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## How music and lyrics interact: A translation-oriented analysis of musical narrative in Disney's "Let it go"

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### ABSTRACT

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Much research on song translation focuses on formal constraints, such as rhyme and rhythm, but few studies seem to investigate the relationship between lyrics and music itself. This study examines how meaning is constructed in music, and how the meaning of music interacts with the meaning of lyrics in a song translation context. The analysis follows three paradigms of meaning in music: musical narrative, music rhetoric, and music semantics. These paradigms are used to describe the meaning of the music of the Disney song "Let it go", from the 2013 musical film *Frozen*. Disney songs are some of the most commonly translated songs, and as such, they have an important effect on child development. It is found that on a general level, the music of "Let it go" expresses a victory of a rebellious force over an established order, which is expressed by means of a growth of energy and intensity. This growth closely follows the four rhetorical phases of the *narratio*, *probatio*, *dubitatio*, and *peroratio*, which allows for a structural analysis of musical meaning and narrative. The findings suggest that treating the music of a song as a central element can guide the translation process and scholarly analysis of songs and their translations. This study stresses the importance of the role of music in the multimodal product that is a song.

Keywords: audiovisual translation, Disney, musical narrative, music semantics, song translation

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### 1. Introduction

Music is an integral part of human existence. It connects us (e.g. Urbain 2018) and makes us feel things (Haapaniemi/ Laakkonen 2019). Although it can have

a great impact on us, it is difficult to define what exactly a piece of music *means* (Almén 2017). *How* does it affect us, and *why* does it affect us that way? These types of questions are essential to answer for any musician and composer, but also, for example, for filmmakers (Dyer 2012) and song translators (Reus 2020). The case study presented here focuses specifically on the last, aiming to clarify the often nebulous concepts of musical meaning and musical narrative for song translators and scholars in particular.

For song translators, the relation between music and lyrics forms an important constraint on their translation choices (Kaindl 2005; Franzon 2008). An important aim for song translators when they wish to create a singable translation is often to have a song's lyrics relate to music in a similar fashion as in the source text. To achieve that, it is, perhaps naturally, useful to understand what is expressed by music itself: how the audience interprets music and how that interpretation relates to lyrics. The relationship between lyrics and music has been studied to some degree in a song translation context (e.g. Kaindl 2005; Tråvén 2005; Reus 2020), but the meaning of the music itself has rarely been implemented in methodologies outside the musicological field (Almén 2017; Mikalonytė 2018).

Even within the context of musicology, however, music semantics is a contentious topic (Schlenker 2019). It is clear that music has syntax – it has a way of meaningfully structuring musical elements – and it is also uncontroversial to claim that music means something – it evokes tangible feelings in audiences (e.g. Scherer/ Zentner 2001; Urbain 2018), and there are many ways to employ music in film (e.g. Dyer 2012). Yet, a clear system of semantics is more difficult to define. Nevertheless, the field has received fairly extensive academic attention since the start of the new millennium (Honing 2005), and has seen the development of several models of understanding musical meaning. This study relies on three models in particular (detailed in Section 1.1) to explore the meaning of the music of the Disney song “Let it go”, from the 2013 animated musical film *Frozen* (contextualised in Section 1.2) within a song translation context.

### 1.1. Meaning in music

The theories used in this study have been limited to only those most accessible to non-musicians and most relevant to the business and study of song translation. As such, the three theories of musical narrative and music semantics used are Almén's (2017) description of musical narrative; Paradiso Laurin's (2012) discussion of rhetoric in classical music; and Schlenker's (2019) linguistics-based approach to music semantics. These three models complement each other through significant differences in paradigm, approach, and even interpretation of the notion of musical meaning. This subsection briefly contextualises each model.

Almén's (2017) model allows us to systematically investigate the narrative arc of music. He suggests a three-step method to define the narrative in a piece of music: first, to divide a work into *isotopies*, or "spans that create meaningfully coherent units" (2017: 56); then, to describe each isotopy in terms of musical structure; and last, to identify one of four narrative archetypes based on the features of the isotopies. These archetypes represent the movement of music: either a victory or a defeat of transgressive forces over or to forces of order. Victory is characterised by rising melodies and major chord progressions, for example, whereas defeat is quite the opposite. The identity of order is based mainly on musical consonance and silence, whereas the opposite (i.e. dissonance and loud or unexpected sounds) represents transgressive elements. These concepts, as well as several additional concepts introduced in the analysis below, help identify the story that the music tells us.

Paradiso Laurin (2012) focuses on classical music: in particular, the functions of rhetorical features in Baroque music. Basing her ideas on a long history of classical music analysis, she describes four rhetorical phases of a piece of music (which, I argue, can also be found in many types of music outside traditional Western art music): the *narratio*, which introduces the main themes; the *probatio*, which develops the themes further, perhaps by introducing new elements or changing elements; the *dubitatio*, which introduces a new theme that opposes the main themes; and the *peroratio*, which returns to the main themes and concludes the piece. In general, many styles of music composition follow rhetorical rules to evoke certain feelings, and analysing music from a rhetorical point of view helps us understand how a piece of music was designed to influence the listener and, therefore, create meaning.

Schlenker (2019) approaches the musical meaning of Western music from a more linguistics-influenced definition of semantics. According to Schlenker (2019), our interpretation of music is affected by many factors, which can be separated into auditory cognition factors and tonal property factors. Auditory cognition is instinctive and includes onomatopoeic sounds (e.g. a flute makes us think of a bird more so than a piano does, simply because a flute *sounds* more like a bird than a piano does), loudness (a louder sound means the producer of the sound is closer or bigger), and pitch (a higher pitch means the producer is more energetic). Tonal properties are the effects of musical qualities, such as the major scale creating excitement more so than the minor scale does, or a full cadence signalling the end of a piece more so than a half cadence does. These tonal property factors are learnt, but most people in Western societies are unconsciously familiar with them. Although Schlenker goes into great and fascinating detail, this study uses the concepts presented simply to support a general analysis of the feelings the piece evokes in its listeners.

## 1.2. A case study of Disney's "Let it go"

The case study presented here focuses on the Disney song "Let it go" by Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Robert Lopez, from the 2013 film *Frozen*. Audiovisual media, such as musical films, constitute a large part of modern childhood, but the ways in which it affects childhood is not well understood (Porta 2018). This is especially true for translated audiovisual media. In many countries, Disney is one of the most important producers of translated songs. The company's musical films have been translated into a great variety of languages and have been massively popular among many generations of children (e.g. Beaudry 2015; Wilde 2014). *Frozen* has been dubbed into at least 45 languages (Giese 2017), and "Let it go", being the film's most popular song, has seen significant radio play in its own right (August/ McKenna 2014). Due to the extensive impact of Disney songs in general and the global popularity of *Frozen* in particular, it is valuable to investigate the ways in which meaning is created in the music of the film. The version of "Let it go" referred to in this study is available on YouTube as published by Walt Disney Animation Studios (2013).

In the context of the film, the primary purpose of "Let it go" is to show the character development of one of the main characters, Elsa (Yee 2014). Narratively, Elsa, a princess who has up until this point been voluntarily locked up in order to learn to control her magical ice powers, accidentally attacks the guests at her coronation ceremony and subsequently runs away. The singing of "Let it go" takes place directly after this incident, and shows how Elsa's thinking develops from fearful, oppressed, and lonely to confident and liberated. It ends with Elsa in control of her powers (August/ McKenna 2014).

Musically, "Let it go" is a song in common time with a tempo of 69 bpm – a tempo described in the sheet music as *mysterious* (Anderson-Lopez/ Lopez 2014). This time signature and tempo present a framework common to Western pop music that is unsurprising and easy to digest. According to Beaudry (2015), this is a conscious decision of Disney songwriters that has been used consistently since at least the 1990s but can be traced back to Walt Disney's first foray into animated musical film territory in 1937. The tonality (or key) changes several times throughout the song: the verses are in F Aeolian; the choruses are in the relative mode of A, Ionian; the pre-choruses can be conceptualised as E<sub>b</sub>, Mixolydian; and the bridge is in D, and E<sub>b</sub>, Mixolydian. All of these modes are enharmonically equivalent (apart from the dip to D, Mixolydian in the bridge), so the tonality shifts are primarily shifts of perspective rather than location (Almén 2017). As a result, these phases sound quite similar and the shift from one to another does not cause great shock.

The analysis in Sections 2 to 5, structured along Paradiso Laurin's (2012) four phases of musical rhetoric, goes into more specific detail. The *narratio* covers the song's introduction, first verse and first chorus. It presents all the musical

ideas of the song (with the exception of the bridge), as well as the idea of growth. The *probatio* covers the second verse and second chorus. This phase consolidates and expands upon the musical ideas expressed in the *narratio*. The *dubitatio* covers the bridge section, and presents a new, opposing, musical idea. The final chorus constitutes the *peroratio*. This phase re-establishes the musical themes of the first two phases and concludes the song. Each section below begins with a brief description of the lyrics (of which a more extensive analysis can be found in Appendix 1), followed by a division into isotopies and analyses of narrative, auditory cognition, tonal properties, and rhetoric. This approach results in a qualitative description of musical meaning that is hoped to be useful to song translators and scholars and stimulate further research into this valuable field.

## 2. *Narratio*

The *narratio*, which introduces the song's main themes, comprises the first minute and 28 seconds of the song. Lyrically, this phase conveys three primary ideas: Elsa's loneliness and fear in the first verse; the way her parents (and society in general) oppress her in the pre-chorus; and her break from society in the chorus. In the first verse, Elsa describes her loneliness by equating her feelings to the landscape: the lack of footprints in the snow is a metaphor for her being alone and the howling wind represents her conflicted emotions. The pre-chorus repeats the advice that Elsa's father gave her earlier in the film: "Conceal, don't feel". Originally intended to help protect the kingdom from Elsa's magic, the phrase is used here to convey Elsa's loyalty to her parents. The final line of the pre-chorus, however, "Well, now they know", shows an eagerness to move past that mantra. The chorus shows her moving on: Elsa leaves society ("Turn away and slam the door") and admits that her magic is a part of her ("Can't hold it back anymore"). The repetition of the line, "Let it go", stresses Elsa's excitement. In the lyrics, then, this phase moves from the fear that characterises Elsa during the first half of the film to the excitement and sense of optimism of the rest of the song.

Musically, the *narratio* can be divided into six isotopies. The *Isotopy* column in Table 1 (p. 138) gives the name of the isotopy, and the *Time* column indicates at what point in the song the isotopy can be found. The *Description* column lists the tonality of the isotopy, orchestration, and a broad description of its rhythm, melodic pitch, and pattern (in which the numbers describe scale degrees). The *Rank* and *Mark* values in Table 1 represent two concepts of Almén (2017): *rank* indicates how important the isotopy is in the context of the song, based on musical intensity, pitch, melody, and harmony; and *mark* indicates how unexpected the isotopy is when compared to the preceding isotopy (or, in the case of the

first isotopy, the silence that precedes it), based on changes in orchestration, pitch, melody, and harmony. Both variables use a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 being the least ranked or marked. The discussion below first explores the phase's structure and then addresses the effects of auditory cognition and tonality.

Table 1: *Narratio isotopies*

	Isotopy	Time	Description	Rank	Mark
1	Introduction	0:00–0:14	f, high piano notes defining a 2-3-2-3 melody	1	2
2	Verse 1	0:14–0:42	f, low piano notes and vocals, 5-3-4-1 melody	2	1
3	Pre-chorus 1	0:42–0:59	E <sub>b</sub> , Mixolydian, higher vocal melody, 5-8-5-8-9 melodic pattern, also 2-1-2-4-3 melody	2	3
4	Chorus 1.1	0:59–1:21	A <sub>b</sub> , longer and higher notes, 1-2-3 / 1-2-4 melodic pattern	3	1
5	Chorus 1.2	1:21–1:25	A <sub>b</sub> , lower vocal melody, full orchestration, 8-7-5 melody	2	2
6	Conclusion 1	1:25–1:28	A <sub>b</sub> , low vocal melody, sudden change in orchestration, 4-3-4-3-1 melodic pattern	2	3

A quick look at rank reveals that Chorus 1.1 is the primary isotopy in the *narratio*, drawing attention with its high, clearly ascending vocal melody, made up of many long notes, and its Ionian mode, which is the most consonant mode in Western music (Clendinning/ Marvin 2010). This isotopy, then, represents a narrative key moment. A look at markedness reveals the importance, too, of isotopies 3 and 6. Pre-chorus 1 presents an epiphany: a modal shift, in this case from downwards to upwards (Almén 2017). The tonic shifts from a minor to a major chord, the rhythm is more sharply defined, and the vocal melody is higher and has greater intervals. It shifts from a state of *being* to one of *becoming*. The Conclusion 1 isotopy is characterised by a sudden reduction in orchestration and lower vocal melody pitch.

Auditory cognition greatly shapes our interpretation of meaning here. In Introduction, the step-wise melody (one step up and one step down, repeatedly), especially when combined with the timbre of the piano, signifies careful or laborious movement, and the low pitch of Verse 1 expresses feelings such as

sadness or confusion. Pre-chorus 1 and Chorus 1 introduce more instruments and a higher pitch, which indicates growing activity. The increased loudness during Chorus 1 implies increased nearness and intensity. The reduced volume of Conclusion 1 signals the end of the first phase: reduced volume, according to Schlenker (2019), means that the producer of the sound is farther away, thus signifying a moving on. However, the lower vocal pitch also makes the singer sound nearer, contributing to the isotopy's markedness. The singer's sudden closeness is reinforced by the rhetorical force of the relative silence surrounding her (helping shock the audience into wakefulness), and indicates the singularity, clarity, and, thus, the importance of this isotopy.

Tonal properties contribute importantly to this narrative, too. The Aeolian mode of Introduction and Verse 1 represents subduedness or sadness, reinforced by the harmonic structure, the sparse orchestration, and the low melody focusing on minor third intervals. The modal change in Pre-chorus 1 from *f* to *E<sub>b</sub>* represents a shift in perspective. The greater energy of this isotopy is the result of the focus on the major chords and simple harmonic structure, as well as the greater melodic intervals stressing the root, fourth and fifth notes. The Ionian mode in isotopies 4, 5, and 6 represents excitement and assertiveness. Chorus 1.1, with its calmer rhythm and its more open orchestration (involving both high and low pitch ranges), provides a release for the rhythmic and harmonic tension built up during Pre-chorus 1. The harmony implies the major version of the harmony of Verse 1: *i-VI-VII-iv* turns into *I-V-vi-IV*, establishing a subverted relation to that isotopy. The sadness of Introduction and Verse 1 has turned into energetic joy. Rhetorically, the repetition in the melodic line (as opposed to the lack of repetition in the melody of Verse 1) adds reassurance and stability to that sense of energetic joy.

The primary development in musical narrative in the *narratio*, then, is that of the sadness of Introduction and Verse 1 to the joy and energy of Chorus 1 and the assertiveness of Conclusion 1. This movement is implied by the tonal qualities of the music and our auditory cognition, as well as by the rank and markedness of the key isotopies. The most important isotopies in the *narratio* are Chorus 1 and Conclusion 1. Both rhetorically and narratively, the music of the *narratio* displays a clear progression from a sad or tender state of being to a happy state of becoming.

### 3. *Probatio*

The next 59 seconds of the song (from 1:28 to 2:26) constitute the *probatio*. This phase covers the second verse, the second pre-chorus, and the second chorus. The lyrics describe Elsa's relationship with society (in the second verse) and her magic (in the pre-chorus) in a more optimistic light than in the *narratio*. In the

verse, lines such as “And the fears that once controlled me/ Can’t get to me at all” show that she detaches herself from her previous life. The pre-chorus expresses Elsa’s desire to experiment with her powers, with lines such as “It’s time to see/ What I can do/ To push the limits and break through”. The second chorus offers one metaphor (“I’m one with the wind and sky”) and one direct statement of her newfound confidence (“You’ll never see me cry”). The metaphor in particular reinforces the overarching conceit of the landscape as a representation of Elsa’s feelings. The lyrics in this phase further develop the positive direction set out in the *narratio*, expanding the metaphors and increasing both Elsa’s detachment from society and her confidence.

The *probatio* can be divided up into four isotopies, as detailed in Table 2. This table, like Table 1 (p. 138), lists the isotopy number and name, the time code, a brief description, and the rank and mark values. In this phase, the most important isotopy (i.e. the isotopy with the highest rank) is Chorus 2.1. Whereas Verse 2 and Pre-chorus 2 add new elements in their repetition of, respectively, Verse 1 and Pre-chorus 1, with new lyrics and a new vocal melody, Chorus 2.1 presents similar lyrics and the same vocal melody as Chorus 1.1, the only major difference being the orchestration. The orchestra covers a wider range of pitches and comprises fewer staccato notes and rests, which makes this isotopy sound more overwhelming than both Chorus 1.1 and the preceding two isotopies (Schlenker 2019). Chorus 2.2 is less important, musically, because it does not introduce changes in orchestration and its descending melodic and harmonic movement are less energetic than the ascending melody of Chorus 2.1. None of these isotopies are very marked, because harmonically and melodically, they repeat the previously established themes, and this repetition is expected in this type of music (Beaudry 2015; Paradiso Laurin 2012).

Table 2: *Probatio isotopies*

	Isotopy	Time	Description	Rank	Mark
7	Verse 2	1:28–1:46	f, full orchestration, medium-low vocals, 5-3-4-5 melody	2	1
8	Pre-chorus 2	1:46–2:01	E <sub>b</sub> , Mixolydian, 5-8-5-8-9 melodic pattern	2	1
9	Chorus 2.1	2:01–2:22	A <sub>b</sub> , even fuller orchestration, long and high notes, 1-2-3 / 1-2-4 melodic pattern	3	1
10	Chorus 2.2	2:22–2:26	A <sub>b</sub> , lower vocal melody, 8-7-5 melody	1	1



Because the *probatio* comprises much musical repetition of the *narratio*, an analysis of the effects of auditory cognition of these isotopies looks quite similar. Going from Conclusion 1 into Verse 2, more musical voices are added, so we instinctively feel as if there were more movement, but this movement is not as active or energetic as in Chorus 1. This activity – expressed in the orchestration (through the number of instruments), rhythm (through the stressed crotchets and quavers), and pitch – grows more lively throughout the *probatio*, but is never dissonant, so it does not sound threatening (Schlenker 2019). The orchestral differences contribute to this lack of threat: whereas the piano of the *narratio* has a high onset and decay rate, the string section used in the *probatio* has a more even timbre, with a low difference between the onset and decay. As a result, the strings sound less surprising, and more gentle and stable.

With regard to tonal properties, however, the differences between these isotopies and those of the *narratio* are more pronounced. After the confidence of Conclusion 1, Verse 2 sounds carefully optimistic, with the drums settling into a steady though playful rhythm after the sparing accents in Chorus 1. The carefulness in this playfulness is expressed in the harmony, which, as is the case with Verse 1, outlines the Aeolian scale, and the vocals, which, although not as low-pitched as in Verse 1, are lower-pitched than in Chorus 1 and remain relatively monotonous when compared to the pre-choruses and choruses. There is joy here, but not great joy. This joy grows, however, in Pre-chorus 2, where it combines the same stable rhythm with a greater melodic variation and a more energetic and consonant scale, i.e. the Mixolydian. In Chorus 2, the orchestration, as said, opens up, encompassing a greater range of pitches, and the vocal melody is both more clearly ascending and higher-pitched than in the preceding isotopies. The tonality settles on the Ionian scale. Here, then, the levels of energy and consonance are greatest, expressing a straightforward and stably positive emotion.

The *probatio* is quite similar to the *narratio*. It expresses a build-up of energy and consonance, implying an optimistic mood that initially is expressed carefully and hesitantly. Towards the end it becomes more energetic, bombastic, and uncomplicated. Like in the *narratio*, the music here conveys a sense of becoming, but whereas the becoming of the *narratio* describes emotional movement from sadness to happiness, in the *probatio* it describes a development within that happiness, from insecurity to confidence. The *probatio*, like the *narratio*, describes a sense of growth, but the starting and end points of that growth are different.

#### 4. *Dubitatio*

The *dubitatio* covers the next 36 seconds of the song, from 2:26 to 3:02. This time span comprises a bridge section. The lyrics in this section further stress

the growth of Elsa's control over her powers by presenting a more immediate description of both her relationship with her powers and the metaphoric role of the landscape and weather. For example, the line "My soul is spiralling in frozen fractals all around" equates Elsa's soul with her powers (described earlier in the song as a storm and visually represented by ice). Her resolve also grows stronger in this phase, claiming (in a suddenly short and relatively monotone line, thus grabbing the audience's attention and expressing certainty) that she is "never going back" to society. Whereas the first two phases are playful and contemplative, this phase is stalwart and determined.

Table 3 lists the four isotopies identified in the *dubitatio*. This phase marks a sharp melodic, harmonic, and orchestrational shift, reflected in the high mark value of the Bridge Introduction isotopy. Tonally, Bridge Introduction shifts to D<sub>b</sub> Mixolydian – the only tonality harmonically non-equivalent to A<sub>b</sub> Ionian – there are no vocals in this isotopy (for the first time since isotopy 1), and the string section describes a strong rhythm of quavers (highlighted not by the steady drum rhythm of the preceding isotopies, but by a sparse, bombastic, and less strongly structuring timpani pattern) and an ascending melody that is repeated in Bridge 1 and 2 by the vocals. When it comes to rank, the four isotopies are quite similar. However, the reasons for these ranks vary: Bridge Introduction marks the start of the musical shift; Bridge 1 re-introduces the vocals to accentuate the melody more strongly; Bridge 2 modulates up a major second to accentuate the sensation of ascension and growth more strongly; and Bridge Finale finally releases the tension built up by the rhythm of the preceding three isotopies, mirroring the melody of the Pre-chorus isotopies. This growing tension is an example of the discursive strategy of emergency (Paradiso Laurin 2012), and the release in isotopy 14 represents the strategy of epiphany: it marks a sudden, new development in its transition back to the main theme.

Table 3: *Dubitatio isotopies*

	Isotopy	Time	Description	Rank	Mark
11	Bridge Introduction	2:26–2:34	D <sub>b</sub> Mixolydian, full string section, no vocals	2	3
12	Bridge 1	2:34–2:47	D <sub>b</sub> Mixolydian, syncopated rhythm as in verses, 1-7-1-2-3-4-5   7-6-5-4-5 melody	2	1
13	Bridge 2	2:47–2:54	E <sub>b</sub> Mixolydian, modulate up major second	2	2
14	Bridge Finale	2:54–3:02	A <sub>b</sub> , rhythmic change, 2-1-2-3-4 melody	2	2

With regard to auditory cognition, the primary effect of the *dubitatio* is the sensation of rising tension. The steady pattern of quavers in the string section, rather than the syncopated crochets and longer notes of the *probatio*, as well as the ascending melody, indicates growing energy and creates a sense of urgency. The descending notes at the end of each melodic line could be argued to help outline a mountain: from low (the 1 note) to high (6,7) to low again (4). In addition, the simple fact that the melody ascends implies going upwards or climbing. The more steady rhythm, when compared to the carefree happiness of the sweeping notes in Chorus 2, establishes a sense of control and determination. The tension and energy created is not released until Bridge Finale, where the sudden drop in the number of voices (i.e. instruments) and a changed melody imply a significant change of some sort and a great sense of revelation or determination.

This sense of rising tension can also be found in the tonal properties of these isotopies. The use of accidentals (i.e. chromatic notes not in the key) implies unease or strife, which is an essential part of building tension (Almén 2017), and the change in tonality (especially from Chorus 2.2 to the D<sub>b</sub>, Mixolydian of Bridge Introduction) implies a new (emotional) environment (Schlenker 2019). Although these elements contribute to a sense of unease, the Mixolydian scale and the major chord (Bridge Introduction, Bridge 1, and Bridge 2 consist of only one chord) create a sense of joy and safety, and the unease manifests itself mainly as a striving towards something. In Bridge Finale, the melody echoes the melody of the pre-choruses, signalling, through the power of repetition, a return to the main themes. However, there is a difference to the previous pre-choruses. The harmony of the Bridge isotopies is similar to that of the pre-choruses, but their harmonic movement has been reversed: from D<sub>b</sub> to E<sub>b</sub>, rather than the other way around. This rhetorical tool stresses the opposition of the *dubitatio* to the previous phases and reinforces the idea that the purpose of the song has, indeed, changed.

The *dubitatio*, then, offers a contrast to the preceding phases. It inverts the melody, harmonic structure, and rhythm in ways that are sometimes subtle and sometimes quite obvious, creating both an opposition to the first two phases as well as an expansion of their messages. The Bridge Finale isotopy, finally, presents an epiphany to the growing tension and transitions to the familiar-but-different last chorus.

## 5. Peroratio

The last 36 seconds of the song (from 3:02 to 3:38) constitute the *peroratio*, which covers the final chorus. Like the first two choruses, this chorus expresses Elsa's growing confidence in one metaphoric line ("And I'll rise like the break

of dawn”) and one more direct line (“That perfect girl is gone”). The landscape metaphor in this chorus encompasses not only the mountain and the sky, like in the previous two choruses, but even the passage of time itself – an escalation that mirrors Elsa’s confidence. Daylight is presented as a sign of clarity and inner peace (“Here I stand / In the light of day”), and the storm, as usual, represents Elsa’s powers – now raging while allowing daylight to reach Elsa, which shows the growth of Elsa’s control over her powers. The song concludes with the line, “The cold never bothered me, anyway”, stressing that the oppression of Elsa’s powers has always come from the outside. A fitting conclusion for the empowering message of the song.

This phase contains three isotopies, as outlined in Table 4. These are the two chorus isotopies and the Conclusion 2 isotopy, which is a repetition of Conclusion 1. After the subversion of musical themes in the *dubitatio*, the return to the chorus (the highest-ranked isotopies in the song) functions as an affirmation of the themes established in the *narratio* and *probatio*. The high rank of Chorus 3.1 is the result of its full orchestration and high-pitched vocal melody, as well as the return to the familiar A<sub>1</sub> Ionian mode after the Mixolydian modes in the bridge. Chorus 3.1 maintains the same vocal rhythm and ascending melodic pattern as Bridge Finale, but significantly expands the orchestration. By this point, the listener knows the chorus, so this third chorus is not very marked. Conclusion 2, a repetition of Conclusion 1, does represent a marked shift; however, there are significant differences between it and Chorus 3.2 with regard to orchestration, vocal pitch, melody, and harmony. The *peroratio* as a whole, then, repeats the last three isotopies of the *narratio*, but with more extensive orchestration and higher-pitched vocal lines.

Table 4: *Peroratio isotopies*

	Isotopy	Time	Description	Rank	Mark
15	Chorus 3.1	3:02–3:25	A <sub>1</sub> , fullest orchestration yet, long and high notes, 1-2-3 / 1-2-4 melodic pattern	3	2
16	Chorus 3.2	3:25–3:31	A <sub>1</sub> , lower vocal melody, 8-7-5 melody	2	1
17	Conclusion 2	3:31–3:35	A <sub>1</sub> , low vocal melody, no instrumental accompaniment, 4-3-4-3-1 melodic pattern	2	2

Chorus 3 is the loudest part of the song. Instinctively, we interpret loudness as closeness or largeness, which is often associated with great energy and intensity (Schlenker 2019). This sensation is reinforced by the high pitch of the

melody, which indicates great excitement. But this chorus is not entirely surprising: it is the third repetition of this part, so listeners have by now become familiar with the harmony and melody. We know what to expect, and we enjoy having our expectations confirmed, especially after the surprise of the *dubitatio*. In addition, this familiarity means that the music catches our ear. We know what is happening, and we notice the differences between this chorus and the previous two. In Conclusion 2, like in Conclusion 1, the sudden drop in volume indicates that the situation is ending. The reduction in voices (from a string orchestra to just vocals) indicates simplicity: there is less to pay attention to, so the situation is less complex. With regard to our interpretation of sounds, then, the *peroratio* moves from great intensity to a sudden, shocking, but not entirely unexpected ending.

The release of energy in Chorus 3 can also be recognised when looking at the music's tonal properties. The return to a stable drum pattern (after the timpani accents in the *dubitatio*), the return to the A<sub>b</sub> Ionian mode, and the absence of accidentals in the melody, combined with the familiar chorus harmony, contribute to greater consonance. The ascending movement of the melody expresses optimism or positive growth, and the wide range of the orchestration, which again covers both very low and very high pitches, indicates the massive size and all-encompassing nature of this growth. Rhetorically, the contrast in Conclusion 2 to the preceding two isotopies creates a dynamic sound that shocks the listener into observing Elsa's changed mindset. The melody here does not ascend, as in Chorus 3, but rather mimics the step-wise motion of isotopy 1. The melody ends on the 1st note, describing a return to the tonic, so a return to a safe, familiar location. Combined with the preceding notes, which stress the major third interval of the very consonant A<sub>b</sub> chord, this constitutes a clear, natural conclusion to the song.

Although the *peroratio* repeats the chorus for the third time, it offers new developments, mainly by way of orchestration and melodic pitch. The repetition of the chorus creates a sense of safety and excitement in the listener, and the new elements increase the emotional intensity and sense of growth of this phase. The last isotopy provides a sudden and strong contrast to the preceding two isotopies, which signals the end of the song, with regard to the listener's interpretation of both sounds and musical structure. This combination of repetition of the highest-ranked theme, growing intensity, and finally, the strong sense of simplicity and clarity provide a natural ending to the song.

## 6. For the song translator

Through the application of the three methods of describing musical meaning used in this study – Almén's (2017) musical narrative paradigm; musical rhetoric

as described by Paradiso Laurin (2012); and Schlenker's (2019) linguistics-based approach to music semantics – a narrative structure of the music of “Let it go” has emerged. On a general level, “Let it go” can be comfortably analysed according to the four rhetorical phases (Paradiso Laurin 2012) of the *narratio*, *probatio*, *dubitatio*, and *peroratio*: the introduction of main themes, the development of those themes, the introduction of opposing themes, and the reestablishment of the main theme. On a more specific level, we can identify and compare isotopies, of which each expresses a single musical idea (Almén 2017), and those isotopies can be described according to their sonic and musical effects on the listener's mind (Schlenker 2019). This methodology allows us to describe the narrative movement of a song in great detail.

The analysis found that musically, “Let it go” is about a victory of rebellion over an established order. The initial isotopies, expressing sadness and carefulness, generate an image of a flawed initial hierarchy. These emotions are gradually replaced in later isotopies by happiness and excitement – a development marked especially strongly by the epiphanies presented in Conclusion 1 and the end of the *dubitatio* – and developed further in the choruses and the bridge, which represent situations of growing importance and intensity. Pre-chorus 1 marks the shift from downwards (sadness and carefulness) to upwards (happiness and excitement). These sensations are the result of musical devices as well as the sonic qualities of the music in relation to the preceding isotopies. The theme of a victory of a rebellious force over an established order can, of course, be gleaned from the music simply by listening to it actively (if not, it would not be the narrative told by the music), but if one wishes to translate the song, describing the music's narrative so explicitly may help focus on the song's essence, develop a translation strategy, and find fitting translation solutions.

Musical narrative interacts with lyrical narrative in important ways. The music may illustrate the lyrics; it may expand upon it or enrich the lyrics' context; or it may contradict the lyrics, signifying irony or disingenuousness (Kaindl 2005; Tråvén 2005). On a general level, the music of “Let it go” follows the narrative of the lyrics closely. Like the music, the lyrics express, first, sadness (e.g. “The wind is howling like this swirling storm inside”), then a focus on Elsa herself and her freedom in the chorus (“Let it go, let it go / Can't hold it back anymore”), an excitement to experiment and grow in the *probatio* and *dubitatio* (“And the fears that once controlled me / Can't get to me at all” and “My power flurries through the air into the ground”), and a stronger declaration of happiness in the final chorus (e.g. “And I'll rise like the break of dawn”). The one exception to this generally illustrative relationship is Pre-chorus 1. Musically, this isotopy represents a shift away from sadness and towards happiness, whereas lyrically, Elsa repeats her father's advice to suppress her feelings. It is not until Chorus 1

that the lyrics express the shift towards freedom, introduced by the last line of Pre-chorus 1, “Well now they know”, which gives way to the line “Let it go, let it go”. This disjunctive nature of the relationship between the lyrics and the music in Pre-chorus 1 evokes a sense of irony or sarcasm: Elsa does not truly believe her father’s advice anymore (i.e. “Conceal, don’t feel / Don’t let them know”). In this case, the music and the lyrics complement each other in less obvious ways than simply illustration – a listener still notices the relationship between the music and the lyrics, however unconsciously. This implies that the music’s narrative is as important as the lyrics and formal musical constraints, such as rhythm and rhyme, when translating songs or analysing song translations.

To make use of this analysis on a very practical level, when creating or analysing a translated version of “Let it go”, the song translator or scholar may ask themselves various questions based on these findings. For example, do the translated lyrics of Pre-chorus 1 contrast the meaning of the music effectively? Is the language of Conclusions 1 and 2 concise and simple enough to fully express the intensity created by the musical markedness of those parts? Does the translation effectively retain the structure of a victory of a rebellion over an established order as expressed by the music (and illustratively complemented by the ST lyrics)? Questions of this nature – i.e. questions that explicitly establish a connection between the translated lyrics of a song and the meaning of that song’s music – can help translators create more effective translations and achieve more positive translation processes, and help translation scholars investigate translated music in more detail.

However, it is often not practical (nor, arguably, desirable) for translators to conduct as extensive an analysis of musical narrative as is presented here. Further research should be conducted on how to design a practical model of musical narrative analysis that can be useful for song translators specifically. In addition, the relationship between musical narrative and lyrical narrative deserves more academic attention: how can this relationship be conceptualised most effectively, and how can translators and scholars use it more effectively in their respective fields? Tråvén (2005) addresses the matter of translation already in a Baroque context, which can serve as a useful starting point for further research. This study presents an initial foray into the matter of musical narrative for translation purposes, with the aim of inspiring more research into animated musical film translation, and expands upon the currently common view among audiovisual and song translation scholars that music presents only constraints. As has hopefully become clear, the presence of music does not merely pose constraints, but also offers tools for the animated film song translator and translation scholar to focus their translation and research on specific elements of the song to be translated or of the translated song.

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## Appendix 1. Lyrical analysis of “Let it go”

Music and lyrics: Kirsten Anderson-Lopez and Robert Lopez.

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Line	Lyrics	Meaning and narrative
<b>Introduction</b>		
<b>Verse 1</b> ( <i>Narratio</i> )		
1	The snow glows white on the mountain tonight	present tense (direct, confrontational), little line length coherence (little musicality), monosyllabic words signal uncomplicated emotions (sorrow), cold/snow as isolation/loneliness
2	Not a footprint to be seen	rhyme (internal and between lines): musicality
3	A kingdom of isolation	the kingdom is a metaphor for herself; short lines and end-rhyme (musicality)
4	And it looks like I'm the queen	
5	The wind is howling like this swirling storm inside	expanded metaphor (wind as emotions); multisyllabic words (complex emotions), continuous mood (immediacy, forceful), rhyme with l1
6	Couldn't keep it in	expanded metaphor (Elsa creates wind, merging of her & mountain); short lines and end-rhyme; reference to earlier events (her magical outburst at the palace)
7	Heaven knows I've tried	
<b>Pre-Chorus 1</b>		
8	Don't let them in	strict line length (much shorter) & great rhyme (more musicality), monosyllabic words (what's the emotion?); repetition of what Elsa's dad said to her; the object is only implied, not explicitised (fearful, scandalous); reference to female oppression (broken in l14)
9	Don't let them see	
10	Be the good girl	
11	You always have to be	
12	Conceal don't feel	
13	Don't let them know	
14	Well now they know	

Line	Lyrics	Meaning and narrative	
<b>Chorus 1.1</b>			
15	Let it go Let it go	short utterances (creates anticipation/energy), monosyllabic (joy), powers vs others' expectations	
16	Can't hold it back anymore	varying line length (complex), negative verb (inability), responds to powers	
17	Let it go Let it go	repetition (musical, stresses the importance)	
18	Turn away and slam the door	door as metaphor for shutting people out, isolation, responds to others' expectations	
<b>Chorus 1.2</b>			
19	I don't care	mirror l15/17 in form, expand content (self vs other)	
20	What they're going to say		
21	Let the storm rage on	storm as euphemism for her powers (estranging)	
<b>Conclusion 1</b>			
22	The cold never bothered me anyway	the cold as isolation; not living in a patriarchal society	
<b>Verse 2 (Probatio)</b>			
23	It's funny how some distance	distance as happiness, expansion of environment as Elsa (physical = mental)	uneven line length & rhythm, little rhyme (un-musical)
24	Makes everything seem small		
25	And the fears that once controlled me	direct explanation/repetition of l23/24, reaffirmation	
26	Can't get to me at all		
<b>Pre-Chorus 2</b>			
27	It's time to see what I can do	strong verbs (forceful), rhythmical (certainty), focus inward rather than outward, contrast to l23–26	
28	To test the limits and break through		
29	No right no wrong no rules for me	internal repetition, monosyllabic, sentence fragments, simple and ecstatic, building up to l30	
30	I'm free	shortest line, rhyme, monosyllabic (pure joy), a peak	

Line	Lyrics	Meaning and narrative
<b>Chorus 2.1</b>		
31	Let it go Let it go	return to l15/17, stresses importance even more
32	I'm one with the wind and sky	uneven line length w/ l34 (unmusical), but there's rhythm; reaffirm metaphor of the mountain as Elsa
33	Let it go Let it go	more repetition, importance & musicality
34	You'll never see me cry	shockingly directly addressed, direct language, uneven line length (unmusical), rhyme (musical), stands out
<b>Chorus 2.2</b>		
35	Here I stand	again mirror l31/33 in form and content, expand content (away vs stay)
36	And here I'll stay	
37	Let the storm rage on	storm as her powers (estranging because metonymous; affirmation of the environment as Elsa)
<b>Bridge Introduction</b>		
<b>Bridge 1</b> ( <i>Dubitatio</i> )		
38	My power flurries through the air into the ground	many strong verbs (forceful), long lines (no anticipation, stream of consciousness); separation of powers and environment (no estrangement of the euphemism, growth of self-awareness); full merging of Elsa and her powers (before: separation of mountain and sky)
39	My soul is spiralling in frozen fractals all around	
<b>Bridge 2</b>		
40	And one thought crystallises like an icy blast	
<b>Bridge Finale</b>		
41	I'm never going back	short line (shocking), not rhythmical, no rhyme; strong decision, expressed directly/bluntly
42	The past is in the past	rhyme w/ l40, heavy repetition, restart the rhythm; expansion of l41/18 (affirmation)

Line	Lyrics	Meaning and narrative
<b>Chorus 3.1</b> ( <i>Peroratio</i> )		
43	Let it go Let it go	repetition of l31/33 but different load (restrictions to powers vs others' expectations)
44	And I'll rise like the break of dawn	uneven line length w/ l46 (unmusical), but repeated rhythmical unmusicality from l32/34; bigger metaphor of nature (not just mountain, but entire dawn)
45	Let it go Let it go	repetition, simplicity, importance
46	That perfect girl is gone	contrasting very direct line (mirrors l34): inward vs outward
<b>Chorus 3.2</b>		
47	Here I stand	rhythmically mirrors l43/45, expand content (away vs stay), daylight as a metaphor for clarity/happiness
48	In the light of day	
49	Let the storm rage on	storm as her powers (reaffirming her growth, since she and her powers are now one, and her happiness with her powers, as there is daylight in the storm)
<b>Conclusion 2</b>		
50	The cold never bothered me anyway	the cold as isolation; not living in a patriarchal society