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MELIC TRANSLATION

Abstract

In the following paper the author presents selected theories and approaches related to the translation of songs. She believes that these are crucial in understanding the melic translation process. Some aspects of the melic translation process itself, especially those connected with the translator's decision, are also mentioned. They are described in order to show the need for an interdisciplinary perspective when approaching the topic. The main aim of the article is to present a possible solution for song translation with reference to the theories presented. The solution proposed involves the need to keep in mind not only 'the message' of the song, semantic dominant, harmonic dominant, and 'the sound' but also the fact that children are the main recipients.

Keywords: translation, melic translation, translation of songs, music theory

Słowa kluczowe: tłumaczenie, tłumaczenie meliczne, tłumaczenie piosenek, teoria muzyki

1. Introduction

Melic translation may be considered as a lesser known topic in the field of the humanities as well as among translators specialising in particular areas. Reasons for such a *status quo* might derive from a general tendency to depreciate melic translation. It can be perceived as less valuable, or less worth exploring, due to the translator's inclination toward music rather than to a text. Also, it is generally

accepted that the text should take priority. This tendency may be reflected by the fact that there are a relatively small number of publications on the subject. A closer insight is presented in analyses of melic translations made by different critics or authors. To mention Bednarczyk (1995: 13) (author's translation): 'Not only did Wysocki change the way of interpretation (guitar chords, some words, intonation) but sometimes he also changed the words of a song in a way that changed the semantics of the work' and also Bryll (2006: 94) (author's translation) 'even a cursory reading of the translation shows what kind of compromises, consisting mainly in semantic transformations, the melic translator had to decide on, seeking to maintain the melodic line of the song'. The above citations are quoted in order to show, at least partially, the essence of melic translation. The author aims to present a possible solution for song translation with regard to several factors which determine the end result and individual decisions taken.

2. Theoretical considerations

In the analysis of melic translation or the melic translation process, various kinds of corpora can be used. According to a generally accepted classification, vocal forms comprise: a song which consists of one part, two parts, etc., a song with one stanza or more, variation song, through-composed song, ballad, Gregorian chant, the Protestant chorale, aria, arietta, elegy, recitative, motet, madrigal, and cantata. Undoubtedly, the type of analysis which is most often described in the field of translation research concerns the translation of songs. The problem of melic translation with songs as the corpus has been studied mostly by Bednarczyk (1993, 1995, 2005), Osadnik (2006, 2006a), and Bryll (2006, 2012) (among others). Supposedly, the selection of songs, motivated mainly by the popularity of song as a genre, is also the most natural.

In the case of song translation, the process itself may be perceived by many as very difficult, arguably due to its multi-faceted nature. Two layers of transfer can be differentiated: semantic transfer, which, according to Bristiger (1986), is based on verbal means, and melic transfer. In melic transfer sounds constitute the means of expression. A translation of a song includes the translation of words, but it also includes the sounds and, in a sense, their translation. This in turn raises the question of the need to adopt a multidisciplinary perspective in this area. The multidisciplinary perspective is understood here as the merging of linguistics and musicology. While with reference to melic translation the linguistics perspective is debated rather extensively, the musicological perspective appears to be neglected in some areas. The history of music, psychology of music, aesthetics, philosophy of music, sociology of music, ethnomusicology, and organology are usually applied to assess melic translation

analyses. Music theory, including harmony, ear training, music notation or others, which could be helpful in analysing mutual relationships between words and sounds, are not necessarily applied.

Song perception takes place on two levels: the literary level and the musical level. Both are perceived in two phases. Bristiger (1986) differentiates the 'surface phase' and the 'deepened phase'. In the surface phase, the most crucial issue is the recognition of meaning, as well as connotations and denotations, and also the awareness of the poetic picture and general understanding of the work. On the musical level, in the first phase the most crucial issue is the recognition of pitch, register (if it is minor or major), the harmony of chords and music types (classical, jazz, etc.). The perception of the literary and musical level in the deepened phase shifts in the direction of in-depth awareness of the phenomena occurring. The receiver begins to become aware of the linguistic structure of the text, the means of expression, poetic language, musical figures, the logic of harmony and musical artistry. The levels of cognition regarding vocal forms defined by Bristiger (1986) could be adopted, or even could have already been recognised in the process of deciphering the original text and its music by a melic translator. Naturally, in the melic translation process, a translator recognises these structures gradually while he/she is listening to the recording. It may additionally emphasise the necessity to apply musical theory, especially harmony, rhythm, and melody more extensively in melic translation analyses.

Krysztofiak (2011) describes three levels, or three codes, of translation: lexical and semantic, cultural, and aesthetic. The relationship between the codes has an influence on the quality of the translation. In literary translation, all three codes coexist and interpenetrate. In song translation, aside from the three aforementioned codes, there is also a code called melic or musical. Therefore, it is vital to ensure a suitable balance between all four codes in the melic translation process. Practically, recreating the sound of music and the musicality of the text in melic translation may pose problems. Since the lyrics of the song impose their own rules, which should be respected, a translator departs from the main senses of the text, while striving to keep the melody and the rhythm.

Bristiger's theories might be perceived as a milestone for considerations concerning mutual relations between words and sound. Tomaszewski (2003) is another theorist, linguist, and musicologist who analyzes relations between music and poetry, mutual relations between text and melody, relations of text content and its musicality, or relations between the phoneme and sound using terminology derived from linguistics. The main concern of Kolago (1997), who studies structures which are shared by music and literature, is the question whether musical forms can actually be transferred to the field of literature.

Undoubtedly, one of the most prominent figures interested in the translation of songs and also focusing on melic translation was Barańczak (1974, 1992, 2004). He primarily drew the attention of translators to such elements as word accent, which should fall on pitch accent, syntax, which should be analogous to musical phrases, or masculine rhymes, which should not be replaced by feminine rhymes. Whereas in the case of Barańczak the main area of interest as regards vocal forms were songs, Jerzy Zagórski (1995) analysed the translation of opera. Several of his findings can be adopted in the translation of songs as well. The compromises a translator must make, which stem from the need to preserve melody and rhythm, have been studied by Zazula (1999). So far, probably the most extensive studies concerning song translation are those by Bednarczyk (1993, 1995, 2005), who has devoted several works to this topic. She has defined different types of dominants in reference to the semantic dominant introduced by Barańczak (2004).

3. Music and sound

Sound, as the most basic concept in music, features several characteristics. As an indispensable element of melic translation, it should be found by a translator or researcher, rendered and reflected in the melic translation process. Written representation of sounds, notes, forming phrases and other distinctive structures are similar to letters forming words and the longer sentences. They serve here as the tool for compilation and comparison. In physics, sounds possess features such as direction, speed, amplitude, wave number, frequency, wavelength, and sound intensity. In music, sounds are analysed in terms of duration, colours, pitch, and volume. Duration is the time during which the recipient hears the sound. Colours are determined by the source of sound, which mainly refers to the instrument. The number of oscillations per second determines pitch, A1 sound has 880Hz while a1 440Hz. Volume, which can be understood as sound amplitude, is measured in decibels. The distance between two sounds is called an interval.

In the case of melic translation analyses, in analysing music (melody, rhythm, harmony etc.) sound, which has the characteristics described above is a basic concept. It is also the basic media carrying musical sense. The analysis begins with concepts such as semitone and tone. These intervals constitute the main point of reference. In other words, there are minor second and major second intervals. On the piano, the distance between the sounds of two ivory keys which are the closest is called a semitone. It is often the distance between white and black ivory keys. The tone is a distance where there is another ivory key between two. Further intervals are minor third, which contains three semitones and major third involving four semitones. They are followed by fourth and fifth, which contain five and seven semitones respectively. Between

them there is the so called tritone, which has six semitones and is considered to be a specific interval, not very "pleasant" to the ear. A minor sixth is the next interval consisting of eight semitones, which is followed by major sixth, consisting of nine semitones. Next, there are the minor seventh and major seventh, which have ten semitones and eleven semitones respectively. Twelve semitones, constituting the octave, are another concept which serves to identify a melody. Melody is formed by intervals following one after another. A specific organisation of intervals forms a particular kind of a melodic line. This is important insofar as in melody analysis the researcher can use the concepts presented as well as many others used in the theory of music, and in the context of not only musical analysis but also melic translation analysis.

4. Practical considerations

In terms of word content, including their meaning, and with respect to the precision of their translation or the arbitrariness of interpretation, the lyrics of the song are governed by inherent rules, which give a particular weight to certain words, layers or structures. With regard to the musical layer, which in melic translation should be retained, in practice some allowances must be made, if only out of necessity to preserve the core meaning of the lyrics and their semantic dominant in particular.

The concept of a dominant was first introduced in the field of linguistics by Roman Jakobson in 1935. Jakobson (1978) understood a dominant as an ingredient which conferred homogeneity and affected other elements of a text. The same term, or idea, was used much earlier and employed by Russian formalists, with the philosopher Christiansen (1914) among them, when describing art where the concept was not confined to literary art alone. Later, this concept was transferred to the field of literary theory and translation study research from the field of aesthetics and philosophy. It is important to note at this point that the concept of a dominant is present in a number of disciplines, including musicology and the theory of music. In the context of music, a dominant is understood as the main element of the work. Therefore, the entirety of the musical layer strives for it. Only then, as it is in most cases, does a dominant revert to tone, which is the starting point. Typically, a harmonic dominant, which in very technical terms could be put as a V degree of the given scale, often coincides with the melodic dominant. It seems that the concept of a dominant in music, as well as its designation, seem to be much clearer and less controversial than the concept or designation of a dominant in translation. A dominant in translation, specifically a semantic dominant, is understood by its creator, Barańczak (2004), as the most important and irreplaceable semantic or formal

element of a poem. Such an approach to the above concept of a dominant assumes that the text can be deciphered only in one way.

The issue here lies not in the fact that Barańczak's (2004) concept is inadequate, but in the fact that the translator is required to find one particular key or solution for a given poem or song. The subject of a dominant in translation in terms of the possibility of choices receives a more in-depth analysis from Bednarczyk, who adopts the assumption of multiple interpretations or definitions.

The Polish author and translator Barańczak (1992) stated that children are not fully able to appreciate all the functions of a song due to the fact that the world in which children perceive or meet with the work may differ totally from the world they experience. Therefore, the best solution for a translator according to Barańczak (1992: 67-68) is to adapt the work to the recipient. The so-called 'childishness' of the work, understood here as the quality of being childlike, i.e. interactive, experimental, dynamic, unstable etc., is believed by the author to take precedence over other aspects. Theories formed by Puurtinen 1995, who analysed the acceptability of translation for children, could shed light on the importance of the sound and resonance of a song, especially when it is written or translated for a child. Puurtinen's notions of 'readability or speakability' of the text may serve as the point of reference for understanding of the role of the text's musicality. Differentiating four stages of child development Jean Piaget (1956) indicated that the child starts to see abstract concepts at around the age of eleven. Therefore, a song should be 'tangible' in the musical sense, catchy and at the same time of artistic value. Additionally, when it is written for younger children a song, as material, can constitute a great challenge for a translator. Possible solutions for keeping the semantic dominant, the harmonic dominant, generally 'the sound', and the main senses of the text in particular, are presented on the basis of the following song.

A song composed by Grabowska-Wacławek, working under the pseudonym 'Bovska'. Melic translation by Weronika Szota.

KTOŚ COŚ

1.
Prosta piosenka raz i dwa
Idzie żyrafa klapu klap
Tam stąpa cichutko jakiś ktoś
Za plecami chowa coś

Ktoś coś chowa przed żyrafą
Ktoś coś srebrzystego wziął
Kto to taki jest niegrzeczny
Kto no kto ——> refren

2.
Gdy to żyrafa zobaczyła
Zaraz tego ktosia zaczepiła
A był to nieduży szary kret
Który w kieszeni schował flet

wariant refrenu:
Kret flet chowa przed Żyrafą
Kret coś srebrzystego wziął
Kto to taki jest niegrzeczny
Kto no kto

Figure 1: Music notation by Bovska.

WHO SOMETHING

A simple song one and two
A giraffe is going clap and clap
There's stepping silently kind of who
Behind his back who's hiding something

Who something's hiding from giraffe
Who something (of) silver took away
Who is so rude today
Who tell who

When the giraffe got something see
She hooked the who right away

Who was a little (and) grey mole
Who hid the flute in his bay

Flute, mole is hiding from giraffe
Mole something (of) silver took away
Who is so rude today
Who tell who

The translator recognised the word play between words *ktoś* and *coś* as the most crucial element of the song. The title itself constitutes the reference to the content and reveals core meanings and the main message of the song. Word play between the words *ktoś* and *coś* could therefore be recognised as the semantic dominant. Having looked at the content, the translator decided on the translation: *who* and *something*. This combination of words in the song carries a multiplicity of interpretations; it is also the answer to the needs of the recipients. In several places *Who* can be understood as a person kind of *who* (a kind of man) or an animal or generally some creature possessing the name *who* (who something (of) silver took away), which is probably the closest interpretation for a child (which also depends on the child's age). It can also be understood as the interrogative pronoun *who*. Due to the fact that the word 'something' has one more syllable than the Polish word *coś* deviations from the melody were unavoidable. Hopefully, the additional syllable, in the present musical context, may be interpreted as an additional note, which could serve as a preceding note, auxiliary note, etc. The word *something*, with the accent on the first sound and the second syllable *thing*, makes an impression of echo or more precisely an impression of sound reflection. Additionally, the word *something*, having one syllable more than the original word *coś*, strengthens the harmonic dominant in the refrain.

The translator's objective was to keep the imaginary language and to transfer poetic pictures depicting different scenes. Puurtinen's (1995) approach to translation for children was followed. There was also an attempt to illustrate the model of the world. The translator decided on a possibly faithful translation with simple syntax, one of the exceptions is a translation of *kto no kto* as *who tell who*, which is the invitation for children to imitate and repeat. In reference to semantic transfers (referential, pragmatic and intralingual) it can be stated that, in this particular example, pragmatic transfer had priority.

5. Conclusion

The procedure which is postulated in Barańczak's studies (2004) assumes finding a modus operandi when translating a particular song. It results directly from the postulate to convey 'all its senses'. In practice, it imposes the finding of key

words and the 'spirit' of the message of the song. Therefore, a designation of different elements as more or less important and the establishing of a so called hierarchy of structural elements etc. is indispensable. As in the short example presented above, analysing melic translation without reference to the musical notation, recording or to musical theory may pose problems, especially when the analysis is more extensive or detailed. An absence of this reference seems not to reflect the whole picture or the reasons for a translator to make a particular decision or choice. In the example presented above it was necessary to preserve 'the sound', the semantic dominant, the harmonic dominant and the main senses of the text in particular. Striving to keep coherence between all four translation codes, the translator presents a result where subtle differences in the sound of the material appear to be unavoidable. In this context, it is important to stress an interdisciplinary approach, since as Bristiger (1986: 25) (author's translation) wrote: 'For the verbal texts of musical works, a research procedure has not yet been established. It can only be created under a new branch of stylistics within an interdisciplinary studium involving music theory'.

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