

Franzon, Johan, Greenall Annjo K., Kvam, Sigmund, Parianou Anastasia (eds) (2021). *Song Translation: Lyrics in Contexts*. Berlin: Frank & Timme, pp. 499, 68€. ISBN: 978-3-7329-0656-7; 978-3-7329-9334-5 (e-Book); 1438-2636.

The first two decades of the twenty-first century saw a flurry of activity in the field of music and translation with scholars exploring the field not only in practical terms, with regard to how to make translations singable, but from an interdisciplinary point of view, encompassing semiotic, sociological and multimodal issues. Although this sub-field of Translation Studies may now be more firmly established, monographs and edited collections, such as *Song Translation: Lyrics in Contexts*, are still uncommon. This volume makes a valuable addition to the field.

Whilst much research in vocal music translation has been confined to opera, classical or sacred music genres, in this collection of essays, the authors address the translation of lyrics in popular songs from the 1920s to the 1990s, as well as other less researched genres like hymns, national anthems and children's songs. For anyone interested in intersemiotic, intermedial or intralingual translation as well as the blurry lines between adaptation and transformation, this volume has much to offer. The sixteen contributions, in three sections and a mix of English and German, focus on exploring what kind of translation strategies, choices and decisions have been adopted by translators of song lyrics and why. Whilst song translation to and from Scandinavian languages tends to dominate the collection, it still manages a high level of internationality discussing song translation to or from English (mainly American English), German, Greek, Italian, Turkish and Spanish.

The contributions can be characterised by their non-evaluative or "descriptive-explanatory approach" (13ff). This approach typically investigates patterns found in translation strategies and the influence of the surrounding context on the choice of strategy. Gideon Toury defined Descriptive Translation Studies as a science based on observation (1995: 222), in which translations are redefined as target-cultural products to be studied as observational facts. Instead of making the definition of translation dependent on equivalence, the descriptive approach explores a translation's context and conditioning factors in order to uncover reasons that explain "why there is what there is" (Hermans 1999: 5). In keeping with Toury's methodology, the contributors conduct comparative analyses of source and target texts, identifying regularities and formulating generalisations about norms of translation and their implications for translation (Toury 1995: 36-39, 102).

I particularly enjoyed the introductory chapter, in which the editors offer an excellent and comprehensive introduction and overview of vocal music

translation research, in which they detail its historical development as well as describing its many and various directions of study. The references are wide, all-encompassing, and a useful resource for anyone entering this field of studies.

The editors take some effort to explain the descriptive approach taken by the contributors and highlight three main contexts in which song lyrics and their translations may be studied. First and, as they say, “most central” (31) is music. However, this context seems to be limited to formal and structural aspects or culture-based genres and forms. In fact, this context is least explored in this volume and the semiotics of music hardly enter into any of the essays. The second context is *skopos* and the third, sociocultural significance. Whilst many of the essays focus on functionalism, on balance, the majority of the essays explore the historical, social, cultural and political contexts that influence the act of translation, revealing translation as a tool in historical and cultural analysis.

The chapters are divided into three sections: the first explores translations of popular twentieth century songs, the second looks at other song genres in different historical contexts, and the third broadens the scope of song translation research with its multimodal and didactic approaches.

In the first section, Kelandrias looks at strategies used in 80 Greek versions of English and Italian pop songs and finds a type of “translational transformation” (52) where the lyrics are completely new (not even thematically similar in many cases) to be the dominant strategy. The reasons given for this strategy are, firstly, that the differences between languages makes fitting new words to existing music difficult and, secondly, that, whilst the music is often known in the target culture, the lyrics are not, and may even be irrelevant due to different perceptions and realities between cultures. The findings are not particularly new, though there is much of interest in the diagnostic approach taken here. However, I am left asking what the knowledge accumulated yields in terms of either theory or application. Franzon examines a corpus of Swedish translations of American popular songs from the past 100 years. He concludes that the most commonly used translation strategy is what he calls “near-enough” translation (85ff), although considerable variation in strategy is evident. According to Franzon, “near enough” translation respects the original lyrics, as opposed to the other five strategies identified, which suggest that “verbal fidelity” is “very optional” (118). Franzon concludes that “the liberal mixture of translation and non-translation in song translation is a universal tendency, somehow part of the essence of song tradition itself” (118). This chapter offers a rich and broad exploration of adaptation and “textual practices” (91) that Franzon considers unique to this field of Translation Studies. It also forces the reader to consider again the very nature of translation.

The following three chapters are case-based. First, Axelsson studies the transposition of Tom T. Hall's country song "Harper Valley P.T.A." (1968) into Norwegian and Swedish through three translations that depart from the source text to make the resulting lyrics ostensibly more appropriate to the target text culture. In his long, detailed explication of textual, social and cultural meaning Axelsson presents an excellent model of qualitative and hermeneutic research exploring two different cultural contextualisations. Angelsen and Mitchell investigate Norwegian versions of three Leonard Cohen's songs. The authors focus on how textual changes from source to target text relate to the change in the gender of the performer, musical style and use of dialects to create new interpretations with different effects on audiences. They conclude that re-contextualisation occurs mainly due to the performer's background and experiences and in light of what the performer wants to say. Like the previous chapters, this one also deals with adaptation, but, here, there is also a welcome discussion of the multisemiotic nature of a song, where musical arrangement, style and instrumentation as well as the performer's persona affect the final translated text. Susam-Saraeva looks at the Israeli/Arab/French singer Riff Cohen's "Dans mon quartier", translated into Turkish as "Miş miş". She investigates the interaction between lyrics, music and performance in music videos, with a focus on ethnicity and values of diversity and equality, community, gender relationships, truthfulness and justice. What emerges is that the visual impact of a music video, when well known by the target culture, can influence the translation outcomes as much as the original text. The author encourages greater multimodal literacy among song translators so that not only textual signs but also other semiotic modes are given the same attention when translating song lyrics.

The final chapter in the first section involves the author discussing her own translation of an English language pop song. Greenall takes a very interesting approach using Fillmore's scenes-and-frames semantics, which suggests that one cannot understand the meaning of a single word without access to all the essential knowledge that relates to that word. As the author says, the approach is "useful for delving beneath" the linguistic surface and particularly helpful when non-verbal stimuli constitute part of the meaning (227). Given the challenges of the musical structure in song translation, creative adaptation often becomes essential, and scenes-and-frames semantics offers an insight into how that creativity might work. The one downside in this chapter is technical; the highlights in the examples make it difficult to read the text. However, the use of graphics in word clouds is extremely interesting and illustrative of the approach.

In the second section of the book, the contributors look at song translation in different historical contexts. Lundberg examines 16th century translations of Medieval Latin liturgy into the Swedish vernacular according to notions

of function and purpose. Lundberg concludes that the translators were highly inventive when dealing with metre, rhyme, dialect variation and idiosyncratic theological terminology but that the overriding constraint to which they bowed was the musical structure. They preferred to stray from textual meaning rather than compromise melodies that had been known by illiterate congregations for over half a millennium. This essay contributes much to the discussion about translation's role in the development of a country's literate language and, therefore, its culture and identity as a nation. Translations of Grieg's 19th century art songs are examined through the lens of text linguistics by Kvam. According to Kvam, the musical "superstructure" (including rhyme and metre) (260) is the dominant constraint when translating a song text and remains an invariant in translation; although at the "macro" level, the demands of semantic invariance are weaker, these, together with the demands of music, challenge the translator's creativity at the "micro" level of grammar, syntax, lexis, topology, morphology, etc. Kvam has found a very clear manner in which to describe how translators may have produced singable translations when the stature of the text as poetry demands, for cultural reasons, that a translation respects the source text. Schopp offers the reader an insight into how and why a translation established itself as a national anthem. Subject matter, composer, historical situation and, not least, a melody that was universally appreciated and easy to sing all contributed as much as the text. Here we find a comprehensive discussion about the blurred lines between translation, adaptation and transformation. Parianou looks into translations of traditional children's songs using primarily frameworks from Low (2005) and Franzon (2008), and concludes that the most used strategy has been adaptation, closely followed by writing new lyrics. This breadth of freedom is explained by the fact that children's nursery songs seldom have a known author or composer; translators, therefore, appear to owe less allegiance to the original text and music. In the final contribution to this section, Fryer discusses "The Preacher and the Slave" (1911), an intralingual translation by Joe Hill of a popular hymn, "The Sweet By-and-By" (1868). In this chapter about transformation and re-contextualisation, the author goes into detail about lexical, grammatical and semantic choices as well as the socio-historical context, but again I was left wondering what this meant for vocal music translation as the essay focusses solely on the lyrics and the musical context is hardly mentioned.

The final section, titled "Multimodal and Didactic Approaches", seems to be a catch-all section. It begins with a chapter by Viljanmaa, who explores the intersemiotic translation of songs into sign language. Viljanmaa has introduced a little researched phenomenon of translation: how linguistic, acoustic and embodied-visual signals relate to each other. Her research found that sign language interpretation of songs is an even more creative activity than most cases of translation, shaped by the interpreter as a

performer. It is a shame that this chapter, whose subject is of growing interest and application, is written in German, as this may limit its influence. Svenhard also explores intersemiotic or intermedial translation, looking at the figure of the troll from Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt* and how it has been re-contextualised in classical (*In the Hall of the Mountain King* from *Peer Gynt* by Grieg) and rap music (*Hair Up* by Justin Timberlake in the film *Trolls*). Svenhard provides a fascinating discussion of intertextuality and adaptation, and proposes that rather than looking at fidelity in adaptations one ought to focus on the "polysemiotic chains" that lead a "hypotext" into new media (420). Whether or not this very interesting essay belongs in a book that focuses on song lyric translation is questionable since it is plainly about the translation of myth and concepts rather than lyrics.

The final two chapters focus on the didactic use of lyric translation. Grønn gives an all-encompassing report of the use of translation in reading comprehension and cultural awareness amongst secondary school students. Translating song lyrics introduces them to the role that context plays in the process of determining meaning whilst reflection on the new lyrics helps them understand differences between cultures. Salvarani explores the crossover between translation and adaptation in a pedagogical context where school students translated/adapted Grieg's *Peer Gynt* and *Seven Deadly Sins* by Weill/Brecht for a full production by fellow students and parents. Although located in a pedagogical context, this chapter provides an excellent and detailed description of the practicalities of song translation and is one of the few chapters to explore the semantic contribution of the music.

The book's abstract mentions that it is intended for musicologists, students of language and/or music and practicing translators. However, I think it is fair to say that translation scholars will benefit most from this collection. I am not sure there is enough about music to make it relevant to musicologists. Indeed, for a book about song translation, not enough attention is given to musical matters, musical semantics or the relationship between musical and textual signification. The musical aspect is limited to metrics, syllabic count and weight, rhyme and the like but the close relationship of musical meaning in context with the words of the original song and those of the translation is hardly discussed or explored. I would have liked to have seen a little more of this included.

Looking at the book generally, it might have benefited from closer editing. Some additional scrutiny might have made what is already very good writing, excellent. Whilst I do not advocate a dry academic style, I think there is a little too much colloquial or informal language for an academic publication. I also found that some of the choices in layout for side-by-side translations and glosses made following the argument in the text difficult and I gave up in some instances (59-62). It may perhaps have been better

to agree on a similar layout approach across the chapters. Although well intentioned, no doubt, the colour highlighting also made it sometimes impossible to read the text beneath.

All in all, this collection of essays covers a lot of ground. With its interdisciplinary theoretical references and diverse examples, it extends present scholarship in vocal music translation. In particular, for those already engaged in the field, it offers new insights as it delves into less explored areas of vocal music translation, especially intermedial or intersemiotic translation (e.g. sign language). The book is a very welcome addition to this field of translation, and I thoroughly recommend it to those involved with research in this field.

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