**The Scandinavian singer-translator’s multisemiotic voice as performance**

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Annjo K. Greenall, Norwegian University of Science and Technology

*Most current research on translator’s voice within Translation Studies focuses on voice in written communication. The present chapter seeks to expand the concept to include multisemiotic voice – ways of expressing (inter)subjectivity/agency/identity across several channels, including the visual and auditory. The notion of multisemiotic voice is illustrated through the case of the Scandinavian song translator, more specifically the singer-translator, that is, song translators who translate songs as well as perform them. The chapter also discusses the relationship between the translators’ textual and contextual displays of voice, arguing that they converge on the notion of* performativity*: they are social rituals whereby (singer-)translators build their identities as performers, in a literal or non-literal sense.*

**Keywords:** translation, song translation, *bricolage*, English, Scandinavian languages, voice, J. L. Austin, speech acts, performativity, performance

**1. Introduction**

The notion of *voice* has been used in a number of ways within Translation Studies (see e.g. Alvstad 2013, and Taivalkoski-Shilov and Suchet 2013). What most or all of these uses seem to converge on is the necessary existence of a fictional or non-fictional *enunciating instance* who possesses some kind of (inter)subjectivity, agency, or identity and who transfers, directly or via someone else, a given *point* through some kind of *medium*, most often a “text.” Sometimes voice is more closely identified with the enunciating instance’s (inter)subjectivity, agency or identity, other times with the transferred point, and sometimes it is most closely identified with the way enunciating instances and/or the given point come across in a given text. The concept of voice has also been used in a more concrete sense, as *physical voice*, which is also often involved in translation, for example in interpreting (Taivalkoski-Shilov and Suchet 2013) or in song translation (Greenall 2015a).

In a recent article, Alvstad and Assis Rosa distinguish between *textual* and *contextual* voices. This is a distinction based on where a given expression of voice is situated within the range of different kinds of text somehow involved in translational transactions:

Textual voices are part of the product (narrative voice, the voices of characters and the translator’s textually manifested voice), whereas contextual voices are related to the sociological translation/process and hence to the multiple agents that produce, promote and write about translations. (Alvstad and Assis Rosa 2015:3–4)

In other words, the *translator’s* voice – which will be my focus here – can be either textual or contextual, depending on whether the translator expresses him or herself within or through the actual translational product (the text) or through various kinds of context, such as unpublished drafts, correspondence, prefaces, and interviews.

In the prototypical case (Halverson 2000), that is, when the translated product essentially consists of a verbal written text, the distinction between textual and contextual voice comes across as relatively unproblematic. Other, less prototypical forms of translation, however, challenge the distinction somewhat. An ever-growing number of text types comprise elements that are presented in several semiotic channels simultaneously, namely, the verbal-visual, the verbal-auditory, the non-verbal visual, and the non-verbal auditory channels. Examples here include children’s picture books (Oittinen 2015), audiovisual texts (film, TV), online texts, and songs. In all of these cases, there is the possibility of elements within more than one semiotic channel undergoing, or being swept along in, a process of translation.

The mere existence of such (untranslated or translated) texts might at first glance seem to challenge the notion of “text” in “textual,” except the field of semiotics has of course long since established an extended notion of text, where “text” can comprise both verbal and non-verbal elements, or even exclusively non-verbal elements (Sonesson 1998:86–87). The notion of text thus extended, “textual voices” will – in the present context, where the focus is on translation – be those that are expressed within or through a given translational product, whether this includes translated verbal text or translated or transferred images, instrumentation, arrangement, vocal style, visual style, and so on. There are, however, other ways in which such multisemiotic translations – expressing what we may call *multisemiotic voice* – challenge the textual-contextual distinction. This can be illustrated by a quick look at an example involving the translation of several modes, namely, the translation of some of Janis Joplin’s most famous hits into Swedish by Caroline af Ugglas, who also performs her own translated lyrics, and who is hence what I have called a *singer-translator* (Greenall 2015a, 2015b). In the context of the release of her CD *Joplin på svenska* (Joplin in Swedish, 2007), af Ugglas borrows many of Joplin’s vocal and physical mannerisms, as well as some of her visual stylistic features (such as her somewhat unkempt hair and hippie-style clothing) – albeit with a personal twist. These elements are arguably *also* a part of the translated product; they are, according to the abovementioned broad notion of text, *textual*. However, some of these features also play along when, for example, af Ugglas is interviewed, for example, about her album release, where she speaks not, as one might intuitively want to call it, indirectly through a translation, but rather directly to an interviewer, employing her *contextual* voice. Her translated physical appearance and body language, both reminiscent of Joplin, but also eminently those of af Ugglas herself, communicate in unison with her verbal statements; the message processed by viewers and listeners, the sense they get of the translator’s voice, is a message comprising all of these factors, translational and non-translational, textual and contextual, taken together.[[1]](#endnote-1) In other words, the line between textual and contextual voice is sometimes blurred. And while this fact does not give us enough reason to abandon the distinction entirely – it is valuable as at least a starting point for exploring voice in different kinds of text – it does demonstrate the importance of adopting a methodology that combines text and context, not in the usual sense of one being the “object of study” and the other a “source of explanations,” but where both are simultaneous objects of study. This kind of approach is more likely to reveal the complex interrelationships between the two overlapping and intermixing levels.

This chapter, then, seeks to explore the multisemiotic nature of the singer-translator’s voice, showing how this area in particular can shed light on the mentioned overlap between textual and contextual voice. This is done with reference to the notion of *performativity*, which has its roots in language philosopher J. L. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* ([1962] 1975). I discuss the ways in which expressing oneself textually through multisemiotic translation and contextually through paratexts, such as liner notes, translator’s notes, promotional texts, and interviews (cf. Pellatt 2013a), are related by virtue of both being aspects of performativity. Lastly in the chapter I briefly consider the fact that although the main corpus that I draw examples from will be a corpus of popular song translations, this is a model and an argument that can be applied to other kinds of translation.

**2. The singer-translator’s voice as multisemiotic voice**

Song lyrics have (at least) two important jobs to do: first, they provide semantic content that plays along emotionally with (or in contrast to) the music, and second, they co-constitute an instrument together with the physical voice, with stress, syllables, consonants, and vowels providing opportunities for the creation of rhythm, timbre, and pitch. Often the semantic role is overridden by this instrumental role: words may become blurred as rhythms are prioritized, and/or audiences pay less attention to their semantic content either because the words cannot be (fully) understood, or because the semantic content of the words in pop music is simply not considered very important in the receiving culture (a phenomenon that falls under the label *musicocentrism*, see Gorlée 2005:8).

As one of several instruments, however, the lyrically realized physical voice is typically only one element in a musical whole involving, among other things, instrumentation and arrangement, documented through recorded or live performances. In addition, all of these textual features are closely interwoven with a wider, sociological context. According to Klaus Kaindl (2005:241), popular songs are “multiple texts,” which cannot be viewed isolated from the context of musical production and reception, including various channels of dissemination, the practices of artists and consumers, visual aspects, sound aspects, and general discourses about music and musicianship in the media. The translation of such complex wholes Kaindl refers to as a process of *bricolage*, a term that he traces back to anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966:19–21) and media theorist and sociologist Richard Hebdige (1979). According to Kaindl,

the term “*bricolage*” can be applied in relation to verbal, vocal and musical appropriation. In the process of translation a number of elements, including music, language, vocal style, instrumentation, but also values, ideology, culture, etc., are appropriated from the source culture and mixed with elements from the target culture. The translator in this sense becomes a “*bricoleur*” who chooses various components of the multiple text which he combines and connects in order to form a new unified, signifying system. (Kaindl 2005:242)

The singer-translator that was introduced above is indeed such a *bricoleur*. A singer-translator is typically an artist who selects the songs of one or more popular and influential Anglo-American singer-songwriters for translation, for example for the purposes of “becoming one with” the original artist, and/or for the purpose of artistic reinterpretation (Greenall 2015b). Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, both singer-songwriters whose lyrics have entered the literary canon, have been typical choices for such singer-translators, and the lyrics of Dylan’s and Cohen’s songs are thus available in a large range of languages, either in singable or non-singable form (Low 2003; Franzon 2008). In the process of translating the works of such artists, several aspects in addition to the lyrics, are – consciously or subconsciously – translated. Sometimes, these other aspects may even begin to undergo translation ahead of the actual translation of any lyrics. A case in point here is that of the Norwegian singer-translator Kjell Inge Torgersen, who released an album entitled *Aks av gull* (Ears of golden barley) in 2006, containing a number of songs by the British pop group The Police and solo work by its vocalist Sting, translated into a dialectical variant of Torgersen’s native Nynorsk, one of the two official written standards of the Norwegian language. Torgersen’s appropriation of Sting began, however, long before this release. In 1997, Torgersen had won the Norwegian version of the TV broadcast imitation talent competition *The European Soundmix Show*, singing Sting’s “Englishman in New York.” Later, he came third in the European final of the same show. Obviously, he could not have done this had he not been able to render Sting’s voice and imitate his vocal style to near perfection. As with Caroline af Ugglas, the vocal material necessary to achieve this level and degree of imitation of another artist was probably there from the beginning. Nevertheless, voice quality is in many ways as unique as a thumbprint, and making oneself sound almost exactly like someone else will in most cases (as here) be a conscious act. That such attempted imitations of another’s voice quality and singing style constitutes a translational act becomes most clear when this particular element in the *bricolage* is contextualized by other, more clearly translational, elements, such as sung lyrics in a new language: here, the attempted imitation takes on the appearance of a translation of a certain kind within the translated whole, namely, a heavily source-oriented choice, similar to the translation strategy of borrowing, also known as direct transfer (or any of the other labels that have been used to name the choice of keeping source elements unchanged).

As noted above, Kaindl (2005:242) contends that the popular song translator “chooses various components of the multiple text” and then combines and connects them to “form a new unified, signifying system.” Two points need to be made here. First, the notion of (individual) choice often implies that whatever action it is that is being carried out in a given case is a self-contained affair. It is as always important to keep in mind that translating – also, or perhaps especially within, the field of popular music – is an intensely dialogic (in a Bakhtinian sense) process. In addition to the more subtle influences exerted by the language itself and the world of texts, various formal and informal consultants may be called upon to take part in the process, and more than one translator may be involved (on the concept of such multiple translatorship, see Jansen and Wegener 2013). An example of the latter from the realm of singer-translating is the translation into Norwegian of some of Bob Dylan’s songs by poet Håvard Rem. Rem is one of Norway’s most prolific song translators, and he often performs his translated lyrics in the form of recitals with musical accompaniment. In the case that I am alluding to here, however, some of Rem’s Dylan translations into Bokmål,the other official written standard of Norwegian, were further adapted in collaboration with Rem by the well-known rock artist/singer-songwriter Åge Aleksandersen into the latter’s Trønder dialect (Håvard Rem, pers. comm.). The songs were subsequently recorded by Aleksandersen and his band on the album *Fredløs* (Outlaw) in 1997. Here, the translator team also included the band musicians, session musicians, and producers that took part in shaping the translated cover song.

Evidence of awareness that the translation process extends far beyond the translated lyrics can be found not only among scholars but also among listeners. The following is an excerpt from a review of Danish singer-translator and pop artist Steffen Brandt’s album *Baby Blue: Bob Dylan gendigtet* (Baby Blue: Bob Dylan re-poetized, 2009) containing eighteen Dylan songs translated into Danish:

Songs like “Det meste af tiden” (“Most of the Time”) and “Jeg vil ha’ dig” (“I Want You”) also preserve the originals’ carrying tones. At the same time, however, they reveal one of the most serious problems with Steffen Brandt’s project: the fact that his re-interpretations are generally quite toothless and harmless. The lingering, melancholic Daniel Lanois sound of “Most of the Time” is for example completely gone from Brandt’s version. [. . .] The songs all turn into boring middle-of-the-road pop/rock, *greatly enabled by Nikolaj Nørlund’s flat production*, which again deserves to come under fire.[[2]](#endnote-2) (Hornsleth 2009, my emphasis)

The attitude that seems to be expressed here is that while it is fully acceptable, in a project like Brandt’s, not to translate the musical aspects literally, it is essential that one succeeds in matching the excellence of the original, providing something out of the ordinary, something artistically interesting. In other words, there seems to be a demand, on the part of at least some listeners, not only for the singer-translator’s *non-manifest* subjectivity or voice in the form of faithful imitation, but also for a high degree of his or her *manifest* voice, in the form of a discernibly subjective, artistic imprint on the new product (Greenall 2015a).

The second point that needs to be made in regard to Kaindl’s (2005:242) statement above (a *bricoleur* “chooses various components of the multiple text”) is one that follows from it, and also from the argument made in the previous paragraph, namely, that song translation, as opposed to many other forms of translation, involves a stronger license to simply drop certain aspects of the source. We see this in a multitude of cases. Sometimes the lyrics of a given song can be completely changed semantically: in such cases, the play on recognition and contrast can be exploited, for example for humorous purposes. An example of this is Barry Mann’s timeless doo wop question from 1961, “Who put the bomp / in the bomp-bah-bomp-bah-bomp?,” translated by the Norwegian band Vazelina Bilopphøggers (1981) into their Toten dialect as “Hu putte bomull / i bomullstrøya mi” (‘She put the cotton / in my cotton shirt’). In this example, the first parts of the two lines are near-homophonous, with “Who put the bomp” ['huː pʊt ðə 'bɒmp] mimicked by “Hu putte bom-” ['hʉː pʉtːə ''bumː]. When recognized by audiences, this phenomenon, dubbed “phonetic translation” by Smith-Sivertsen (2008:173),[[3]](#endnote-3) triggers voice manifestness and amusement. At other times, aspects of the original’s musical layout are simply left out and replaced with other elements, either borrowed from other sources or self-invented. An example of the former is provided by Kjell Inge Torgersen’s version of Sting’s “Fields of Gold.” The original is quite richly orchestrated, featuring drums, bass, keyboards, guitar, harmonica, and Northumbrian smallpipes, while Torgersen’s is acoustic and stripped down. The reason for this is likely Torgersen’s self-professed fondness for Eva Cassidy’s version of the song (Akhtar 2015), which is even more stripped down than Torgersen’s, with just one acoustic guitar as accompaniment and an electric guitar added from the solo onward. Torgersen’s version places itself somewhere between the original and Cassidy’s version, with acoustic guitar, double bass, violin, and cello. Torgersen is also inspired by Cassidy in terms of how she phrases the lines in singing, and this, plus the acoustic sound and the relaxed tempo, creates an atmosphere that is much more reminiscent of Cassidy than of Sting, although Torgersen’s choice of instrumentation also adds something new and different. What legitimizes such mixing and matching, and not least the leaving out of various elements, is a range of factors, including the difficulty of transferring semantic content when the lyrics have to match the music, the possibly more ephemeral quality of the musical imprint on listeners’ memories (as compared with the textual imprint), and not least the expectation that the singer-translator adds something of their own to the new version, that their voices are manifest.

 Another reason why singer-translators’ voices are generally quite manifest is that they are expected to be strongly audible also in the various promotional contexts surrounding their translated product, such as giving interviews and writing and publishing various forms of promotional texts and CD liner notes. Here, singer-translators get to display their voices – not indirectly via an artistic product (where the enunciating subject plays hide-and-seek among the voices of the author and various narrators and characters, see Taivalkoski-Shilov and Suchet 2013) – but more directly, as a more unambiguous “I” speaking to a “you.”[[4]](#endnote-4) This aspect of the difference between textual and contextual expression could perhaps be fruitfully looked at through the lens of Sophie Marnette’s interpretation of Oswald Ducrot’s polyphonic theory of enunciation. Following Lacan, Ducrot argues in favor of a split subject consisting of three actors: a speaking subject, who produces a given utterance; a locutor, the “I” of the utterance, who takes responsibility for the act of enunciation; and an enunciator or enunciators, who are responsible for the point of view expressed (Marnette 2005; see also Taivalkoski-Shilov and Suchet 2013:5–9). In the case of translation, the translator is the speaking (or writing) subject, arguably partly a locutor, and sometimes an enunciator (at least if they are *singer*-translators, see below). When speaking as themselves in interviews, however, translators are speaking subjects, full locutors, if not always full enunciators (nobody ever is – insofar as we always quote, borrow, and hedge, often unwilling to pin ourselves down completely to a particular point of view). On this latter – contextual – arena, singer-translators often avail themselves of the opportunity to be explicit about the rationale behind the various choices made in the translation process, from the choice of source artist to the choice of translation strategies with regard to lyrics and music. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Kjell Inge Torgersen, where he describes his first encounter with Sting’s music:

[TORGERSEN:] It was *feinschmecker* music in the borderland between pop and jazz, and in addition, the artist came across as a politically, religiously, and socially committed person with values beyond the musical aspects.

[INTERVIEWER:] *Was this important for you?*

[TORGERSEN:] Yes, I like artists who care for other things besides themselves, like U2 has also always done. (*Vårt Land* 2006)[[5]](#endnote-5)

Sting’s sociopolitically committed outlook is here stated as a significant factor guiding Torgersen’s choice to translate the former’s music, and Torgersen has later, through his translated album, demonstrated a similar type of commitment, particularly within the area of language policy. Torgersen has on more than one occasion explained that he chose to translate Sting’s music into Nynorsk rather than Bokmål because of what he considers to be the former’s superiority as a language of poetry and song, thus signaling an intention to promote this (minority) variety (Greenall 2015b).

Statements such as these can be found in various kinds of material and play alongside the singer-translator’s lyrico-musical contribution in a complementary and dialogical fashion, where the movements within both main categories of material converge on the notion of voice. Still, if we want to make the claim that observations from textual (translated) and contextual (paratextual and/or sociological) material indeed point toward the same phenomenon ­– that is, voice – we need to establish a better understanding of what these observations have in common, in order to be able to say that they constitute *commensurable* evidence of voice.

**3. The singer-translator’s textual and contextual voice as performance**

The possibility I explore in the remainder of this chapter is that the common ground shared by these main forms of expression within singer-translatorship – the textual, expressed in various forms of recorded or live performance, and the contextual, expressed in various forms of written or spoken media – is that both involve *performativity*, understood here as the property of an act that causes this act to have a potential or actual impact on its surroundings (cf. Sætre et al. 2010b:9). Translating, performing in the studio or on stage, and making statements in the media are all forms of *doing* whose essential purpose, in this case, is to build the singer-translator’s identity as a translator and performing artist.[[6]](#endnote-6) The multisemioticity and general multifacetedness of the “full” singer-translation act makes it a good case for such an exploration, since, as I show below, it touches on the full breadth of issues within debates on the notion of performativity, including as it does linguistic, extra-linguistic, translational, and “literal” performance (i.e., performance in a studio or on stage).

*3.1 Performativity*

According to Austin (1970:233), we are “more than entitled not to know what the word ‘performative’ means. It is a new word and an ugly word, and perhaps it does not mean anything very much. But at any rate there is one thing in its favour, it is not a profound word.” This humorously self-deprecating statement wildly understates, of course, the significance that the notion has assumed and the role it has played in the aftermath of Austin’s book *How to Do Things with Words* ([1962] 1975).

Rather than going deeply into the ancestry, history, and the sum total of debates surrounding the notion (for such an account, see for example Sætre et al. 2010a), I limit myself here to examining three issues that concern the relationship between the textual and contextual dimensions of voice in the case of singer-translatorship: What is the relationship between verbal and non-verbal acts in regard to performativity? What is the relationship between non-fictional and fictional acts in regard to performativity? And what is the relationship between “everyday performativity” and actual, literal performance?

*3.1.1 The performativity of verbal vs. non-verbal utterances*

The Austinian starting point is given by the initial distinction between *performative* and *constative* utterances. Performative utterances constitute acts (so-called illocutionary acts) that, if performed in the right context and in the right way, bring about changes in the external world (i.e., have perlocutionary effects), such as a baby having been christened, a couple having been married, or a promise having been made. *Constative* utterances, by contrast, are simply statements of fact that can be either true or false. This distinction was later erased, however, when Austin came to the conclusion that “to state is every bit as much to perform an illocutionary act as, say, to warn or to pronounce” ([1962] 1975:134). Despite this, he admitted to at least one difference between the performative and the entity formerly known as the constative, namely, that while many performatives have an identifiable “perlocutionary object” ([1962] 1975:140) – that is, a conventionally associated effect, such as “convincing” in the case of “persuading” and “alerting” in the case of “warning” – constatives do not, which he offered as an explanation for “why we [philosophers] give ‘statements’ a certain special position” ([1962] 1975:140).

 While Austin and his colleague John Searle (1969) were, by and large, strictly concerned with the performativity of verbal communication, others have sought to export the notion into the non-verbal realm. One name with which the notion of performative is strongly associated is the gender theorist Judith Butler ([1990] 1999), who outlines a theory that views both language use *and* non-linguistic cultural practices as enacting and re-enacting gender identities. From this vantage point, I would claim, it is possible to view language use and non-linguistic cultural practices as capable of enacting and re-enacting any form of identity, not just gender identity (e.g., in the current case, artistic identity).

Butler’s position challenges Austin’s strict preoccupation with convention, in particular the notion, mentioned above, that an illocutionary act most often will have a (particularized) perlocutionary object associated with it. We would be hard pressed to establish any specific conventional ties between any given act and its identity-upholding or identity-building effect. Austin did, however, include in his account the notion of a perlocutionary *sequel*, a further response or effect resulting from the perlocutionary object having been reached. Among Austin’s examples we find the act of warning, which “may achieve its perlocutionary object of alerting and also have the perlocutionary sequel of alarming” ([1962] 1975: 118). If we accept the possibility of more than one sequel (I do not see why we should not), and that there may be chains of sequels where those further down the line may become gradually less conventionally tied to the original illocutionary act, we could say that Butler’s concern with the enactment and re-enactment of identities constitutes such a further-down-the-line, *generalized* perlocutionary sequel, one that follows the production and success of one or more illocutionary and/or particularized perlocutionary acts and sequels.

J. Hillis Miller (2010:32) is one who has not been willing to “accept an intellectual lineage that goes from J. L. Austin to Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*” for a different reason. He argues that while Austin’s performative utterances presuppose a stable identity for the enunciator of a performative utterance to be performed “felicitously,” Butler sees identity as non-stable and created in the moment through various verbal and non-verbal acts. Here Miller probably overstates both the necessity for Austin’s performers’ identities to be stable (even a priest who does not feel quite at home in his calling can successfully christen a baby) and the non-stability of Butlerian identity: nowhere does she show signs of underestimating the strong pull of an identity assigned by birth (and perpetuated by institutions that frequently figure as the backdrop in Austin’s discussion of the performative, such as the church), which could perhaps be recast as a “working identity” that mostly serves us adequately and is experienced *as* stable in the here and now, and that provides the subject with a platform for negotiating that identity. Miller further objects to the association between Austin and Butler on the basis of Austin’s explicit rejection of the applicability of the notion of performativity to cases involving actual, literal performance (Austin [1962] 1975:22), while a large part of Butler’s exemplification comes precisely from this realm of actual performance (e.g., performances in drag). This is a point I will briefly return to below, but for now, my claim is this: if we follow Austin, Butler, and many others in seeing language as a form of action, there is no reasonable way to draw a theoreticaldistinction between linguistic action and other forms of embodied action, such as singing, dancing, gesturing, and using tools (whether hammers, screwdrivers, paper, or computers), although these different acts obviously come with their own particularities. Even Austin opens up for this possibility in a little-heeded statement to the effect that “[i]t is characteristic of perlocutionary acts [physical acts of uttering sounds that carry a given set of meanings] that the response achieved, or the sequel, can be achieved additionally or entirely by non-locutionary means” ([1962] 1975:119). Butler’s account shows us this clearly in regard to the generalized perlocutionary sequel. Her account takes us from a pure consideration of language and linguistics to a more integrated account of these different forms of embodied action and their impact on interactants’ cognitive environments (self-perceptions and others’ perceptions of identities) and, in further sequels, on the physical world, in terms of the various empirical manifestations and effects that having and constructing these identities may have. This in turn allows us to talk about the performativity of multisemiotic utterances,[[7]](#endnote-7) such as song translations, where linguistic expression, musical expression, fashion, stylized body language, and images fuse together into a unified whole, on the textual as well as the contextual level. Verbally and non-verbally, artists constitute themselves as artists within the texts and contexts they move within, as they enact, re-enact, and shape their identities as creative translators and artists.

*3.1.2 The performativity of non-fictional vs. fictional acts and non-translational vs. translational acts*

Austin’s account limits the occurrence of speech acts (including illocutionary and perlocutionary acts and sequels) to the non-fictional realm. For a speech act to be performed “felicitously,” according to Austin, it will have to be performed by the right people in the right kind of context. A child baptizing a toy ship with an empty milk bottle has *not* felicitously performed the act of baptizing a ship. The latter amounts to what Austin calls a “parasitic” use of language (Austin [1962] 1975:22). Authors (whom I take to include lyric writers) “playing with language” to create a fictional universe are also seen to be using language in this parasitic way (Austin [1962] 1975:22).

Many scholars have refused to accept this limitation. Lakoff and Tannen (1984:323), for example, argue against a watertight separation between language use in real life and in literature, on the grounds that the utterances produced in both cases draw on the same linguistic competence. Larsen suggests that fictional texts show “two performative dimensions: the performance in the text,” referring to the speech-acting going on between and among the characters within the work, “and the performance of the text” (Larsen 2010:69), referring to the speech-acting going on between the author-narrator and readers (or, in the case of song lyrics, listeners). Similarly, Berns (2009:97) distinguishes three levels where the performativity of speech acts is relevant in fiction: the in-text level (corresponding to Larsen’s first performative dimension), the level of the narrator, and the level of the empirical author (both corresponding to Larsen’s second performative dimension).

Even if we accept that both non-fiction and fiction contain acts that are equally valid and work in the same ways, there still remains the hurdle of arguing for the performativity of *translation*. In traditional linguistic theory, translators have not been accepted as enunciating instances, and hence translations have not been accepted as (containing) proper speech acts. Pym (2011:33) notes that the perception of the role and status of the translator and of translation is culturally determined, and that currently, “in our immediate cultures,” the definition of “translator” is that of someone whose subjectivity does not count. While it may be acknowledged, Pym states, that some measure of creativity is necessarily involved in translation processes to make up for the incongruity of languages, translators are not seen as authors in the sense that they have to, or should be made to, take responsibility for the content of the utterances they translate. Although Pym himself lists several cases that challenge the limits of such a view – for example, the two translators who were killed and severely wounded, respectively, for translating Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* – he nevertheless concludes that the translator in the typical case will be, and *should* be, exempt from such responsibility, as the Rushdie case perhaps compels one to argue.

The number and type of cases that challenge or question the strict borderline between author and translator involvement and (legitimately assigned) responsibility is, however, greater and more diverse than Pym seems to assume. Pym’s examples of exceptions largely revolve around politically and ideologically charged texts, where translators sometimes come to be held accountable and punishable for a given content disseminated through their translations. What is not mentioned are some of the more explicitly creative and also relatively prolific forms of translation, such as poetry translation and song translation, where at least in the latter case there is clear empirical support, in the form of reception data such as reviews and online comments, for a strong expectation among both professional and lay audiences to the effect that the translators *should* subjectively transform the original message, as touched upon earlier. Here, two reviewers write about their perceptions of Caroline af Ugglas’s versions of Janis Joplin’s songs:

One loudmouth interprets another loudmouth. [. . .] There is no doubt that af Ugglas sings Joplin’s classical recordings with great pathos. But she doesn’t add anything new. It all amounts to talented Joplin karaoke. (Larsson 2007)[[8]](#endnote-8)

The Swedish version’s merits lie in its pathos, charm, and the individuality she [af Ugglas] pastes onto her self-written lyrics. (Karas 2007)[[9]](#endnote-9)

Whereas Larsson somewhat ambiguously praises af Ugglas for the way in which she manages to sound almost exactly like Joplin in the way she sings, he also laments the fact that her versions do not add anything beyond what was there to begin with. Karas comments more specifically on the lyrics, praising af Ugglas for the fact that she contributes her individuality in the translation process, and in fact goes as far as characterizing af Ugglas’s Swedish lyrics as “self-written,” suggesting that af Ugglas is indeed the author of these lyrics.

Turning from culturally defined notions of authorship and translatorship to more ontologically oriented arguments regarding the relationship between the two, it has been argued that this relationship needs to be seen in the light of the basic *citationality* of language. Language is a social construction; it is always “half someone else’s” and “populated – overpopulated – with the intentions of others” (Bakhtin 1981:293–294). Each repetition or *iteration* (Derrida 1988) furthermore adds something to those intentions and transforms them. All language use is “reperformed language” (Robinson 2003:18), whether we are talking about ordinary language use or translation. Citationality and iterability thus erase a perhaps falsely erected boundary between non-translation and translation, and thus between authorship and non-authorship.[[10]](#endnote-10) According to Pym (2011:31–32), this view does not do anybody any favors, since it blurs all boundaries between different forms of language use: “to say that the translator has authorship is also to say that all authors work translationally.” But these boundaries can in fact be, as they have been, re-established in a different way, one that does not necessitate a hierarchization of the roles of author and translator and that in fact does not necessitate a reference to the roles of author and translator at all. According to Sandra Berman (2014:290), translation simply distinguishes itself by adding “reference to a particular prior text (or source). By bringing within its scope this ‘other text’ with its clearly different language(s), conventions and historical context, translation dramatizes the encounter with alterity that exists to a more limited extent in every instance of language use.” Moreover, Berman’s statement clearly carries over to the multisemiotic realm of song (and other multisemiotic) translation, insofar as “reference to a particular prior text (or source)” obviously also can be achieved non-verbally, as when singer-translator Caroline af Ugglas decides not to brush her hair for a while and ends up looking like a ruffled Janis Joplin. Finally, it demonstrates the interlinkage between the textual and non-textual levels, as a clear reference back to an original can be obvious both in virtue of the existence of some actually translated lyrics, and in the way an original source is evoked, both verbally and visually, in artist statements, interviews, and other paratextual material.

*3.1.3 The performativity of everyday linguistic and non-linguistic action vs. actual, literal performance*

Austin’s approach distinguishes between the everyday, real-life use of speech acts on the one hand and fictionality and theatrical performance on the other, considering both of the latter to constitute a parasitic use of language. This distinction is still heeded by some theorists, for example Miller (2010), who labels the former (i.e., the real-life use of speech acts) performativity1 and the latter performativity2. Miller criticizes Butler for conflating them, even though Butler (1993:95) was in fact careful to stress that the one does not necessarily equate the other. Barbara Godard (1991, 2000), by contrast, emphasizes the fundamental performativity that bridges the gap between ordinary language use and theatrical performances (here I take the latter to include any staged performance, e.g., those by musical artists such as singer-translators). While acknowledging an academic tradition that distinguishes between the two – regarding one as “behavior” and the other as “playing with behavior” – Godard sides with scholars who have stressed their similarities with reference to the ritual nature of much everyday social behavior, which means that “identities are played with, performed” (2000:329), adding a “persistent theatricality” (2000:401) to all human culture. Returning again to Austin, we could legitimately ask, What is not theatrical about being baptized or married in a church? What is not theatrical about swearing with your hand on the Bible in a courtroom?

 This view clearly bridges the gap between the contextual and the textual in song translation. A singer-translator’s voice is always *performed* voice, whether it speaks in real life, in or through various paratexts, as a co-narrator with the original songwriter in translated texts, or in literal performances of these texts. Sometimes, within the realm of singer-translatorship, all of these dimensions even merge with the literal notion of “theatre.” In Denmark, especially, the phenomenon of the *teaterkoncert* (‘theater concert’) has gained great popularity. This genre combines the stylized performativity of the concert performance with the generally even more stylized performativity of theater. The frequently found tribute and pedagogical functions of singer-translatorship (Greenall 2015b) might be one of the driving forces behind the evolution of this hybrid genre. Within it, singer-translators, in addition to or instead of performing their translated songs straightforwardly in concert, build, in collaboration with relevant agents, a theatrical performance around their repertoire, including the use of scripts, props, musicians, dancers, and (other) actors. This was done, for example, by Steffen Brandt in connection with his translations of Bob Dylan’s songs. A promotional video shows Brandt himself and his backing singer Trine Dyrholt performing the Danish version of “It's All Over Now, Baby Blue” with band musicians in the orchestra pit, artificial snow falling down on the actors’ heads, and actors posing in the style of modern dance on chairs and within wooden triangles.[[11]](#endnote-11) We can look at this as a layering of acts, from Austinian, verbal speech acts (fictional and translational, within the lyrics), to non-verbal acts (e.g., musical arrangement, choice of attire, choice of body language and poses associated with lyrical-musical performances), and finally, all of this, in a theatrical framing.

Godard (2000:337, citing Pavis 1992:138–139), sees the role of (theater) translation as one in a “‘series of concretizations’ through which the dramatic text is transformed as it is ‘written, then translated, analysed dramaturgically, staged and received by the audience’ in a different language and culture.” Each such concretization is a separate but interconnected form of social ritual, with different central participants and its own unique characteristics. Singer-translatorship generally features many of these same types of concretizations, and the theater concert features them all.

**4. Concluding remarks**

Singer-translators are *bricoleurs* who translate not only the semantic content and formal aspects of linguistic items and groups of items, but also musical elements such as instrumentation, arrangement, singing style, voice quality, and visual aspects of the original artist’s image and performance(s), all of which are subsumed under an extended view of the notion of “text” and hence belong on the textual level, as defined here. Some of these elements furthermore carry over into the contextual realm, where singer-translators display their voices – as speaking subjects/locutors/enunciators – through various media, such as album covers, websites, and TV and radio programs. In order to chart the singer-translator’s voice to its fullest extent, it is necessary to look for this voice on both these levels, that is, the multisemiotic textual level and the multimedial contextual level.

In this chapter, I have argued that what defines the different textual and contextual elements as “elements of the same order” is their performativity. All language use, including the production of fiction and translation, is fundamentally performative: language users perform speech acts that have the potential to effect changes in the world (to have perlocutionary effects), both in the cognitive environments of interlocutors and in the physical world. Other forms of semiotic expression, as Butler ([1990] 1999) and others have shown, are also fundamentally performative: like speech acts, all acts of meaning-making, by way of any semiotic system, have the potential to bring about change. It follows that if voice involves potential expression or expression – and there seems to be agreement that it does – then voice is a profoundly performative concept. Singer-translators use their voices to perform speech acts of all kinds, in all kinds of semiotic realms and media, also in order to achieve the generalized perlocutionary sequel of creating an identity for themselves as translators and artists. Moreover, it should be possible to claim at this point that *all* translators’ voices can be said to be performative in this fashion: performativity is a property of all meaning-making action; recorded or stage performance is not a required element, although this aspect of singer-translatorship does arguably make it a case particularly well suited to illustrate the issue. Even a non-singer-translator who tries to obscure his or her own participation in the translation process is in fact performing an identity: that of the translator who chooses, generally for understandable reasons, to remain in the background.[[12]](#endnote-12) Many non-singer-translators choose to depart from this trodden path, however, by engaging in foreignizing translation, experimental translation, and political forms of translation, thereby showing that voice and performativity can never be fully harnessed.

1. Video clips where af Ugglas is interviewed about her Janis Joplin translations seem to be nonexistent. However, her Joplinesque style is evident also when she talks to interviewers about other topics, see, e.g., “Caroline af Ugglas undrar vem hon är,” YouTube video, posted by Piratförlaget, September 16, 2010, accessed September 29, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j95EazH7HI4. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. “Numre som ’Det meste af tiden’ (’Most of the Time’) og ’Jeg vil ha’ dig’ (’I Want You’) bevarer også originalernes bærende toner. Men samtidig stiller de en af de væsentligste anker mod Steffen Brandts projekt til skue: At hans fortolkninger og gendigtninger generelt er temmelig tandløse og ufarlige. Den slæbende, melankolske Daniel Lanois-lyd fra ’Most of the Time’ er for eksempel helt væk i Brandts version, […] numrene [forfalder] til kedelig middle of the road pop/rock, godt hjulpet af Nikolaj Nørlunds tamme produktion, der endnu en gang fortjener at stå for skud.” (This and all subsequent glosses are mine). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. This concept is similar to Catford’s “phonological translation” (1965:56) and Lefevere’s “[p]honemic translation” (1975:384). However, while both of these scholars see the transfer of sound as something that happens or ought to happen in combination with a preservation of as much of the grammar and semantics of the source-text elements as possible, Smith-Sivertsen’s definition allows for the possibility of a complete replacement of the semantic content of lyrics, for which there is a strong tradition in musical versioning. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This fact holds up even when we consider that in some cases, like in written interviews, the voice of the “I” can be mediated through reported speech. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. “Det var feinsmeckermusikk [sic] i grenselandet mellom pop og jazz, dessuten fremstod artisten som en politisk, religiøst, og sosialt engasjert person med verdier utover det musikalske.

*Var dét viktig for deg?*

Ja, jeg har sans for artister som vil flagge andre ting enn seg og sitt slik også U2 alltid har gjort.” [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. See also Taivalkoski-Shilov and Suchet’s (2013:2) summary of earlier research on voice, which shows (among other things) how “voices represent and create identities and subject positions.” [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. See also Pennycook’s notion of “language as part of transmodal performance” (2004:7). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. “En gaphals tolkar en annan gaphals […] det råder ingen tvekan om att af Ugglas sjunger Joplins klassiska inspelningar med stor inlevelse. Men hon tillför inget nytt. Hon framför mest begåvad Joplin-karaoke.” [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. “Den svenska versionen vinner på inlevelsen, charmen och prägeln hon klistrat fast på hennes egenskrivna texter.” [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. It is therefore curious to observe that although both are supposedly anchored in the notion of citationality, Godard’s labeling of translation as “double-voiced enunciation” (2000:336) and Folkart’s “re-enunciation” (1991) seem to imply that *only* translation is double-voiced or re-enunciated. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. “Baby Blue.mov,” YouTube video, posted by Betty Nansen Teatret, November 26, 2009, accessed August 12, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWkOv0s0t7w. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. This creates an invitation to the reader to enter into a “translation pact” (Alvstad 2014), whereby the reader reads the given work as if it was written in the original. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)