characterised by clear enunciation; the visual dimension would be an artful addition or a significant element reinforcing the comic effect. In this way, the target songs were coherent and highbrow compositions with a clearly determined character (either a comic song or a lyrical one), meaning and form, thus fulfilling the educational role of a national television (or its propaganda purposes).

Naturally, all of these constraints were brought under the umbrella of the song text, which itself was another source of limitations stemming mainly from its composition. The changes in the linguistic dimension may have indeed resulted from the goal of warranting the performability of the TT. However, the variety of translation strategies observed across the analysed episodes is indicative of the fact that the functional constraint of singability may be tackled in a number of ways, depending on deliberate contextual decisions. The context of translation discussed here included far more than the metatranslational constraint of

the TT function and its singability. As evidenced by the analysis, it was mainly the socio-cultural and political circumstances and the resulting role of television that shaped the target songs with regard to their lyrics, music, performance and the visual dimension. All of the constraints were tackled in a way that produced either a more faithful representation of the original song or a target song that departed from its original to be more acceptable.

6. Conclusions

The socio-cultural and political circumstances are an important constraint on translation, as they include the translational *here and now*, cultural conventions accepted by the target audience or the intended role of the target text. In the analysed episodes, the English-language songs represented a locale that proved to be too distant to be accepted without significant changes that pertained to all the four dimensions of a song text (i.e. lyrics, music, performance and the visual dimension). The socio-cultural and political constraints and the ones related to the semiotic make-up of the songs were tackled in a way that helped to arrive at a pragmatic compromise: on the one hand, the English-language songs still retained their foreign character in that the original context (i.e. their performers or the titles) was revealed to viewers. On the other hand, though, those songs were presented in a controlled form that seemed more familiar and thus acceptable.

The discussion presented in the paper is only a pilot study and more research, including a larger sample, is needed to describe the actual norms of translating songs during a specific period of time. However, even such a small-scale study confirms the importance of adopting a wider perspective while analysing translations, a perspective in which all textual and extratextual constraints are combined. In the case of song translation, the technical constraint of singability is not always the main and only parameter that determines translation and explains the nature of this activity. As it can be addressed deliberately in various ways, ranging from faithful reproductions of all song dimensions to free appropriations of lyrics, music and performance, it is vital to move beyond this technical aspect, which seems to have defined the field of song translation, and look into the whole context of translation.

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