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Activating creativity in translation training courses through song translation

#### Abstract

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The aim of this paper is to present possible applications of song translation in translation training courses as a way to encourage a creative mindset among translation students. The songs selected for the activities under discussion came from *Six: The musical*. The genre of a musical was chosen because of the multimodal nature of musical theatre. In a musical, consideration must be given to the limitations imposed by music as well as the plot, stage movements, or the need to differentiate between registers used by characters. Students undertook translational actions using the five choices described by Franzon; however, they started with the additional step of machine translation. The translations prepared by students were compared and discussed in class, as well as contrasted with the machine-generated text. The translated versions were analyzed following the creativity markers proposed by Bayer-Hohenwarter.

Keywords: song translation, creativity, creative shifts, translation training, artificial intelligence

# 1. Introduction

The development of civilization and technology shapes the demand for new skills and competences to be acquired by novices in any profession. This is also true in the case of translation training. The introduction of CAT tools forced the shift to technology in translator education, and the growth of the Internet caused the need to teach translation students information searching skills (Brożyna-Reczko 2020; Paradowska 2020). With the introduction of neural

machine translation (NMT), the application of AI in translation practices, and the easily accessible ChatGPT, information-seeking and pure technical skills are clearly not as important as they were believed to be ten years ago. Translators in training are now aware that, inevitably, repetitive and controlled content will be processed by highly efficient neural machine translation systems. Nevertheless, high-quality human translation will always be needed in the areas requiring risk awareness, confidentiality, and creativity. The aim of this paper is to focus on creativity, how to foster it during translation classes, and to provide practical examples of class activities to be included in the course curriculum.

## 2. Research on creativity in translation practices

The question of whether it is possible to teach creativity has already been positively answered in academic research through various studies (Kussmaul 1995; Hewson 2016). Creative processes are often compared to those of human cognition, which leads to the conclusion that creativity is not a gift possessed by a select few but a basic feature of the human mind (Kussmaul 1995: 52) that can be developed (Robinson 1998; 2005; Henriksen et al. 2016: 34). Creativity is considered an inherent element of the translation process because creativity informs the decisions translators make regarding the application of appropriate strategies and procedures to the language (Piotrowska 2007: 74). Creativity becomes a feature of human translation in the technology-dominated translation market.

Translation studies offers two approaches to investigating creativity. One approach involves the examination of the translation process, while the other focuses on its final product or the target text. The researcher who greatly contributed to the study of the creative process in translation is Paul Kussmaul. He utilized the findings from the field of psychology and distinguished between four stages of the creative process: preparation, involving the source text; incubation, connected with the search for ideas in the known world; illumination, leading to the creation of those ideas; and evaluation, involving the verification of those ideas (Kussmaul 1995). The presence of those stages can be identified by recording the translation process, as with the use of TAP data (Lörscher 2005) or key-logging studies (Heiden 2005).

Translation born out of creative effort needs to be novel and contain an element of surprise. It must be unique or at least uncommon, but at the same time, it must satisfy specific requirements and fit reality (Kussmaul 2000: 118). Creativity can also be defined as a task that involves problem-solving at an individual level and leads to innovation on a more general level – in other words, producing work that is at the same time novel, original, unexpected, and appropriate or useful for a given purpose (Lubart 2004: 3). The features of novelty, surprise, and fitness are the defining characteristics for creative translation perceived as a product. Without insight into the process and creativity markers, certain criteria must exist to describe a translation product as creative. Such criteria for measuring translational creativity and for promoting it have been proposed by Gerrit Bayer-Hohenwarter in the form of creative shifts (2009; 2010; 2011). Although the first mention of *creative shifts* was introduced by Kussmaul (2007) in his process analysis on a cognitive level, Bayer-Hohenwarter (2011) systematized and provided the most detailed and exhaustive method to measure creativity in the translation product; therefore, her classification of creative shifts as markers of text originality will be used in this study.

At this point, it is worth examining factors that facilitate the process of creativity development. Piotrowska (2007: 91) suggests that the translator trainer should create appropriate conditions for the students to gain positive selfawareness and to believe they are able to solve the translation task. In this study, the aim is to show students the creativity features they already demonstrate and contrast them with a post-edited NMT-generated output.

Songs provide a good starting point for creative translation because they involve many senses. For example, students can listen to the sound of lyrics and watch a video. Consequently, while experiencing the work more viscerally, they may become more creatively involved in the translation. This is consistent with the propositions put forward by Kelly Washbourne (2013: 57–58). Washbourne encourages the use of sound libraries or presenting students with illustrations of paintings contemporary with the work of a given writer. The source material chosen as the basis for the project described in this paper was a song from *Six: The musical.* This genre was selected due to its multifaceted nature, requiring attention to constraints posed by its music, plot, stage movements, or the necessity to distinguish between characters' registers, but offering at the same time additional stimuli in the form of images and sounds, thereby fostering creative thinking and problem solving.

## 3. The source material

The song selected to be the source material for student translation comes from *Six: the musical*, created by Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss. The musical is based on the story of the six wives of Henry VIII but presented in the form of a pop concert. The wives, who are portrayed as pop stars, compete on stage for the position of the leader in their group; the winner is the one with the most miserable fate presented in her song. According to the promotional materials, the six wives decided to "take the microphone to remix five hundred years of historical heartbreak into a Euphoric Celebration of 21<sup>st</sup> century girls" (Citadel Theatre 2023). The musical originated as a performance prepared by Cambridge University

students and presented at the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh in 2017. It was highly acclaimed and quickly made its way to the stages of London and New York. *Six* also entered popular culture, as songs from the show reached twelve million streams on Spotify. In addition to the six wives of Henry VIII being presented as pop music divas, the whole musical provides an excellent example of how contemporary art can transform *history* into *herstory* by signifying the empowerment of women and lifting up their voices.

At the time of the student project, the musical was not performed on Polish stages, as it had its Polish premiere in September 2023 by the Syrena Theatre in Warsaw (e-teatr 2022). Therefore, it is believed that the project was carried out at the best time for using these source lyrics as class material before students had an opportunity to see and hear the Polish version of the musical on stage.

Each characterization of the wives is inspired by one or more popular female singers: Catherine of Aragon by Beyoncé; Anne Boleyn by Avril Lavigne and Lily Allen; Jane Seymour by Adele and Sia; Anne of Cleves by Nicki Minaj and Rihanna; Catherine Howard by Britney Spears and Ariana Grande; and finally, Catherine Parr by Alicia Keys (Chicago Shakespeare Theater n.d.). All the songs contain historical references, but they are written in a language of contemporary youth; therefore, the choice of this type of material for students of English Studies and the history of Great Britain seemed appropriate.

The song selected as the source material was presented by the singer playing Anne Boleyn, the second wife of Henry VIII, and titled "Don't lose ur head" (the fragments of lyrics quoted in this paper are attached as Appendix 1). The song contains many expressions characteristic of youth dialect, such as *sorry, not sorry, LOL*, or *XO*, as well as references to pop songs.

## 4. Study design

A total of twenty-eight master students took part in an activity involving English into Polish translation. The activity was part of the Audiovisual Translation course at the Institute of English Studies, University of the National Education Commission in Krakow, and took four class units of forty-five minutes. All the translators were native speakers of Polish and had completed their BA programme in Translation Studies.

For the introductory stage of the assignment, the students were asked to get acquainted with the theory of song translation by reading two research papers: on different ways in which a song can be translated (Franzon 2008) and on the notion of singability (Low 2008). The next stage of the assignment included a group activity, in which the students were asked to examine both machine translated and ChatGPT-generated texts. During these two stages, the students analyzed the quality of the texts obtained and discussed the possibility of using

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these raw outputs as the material for post-editing. It was resolved that since the ChatGPT-generated and post-edited texts would satisfy the criteria of the second choice in song translation, i.e. translating the lyrics but not taking the music into account (Franzon 2008: 376), recreating the same version anew would be a redundant exercise. Therefore, in the next part, the students had an option to choose from the remaining three strategies of song translation: writing new lyrics to the original music with no overt relation to the original lyrics; translating the lyrics and adapting the music; or adapting the translation to the original music. At this stage, the students worked in pairs and were specifically asked to consider all the three options before selecting the one with which they felt most confident. With their prior knowledge and practice in translating various types of texts, the students did not have to rely on machine-generated output to creatively approach translation of the song selected for this project. They started their work in class but were allowed to complete it at home and upload it to the shared folder on MS Teams. In class, all the students listened several times to the original recording when doing their work, as they were equipped with their headphones, which allowed all of them to work independently.

Prior to choosing the translation strategies, the teacher discussed with the students the concept of singability, ensuring their understanding of related linguistic challenges, such as consonant clusters in Polish and the difference between long and short vowels. Following the solution proposed by Low (2008), the students were encouraged to recite their translation to identify possible impediments and to verify whether their texts can be sung with no difficulties.

# 5. Output generated by ChatGPT

The translation prepared by ChatGPT 3.5 provided by OpenAI proved surprisingly good, requiring only minor post-editing. The translation outputs generated by Google Translate and DeepL were less accurate and demanded some major changes. Due to a difference in the quality of translation between the output generated by the two NMT systems and ChatGPT, only the latter was taken into account in the post-activity discussion.

The AI-generated version was not free from errors, yet they were quite easy to spot and correct. ChatGPT grammar errors included wrong, non-existing forms of imperfective verbs: "nie tracaj głowy" instead of "nie trać głowy" ('don't lose your head'); one case of wrong adjective forms, masculine instead of feminine: "Nie chcę być jednym z dziewcząt w trójkącie" ('Don't wanna be some girl in a threesome'); masculine instead of feminine verb forms in two instances: "powiedziałes" instead of "powiedziałas" ('he said' and 'she said', respectively); and an entirely wrong and nonsensical expression: "Krzyczy i wrzeszczy jak tak sądzący!" ('He screams and shouts like so judgmental').

Surprisingly, ChatGPT generated relevant, non-routine equivalents for the elements of youth dialect, as shown in Table 1 below.

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Source text	ChatGPT output
Politics? Not my thing	Polityka? To nie moja bajka
Your comic went viral	Twój komentarz stał się viralowy
LOL	LOL
I wouldn't be such a b-	Nie byłabym taką

Table 1: Non-routine translations generated by ChatGPT

*Viral* is a good example of "selecting" the right register by ChatGPT, as *wirusowy* (the literal translation, meaning 'virus-related' or 'virus-infected') generated both by Google Translate and DeepL was not a good equivalent in this context. Nevertheless, all of the idioms, allusions, and metaphors were translated literally.

No to lecimy

The prompt given to the AI to obtain the target text was "Translate into Polish", and followed by lyrics in English. Following the satisfactory output of AI-generated translation, at the request of the students present in the classroom, another attempt was made to work with ChatGPT 3.5 provided by OpenAI, but this time by providing the AI with the following prompt: "Translate into a Polish singable version". The answer provided by the application is quoted fully below, as it was an important message to be delivered to the students:

Sorry, but I can't assist you in translating these lyrics into Polish while keeping them singable. The translation process for lyrics involves not only finding equivalent meanings in another language but also matching the syllable count, rhythm, and rhyme scheme to make sure the song remains singable and retains its musical flow. This requires a creative touch from a human translator who can adapt the lyrics effectively. If you're looking for a singable translation, I recommend working with a professional translator who has experience with song lyrics.<sup>1</sup>

# 6. Student translations

In most of the target texts prepared by the students (eleven out of fourteen) the translation was adapted to the original music. Only two versions included new lyrics to the original music, which meant departing from the source text; and

Here we go

<sup>1</sup> The work with Chat GPT 3.5 from OpenAI conducted as part of the project was carried out in April 2023.

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in one case, the students claimed to have selected the fourth mode (translating the lyrics and adapting the music accordingly). In this case, the adaptation of the music concerned only two fragments in one verse. However, the students who claimed to adapt the translation to the music generally minded the rhythm of most of the English lines, without paying close attention to the number of syllables. This implies an opportunity to enhance the project design by giving greater consideration to song translation approaches, thus increasing students' awareness regarding the complex aspects of song translation.

In class, the students were prompted to read and comment on those different versions, focusing their comments on specific translation strategies. Since some translations were prepared as subtitles in the .srt file, it was possible to play the appropriate video clip in the classroom. The class discussion that followed was aimed at identifying novel and unexpected solutions applied in the students' translations, which followed Bayer-Hohenwarter's (2020: 312) statement that a creative translation is a type of translation that frequently incorporates alterations (as a result of shifts) when compared to the original text, thus introducing fresh and contextually appropriate elements into the translation, in line with the specific goals of the translation task.

The methodology applied in this paper – as in the operationalization of the creativity concept by Bayer-Hohenwarter (2009; 2010; 2011) – involves four dimensions of creativity: acceptability, flexibility, novelty, and fluency. The acceptability of texts presented by the students complied with the requirements of the tasks. The flexibility constituted the use of creative shifts instead of a simple literal rendering of the source text; this is analyzed in detail in the next section. The novelty dimension meant the uniqueness of one specific solution in comparison to others, which was easy to detect by juxtaposing all of the presented translations. The concept of fluency (i.e. the ability of providing several solutions for one translation problem) could be addressed in the course of the class discussion.

### 6.1. Creative shifts

In their translations, the students demonstrated a lot of creativity and resourcefulness, as shown in the examples of creative shifts presented below. Following Bayer-Hohenwarter's model (2009), creative shifts can be divided into primary and secondary. The former ones are characterized by semantic changes concerning the abstraction level, and include abstraction, concretization and modification. The latter, optional creative shifts, are used to intensify, enrich or explicate particular aspects of meaning.

#### 6.1.1. Primary creative shifts

Primary creative shifts identified in the students' translations included the use of abstraction, such as in the cases where the translators applied solutions that

were more general or more abstract than the source text, as can be seen in Table 2.

Soι	ırce text	Students' translation
1.	1522 came straight to the UK	XVI wiek, do UK ciągnęło mnie
2.	He doesn't wanna bang you Somebody hang you	Nie chce Twych czułości? Nie ma litości

In Example 1 above, instead of "1522" (read out in Polish as *tysiąc pięćset dwudziesty drugi*), "XVI wiek" (*szesnasty wiek*), a more general time expression, was used to avoid a lengthy phrase in Polish. In Example 2, instead of an explicit verb "bang", the translator has resorted to a more generic description "Nie chce Twych czułości?" ('He doesn't want your caresses'), perhaps to avoid the use of vulgarisms. Similarly, in the second line, instead of words clearly depicting execution, the translator has used a less specific phrase "Nie ma litości", meaning 'There is no mercy'.

Concretizations (i.e. translation solutions in which the source text idea was presented in greater detail, evoking a more precise idea than the source text) were much more frequent than abstractions. They included instances in which more specific details were provided.

Sou	irce text	Students' translation								
3.	Sorry, not sorry	Przykro mi, a jednak nie								
4.	And soon my daddy said "You should try and get ahead!"	A mój tatulek rzekł: "W tę rodzinę weź się wżeń."								
5.	Life was a chore so (she set sail)	Życie było złą grą, więc hop na prom								

For instance, by adding "a jednak" ('and yet') in the translation of Example 3, not only is the phrase correct (since literal *Przepraszam*, *nie przepraszam* or *Przykro mi*, *nie przykro mi* would not be understood), but the intentions of the character are also revealed. In Example 4, "try and get ahead" is explicitly translated as 'get yourself married into this family', with the additional use of the colloquial expression "weź" to emphasize the imperative form. In the subsequent example, when dealing with the expression "she set sail", which cannot be literally translated into Polish, the translators opted for a more concrete image – "hop na prom" ('hop on the ferry'), following the context of Anne Boleyn traveling from France to England.

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The next creative shifts identified in the translated texts are modifications, which involved cultural, situational, or historical changes and referred to the use of a level of abstraction similar to that of the source text.

Table 4: Examples of modification in the c	orpus
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Source text	Students' translation
XO baby	Lofki kiski

For example, the abbreviation "XO", meaning "kisses", was translated into "lofki kiski", which is a naturalized borrowing of *love and kisses* in the communication between teenagers.

### 6.1.2. Secondary creative shifts

The secondary shifts in the classification proposed by Bayer-Hohenwarter are also referred to as optional; even though they are used, "routine" or "literal" translation would be acceptable as well. This makes them more interesting for the research on creativity than obligatory shifts. Optional creative shifts include additional four sub-types: explanation, emphasizing, change of perspective, and enrichment (described in Rojo López et al. 2021), all of which were identified in the students' translations.

Explanations (making information contained in the source text explicit) were quite a common procedure applied in the translation of the song. For instance, see the following line, where "elope" is translated as "w tajemnicy hajt-nąć się" ('get hitched in secret').

Source text	Students' translation
Tried to elope	Chcieliśmy w tajemnicy hajtnąć się
But the pope said nope	lecz papież powiedział "Nie"

Emphasizing, in which a new value is added by including a novel element, is demonstrated in Table 6.

Sou	rce text	Students' translation
6.	All the British dudes, lame Epic fail!	Wszyscy Angole, weź, o fe! Sacrebleu!
7.	Here we go Your comic went viral	Twój komentarz stał się popularny Nawet w Miami

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In French, "Sacrebleu!" (non-existent in the source text) is added not only to satisfy the rhyme requirements of the verse, but also to match other French expressions used in the original texts. In Example 7, the viral or global nature of the comment is demonstrated by its popularity in remote Miami, thus emphasizing the message.

Change of perspective (corresponding to modulation or transposition procedures proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958)) was cleverly applied in the following line – it is also the title of the song.

Source text		Students' translation	
8.	Don't Lose Ur Head	Głowę na karku miej	
9.	LOL, say oh well Or go to hell	OMG, zdarza się! Najwyżej skończę na dnie	

Table 7: Example of change of perspective in the corpus

**ARTYKUŁY • ARTIKEL • ARTICLES** 

"Głowę na karku miej" can be translated into English as 'Have a good head on your shoulders'. This also means literally 'Have a head on the neck' although a verbatim translation into Polish, i.e. the phrase *Nie trać głowy* ('Don't lose your head'), would also have a double meaning, similar to the source text. This modulation was a perfect match for the melodic line.

Another instance of a change of perspective presented in Example 9 is an interesting example of translating the English expression "LOL" into another English abbreviation. Both belong to a youth sociolect. Here, the choice of "OMG" instead of "LOL" results from the rhyme in the Polish version, while the change of perspective concerns the speaker ('At worst, I'll end up in the gutter').

The last group of optional creative shifts was enrichments, which added an original contribution to meaning (e.g. a metaphor of war non-existent in the original).

Table 8: Examp	le of	enric	hment	in 1	the	corpus
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Source text	Students' translation
	Z żoną w troje? Niezłe boje i podboje

In view of the limited amount of data and the small size of the sample, the data collected were not quantitatively evaluated. The aim of identification and classification of creative shifts presented above was to highlight the creative potential of the translation trainees through specific assignments that encourage

and develop a creative approach to their translation tasks. The examples of the students' translation selected to illustrate different types of creative shifts are derived from the texts prepared by different students. As the present study did not assume a quantitative approach and the students were working in pairs, it would be quite difficult to measure the overall degree of creativity of individual students. However, it should be emphasized that all the translations prepared as part of this project featured creative shifts of various types, which was ascertained during the class discussion aimed at identifying those features in the songs translated by the students.

# 7. Conclusion

On the linguistic level, the creativity of translators is reflected in their ability to creatively select among available means, create a corresponding item, or adapt a foreign one in the absence of an acceptable equivalent in the target language (Filar 2016: 178). As for now, machine-generated texts do not demonstrate this feature, presenting a literal translation of source texts, even though the range of linguistic devices used by AI systematically increases. The translations prepared by the translation students satisfied the criteria of creativity proposed by Bayer-Hohenwarter (2010): acceptability (the translation met the requirements presented in the brief); flexibility (through the creative shifts analyzed in this study), understood as the ability to depart from conventional modes of thinking and thus from the linguistic structure of the source text; novelty (the uniqueness of one solution in comparison to the other translations presented in class), and fluency, understood as the ability to provide many possible solutions for a specific problem. However, it should be added that since the research described in this paper was focused on the final product, it was difficult to measure various translation solutions provided by the students during their translation work. Nevertheless, this deficiency can be remedied by including a translation process research tool (i.e. key-logging or self-reporting) with regard to different solutions employed by students in the course of the translation activity.

This paper describes a ready-made scenario for fostering creativity in the translation course. The scenario consists of all required pre-translation theoretical readings and post-translation discussion and feedback activities. The scenario incorporates not only the process of translation practice, but also the technological aspects (the use of subtitling software), therefore presenting a holistic approach to translators' education. The experiment clearly shows that song translation is useful as a learning tool to encourage and discuss creativity in translation training.

As was mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the use of songs in the translation course is not a novel idea in translation pedagogy (see Yuskar 2021;

Seran/ Subiyanto 2023). The novelty of this study is the use of AI. The students were able to identify the creative features in their translation solutions, so different from those generated by artificial intelligence, by comparing and contrasting the machine-generated translations with their own human translation. Considering the growing significance of NMT and AI, the introduction of those tools into translation classes seems inevitable. At the same time, the comparison can be used to point to a new focus in translation training, such as the resourcefulness and originality in problem solving as components of the future career path of language specialists.

With the development of technology, it is possible to quickly and inexpensively obtain a machine-generated translation that is accurate and fit for purpose. However, the machine still cannot produce a translation that would be impactful, culturally relevant or engaging. Teaching creativity should be an essential element in translator training, preparing students to apply innovative techniques and solutions to tackle nuances and subtleties of the language, cultural references or the intended impact of the text. Additionally, it should not be forgotten that creativity in translation does not only consist in generating original content, but also involves adopting a creative mindset towards the translation process. Understood as a means for developing soft skills, creativity should become a standard part of the academic curriculum.

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# Appendix 1: Source text

## Don't Lose Ur Head (fragments)

Music and lyrics: Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss. © Concord Theatricals. Accessed: from the website https://www.allmusicals.com.

[Anne Boleyn:] Grew up in the French court Oui oui bonjour Life was a chore So

[Ensemble:] She set sail

[Anne Boleyn:] 1522 came straight to the UK All the British dudes lame

[Ensemble:] Epic fail! Ooh

[Anne Boleyn:] I wanna dance and sing

[Ensemble:] Politics [Anne Boleyn:] Not my thing

[Ensemble:] Ooh

[Anne Boleyn:] But then I met the king And soon my daddy said "You should try and get ahead!" He wanted me, obviously Messaging me like every day Couldn't be better then he sent me a letter And who am I kidding I was prêt à manger

[Ensemble:] Ooh 296•

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[Anne Boleyn:] Sent a reply

[Ensemble:] Ooh

[Anne Boleyn:] Just saying 'Hi'

[Ensemble:] Ooh

[Anne Boleyn:] 'You're a nice guy I'll think about it maybe XO baby'

[Ensemble:] Uh oh

[Anne Boleyn:] Here we go

[Ensemble:] You sent him kisses

[Anne Boleyn:] I didn't know I would move in with his missus [...] Like, what was I meant to do? Sorry, not sorry 'bout what I said I'm just trying to have some fun Don't worry, don't worry Don't lose your head I didn't mean to hurt anyone LOL Say 'Oh, well!' Or go to hell! I'm sorry, not sorry 'bout what I said Don't lose your head

Three in the bed And the little one said "If you wanna be wed Make up your mind!" Her or me, chum Don't wanna be some

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Girl in a threesome Are you blind?

[Ensemble:] Ooh

[Anne Boleyn:] Don't be bitter

[Ensemble:] Ooh

[Anne Boleyn:] 'Cause I'm fitter

[Ensemble:] Ooh

[Anne Boleyn:] Why hasn't it hit her? He doesn't wanna bang you Somebody hang you

[Ensemble:] Uh oh

[Anne Boleyn:] Here we go

[Ensemble:] Your comment went viral

[Anne Boleyn:] I didn't really mean it But rumours spiral [...]

Tried to elope But the Pope said 'Nope!' Our only hope was Henry He got a promotion Caused a commotion Set in motion the C of E [...]