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The marriage of modes: Singable opera translation

Abstract

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Despite the increase in scholarly articles and publications that focus on singable translations of vocal music texts, few tackle the relationships and interplay between the two main semiotic systems of words and music, nor how they may or may not be preserved in translation. The translator's understanding of how meaning arises across semiotic resources, especially between music and words, is equally as important a criterion for decision making when translating a vocal music text as sense, naturalness, singability, rhythm and rhyme and deserves as much attention as any staging demands or the diverse requirements of cultural transfer. By means of demonstration, using examples from a translation of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* by Jeremy Sams, this study explores an approach to singable opera translation that focuses on the stylistic decisions of the composer when marrying verbal and non-verbal semiotic modes and how the translator preserves or alters their relationship, which in turn may affect their interpretation, especially by singers.

Keywords: multimodality, intersemiosis, Mozart, Jeremy Sams, opera

1. Introduction

In the field of song translation studies, whose focus includes the singable translation of vocal music texts, most of the discussion about the contribution that music makes to translation decisions has largely been restricted to practical concerns that the combination of music and text raise, such as their prosodic and phonetic compatibility (see Apter/ Herman 2016; Low 2017). The interplay between musical and verbal meaning has had far less attention. Translators of vocal music of all types cannot ignore the undeniably exigent factors of, for example, fitting new words to the rhythms of existing music, retaining rhymes

(perhaps), and ensuring the new words can be sung on the notes on which they are placed. However, I propose that neither can they ignore the "interaction of meanings across different semiotic instantiations" (O'Halloran 2006: 4), nor how these different semiotic resources or modes "semantically complement each other to produce a single textual phenomenon" (Royce 1998: 26). I suggest that this intersemiosis, i.e. the relationship between textual and musical semiotic systems that creates meaning through their integration, might be treated as a primary concern of the translator in addition to any skopos, brief, cultural exigencies, staging requirements and so on. Whether singers are performing an art song, opera or a popular song, their aim is to communicate with their audience and much of what they communicate is based on their interpretation of the combination of words and music. A translation meant for performance may have words that perfectly match the prosody of the source text (ST) and vowels that are perfectly suited to the pitch on which they are set, but if it ignores the musical meaning, it may negatively affect the singer's interpretation. This may subsequently be detrimental to the listener's reception, especially if the translator's combination of verbal and musical meanings is contradictory or confusing. In this study, I propose an approach to vocal music translation that puts intersemiosis, the semiotic interplay between musical and verbal meaning, at its centre. I suggest it is particularly applicable to the translation of vocal music based on texts that existed in their own right before the music was composed such as art song[1], oratorio and opera libretti, in conjunction with any other theoretical model or methodology that may be appropriate, such as those concerned with social or cultural matters.

When discussing the contribution that music makes to meaning in a vocal music text such as opera, the focus of this study, the translator is forced to take analytical methods from other disciplines because there are "hardly any translation-relevant analysis models […] for non-verbal modes" (Kaindl 2013: 265). Therefore, the theoretical framework for the translation approach proposed in this study takes its lead from multimodal stylistics, where literary stylistics and multimodal discourse analysis are combined to examine the "communicative correlations between semiotic resources" (Kaindl 2013: 265). Literary stylistics addresses the aesthetic use of language and the ways in which meaning is created by linguistic means. Multimodal stylistics embraces meaning which is created by other semiotic systems. Based on Halliday's social semiotic account of communication, this means looking at how modes, such as music, articulate ideas (ideational), construe the attitude of the composer or protagonist towards the content (interpersonal) and create discursive flow (textual) (Halliday/ Matthiessen 2014: 29–30). This approach demands an understanding not only of

1| Also called "classical songs". Songs where an existing poem or piece of prose is set to music.

the contribution that non-verbal semiotics make to the whole but also of how the semiotic distribution across resources creates meaning. In the case of vocal music, it is not enough to consider the "tautological duplication of the spoken message"[2] (Kaindl 1995: 114) in the corresponding music, which is often doing so much more such as augmenting, explaining, emphasising, or contradicting the meaning of the words. The combination of words and music, that has been designed (in most cases by the composer) to have a particular effect on the listener, requires particular attention be paid to their interdependence and the effects of the word-music relationship. A musically conscious translation approach that respects the composer's design furnishes the singer with the best material for interpretation, which in turn produces a more satisfying performance for the audience (Smith/ Chipman 2007: 115–116).

The multimodal stylistic approach that is discussed here is inevitably a multi-disciplinary one, and whilst most translation scholars might be comfortable dealing with written texts, they may struggle with other modes, such as music. As Susam-Sarajeva (2008: 189–190) puts it "few […] can effectively deal with meanings derived not only from text, but also from melody, pitch, duration, loudness, timbre, dynamics, rhythm, tempo, expression, harmony, pause, stress or articulation in music". Yet, according to Low (2013: 78), the translator of "the text of a musical work […] should in fact be able to understand the music setting".

In the case of opera translation, the list of translators who have worked for the English National Opera (ENO), which is the largest and most important company performing opera in English in the UK, suggests most UK-based translators have or had a musical background. On its website[3], twelve out of the seventeen translators featured, such as Andrew Porter, Amanda Holden and Jeremy Sams were or are musicians. The opera translator also needs familiarity and expertise in performative and linguistic modes, but the fact that so many have musical expertise highlights the importance of the mode of music to the act of vocal music translation.

In this study, I have sought to explain personal and general interpretations of musical meaning by looking at the forms and structures of music. In so doing I have used the language of music theory just as I use the language of literary theory when discussing the verse of the libretto. I have given explanations of the technical terms in the footnotes; however, the interpretation of the musical features and how they relate to verbal meaning does not rely on an understanding of musical theory and any semantic interpretation will be clear within the context of the discussion.

2| Original German: "[…] die tautologische Verdoppelung der sprachlichen Aussage […]"
3| https://www.eno.org/news/roles/translator/ (accessed: 18.04.2024).

After a brief exploration of multimodal stylistics and musical semiosis, I discuss the multimodal stylistic approach as applied to a singable translation of three arias from the libretto of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's opera *Le nozze di Figaro* ('The marriage of Figaro') K. 492 (2001) as translated by Jeremy Sams (2004). I focus on how the mode of music, through its meaning-making resources and the composer's stylistic choices, shares the semiotic 'work' with the text of the libretto and how the translator might think about approaching the text to preserve the marriage between words and music made by the composer.

2. Multimodal stylistics

In literature, style refers to how authors express meaning through the structure of their texts. Words are not selected for meaning alone but for how they relate to others in the syntagmatic axis, the axis of combination. By "projecting the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination" (Jakobson 1960/1981: 27), the author organises words for a more precise meaning than they might have in isolation. The same can be said of the composer and musical composition. The key word is 'organises'. The stylistic choices, evident in each individual mode as well as in how they are combined to create a relationship and an effect on each other, influence the perception of the whole. These intersemiotic relationships can be described as the result of contextualising relations and tend to function primarily through modal convergence (co-contextualisation) or divergence (re-contextualisation) (O'Halloran 2006: 239 onwards).

By convergence is meant relations of parallelism where the meaning of one mode seems to reflect the meaning of the other, whilst divergence is understood as relations of dissonance where the meaning of one mode seems to be at odds with or unrelated to the other (O'Halloran 2006: 239 onwards). Convergence can be thought of as a mode's "illustrating function" (Kaindl 2013: 265), where modes repeat the content or experience of another to provide emphasis, focus, elucidation, elaboration or affirmation, and like a secondary clause, change the way information is perceived. When something is foregrounded through a relationship of divergence, the result is semantic re-contextualisation that may introduce irony, sarcasm or ambivalence to what is being communicated. In opera, this modal divergence is an effective means of communication: words may say one thing but the music says another (for a fuller discussion see Wilson-deRoze 2017: 24–39). In opera, the modes of music and verse[4] share many

4| Libretti written in prose are to be found but are less common than those written in verse. Many operas also feature recitative, similar to spoken-word theatre, and usually more like prose than verse. In traditional operas, most closed numbers (arias, duets and so on) are in verse (see Rossi/ Sindoni 2017: 73).

resources that facilitate their convergence. Prosody and rhyme are possibly the best known, but in this study, I focus on how music embodies, expresses, or symbolises meaning and constructs an intermodal relationship with stylistic features in the verse. I focus on how the composer, when combining the semiotic resources of music and verse, creates coherence (sense-continuity) and cohesion (connectedness) to point the reader or listener to a particular meaning.

3. Musical semiosis

Since the way that music represents or symbolises meaning is not general knowledge, it is necessary to give a brief outline of how the mode of music operates semantically in conjunction with verse. Although musical semiosis is a vast and complex field of study, in which there seems to be no consensus, I have identified certain useful concepts to explain how the language of music is used to either converge with or contradict the verse, both in terms of form and meaning. These concepts have been derived from the work of musicologists and music semioticians, including Cooke (1959/1990), Jiránek (1980), Monelle (2010), Tarasti (2012) and Schlenker (2019).

To create meaning, music has resources similar to those of verse related to duration (rhythm, tempo), intensity (dynamics), colour (timbre) and pitch (intervallic relationships, tonality). The individual elements combine to form larger semantic units according to various conventions, because, like language, music has its own distinct grammar, despite all its stylistic heterogeneity. The "semantic possibilities of accentual hierarchies, intervallic tensions and tonal relationships are examined" (Wilson-deRoze 2020: 254) in this study to explore how in their convergence with verse, Mozart's musical language contributes to textual meaning, going beyond iteration to functioning as a linguistic subclause that emphasises, contradicts, undermines or adds meaning not available in the words alone. I limit my discussion to two important ways in which the language of music converges with or diverges from the verse to create meaning; the first way is through imitation, often referred to as word-painting or pictorialisation, and the second way is through its own musical lexis, conventionalised musical patterns that have become culturally embedded with a specific meaning.

Imitation in music can be discerned when its meaning is derived from the similarity between musical structure and external reality (Jiránek 1980: 194), so that through the succession of notes, temporal patterning and volume, music orients the listener in space and time through a synaesthetic process. Thus, musical imitation can be said to rely on "inferences from normal (non-musical) auditory cognition", so that "louder sounds are associated either with objects that have more energy, or with objects that are closer to the perceiver" (Schlenker 2019: 3). Through its "analogue code characteristics" (Stöckl 2004: 17), it can

also be made to resemble what it signifies: ascending note patterns can mean ascent, high pitch imitates lightness, low pitch, depth and darkness. The most easily recognizable form of imitation is often called pictorialisation and has been ubiquitous from Renaissance polyphony to contemporary popular songs. Some composers, especially those of the Baroque era (Bach, Handel), painted individual words, whilst others pictorialised the scene, so that whilst a musically imitated shout will be recognised as such, pictorialising the whole scene can indicate whether it is a shout of joy or pain, who is shouting to whom, where the shout is taking place and so on. Psychological or emotional states expressed metaphorically in bodily gesture and movement can also be imitated by melody, harmony, tonality and metre to produce a musical "equivalent of embodied gesture" (Hatten 2004: 132). A pattern of notes, in other words, can "have the same character as a bodily movement" (Budd 2002: 46), so that temporal elements of musical succession can be experienced as physical motion. For example, sadness and happiness are understood through vertical movement: sadness is down and happiness is up (Lakoff/ Johnson 1980: 462). Therefore, music is heard as happy if it is upward moving, in major keys[5], high in the vocal range or at high volume, whilst sadness is expressed when the music is downward moving, in minor keys, has a slow tempo and soft timbre. Music is not perceived note by note but as a holistic relationship of notes that like an image can also be immediately understood when its signs resemble those from life and nature. In other words, when a mode's sign qualities are iconic or indexical, it provides immediate sensory input producing an immediacy of meaning (Stöckl 2004: 17).

The second way in which music can converge with the words is through its own musical lexis where stable musical forms, such as an interval[6] or chord[7], have evolved over generations and through continuous usage to take on meaning in a symbolic sense and become part of a store of "codified, pre-modalized […] ideas […] and topics" (Tarasti 2012: 21). Examples of such fixed "lexical units" (Monelle 2010: 67) are the *pianto*, a descending minor second signifying weeping, and the *gradatio,* a steady and gradual increase in volume and rise in pitch indicating growing intensity. In the mid twentieth century, Deryck Cooke (1959/1990: 51 onwards) catalogued a vocabulary of unconsciously handed down "elements of musical heritage" based on pitch-tensions (intervals), time-tensions (rhythmic accent and note duration) and volume, in which, for

5| In Western music, the key of a piece of music refers to the main notes, scales (sequences of set combinations of pitches and intervals) and chords from which it is built. There are twenty-four different keys possible. Twelve are "major" and twelve are "minor". The difference between them is a function of the space, or interval, between the notes.

6| A difference in pitch between two sounds.

7| A group of three or more notes played simultaneously.

example, an ascending major triad[8] (1–3–5) expresses pleasure whilst its minor counterpart expresses grief. Although Cooke has been criticised for equating unstable, context-dependent musical units with the arbitrary signs of words and of limiting musical meaning to the communication of emotions (Davies 1994: 26), his argument that certain meanings have been conferred on certain sound patterns is compelling. A somewhat older musical lexis, also handed down over time, is tonality. Not only do harmonic relationships and the tensions between different keys serve an expressive function, exploiting their affective properties, but through their consistent association with specific themes, objects, events, people, places and so on, they become "tonal lexemes" (Petty 2005: 2). Although the idea of attributing emotions and moods to music goes back to ancient Greek modes[9], it was only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the affective characteristics attributed to each key, in Western musical tradition, were written down and published, culminating in Schubart's (1806: 377 onwards) definitive listings. Although the semiotic link between key and affect has all but disappeared for the average contemporary listener, for Mozart the "extra-musical association" (Bribitzer-Stull 2015: 197) would have been integral to his meaning. The translator is therefore obliged to pay it some attention. In what follows, I explore how musical imitation and lexis reiterate, emphasise, or supplement the verse, or through divergence, contradict it (for a wider exposition of this see Wilson-deRoze 2017: 85 onwards).

4. Background: libretto and translation

Mozart (1756–1791) composed *Le nozze di Figaro*, hereafter referred to as *Figaro,* in just six weeks in 1786 using an Italian libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte. It is an *opera buffa* (comic opera) in four acts based on a stage comedy by Pierre Beaumarchais called *La folle journée, ou le mariage de Figaro* (1784). The play had caused a sensation because its subject matter dealt with servants rising up and outwitting their masters. As a consequence, it was banned in Vienna and Da Ponte had to dispense with the play's most provocative meaning in order to obtain permission from the Emperor to use it. The opera takes place within a single day in Spain in the palace of Count Almaviva. He plans to seduce the soon-to-be-wife (Susanna) of his servant Figaro and exercise the ancient feudal right of masters: to spend the wedding night with any newly married servant girl. However, Figaro, Susanna and the Countess Almaviva devise a plan to prevent his doing so. After many twists and turns of the plot, they succeed. The

8| The most common chords are triads, which are built by adding the third and fifth notes in the scale above a starting note.

9| The term modes in music describes the scales, which dominated European music for over 1,000 years up until 1500: Inonian, Dorian.

Count has his just punishment and asks his wife to forgive him, Figaro marries Susanna, and there is a happy ending.

I draw my examples from three arias. "Voi che sapete"[10] ('You who know') is sung in Act II by Cherubino, the Count's pageboy (played by a female singer, a mezzo-soprano and often referred to as a "pants role"), who is infatuated with the Countess. He has composed this song especially for her and in it he asks if what he is feeling is really love. "Dove sono" ('Where are they') is sung by the heart-broken Countess Almaviva (soprano) in Act III when she laments her husband's philandering and infidelity. "Deh vieni" ('O, come') is sung by Susanna in Act IV when she is disguised as the Countess in order to trick the Count and expose his infidelity. Figaro is hiding nearby, hoping to surprise her and catch her in the act of being unfaithful to him, not realising she is only pretending to seduce the Count. However, Susanna knows he is there and whilst she ostensibly sings the serenade to seduce the Count, she uses the aria simultaneously to arouse Figaro's jealousy and to profess her love for him.

The English translation, from which the examples are taken, is *Figaro's wedding* by Jeremy Sams (1992). A British theatre director, composer and lyricist, Sams (born 1959), has translated over twenty operas. The date of the translation is unclear but according to a reference made by Newmark (1998: 76), it seems to have been completed by 1992. An article on the Scottish Opera website[11] indicates that the translation was first performed in 1995 by Scottish Opera. The ENO in London appears to have first performed it in 2001 and most recently in 2020. It is also widely used by festival opera companies and amateur groups. The translation is accessible in the insert notes of the Chandos Records[12] CD recording of the opera made in 2004. A vocal score with Sams' translation can be purchased or hired from Josef Weinberger Ltd.

Sams described his translation aim as capturing the "flavour and feel" of the original work and said, "I really want to imagine a text which arrives on Mozart's doorstep in English. He sets it to music and the result is what we hear" (Constantine 2019: 288). This study is not intended as a critique of Sams' translation. It is used only to demonstrate the translation approach recommended here. The examples have been chosen to illustrate the relationships between verbal and musical meaning found in the original score and how Sams' translation interprets them. They allow me to discuss how a translator might best exploit the potential for meaning in the music. I offer some of my own translations to demonstrate alternative ways in which a translator might address the stylistic choices made by Mozart. In the examples (Figures 1–12, pp. 165–177) below, I show the

10| Operatic arias are usually known by their first few words.

11| https://www.operascotland.org (accessed: 22.04.2024).

12| Libretto available to view at https://www.chandos.net/chanimages/Booklets/CH3113.pdf.

vocal line, sometimes with the piano reduction of the orchestral score[13]. In each case, the top line of lyrics is from Da Ponte's Italian libretto, the second line is Sams' English translation and the third line is my own translation.

5. Translating *Figaro*: modal convergence and divergence

5.1. Musical imitation: convergence

In "Dove sono", Mozart employs a number of stylistic musical elements that produce a sonic imitation of the psychological state of the Countess Almaviva as she remembers her husband's love and then his infidelity. At the start of the aria, Mozart sets the first three lines in the musical key of C major, a key that his audience would have recognised as one that communicates sweetness and innocence (Schubart 1806: 377). He even marks the dynamic as *dolce* (i.e. sweet). However, the verse and music of the fourth line are emotionally quite different.

As the Countess sings the words "di quel labbro menzogner?" ('of/from those lips lying') the melody (see Figure 1, p. 165), which ascends in pitch overall, alternates small scalar descents with leaps that span four notes (intervals of a fourth)[14] before ending on an interrupted cadence[15], which like a comma in a sentence indicates that there is more to come that might shed light on what has gone before. The dotted rhythm gives a sense of drive, of acceleration, to the meaning of the words. The rhythm, ascending pitches, continuous small note values and leaping fourths combined with the words, "labbro menzonger" ('lying lips'), seem to musically pictorialise the Countess's rising anguish, anger and despair. When the line is repeated, this anger is further underlined by the disturbing dissonant sound on the second beat of the third bar (see Figure 1) provided by a diminished fifth chord[16], also known as a tritone. This chord has an unstable sound, being neither major nor minor and its ambiguity is often used to heighten emotion. Its tonal tensions communicate restlessness and unease, pain and sorrow, as well as evil and insanity (see Cooke 1959/1990: 84 onwards). The chord ominously colours the Countess's melodic line foregrounding the psychology of someone who is deeply troubled.

13| Copied by myself from the Dover score using a notation application available from Musescore.org.

14| The fourth is the musical interval between two notes/pitches located at a distance of two tones and one halftone from each other.

15| Cadences provide full or partial closure to a musical phrase.

16| A diminished chord has three notes stacked in minor third intervals (a gap of three semitones, twice). It is often described as sounding dissonant, unstable and tense.

Table 1: Comparison of the translations of the first quatrain in "Dove sono"

Source text	**Word-for-word translation**
Dove sono i bei momenti di dolcezza e di *piacer*, dove andaro i giuramenti di quel labbro *menzogner*?	Where are the beautiful moments of sweetness and of pleasure, where did go the promises of those lips lying?
Translation by Sams	**Translation by the author**
I remember his love so tender, those sweet lies I *longed to hear*. Yes, he loved me, but, ah, how quickly so much love can *disappear.*	Where does love go, those tender moments, full of sweetness and *loving sighs*, where has love gone and all his promises, were his kisses *filled with lies*?

Sams does not translate the line "di quel labbro menzonger" so much as paraphrase it: "so much love can disappear" (see Table 1). This describes the Count's infidelity in less potent terms than the original verse. The emotional response to infidelity contained in the words "labbro menzonger" ('of/from those lips lying') seems far stronger than one that describes love as having disappeared.

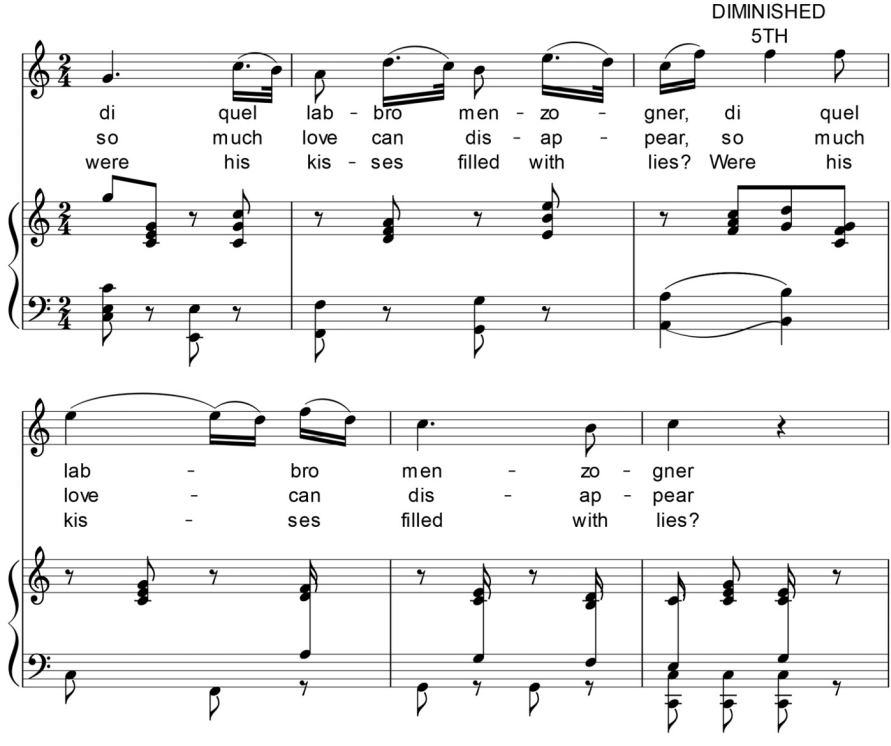


Figure 1: Musical imitation in the line "di quel labbro menzogner?", bars 13–18

What I hear in the music is the accusatory venom associated with "labbro menzogner", alluding to the Count's infidelity. The tension in the music seems less well matched to the idea of love disappearing. The co-contextualising relationship between the verbal and musical modes could be said to have been lost and the contrast between the nostalgia of past love and the anguish of feeling betrayed is not as marked as in the original score. Since in my translation strategy the priority was to preserve the relationship between verbal and musical meaning (albeit they are interpretations), I sought words that I thought would provide the contrast in emotions and capture the heightened emotion of the Countess thinking about her husband's infidelity: "kisses filled with lies" is juxtaposed with "loving sighs" (see bars 5–8).

Musical imitation uses pitch, volume, and tempo to mimic sounds and movements from nature and life such as laughter, crying, thunder and so on. This kind of imitation can be heard in "Deh vieni" (bars 21–33), when Susanna describes the sounds and smells of nature in her alluring serenade, sung ostensibly to the Count in order to lure him into a secret assignation but also directed at Figaro to torment him for doubting her fidelity and to make him jealous. The ambiguity in this aria and this part of the drama is heard in Mozart's playful, meandering melodic shapes, with very few leaps of any kind, and the melismatic[17] word setting, which rhythmically imitates the movement of the murmuring brook and whispering breezes. Like the words of the verse, the music presents to the ear a joyful scene. The regular rhythm and long phrases express happy ideas. At the same time, however, there are musical elements, which I believe provide a different story, one of deception, which lies at the heart of the opera and this aria in particular. The Count deceives the Countess, Figaro deceives the Count and Susanna deceives Figaro in order to teach him and the Count a lesson.

Mozart foregrounds this idea of deception through musical imitation using two distinct musical features, an *arpeggio*[18] and an *appoggiatura*[19]. Firstly, the word "scherza" ('play/jest/frolic') is set to the sound pattern and rhythm of a descending arpeggio. Descending arpeggios in a major key have tended over time and through use to convey a sense of joy (Cooke 1959/1990: 30) and here, it pictorialises in music the lightness and playfulness of the breeze ("l'aura"). Secondly, the line "qui ridono i fioretti" ('here laugh the little flowers') is set such that the *appoggiatura* provides an onomatopoeic imitation of the laughing flowers. It is an embellishment that may even be interpreted as provocative, like a giggle between lovers.

17| A melisma consists of one syllable being sung to a group of notes.

18| A type of broken chord, in which the notes are individually sounded in a progressive rising or descending order.

19| Ornamental note(s) that temporarily displace then subsequently resolve into a main note.

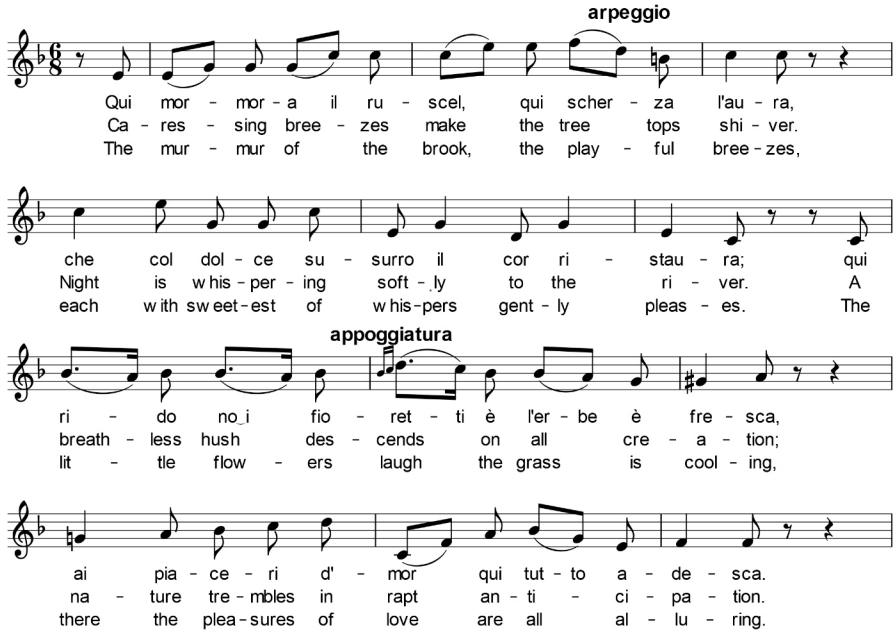


Figure 2: Musical imitation in "Deh vieni", bars 21–33

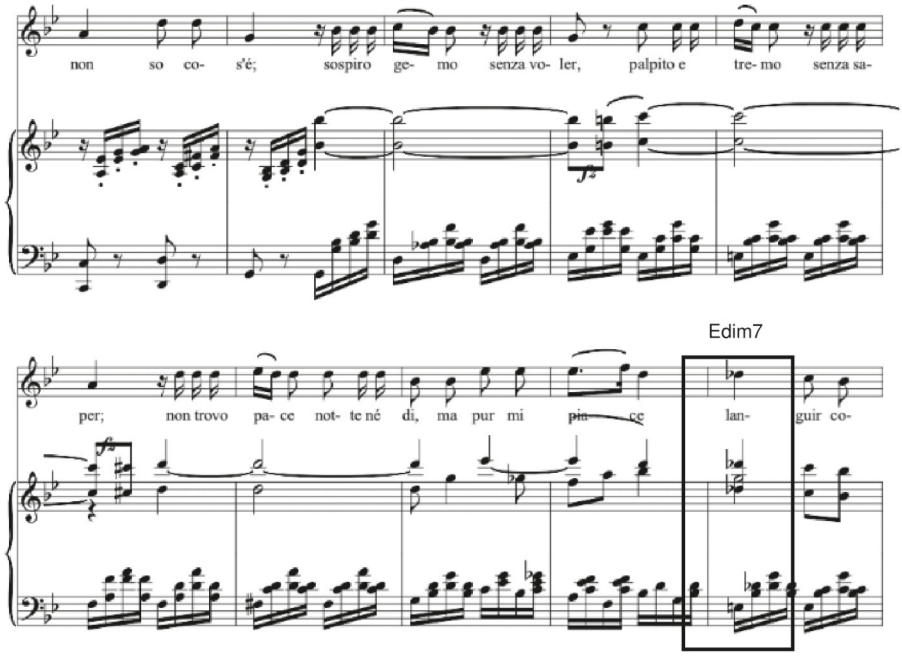
The *appoggiatura*, like a knowing wink, is a subtext that suggests a more erotic encounter and thereby alludes to the deception being played out before the Count to dupe Figaro. It is as if Susanna is laughing as she takes her revenge on Figaro. Just after this, Mozart extends the subtext through the chromatic[20] turn on "fresca" ('freshness') not only emphasising the word, but also tantalisingly and somewhat erotically suggesting something more than the innocent cool freshness of the grass awaits the Count. These features in the music imitate, I believe, the sense of the words and provide a subtext that alerts the listener to the subterfuge being played out by Susanna. Her words and the music are not simply describing a woodland setting.

Sams' translation certainly seems to capture the spirit of the original text and his words remain cohesive with the graceful melody, which can be said to be as imitative of breezes as much as of a rustling stream. However, there is no hint of the subtext, which I have suggested is provided by the music. Since this type of intersemiosis is central to my translation approach, I felt compelled to seek words whose meaning would be enhanced by the inferences of the subtext in the music, as I have interpreted them above. The wave-like flourish of the

20| A chromatic note is one that does not fit within the given key and introduces tension.

descending *arpeggio* underlining "scherza" ('play/jest/frolic') seemed to me to demand a word with a similar meaning in English. Constrained by the prosody of the music, I replaced Da Ponte's verbal phrases with nominal ones in order to accommodate the adjective "playful" on the *arpeggio*. Since the *appoggiatura* works in such a way so as to imitate the little flowers laughing and not to pictorialise just one single word, I felt I could reformulate the phrase and set the word "laugh" on the *appoggiatura* to preserve the effect of the decoration in an almost onomatopoeic way. If "translation is a process of gain and loss" (Apter/ Herman 2016: 15), then the loss in my translation is rhyme. Unlike Sams, who created perfect rhymes for both couplets, my second couplet has the imperfect rhyme words "cooling – alluring". It is a question of balancing constraints and making choices. Some constraints are in the text and music; some are made by the translator. My priorities became constraints that I had to balance with the constraints of musical prosody and English grammar and vocabulary.

Music can imitate feelings by imitating a character's speech intonation, if words were spoken not sung. The paralinguistic use of pitch for emotional expression can be mimetically reproduced in the music so that the meaning and emotions of the words are made available to the listener with greater immediacy (Jiránek 1980: 195), such as can be seen in "Voi che sapete" (see Figure 3, pp. 167–168).



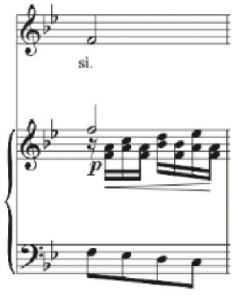


Figure 3: "Voi che sapete" piano reduction highlighting the dissonant Edim7 chord

In "Voi che sapete", as Cherubino expresses his growing confusion and describes the accompanying physical sensations of trembling and shaking, the vocal line becomes quick, repetitive and fragmented. The music rises in pitch as Cherubino acknowledges that the physical symptoms of desire, which he has claimed are unsought and unwanted, are, in fact, a source of pleasure to him.

Da Ponte's verse uses the present active indicative of a string of verbs to foreground Cherubino's rising emotions: "sospiro" ('sigh'), "gemo" ('groan'), "palpito" ('throb'), "tremo" ('tremble'), and "non trovo" ('I don't find'). The mounting physical actions are mirrored in the rhythm of short repeated notes and the climbing chromaticism[21], after which a release from the tension through a chromatic descent might be described as the music enacting "erotic climax and collapse" (Kramer 2016: 171).

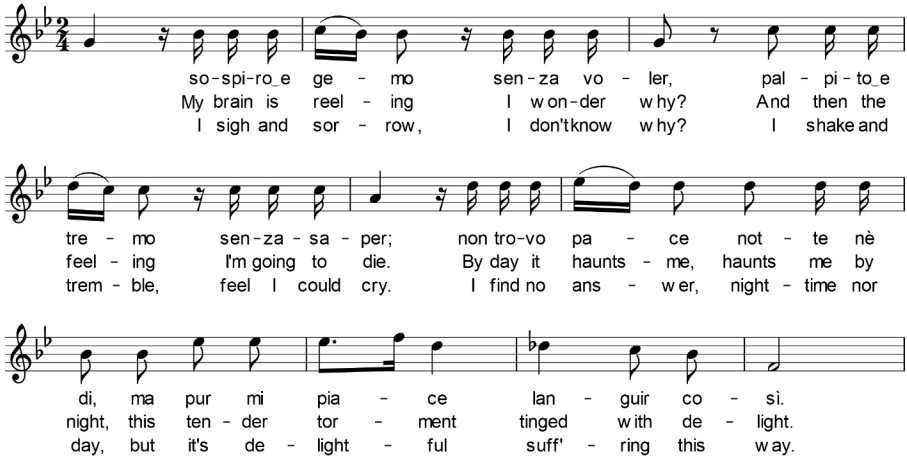


Figure 4: Musical imitation in "Voi che sapete", bars 52–61

21| A compositional technique mixing diatonic pitches with pitches of the chromatic scale. Within each octave, diatonic music uses only seven different notes, rather than the twelve available on a standard piano keyboard. Music is chromatic when it uses more than just these seven notes.

These parallelisms between verse and music have not been preserved by Sams. The rising tension is instead reproduced in Sams' translation through rhyme. The repeated sounds successfully communicate Cherubino's emotional turmoil. In my translation, I prioritised preserving the repetition of the verbs because I felt that this would make Cherubino's emotions visceral and that the singer's interpretation would be helped by preserving their convergence with the musical repetition of pitch and rhythm.

Imitation of a different kind can be heard at the end of the section just discussed, where in the final two bars the descending chromatic progression imitates the bodily gesture of slumping or giving way to sadness and thus the music imitates a physical gesture that reveals Cherubino's suffering, feigned or not. This is music showing things acoustically, working at a metaphoric level. The musical succession of pitch and tempo can be experienced as physical motion. Sams' translation of "languir così" as "tinged with delight" invites questions since its meaning is the opposite of the ST: "languir" means 'suffer', Sams' translation contradicts the doom-laden stepwise chromatic descent of the notes and the dissonance created by the dark E diminished seventh chord[22] (see Figure 3), often used to signal pain (Hatten 2004: 15; Tarasti 2012: 209).

5.2. Musical imitation: divergence

An example of musical foregrounding through divergence can be found in "Dove sono", where Mozart uses wide intervals, both major and minor, ascending and descending, to imitate the turmoil of the Countess's feelings. Just as in spoken language the marked raising and lowering of the voice usually expresses strong emotions, so it is with musical intervals. However, here the rise and fall contradicts the Countess's gentle words that tell of the love that she remembers her husband once had for her.

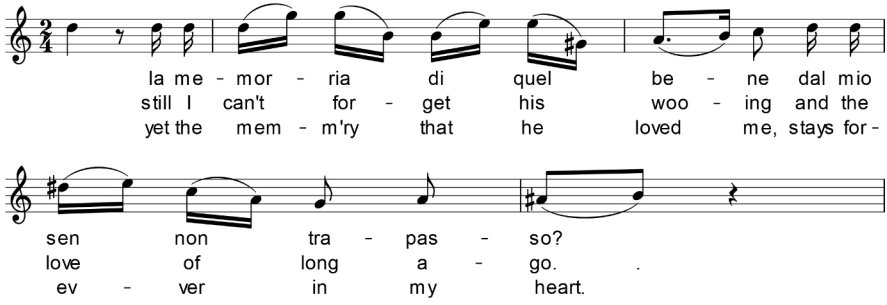


Figure 5: Modal divergence in "Dove sono", bars 27–31

22| A seventh chord is composed of a three note chord (triad) and an additional note forming the interval of a seventh above the chord's lowest note. It is used by composers to provide tension before a resolution.

The divergence between musical and verbal meaning seems to raise doubts about whether the Count ever loved her. Her fond memory of love is undermined by the music, for as her words speak of love, the music speaks of doubt, sadness and even anger. In the ST, memory ("la memoria") is the subject of the phrase and it is memory that is being doubted or questioned by the wide swings in the music. In Sams' translation, however, it is the Countess's inability to forget that is the subject, and the turmoil of the music cannot relate to an inability to forget in the same way as it can contradict a fond memory. In Sams' translation, the relationship between the music and the words can no longer work in the same contradictory way.

5.3. Conventionalised musical forms: convergence

Conventionalised musical forms, which have developed over time and refer to extra-musical ideas and concepts as well as emotions, are used by composers as shorthand codes to infer meaning. I limit my discussion to the expressive and associative use of tonality (keys and modulation[23]), the use of pitch tensions in intervals that have a meaningful function and emotive qualities dependent on their span, and the use of melismatic word settings for iconic, indexical and symbolic purposes.

5.3.1. Tonality

Tonality is one of the most important elements of musical language available to a composer, and can convey a wealth of messages. In "Dove sono", Mozart uses the conventionalised meaning of musical keys and their relationships to illustrate the fluctuating moods of the Countess as she vacillates between anger and love. At the beginning of the *allegro* section of the aria (bar 52) the key has returned to C major in which the aria started and Mozart presents a newly energetic Countess exclaiming with resolute hopefulness her determination to rekindle the Count's love for her. However, a move into C's parallel minor[24] in bars 55 and 56 seems to cast doubt on her intentions. The key of C minor has been associated through convention with unhappy love (Schubart 1806: 377–378), so when Mozart sets the words "nel languire amando ognor" ('though suffering, loving always') in C minor it seems to me he is contrasting musically the Countess's C major hope ("la mia costanza", 'my constancy') with her C minor sadness. The close relationship between the keys also serves to emphasise the close relationship between love and its loss, which lies at the heart of the opera.

23| Modulation is the process that changes the tonal centre from one key to another.

24| The minor key has the same starting note as its major version.

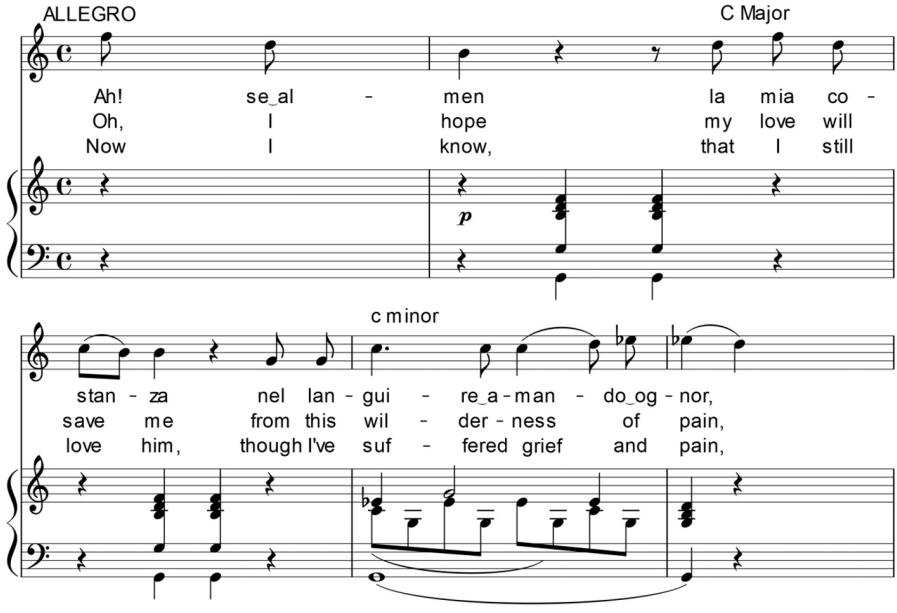


Figure 6: Key relationships in "Dove sono", bars 52–56

Sams' translation and mine capture this sadness and effectively juxtaposes it with the Countess's earlier optimism. Neither translation, largely because of the constraints of English grammar, can combine the idea of suffering and loving at the same time in just nine syllables and thus neither translation can truly replicate the relationship of musical key and text as is found in the original score.

Modulation, like key relationships, is another rich semantic resource. In "Dove sono", Mozart foregrounds the words "in pene" ('in pain'), a subject at the heart of this aria, with a modulation from G major, traditionally used to reflect peaceful emotions of the heart (Schubart 1806: 380), to its parallel minor. G minor is traditionally considered to be a key expressing uneasiness (Schubart 1806: 380).

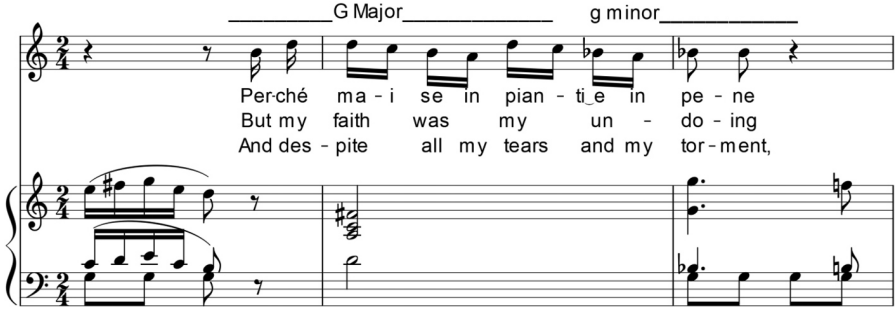


Figure 7: Modulation in "Dove sono", bars 20–22

When a word falls on a modulation, its significance is especially marked and those that move from major to minor generally entail a change to a darker mood. In this example, the modulation seems to make the Countess's pain visceral as she thinks of her husband's infidelity.

Sams translates "pene" as "undoing", a word that means ruin or downfall, and describes what has happened rather than how the Countess feels. Whilst the listener can infer from the change of music to a minor key that her undoing is painful, I suggest a more direct translation, "and my torment". It may be the case that Sams chose the word "undoing" because his priority was the preservation of as much rhyming verse as possible. He produced a fully rhyming quatrain as found in the original libretto. My priorities, that led me to choose the word "torment", meant that I did not.

Table 2: Comparison of the translations by Sams and the author of the second quatrain in "Dove sono"

Source text	
Perché mai, se in pianti e in pene per me tutto si cangiò, la memoria di quel bene dal mio sen non trapassò?	
Translation by Sams	**Translation by the author**
But my faith was my undoing, and my joy has turned to woe; still I can't forget his wooing and the love of long ago	And despite all my tears and my torment, love is lost and torn apart; yet the mem'ry that he loved me stays forever in my heart

In this case, I believe my lack of rhyme is tolerable because the music does not foreground all the rhymes. Mozart ignored Da Ponte's *ottonario* verse form[25] and instead composed the music as if there were just two long lines of fifteen syllables both ending in *tronco* rhymes (where the accent falls on the last syllable of the final word): "cangiò – trapassò". These are foregrounded musically through repetitions and perfect cadences (see bars 20–36), which exert a very strong impetus to reproduce them in the translation (Apter/ Herman 2016: 188 onwards). The *piano* rhymes ("pene – bene") are not heard in the music, therefore, their loss in my translation might be considered a worthwhile sacrifice for the sake of the relationship between the word "torment" and the modulation to a minor key.

25| Four lines of alternating eight (piano (plain)) and seven (tronco (truncated)) syllables.

5.3.2. Intervallic tensions

According to Cooke, "the expressive basis of the musical language of Western Europe" consists of an "intricate system of tensional relationships between notes" (1959/1990: 40). These relationships, or intervals, have developed over time into finite entities and musical theorists have suggested all intervals have a specific meaning. Cooke, for example, describes the minor second as an expression of anguish, the minor seventh as one of mournfulness and the major third as one of pleasure (1959/1990: 78, 90, 51). In the quatrain just discussed (Table 2), the musical language of intervals seems to give expanse to the meaning of the word "tutto" ('everything') in the line "per me tutto si cangiò" ('for me everything has changed').

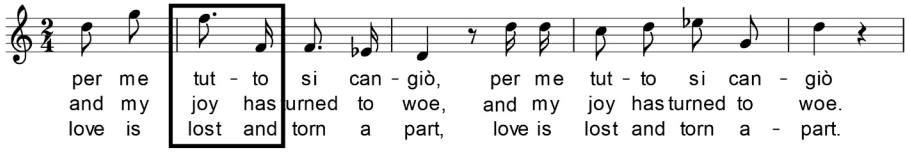


Figure 8: Foregrounding through intervallic distance in "Dove sono", bars 23–27

The consonance[26] of a downward moving perfect octave[27] is often used in music to emphasise grandeur and strength (Rieger 2011: 12) and can suggest great intensity of emotion. The descending motion serves as a musical analogy for concepts associated with downward movement or spatial conceptions of descent, falling, and heaviness. Here it pictorialises the despair and anguish of the Countess. The audience does not see her fall into despair, but "hears" it. It is not easy to find an English word that works with the interval in the way that "tutto" does. Sams' translation paraphrases the ST with "turned to woe", which reflects the downward trajectory of emotion found in the musical phrase; however, it is unfortunate that the word "joy" is so closely bound to this musical gesture that suggests despair. In my translation, which is also a paraphrase, I suggest that the word "lost", set on the upper note of the interval, combined with "and torn apart", are heard as a wail of lament and I hope they engender the same emotion in the singer as did the original verse.

At the beginning of "Deh vieni", Mozart foregrounds, through the use of intervallic tensions, the repeated word "vieni" ('come') rather than the rhymes

26| Consonance: when two or more tones complement each other to produce a sound that is pleasant to the ear.

27| A musical interval consisting of twelve semitones and spanning eight notes of the diatonic scale (notes proper to the prevailing key without chromatic alteration).

"bella" – "t'appella" ('lovely' – 'calls you'), which one might usually expect to be foregrounded. Although the meaning of the word "vieni" remains the same each time, Mozart's intervals seem to provide a subtext that sheds a different light on each utterance, loading each with alternative meanings. His clever use of intervals gives "vieni", when heard the second time, a meaning that undermines that of its first utterance.

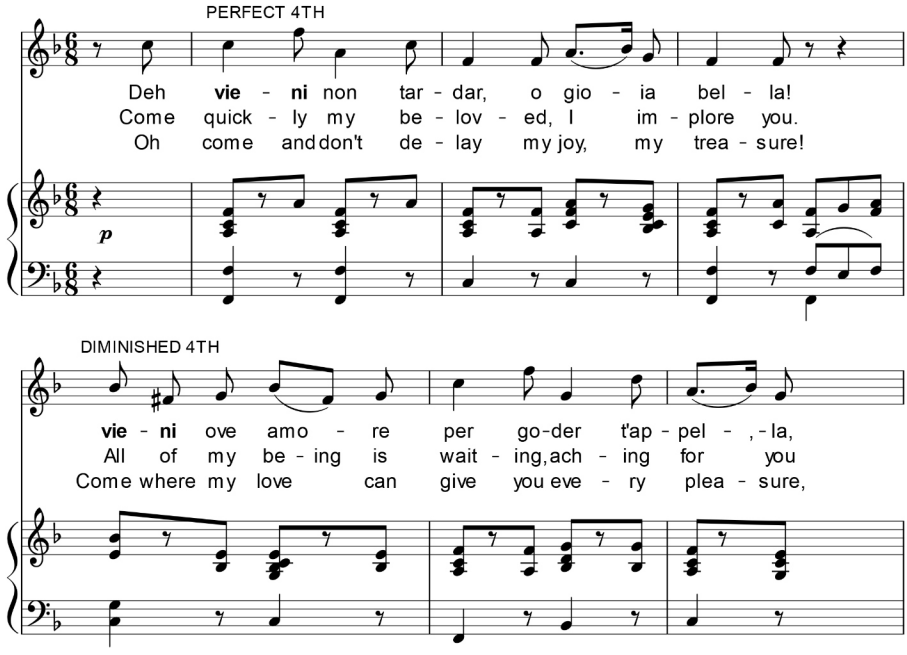


Figure 9: Modal divergence in "Deh vieni", bars 7–13

The first "vieni" is set on a rising perfect fourth interval, the sound of consonance and happiness. The word begins on the dominant[28] (C) and the rest of the phrase descends to the tonic[29] (F) through the major third. This falling phrase pattern has been shown, through use, to convey a sense of happiness, contentment or fulfilment (Cooke 1959/1990: 130). The second "vieni" introduces the aria's first chromatic pitch in the form of F sharp, which is highlighted by its approach through a descending diminished[30] fourth interval. The second "vieni" phrase can be said to subvert the first in as much as Susanna's invitation

28| In Common Practice Harmony, the 5th scale degree is called the Dominant.

29| The tonic note is the first note, or the home note, in any scale or key.

30| Diminished intervals are narrower by one semitone than perfect or minor intervals of the same interval number. They are often described as near-dissonances.

to the Count at first sounds perfectly innocent, but then sounds seductive and alluring. The music initially imitates Susanna's innocent pretence, but the intervals point to what she is really doing, which is outwitting and tricking the Count. Sams' translation suggests he appreciates this semantic juxtaposition, even if the happy melody of the first phrase contradicts the sense of pleading found in the words "I implore you". For me, the impetus to exploit the subtext of the major-minor tonalities, which add to Susanna's playfulness as she deceives the Count and Figaro, was so strong that I devised a translation, which preserved the repetition of the word "come".

5.3.3. Melisma

Mozart uses melismatic word settings to highlight words for dramatic effect. A melisma has the effect of lengthening or expanding a word thus lending it greater emphasis and I have already discussed above the use of melisma as part of imitation where it serves both as an iconic sign (bird song may represent the presence of a bird) or an indexical one (bird song may indicate spring). However, melisma may also function in a more symbolic way because of its origin in sacred plainsong and its use in the Baroque period when melismatic word setting came to denote joy and hope (Athnos 2023: 23–24). Its use by Mozart in bars 21–48 of "Voi che sapete" is not arbitrary but accentuates meaning as it embellishes the words "provo" ('I feel'), "bene" ('affection' or 'love') and "diletto" ('delight').

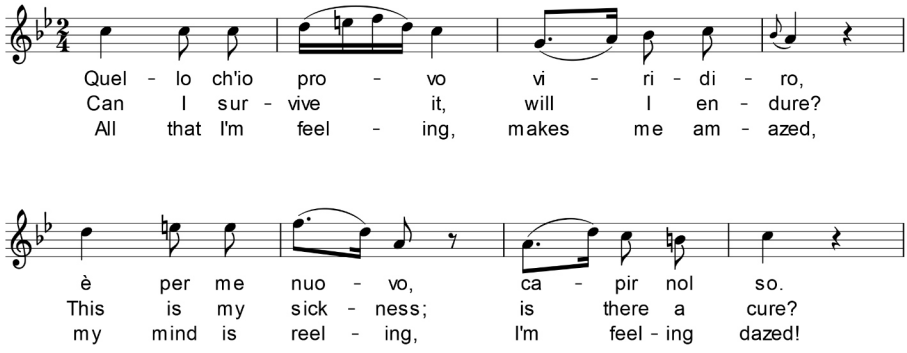


Figure 10: Melismatic setting of "provo" in "Voi che sapete", bars 21–28

The melisma (bar 22) on which "provo" ('I feel') is set appears to emphasise the central theme of this aria; Cherubino's feelings, which he does not understand, but thinks may be love. The melisma expands the first syllable of "provo" both temporally and semantically, giving it tremendous emphasis. The melisma can be said to serve a symbolic function (denoting joy), an iconic one (suggesting swooning) and an indexical one (swooning points to emotions being overwhelming).

Rather than translate the line, Sams writes a new one. In fact, most of his translation of this aria is far from literal. Still, Sams has taken care to ensure the words and music still relate to each other. In this instance, however, the word "survive" has no self-evident relationship to the melisma. For me, the literal translation of "provo" as 'feeling' preserves the correspondence between music and words.

A longer melisma of eight semi-quavers in bars 33–34 provides the word "diletto" ('delight') with the appropriate symbolic meaning of joy. As it rises and falls, its movement suggests delight or euphoria.

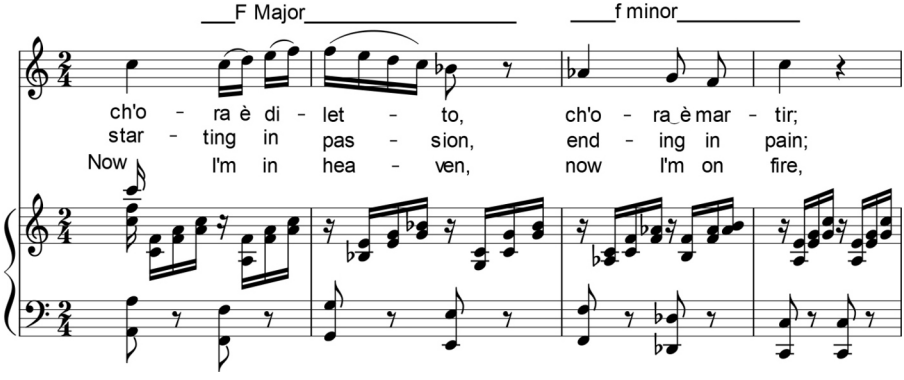


Figure 11: Melismatic setting combined with key change in "Voi che sapete", bars 33–36

This symbolically joyous arch, set in a major key (F), is contrasted, after a quaver rest, by a darker feeling generated by the undecorated, descending scalar figure in a minor key (F). This emphasises, even exaggerates, Cherubino's purported suffering as he sings "ch'ora è martir" ('that now is suffering'). Sams' translation "starting in passion, ending in pain" integrates perfectly with the music to illustrate Cherubino's joy and pain. In my translation, "heaven" and "fire" provide a similar contrast.

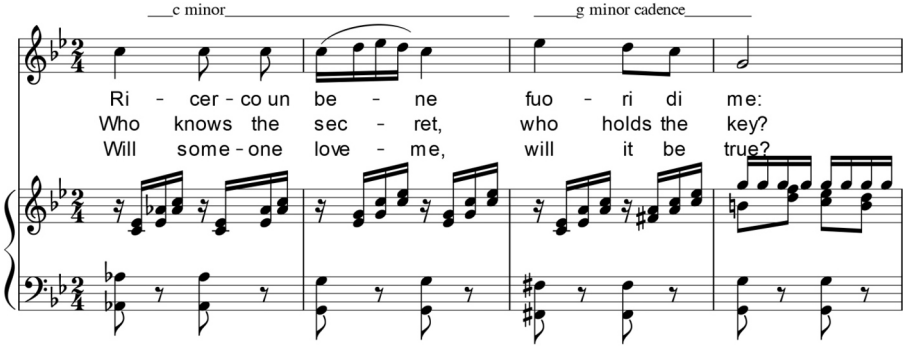


Figure 12: Key change foregrounding ambiguity in "Voi che sapete", bars 45–48

Another four semiquaver melisma (bar 46) foregrounds the word "bene" in the phrase "Ricerco un bene fuori di me" ('I seek affection/love outside of me'). Once again, the arching notes are symbolic of joy, but the melisma now has the additional implications that a change of tonality can contribute.

The words in the preceding eight bars (four verse lines) described Cherubino's physical sensations of burning and freezing in A♭ major, described by Schubart (1806: 378) as the "key of the grave". When Cherubino says he is looking for "un bene" (in this context the word could mean 'blessing, goodness, happiness, affection'), the music changes to the dissonant key of C minor, a key associated with declarations of love and at the same time the lament of unhappy love (Schubart 1806: 377–378). What is even more noteworthy is that this is an unusual chromatic modulation (a major third away) and part of a larger pattern in the aria, in which Mozart takes the listener through numerous and complicated key changes (Carter 1987: 27). The effect is to make the music sound both playful and disoriented, reflecting Cherubino's feelings as he is torn between his desire for love and confusion about its nature. An ambiguity of emotions is reflected in the ambiguity of the music. Sams does not directly translate the line but aptly sets the word "secret" on the melisma to describe the unknowable love of which Cherubino speaks. The minor key that is far distant from the home key suggests Cherubino is very far from finding the secret to love. My translation, which takes a more literal approach, sets the word "love" on the melisma and relies on the contradiction between the dark sound of the minor key and the symbolism of the melisma to emphasise Cherubino's doubts about ever finding what he seeks.

5.4. Conventionalised musical forms: divergence

In "Voi che sapete", Mozart foregrounds Cherubino's ambivalent attitude to love by using intervallic tensions to contradict the meaning of the text (see Figure 4, p. 168). He sets the words "mi piace" ('it pleases me') at the climax of a musical phrase to a triumphant dotted rhythm and a rising major second interval to capture the ambivalence of Da Ponte's verse: pleasure versus suffering. The music at "mi piace" speaks of unhappiness (Cooke 1959/1990: 59), the words of pleasure. The major second interval, despite its name, functions as a mild dissonance with a "longing quality" (Cooke 1959/1990: 79), so although the words speak of pleasure, the music undermines this emotion. The musical and verbal meanings are divergent. The effect of this divergence and the ambivalence it creates is, I believe, lost when Sams uses the word "torment" because now music and word have the same meaning. I propose that by altering the grammar and using an adverbial phrase, "delightful" could be set on these notes with the aim of preserving the ambivalence: Cherubino enjoys his suffering.

6. Conclusions

I have sought in this study to raise awareness of the relationship between verse and music, of how the composer's stylistic choices marry words to music and of how translation choices can preserve or change the semantic co-contextualisation received by one mode from another thereby potentially altering the meaning or emotional content found in the original score. One might not think this would be detrimental to the way in which the audience understands or enjoys vocal music such as opera; however, it is difficult to sing words whose meaning seems unconnected to the music. It affects the singer's interpretation, who since being a student of singing has been urged to enhance performance by fusing music and text in order to achieve meaning and to "tap into [their] reservoir of potential" (Emmons/ Thomas 1998: 198). Students of singing are advised to "assess the emotional truth" in order to convey it to the audience (Smith/ Chipman 2007: 115–116). Anything less, according to Mark Wigglesworth, former Music Director of English National Opera, supposes that singers will be content to "sing along to the music"[31], which he says is "unlikely" given their investment in the performance. Singers of a translation require the same or similar integrity of word-tone relationships found in the original score if they are to affect the audience through their performance in a similar way as they would when singing in the original language of the libretto.

In this study, the discussion has focussed on and been limited to two main approaches to meaning in music and how they co-contextualise the verse of a libretto: imitation and conventionalized musical meaning.[32] Through the imitation of gesture and speech intonation, as indicators of emotion and thought, and through the musical pictorialisation of words or phrases, musical meaning can corroborate the meaning of the verse or juxtapose it to create a multilayered semiosis. Similarly, conventionalised musical lexis, such as tonality (key association and modulation), intervallic tension and melisma provide semiotic resources that the composer can exploit to iterate, corroborate or contradict the meaning of the verse such that the resulting word-tone intersemiosis multiplies meaning far beyond the possibilities of one mode alone. When the translator understands what the music can contribute to a translation then the wholeness of meaning available to the listener of the opera in the original language is more likely to be preserved for the listener of the opera in translation. This requires, of course, that song and opera translators be as musically adept as they are linguistically and culturally, for they are not translating from one source language but two: music and the language of the original song or opera

31| www.bachtrack.com/opinion-gained-in-translation-defence-eno-opera-in-english-policy-january-2019 (accessed: 02.05.2024).

32| For a more expansive discussion, see Wilson-deRoze 2017.

libretto. Whilst I would not go as far as to say that to "translate from such a technical language as Music requires none other than a musician" (Buhler 2017: 25), it does seem self-evident to me that some mastery of the "field to which belongs the text" (Buhler 2017: 25) is recommended. Bear in mind that the libretto of an opera or a poem that becomes a song are essentially provisional texts, which the composer translates into music and in the process whatever the music "says" about them makes them fixed in their meaning. Composers not only imitate musically the prosody of the libretto or poem's verse, fixing it in a rigid musical system, but also fix the semantic relationship between words and music. Without understanding something of how the composer has interpreted the words in the music, the translator risks "serious mistranslations and semantic shifts, the music expressing what the text has not yet said or has already finished saying" (Buhler 2017:19). Sams is certainly a translator with extensive musical knowledge and if, in his translation, he sometimes appears to set aside the implications of word-tone intersemiosis, it may be that Sams had a different interpretation of words and music from mine and/or that our translation priorities were different. This demonstrates the complexities and challenges of translation.

One may well ask, does any of what I have recommended matter when translating vocal music today? After all, singing classical music, especially opera, in translation is quite rare. Whilst in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries opera sung in translation would have been a norm (Apter/ Herman 2016: 11–12), today the demand is very low. Since the middle of the twentieth century, singers have been able to travel around the world easily and performance in the original language of the libretto has become standard. No opera house would ask a singer to learn a role in their local language. Above all, many would argue that the introduction of surtitles (projected captions above the stage) in the 1980s made translations obsolete (Apter/ Herman 2016: 27). Yet, clearly, there remains some demand for translations that can be sung so that an opera may be heard in the vernacular. In the UK, the ENO in London continues to commission new translations and touring companies (for example, English Touring Opera), festival operas and amateur groups across the UK tend to sing translations. Another major outlet for opera in translation has been and remains the Chandos record label whose *Opera in English* series continues to release recordings made of translations.[33]

Whilst the demand for opera and other classical vocal music translation may be low, I hope I have contributed some useful and practical approaches to those involved in and interested in the subject. I hope I have shown that a practical awareness of the contribution of musical meaning to translation is important

33| www.chandos.net/labels/Opera_In_English/7 (accessed: 02.05.2024).

and that I have provided some ideas for translators to use when developing their own approach to incorporating musical meaning in a translation and in so doing, may furnish the singer of their translations with the best possible material on which to base an interpretation. I cannot comment on the way in which the staging or a different socio-cultural setting might affect a translator's ability to include the semiotic contribution of the music. It would be interesting to explore a new translation made for a new production where these variables might play a significant role. Word-tone intersemiosis is only one of many considerations for a translator of a musical text, but I suggest it is indispensable. A translation may work musically, but a musically conscious focus achieves much more.

However this was not the sole purpose of this study, it is also concerned with the nature of the constraints when translating multi-semiotic phenomena. I hope this study raises awareness of how the relationship between different modes influences translation choices and decisions and that it will provoke thought and highlight the wider topic of multimodal translation and its implications amongst translators of all types of song and translators of all multimodal texts.

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