

Audiovisual translation and popular music

Rebecca Johnson

Introduction

The interface between audiovisual translation (AVT) and popular music is an area of study with increasingly—perhaps surprisingly—broad implications for contemporary global society and digital culture, as well as for the field of translation studies itself. In the introduction to the 2008 special issue of *The Translator* devoted to the translation of music, Susam-Sarajeva posits an explanation for the relative inattention afforded to music within translation studies, despite the deep emotional role that music plays in people’s lives and its influence in wider societal construction, not to mention its ability to cross linguistic and cultural boundaries (2008: 188–190). She cites methodological and definitional difficulties relating to the nature of music as a form of expression, emphasizing the need for multidisciplinary approaches to address this lacuna.

With regard to popular music in particular—defined here in accordance with *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* as music of any kind having wide popular appeal and distributed to large audiences by the music industry—Kaindl (2013a: 00:55) suggests that its perceived low symbolic capital as a non-canonized genre has led to its marginalization in the already limited body of theory on translation and music, as compared to, for example, opera surtitling. While popular music lyrics have long been used for pedagogical purposes in language learning (Hewitt 2000), this will usually involve the translation of transcribed song lyrics that are separated off from the music, as opposed to the synchronic translation of song lyrics while they are performed/consumed as part of a multimodal ensemble. Meanwhile, outside of translation studies, scholarship on popular music videos and other musical media will often overlook questions of translation. This, then, is an opportune moment for translation scholars with an interest in popular music culture. Indeed, the evolution of audiovisual translation since the rise of the Internet and digital media (Pérez-González 2014: 15), as well as the recent groundswell of theories and cross-disciplinary ‘turns’ that underline the socio-political import of aesthetic forms of expression previously side-lined by the epistemological norms of Western society (Bleiker 2009: 3), may endow the topic with a new momentum.

This chapter starts within the bounds of traditional understandings of translation, i.e. the interlingual transmission of meaning, as applied to song lyrics in audiovisual texts. This

section looks first at the medium of the music video, and secondly at popular music in film and television. Following this, the scope of the discussion widens to incorporate different types of audiovisual music translation practice: the intralingual translation of song lyrics, and broader understandings of music and translation, e.g. the recycling (or re-appropriation) of popular music in different audiovisual contexts, the role of popular music in the ‘translation’ of cultures and identity, and the music video as a form of translation in itself. The final section sets out research methods in the study of popular music translation and suggests avenues for future research.

Interlingual translation of audiovisual popular music

Music video

As a ‘key driver of popular culture’ (Vernallis 2013: 437) in the digital era, music video is an exciting and evolving medium for popular music consumption. The format was ushered in with the arrival of MTV in the 1980s, and took off as an aesthetic form in its own right after Michael Jackson’s \$1 million budget, 14-minute long ‘Thriller’ video in 1983 (Hearsum and Inglis 2013: 485). During its reign, MTV acted as gatekeeper for both the content and quality of the music videos it aired, with few examples that did not conform to the desired (and somewhat limited) template (*ibid.*: 486). To cater for the wide diversity of markets across the globe, hundreds of separate MTV channels for popular music subgenres were rolled out across different countries, and the interlingual subtitling of lyrics within this setup was not provided for. To widen their appeal, artists would often release songs in other language versions—continuing our Michael Jackson theme, we might cite as an example his 1987 hit ‘I just can’t stop loving you’, which was released in Spanish with the title *Todo mi amor eres tú*, and in French with the title *Je ne veux pas la fin de nous*.

Whilst some popular music artists still choose to do this, since the advent of the Internet—and in particular since the creation of YouTube in 2005—the music video scene has radically altered. YouTube, a participatory media platform (i.e. users can upload their own content and comment on videos published there), has replaced MTV as the primary alternative channel for audiovisual music consumption, evidenced by the fact that 75 per cent of the top 50 searches on the site are for music (Hearsum and Inglis 2013: 495). This scenario has led to (i) definitions of the medium being problematized due to minimal industrial control over quality and format and the ability of video producers to experiment; (ii) the globalization of audiovisual media flows, as compared to MTV’s regionalization; (iii) the blurring of boundaries between producer and consumer (resulting in what is termed the ‘prosumer’) such that multiple amateur videos will usually exist for any given popular song—differentiated from the ‘official video’—and music videos may be remediated by anybody who so desires, including the addition of subtitles by multilingual fans who wish to convey the meaning of popular song lyrics to foreign language audiences.

Comments posted by viewers in response to YouTube music videos attest to a high demand for the translation of lyrics. Sometimes translated lyrics are written in the information section underneath the video, but in cases where subtitles are added this alters the consumer experience by visually foregrounding the lyrics as they are heard in another language; also heightening the visibility of the subtitler as a cultural agent. Questions of quality have been raised regarding the production of YouTube videos due to its participatory nature (Hearsum and Inglis 2014: 488) and these apply equally to their subtitling, which is often

of a low standard. However, the ability to comment underneath videos means that lyrical meaning in translation may be debated. This will perhaps be of lesser importance for the brand of commercial pop song containing few lyrics primarily formulated to pad out a beat; however, engaged subtitling will be extremely important for fans of recognized lyricists such as Canadian singer Joni Mitchell or French singer Edith Piaf, in which case questions of poetics will come into play (for an analysis of the latter see Kaindl 2013b). Also in question are the aesthetics of the subtitles themselves, and whether they add to or detract from the semiotic ensemble. In some cases, subtitles may entail the removal of the intended visual dimension altogether and its replacement with a blank screen filled with the translated lyrics. For some, demand for lyrical translation presents an opportunity for creativity. Rea Zuzume's (2015) Spanish subtitled version of British band Radiohead's 1997 single 'Paranoid Android' from the album *OK Computer*, illustrates the extent to which both the lyrics and the visual experience are key to the song's impact. In this instance, while the official video (an animated story) is lost, Zuzume attempts to recapture some of the Radiohead visual aesthetic by using imagery from the album cover as a backdrop, while the subtitles are placed in various locations around the screen in a font that blends with the backdrop. It is also evident that the subtitler has done his or her best to render the somewhat cryptic lyrics meaningfully into Spanish.

In contributing to the meaning and influence of a musical text as it travels and pluralizes, subtitlers underscore the hypertextual nature of cultural production in the digital age. As Littau puts it, this system 'generates a (foreign) text's productivity endlessly, and reconfigures the once distinct roles attributed to the author, the translator, or reader' (Littau 1997: 93), thereby challenging the widespread view of translation as secondary to the original. To exemplify the notion of the pluralized original, we might consider Peruvian-American rapper Immortal Technique's 2005 song 'Caught in a Hustle', which does not have an official video. Among the proliferation of amateur videos created for it online is one in which freestyle artist Joe Santos (n.d.) interprets the music by drawing a picture as the rap song plays. In the Spanish subtitled version of this (Santos 2007), the translator adds aesthetically presented subtitles in keeping with the artistic theme. This introduces a new layer of performativity to the evolution of the textual narrative, whose origins in the audiovisual format are already diffuse.

We might pause for a moment on hip hop, which as an internationalized genre of popular music is an interesting case, since historically its lyrics have been heavily coded in Black American slang, which tends to be impenetrable to the uninitiated outsider (Alim 2009a: 215). Being so lyric-heavy and its delivery often very fast-paced, it also demands the flouting of standard industry subtitling guidelines—yet the genre's global appeal remains indisputable both in its mainstream, commoditized manifestation and as an 'independent' underground music scene (Vito 2014: 397–398). An example of a hip hop 'fansubber' is Nightmare Theater—a person or collective seemingly based in Germany, who carries out the subtitling of French rap music videos into English on their YouTube channel created in 2006. Among the comments from appreciative viewers are requests for translations of new songs, recommendations of favourite hip hop acts, and offers of viewer contributions in different language combinations. This might be theorized as a transnational community of affinity 'clustered on the basis of mutual affinity and chosen affiliations' (Pérez-González 2014: 72). Such communities are premised on collective intelligence and genre knowledge (*ibid.*: 75) and are facilitated by the contemporary media landscape, which has broken through MTV's regionalization of the music industry, discussed above.

Beyond entertainment and social identity, hip hop's role in globalized political communities is also increasingly recognized (Alim 2009b: 3). In the case of activist (or 'conscious') hip hop, both the poetics and the content of the lyrics are key to its political function. Numerous localized hip hop movements have emerged in conflict zones such as the Middle East and Sudan (Taviano 2012), as well as in response to non-localized causes such as the Occupy movement. Evidently, lyrical translation is instrumental in raising awareness of the cause in hand, garnering empathy and audienceship through musical affect in a way that traditional political narratives, bound by nation state lines, will often fail to do. A salient example is Palestinian hip hop group DAM (n.d.), which began life on the Israeli hip hop scene rapping in Hebrew, but became politicized at the time of the second Intifada in 2000 and switched to Arabic. As the young rappers testify in the 2008 award-winning documentary film *Slingshot Hip Hop* (2008), this language choice was an act of dissent—one states, '[e]very time I speak Arabic I get stopped by a cop. They can't stand hearing our language' (Slingshot Hip Hop, n.d.). Another explains that she was fired from McDonald's for speaking in Arabic. Already a household name in the Middle East, the subtitling of DAM's music videos into English has been indispensable in raising their profile globally and cementing their place in the so-called Global Hip Hop Nation (Alim 2009b: 3), such that their official videos are now available with an English subtitles option as a matter of course.

While popular music artists are commonly pressured by the industry to learn and perform in English for sales purposes, the globalization of audiovisual media flows has led to higher visibility of artists for whom multilingualism is an important element of their image and appeal, and whose fan bases span different language communities. Examples include French-Spanish singer Manu Chao, Italian-Egyptian singer Dalida, and Greek singer Nana Mouskouri 'whose 60s-to-80s albums were mini-Berlitz courses' (Wilson 2014: 47). Music careers can be sustained, revived and furthered outside of industry channels—even posthumously as in Dalida's case—thanks to the relative freedom of today's dominant means of music consumption. In this context, music video fansubbers, especially in the case of non-English lyrics, might act as a counter force to widespread assumptions of the dominance of English in globalizing processes (Pérez-González 2012: 6). In sum, Vernallis' contention that '[s]uddenly music video has the right scale for today, and perhaps the right mode for a competitive global market (tied but loosely to language, it easily crosses national borders)' (2013: 463) might be reformulated in light of the linguistic opportunities that subtitling affords.

Film and television

The mid-1950s saw the beginning of the cinematic use of popular music (Boyce 2001), and nowadays there is significant crossover between the two arts or industries. Indeed, they could be said to enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship, since film may be a platform to raise the profile of a popular music artist, e.g. Québécois singer Céline Dion, whose career 'went viral when she stowed away on the ultimate planetary love boat, *Titanic*' (Wilson 2014: 41); equally, a popular music artist's involvement on a movie soundtrack will add value to the production, e.g. Manu Chao's soundtrack for León de Aranoa's 2005 film *Princesas* ('Princesses'), for which the track *Me llaman Calle* ('They Call Me Street')—a linguistic play on the protagonist's name Caye and her profession as a prostitute—earned a Goya nomination for Best Original Song.

While a film score is often viewed as supplementary to the story and can be universally appreciated for its nonverbal signifiers, the filmic appropriation of pre-existing popular

music for its lyrical content may constitute an important narrative strand in itself, adding to the overall meaning of the film—thus heightening its relevance to AVT. Subtitling song lyrics in such cases is not technically difficult, and yet, since ‘[m]ost users or viewers are only dimly aware of the contribution that music makes to the semiotic fabric of audiovisual texts’ (Pérez-González 2014: 208), they will oftentimes remain untranslated, and thereby pushed further into the background.

To illustrate the semantic and intertextual layers lent to a film by the adept integration of popular music into it—layers which risk being lost on a foreign audience—let us take a scene from Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill: Vol. 2* (2004). In this scene, the protagonist Beatrix (played by Uma Thurman) has been unexpectedly reunited with her young daughter, who was torn from her womb and whose existence was kept hidden from her by the child’s father, Bill. As mother and daughter lie together on a bed watching the violent 1980 action movie *Shogun Assassin*, the diegetic audio of the young boy narrator’s voice fades into the non-diegetic song ‘About Her’ (2004) by Malcolm McLaren, former manager of the Sex Pistols. The soulful soundscape evoked by the song sits in stark contrast to the world of cold-blooded murder tinged with dark humour that the characters inhabit. But there is more to it than the mood of the music itself. The first line of the song—‘My man’s got a heart like a rock cast in the sea’—is a looped sample of ‘St. Louis Blues’ performed by Bessie Smith in a 1929 short film (Who Sampled Website, n.d.). This is followed by the song proper, a cover of ‘She’s Not There’ by The Zombies (1964), featuring the lines: ‘Well no one told me about her, the way she lied / Well no one told me about her, how many people cried / But it’s too late to say you’re sorry / How would I know, how would I care?’ These lyrics add to the complex emotions of trauma and joy contained within this scene; the sense of resolution and homecoming laced with adrenalin and unfinished business. Their deployment in this context also transforms the original narrative of the sampled songs, for example the line ‘No one told me about her’ appears now to refer to Beatrix and her missing daughter, and the man with a heart of rock could be Bill who stole her. The song choice, in its contemporary refashioning of historical popular music, also reminds us that

In trying to understand how a piece of pop music works within a film one must also try to understand the kind of cultural codes that piece of music will bring with it . . . [I]t sometimes seems as if there is a never-ending set of references with which to deal with.
(Boyce 2001)

Without subtitles, the chain of references here is unlikely to be triggered for the foreign viewer in the first place, risking the affective dimensions of the scene being flattened to a forgettable romanticism. Another, perhaps more immediately accessible example is cited in Desilla’s comparative study of British and Greek viewers’ grasp of implicature in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001); the latter group watching the Greek-subtitled version, in which the soundtrack lyrics are not subtitled. The scene in question features the strategic use of the classic hit ‘Respect’ by Aretha Franklin (1967), which plays at the moment the eponymous heroine delivers a triumphantly scathing remark to her boss upon resignation. Desilla states that

The overwhelming majority of the British viewers recognised the song and were perfectly conscious of its function . . . As anticipated, the tune proved much more difficult to identify for the Greek audience. One [viewer] could provide the title of the song and a relevant explanation for its use.

(Desilla 2009, cited in Pérez-González 2014: 210)

Compared to subtitling, dubbing song lyrics in films presents much more of a technical challenge, akin to the sung translation of opera instead of its surtitling. Not only is this the more expensive option, but it also involves questions of metre, rhyme and ‘singability’ (Bosseaux 2011: 186). In dubbing countries, therefore, film and television soundtracks with meaningful lyrics will usually be ignored, leading to a translational loss (Pérez-González 2014: 210). In the case of musical films, however—which sometimes boast the involvement of high profile popular music artists—one way or other lyrical translation must be addressed. Bosseaux notes that when foreign musical films are released in France, a mixed approach is adopted whereby dialogue is dubbed but songs are kept in the original and subtitled (2013: 81). Yet this solution is not always appropriate, such as in children’s movies where everything including the songs must be dubbed over for the sake of the young audience. One fan of Disney’s *The Lion King* (1994)—the soundtrack of which was famously composed by Elton John and remains the only animated movie soundtrack to be RIAA certified Diamond™, signifying 10,000,000 sales (RIAA Website, n.d.)—has compiled a blog detailing all language dubs of the movie that he/she has managed to acquire, including information about the translation of the songs (The Lion King Language Dubs Collection, n.d.). For example, the author lists the Farsi version as a non-official dub in which the song lyrics are subtitled; whereas it is the other way round for the Flemish version, in which the song lyrics are dubbed, not the rest of the film, and are included as a special feature to the Dutch DVD—testifying to the extreme popularity of Elton John’s oeuvre. The fan also describes musical differences between different language versions, for example in the Zulu dub of the song ‘I Just Can’t Wait To Be King’, he/she notes that ‘a significant background choir has been added, which I believe is meant to be the animals singing’. Thus, while the soundtrack very much has Elton John’s stamp on it—affording it global leverage—it also bows to requirements of ‘fulfilling entertainment conventions in other parts of the world’ (Wilson 2014: 48). This reveals how musical dubbing can go beyond lyrics as a vehicle for the hybridization—or ‘creolization’ (*ibid.*)—of cultures, running counter to widespread fears of Anglo-American cultural hegemony in the globalized era.

Aside from technical constraints, an important reason for not dubbing songs in musical films involving popular music artists might be recognition of unique artistic skill. A pertinent example is Lars von Trier’s *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), starring Icelandic singer Björk, who also wrote most of the soundtrack (released the same year under the album title *Selmasongs*). This tragic drama revolves around the inner auditory world of blind factory worker Selma, played by Björk, whose imaginative musical ‘journeys’ are integral to the plot and character development. It is difficult to imagine how Björk’s iconic voice could be divorced from her songs and replaced by another without effecting significant damage to the artistic value of the film. The loss would furthermore be immediately noticeable to viewers already familiar with her music and perhaps even drawn to the film precisely by her performance in it.

As regards television, there is comparatively less to say about the interlingual translation of popular music lyrics, given that, as discussed in the previous section, the medium has radically altered since the launch of MTV in the USA in 1981. Harrison explains that since the turn of the twenty-first century, music television has been disseminated across national channels, organized by genre, and that ‘viewers go to music channels to fill a void left by the departure of programmes such as *Top of the Pops*—a BBC music chart television show broadcast weekly in the UK between 1964 and 2006. With the rise in popularity of new media, people want more music, sooner, faster and all the time’ (Harrison 2013: 187). Harrison also notes that the target demographic for UK music channels is 16–34 year olds

(*ibid.*: 192), which arguably suggests a commercial drive, rather than a cultural or pedagogical one that might place more importance on lyrics. While intralingual subtitling, discussed below, appears to be on the rise in music television, there is no indication of the same for interlingual subtitling, hence foreign language fans taking matters into their own hands and the proliferation of the practice online.

Even the Eurovision Song Contest, television's 'five-decade-old Cheeseball Olympics of pop music, the most watched ongoing musical event on Earth, with an annual audience estimated at 300 million' (Wilson 2014: 44), does not encourage the practice of lyrical subtitling. Indeed, the contest has generated controversy in recent years over its fluctuating language rules that have facilitated linguistic and cultural homogenization:

Though it began with performers wearing local costume and singing in their native tongues, an 'international language' requirement was added in later years by the TV networks that administer it, to make it more commercially viable, so English and French songs predominate. (*ibid.*: 45)

One blogger inadvertently highlights Eurovision's missed opportunity by suggesting (rather optimistically, given the above observation) how his language-learning followers might take the initiative when watching the contest:

Look up the lyrics to the songs (in your target language of course) and use the lyrics to reinforce new vocabulary or phrases that maybe [*sic*] useful later on. You can add these new words and phrases to an SRS like Anki, Mnemosyne, or even Memrise! It also gives you insight into how to write songs in your target language, slang, different dialects, political situations, vital grammatical point [*sic*] and even a little bit about their own culture.

(*Koko the Polyglot 2015*)

The bigger picture notwithstanding, the interlingual translation of popular music is still occasionally found on television. One example found by the author is humorous: Australian music-themed comedy quiz show *Spicks and Specks* concluded one episode in June 2009 with a subtitled version, available on YouTube, of Belgian singer Plastic Bertrand's 1977 hit single *Ça plane pour moi* ('That works for me'), itself a pastiche of the punk genre featuring nonsense lyrics (*Spicks and Specks Translates Plastic Bertrand 2009*). The subtitles here function to increase the song's humour by foregrounding the lyrics and making them even weirder through their literal rendering. Interestingly, the same quiz show also features a game entitled 'Turning Japanese', in which contestants must guess the song by the lyrics, which have been translated into Japanese using an online translation tool and then translated back into English again. Future studies might explore further instances of the interlingual translation of popular music on television networks in different countries.

Intralingual translation of audiovisual popular music

Subtitling of popular music videos is often carried out intralingually. In this case, translational processes are wholly accounted for in terms of modes, understood as 'the visual and semiotic resources required to create and interpret audiovisual texts' (Pérez-González 2014: 192). More specifically, here we are looking at meaning transfer between two medial variants of the core mode of language: spoken/sung language to written language. Music subtitles in

this context differ from the interlingual transfer of lyrical meaning, it is normal practice for the lyrics to be delivered verbatim (Harrison 2013: 188). Whether in a professional or non-professional setting, this form of subtitling may be carried out to enhance comprehension where the lyrical content is important, perhaps for poetic, pedagogical or political reasons; or for entertainment purposes, for example if consumers wish to sing along to a track or to perform it karaoke-style (YouTube is replete with such music videos, in which the vocal track may or may not be absent and the subtitles change colour to indicate when the lyrics should be sung). As with interlingual subtitling, foregrounding the written lyrics in a music video alters the affective experience of the music and, in most cases, constitutes a superimposition upon the intended visual dimension of the semiotic ensemble. As discussed earlier with reference to Littau (1997), this is characteristic of the hypertextual system of the digital age in which the pluralization of the original text becomes the norm.

The ability of music fans to participate in audiovisual media flows as co-creational ‘prosumers’ has seen intralingual subtitling and dubbing employed for creative and comic effect. A famous example is the literal video concept, a global Internet trend that is claimed to have originated with Current TV employee Dustin McLean’s version of A-Ha’s ‘Take on Me’ in 2008 (Dust Films Website, n.d.). Literal videos are parodies of official music videos that aim to ‘narrow the yawning chasm of images-vs.-song lyrics-vs.-celebrity persona by simply inserting their own lyrics, which flatly reiterate or question whatever is happening onscreen’ (Weeks 2008). For example, the literal version of British singer James Blunt’s 2004 hit song ‘You’re Beautiful’, uploaded by Simeon Bisas (2008), ridicules the artist’s posturing in the video whereby he ill-advisedly removes his shirt in the middle of a snowstorm to reveal his bare chest and, sitting cross-legged, inexplicably organizes his shoes and the contents of his pocket into a line on the floor. This activity bears no apparent relation to the lyrical narrative, which recounts a fanciful encounter with an attractive woman on the subway. The ‘literal’ dubbed lyrics, accompanied by verbatim subtitles, are sung in an exaggeratedly effeminate voice and satirically exploit this narrative disjuncture, e.g. the opening lines become ‘I fill the camera / Look of despair’ to realign the lyrics with the visual narrative—a close-up of Blunt’s melancholic face. Such practices might be theorized as a form of audiovisual interventionist approach (Pérez-González 2014: 58) that aims to undermine the commercial dominance of the popular music industry, an observation borne out by the fact that Bisas’ video was initially removed from YouTube following a copyright complaint by Blunt’s label EMI Music (Med Library Website, n.d.).

Another form of intralingual subtitling is for the deaf and hard of hearing on television. The provision of music subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing may seem at first sight counter-intuitive; and yet, as scholar and practitioner at MTV Mark Harrison testifies, there is both consumer demand and scholarly interest:

I am always asked, ‘Why would anyone with a hearing impairment want to watch music on TV?’ The fact is that the vast majority of subtitle users have lost their hearing gradually over time or later in life, leaving them missing music a great deal.

(2014)

The fact that this demand is met is aided by the changing face of audiovisual music consumption in the digital age. In his illuminating study of subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing for UK music channels, Harrison states that ‘[n]o genre of television has seen more diversification in order to maintain an audience than music television’ (2013: 186). Here, subtitling practice

is driven by principles of inclusion and accessibility, no matter how small the audience share of subtitle users, which amounts to less than 1 per cent for most music channels (*ibid.*: 192).

Unlike with YouTube music videos, this form of intralingual subtitling is conducted within an industrial setting, which means that strict guidelines must be adhered to (*ibid.*: 193). The # symbol is used at the beginning of each subtitle to indicate singing, and again at the end to indicate that the song is over. Punctuation is kept to a minimum and colour coding must be employed to reflect different singers/rappers/speakers. While usual conventions apply regarding line breaks and timings for intro/shot changes, a major difference from ordinary television subtitling is that, for copyright reasons as much as semantic ones, there can be no reduction, deletion or paraphrasing of lyrics—they must be 100 per cent verbatim, regardless of the language of the song, and sourced from an approved location (ideally the record label). As Harrison states, this makes things easier on the subtitler, but harder on the viewer, who must contend at times with more text than is comfortable to read in the allotted time (*ibid.*: 189). That said, genres often differ in this respect. As discussed below, hip hop songs contain many lyrics which at times require a reading speed of almost double the recommended rate; dance/electronic music, as well as jazz and easy listening, on the other hand, tends to be much lower in terms of lyrical volume (*ibid.*: 190).

From an AVT perspective, an intriguing aspect of music subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing is that it demands the translation of not just linguistic but audio content as well. At present, this is a limited aspiration, since there is little available space for musical description given the higher number of subtitles, while specialist provision such as on-screen graphic representation of music, pitch and rhythm, or audio production enhancing rhythm and bass vibrations, does not exist (*ibid.*: 198). As such, the visual dimension comes into sharper focus within the musical ensemble in the form, for example, of instruments being played in live performances, facial expressions and/or dancing that displays the beat. Given that contemporary popular music has been increasingly subject to a commercial drive that entails ‘a shift from active musical production to passive pop consumption, the decline of folk or community or subcultural traditions, and a general loss of musical skill’ (Frith 2006: 231), paradoxically, perhaps, the development of audiovisual accessibility for the deaf and hard of hearing may help to reinstate awareness of the affective roots of the human musical experience.

Beyond subtitles—Alternative understandings of AVT and popular music

From an AVT perspective, popular music offers far more than just lyrics. Susam-Sarajeva argues that much can be gained in moving beyond conventional understandings of translational processes as applied to music (2008: 189). While several past studies have been conducted on the role of popular music in cross-cultural transfer, the contemporary audiovisual context opens up yet more avenues in this respect. Kaindl, for instance, traces the translation of not only the lyrics but also the visual dimension of the 1997 hit song ‘Simarik’ by Turkish singer Tarkan, as it moves, via several remakes, ‘from ethnicity to globalization’ (2005: 258). The song, which celebrates the emancipation of Turkish women from a male perspective, was first remade in Turkish for the international market, then covered twice in English with accompanying videos—first by Greek-American singer Stella Soleil in 2001, then in a highly stylized and sexualized manner by Australian singer Holly Valance in 2002. Kaindl notes that

Whereas the videos of the Turkish versions are constructed around a narrative, the English versions focus on the rhythmic dimension of the song, centered on dances with sexual connotations. The discursive element of the foreign song is visually eliminated and reduced to its mere motor-sensual aspects.

(*ibid.*: 259)

In another case study involving the 2012 pop video ‘Gangnam Style’ by South Korean singer Psy—famously the first YouTube video ever to exceed one billion views (Rahman 2012)—we can observe intercultural remakes that sidestep the music industry (thus arguably non-commercially driven). The original song is culturally localized in that it mocks the residents of the wealthy Seoul neighbourhood of Gangnam, and yet it went viral, reached no. 1 in the UK Singles Chart, and was praised by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon for its ‘unlimited global reach’ (Davies 2012). The music video spawned an array of lyrical-visual parodies in the months following its release, made by far-flung amateur prosumers online. These include ‘Gandalf Style’ by Angie Griffin and Chad Nikolaus (2012), which features a man in a wizard costume (supposedly Gandalf the Wizard from J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*) dancing around an urban location to the bemusement of passers-by, singing new lyrics in English: ‘I got a long grey beard / Keep it secret / Keep it safe’ (referring to the eponymous ring). Another Gandalf version in German swiftly followed, uploaded by online comedy trio Y-Titty (2012). This version, staged in a similar way, albeit in a rural environment, has Gandalf complaining that he is underrated, arguing with Frodo the Hobbit, and insulting hobbits in general. Neither version attempts to capture the lyrical semantics of the source text; instead the phonetic semblance of Gangnam/Gandalf allows for the humorous visual and acoustic mood of the original video to be domesticated into the target culture.

Kaindl asserts that popular genres are always part of a cultural system or tradition, whether they are reflective of or reacting against that system, and that when they travel they become part of a new one (2013a: 18:05). AVT scholars can benefit greatly from other disciplines in this area, and vice versa. From a communication studies perspective, for example, Hanke (2006) explores processes of transculturalization and hybridization on the level of genre in music television. Focusing on the Latin American branch of MTV (MTV Latino), he observes a fusion of musical styles within the ostensible context of Euro-American homogenization and commodification, describing the production of music videos in particular as ‘an aesthetic, expressive practice of translating the infinite possibilities of mutating, hybrid sounds into images that travel across time and space’ (*ibid.*: 325). Hanke’s account of hybridization parallels rock critic Wilson’s ‘creolization’ of popular culture mentioned earlier, with both emphasizing the existence of a reciprocal cultural influence on the West that undermines claims of capitalist cultural hegemony. Wilson adds that such claims ignore ‘how commercial music is redeployed in everyday life for people’s own purposes’ (2014: 49). He cites a Jamaican ‘roughneck’ attempting to explain why it is that the saccharine Céline Dion is so beloved of the nation’s gangster underclass, to the extent that guns are fired into the air when she is played in clubs alongside reggae and ska music: ‘Bad man have fi play love tune fi show ’dat them a lova too’ (Bad men have to play love songs to show that they are lovers too) (*ibid.*: 50). Future AVT-based studies might investigate additional possibilities for hybridization afforded by media convergence and participatory culture, taking into account the visual dimension as well as the acoustic/verbal.

Considering hybridization on the level of medium, we might also seek to incorporate translation theory into media studies assessments of what Korsgaard terms ‘wild new forms’

(2013: 501) of music video. These ‘transgress traditional borders’ by problematizing definitive characteristics of the medium such as brevity, and the music preceding the visuals (*ibid.*: 507), while retaining the core functions of showcasing musical features and marketing the song (*ibid.*: 517). Drawing on two case studies (Björk’s 2011 app album *Biophilia*, and Arcade Fire’s interactive video for the 2010 track ‘We Used to Wait’), Korsgaard groups these experimental forms into five categories: participatory/interactive, user-generated content, remakes/remixes (including new language versions, literal videos and parodies discussed above), alternate lengths, and hi/low definition (*ibid.*: 502). In proposing ‘that music videos are intermedial and remedial by nature and that music video continually defines itself by stretching beyond its own territory’ (*ibid.*: 517), Korsgaard effectively theorizes the evolving medium of the music video in translational terms. He thus complements Kaindl’s description of the medium as a complex audiovisual form weaving sound, language and image together in a functional relationship, and of the transfer between aural and visual codes in a music video which can be understood according to Jakobson’s notion of intersemiotic translation, as follows:

The key to understanding the mechanisms of such an intersemiotic transfer lies in the analysis of reciprocal dependencies and potential relations between the various elements. Such an approach was developed by Goodwin (1993), who views pop songs in terms of their narratives.

(Kaindl 2005: 252)

Mention of narratives brings us back to the symbiotic relationship between film and popular music, since many movie directors ‘give music its due as the stimulus that sets off a train of mental images’ (Romney and Wootton 1995: 122). The narratives of popular music however are not just lyrical or visual and contained within the song itself, but are also bound up in the identity of the artist and/or a certain temporal period. As such, a song’s inclusion in a film is sometimes not for its lyrical content at all, but for the broader socio-cultural narratives it represents. There may be a translational aspect to a musical text’s ‘relocation’ in a film, be it from a certain temporal context or a certain social scene to another; notably when there is an element of challenge through which new meaning is produced. One example is the use of Britney Spears’ 2004 single ‘Everytime’—a simple and sad break-up song penned for her ex-boyfriend Justin Timberlake—in the 2012 black comedy film *Spring Breakers*, in which America’s violent and morally vacuous underbelly comes to the fore. In the relevant scene, the three anti-heroines (played by Vanessa Hudgens, Ashley Benson and Rachel Korine), who are on spring break in Florida, gather round a piano holding guns and wearing pink balaclavas. Seated at the piano is their new ‘friend’—a local rapper and drug dealer named Alien (played by James Franco). The song begins diegetically as an off-key sunset sing-along, but the real song eventually takes over non-diegetically, alongside slow-motion footage of the four wreaking carnage together:

When Britney Spears’s ‘Everytime’ floods the speakers, it’s so gorgeous and alluring, the inherent sadness of the song subverted by playing it over horrific, dreamlike images of empowerment . . . the sweetness of ‘Everytime’ does not compute with the violence of *Spring Breakers*.

(Turner 2014)

The subversion of Spears' pop princess image here acts to renarrate the American dream as a whole into a nihilistic vision of aimless consumerism and feminism-gone-wrong. If we look at this from a translational perspective, perhaps as a form of intracultural meaning transfer, we might perceive how aesthetic texts can draw upon affective levels of experience that go beyond language, in order to bridge discrepancies between public narratives (e.g. what is sold by economic power structures) and the reality of people's lived experience. Since the stories of capitalism are internationally disseminated via the entertainment industry, this has wide-ranging socio-political implications. Bleiker indeed outlines how contemporary international relations theory might benefit from scholars sensitized to questions of translation in exploring music-based forms of expression:

[C]an we gain political insight through music that other sources of knowledge, such as texts or visual arts, cannot provide? And if so, how can these forms of knowledge be translated back into language-based expression without losing the very essence of what they seek to capture and convey? . . . We might then be able to appreciate what we otherwise cannot even see: perspectives and people excluded from prevailing purviews, for instance, or the emotional nature and consequences of political events.

(2009: 1–2)

Perhaps when seen in this light, AVT and popular music merits greater attention as an emerging field of study—of which this chapter has only sketched out the beginnings.

Research methods and avenues for future scholarship

Given the scarcity of existing scholarship on AVT and popular music, it seems reasonable to combine a discussion of current methodologies with ideas for new research directions in this section. In her overview of research methods in song translation as a whole since the 1990s, Bosseaux cites some key analytical tools borrowed from literary, poetic, stage and screen translation, such as semiotics and the notion of performability; and draws a major distinction between written (surtitling) and sung or 'singable' translation (2011: 184). Although the subtitling of music videos does not feature in this overview, Low's Skopos-inspired 'pentathlon' approach (2005) emerges as one of the few methodological frameworks devised for performative song translation that could equally be applied in an AVT context. This approach proposes five criteria that need to be balanced to produce a successful sung translation: 'singability, sense, naturalness, rhythm and rhyme' (*ibid.*: 185). While not all popular music translation aims towards a singable text, Low contends that this is the most difficult skopos due to its many constraints, and that the model's emphasis on function and purpose makes it versatile in helping a translator to ascertain which features to prioritize in a given case (*ibid.*: 186). A future study might seek to adapt Low's framework to incorporate the visual dimension beyond that of operatic performance and reassess his hierarchical view of the visual as 'a third code, ideally serving the auditory codes of language and music' (*ibid.*: 188).

Pitted against the bulk of song translation analysis to date, which has 'focused mainly on constraints, techniques and difficulties, with an emphasis on words and music' (2011: 194), Bosseaux acknowledges the broader socio-cultural or historical perspective of some popular music translation scholarship that is beginning to make waves. This looks beyond text and music to contextualize songs within their source and target cultures. Notable among proponents of this approach is Kaindl, introduced above, who uses polysystem theory (Even-Zohar 1997/1990, Toury 1995, Hermans 1999) to set out a 'socio-semiotic foundation for

the translation of popular music' (2005: 242). Arguing that popular music can be structured as a system, and that translation in this context is a socially embedded and often fragmented practice, he views popular music (including videos) in terms of the 'mediated multiple text' (*ibid.*: 241), reflecting Littau's notion of translation as hypertext discussed above. Kaindl advocates the concepts of 'bricolage' (Lévi-Strauss 1966) and 'dialogics' (Bakhtin 1984) as analytical tools to explore the complexity of these systems. Bricolage refers to the appropriation of components including music, language, values and culture that a translator combines and connects 'in order to form a new, unified, signifying system'; while dialogics is the related idea that 'no text, discourse, genre, etc. exists alone but is part of a textual, discursive and generic network and stands in dialogic relationship with previous or future utterances' (*ibid.* 242). This foundation opens up a wealth of possibilities for future studies, with some preliminary ideas having been mooted in the previous section.

Multimodal theory is undoubtedly of immense value to studies of AVT and popular music. As discussed elsewhere in this handbook, multimodality is the combination of speech, writing, visualization and music, and—crucially—as a theoretical framework it 'does not prioritize language at the expense of other meaning-making modes' (Pérez-González 2014: 182). Whether translational processes are understood in the conventional sense or intersemiotically/intermodally, this approach will prove particularly useful in accounting for the complex range of modes and sub-modes that constitute the semiotic fabric of audiovisual popular music texts, and how they are brought to bear in translation.

Another fruitful methodological approach for future studies could be socio-narrative theory, first introduced to translation studies by Baker (2006), which views narratives in their various disparate forms as inherent to human cognition and constitutive (as opposed to representative) of social reality. Here, translational processes can be understood as processes of 'renarration' (Baker 2008: 16), which again might apply both in the conventional interlingual sense and/or in a broader sense. An advantage of the narrative framework over other sociological models is its emphasis on temporality, such that AVT studies might focus on temporal and not just spatial/cultural relocation. Socio-narrative furthermore permits us to extend our enquiry to questions of music and personal identity, i.e. how somebody might 'renarrate' themselves on an ontological (personal) level through music. An illustrative example here, taken from the author's own research, is the song/music video 'Enfants du désert' (2009) by French rapper Diam's (real name Mélanie Georgiades), whose 2006 album *Dans ma bulle* topped the French charts and reached Diamond™ status. In this text, available on YouTube, the artist aesthetically performs the inner process of her public conversion to Islam—an act for which she was widely condemned by fans and critics alike in the volatile French post-9/11 climate, and which led to her retirement from rapping in 2010. The song uses a variety of semiotic means—including an intertextual visual characterization of Diam's as *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis 1994/Groom 1986)—to narrate the artist's ontological evolution (i.e. her characterological growth and change), a process which to her signifies an answer to the empty promises of fame and capitalist materialism, in a wider temporal context of global uneven development (Johnson 2017). Aligning religious conversion with translation here, through the concept of renarration, permits a richer understanding of the various affective, cultural and semiotic processes of meaning transfer involved in the text.

The above is by no means a definitive list of research methods in the growing study of AVT and popular music. Indeed, the gap in scholarship provides an exciting opportunity for new and creative approaches to keep abreast of developments such as the evolving nature and role of the music video, the rise of participatory translation practices in the digital era, and the increasing number of artists who are shunning commercial structures

that have previously shaped production of and access to popular music, perhaps leading to a more truly universalized popular music experience.

Summary

Audiovisual translation and popular music remains an underexplored research subject, despite the significant role that music consumption plays in people's lives and identities and its evolution in the globalized digital era. This is in part due to popular music's perceived low symbolic capital, and in part to a need for interdisciplinary approaches that adequately capture the complexity of music as a form of expression. This chapter has provided an insight into existing scholarship on the topic and attempted to push the boundaries a little further to incorporate contemporary developments in both the music industry and the field of AVT, making a case for its relevance as a social, cultural and political force.

In considering the subtitling and dubbing of audiovisual popular music, we saw how music video has developed as a medium since the advent of YouTube to become more participatory in nature, enabling prosumers to facilitate access to lyrical content across linguistic boundaries, whether for poetic, pedagogical or political reasons, and calling into question notions of authorship. This was contrasted with the more industry-restricted media of film and television, where the interlingual translation of popular music lyrics is often overlooked; while conversely intralingual subtitling of music for the deaf and hard of hearing has become a priority for television producers fighting to maintain audience figures in the Internet age. In extending our understanding of translational practices, we then considered parodies, remakes, socio-cultural context, hybridization, and called into question the very definition of the medium of the music video. It is hoped that the overview provided here will serve as a springboard for the continued development of this highly enjoyable and fertile area of study.

Further reading

- Gorlée, D. (ed.) (2005) *Song and Significance: Virtues and Vices of Vocal Translation*, Amsterdam: Rodopi | *This pioneering collection on the translation of song contains two chapters of particular value to studies of AVT and popular music. Kaindl's 'The Plurisemiotics of Pop Song Translation: Words, Music, Voice and Image' (p. 235–264) offers an invaluable analysis of the socio-cultural impact of popular music, drawing on different German versions (including video clips) of a French chanson. Meanwhile, Low's 'The Pentathlon Approach to Translating Songs' (p. 185–212) posits a functionalist framework applicable to vocal translation across a range of genres, including popular music.*
- Minors, H. J. (ed.) (2013) *Music, Text and Translation*, London & New York: Bloomsbury | *This edited volume seeks to further develop research in music translation and includes contributions from several leading scholars in the field. A particular highlight with relation to AVT and popular music is Harrison's chapter 'Making Music Television Accessible to a Hard-of-Hearing Audience' (p. 187–198), offering a rare and extremely illuminating study from a practitioner in the field.*
- Littau, K. (1997) 'Translation in the Age of Postmodern Production: From Text to Intertext to Hypertext', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 33(1): 81–96 | *This article posits translation as the re-writing of the already pluralized original in the hypertextual system of the digital age. Setting out a robust theoretical grounding in questions of authorship (Barthes, Foucault, Derrida), it theorizes translation in terms of a convergence of postmodern literary theory and computer technology; in so doing the article offers an approach to audiovisual music consumption and related digital textualities that is framed within broader critical understandings of the concept of translation.*

- Susam-Sarajeva, S. (2008) 'Translation and Music', *The Translator* 14(2): 187–200 | *This article is the introduction to the 2008 special issue of The Translator devoted to the translation of music. The article first seeks to account for the peripheral disciplinary position generally occupied by this area of study, and then provides an up-to-date, critical examination of existing research on the topic.*
- Wilson, C. (2014) *Let's Talk About Love: Why Other People Have Such Bad Taste*, New York & London: Bloomsbury | *This book by a Canadian music critic provides a personalized insight into today's popular music industry. The humorous premise (the author's hatred of Québécois singer Céline Dion) is used as a springboard to interrogate the concept of taste from a cultural studies perspective. Chapter 3 'Let's Talk in French' and Chapter 4 'Let's Talk About World Conquest' are particularly noteworthy in regard to questions of translation and popular music in the globalized context.*

Related topics

- 3 Subtitling on the cusp of its futures
- 4 Investigating dubbing: learning from the past, looking to the future
- 6 Subtitling for deaf and hard of hearing audiences: moving forward
- 11 Film remakes as a form of translation
- 12 Mediality and audiovisual translation
- 17 Multimodality and audiovisual translation: cohesion in accessible films
- 24 Ethnography in audiovisual translation studies
- 27 Audiovisual translation and fandom
- 28 Audiovisual translation and activism

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