

Nordfjellmark, Konrad

Comparing different strategies in song translation by using Low's 'Pentathlon Principle'

Bachelor's thesis in *Lektorutdanning i språkfag*
Supervisor: Greenall, Annjo Klungervik

June 2020

NTNU

Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Language and Literature

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
<i>Research focus.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>The structure of the paper.....</i>	<i>3</i>
Theoretical Background	4
<i>Translation and Music.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>'Singable' translations</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Low's Pentathlon Principle.....</i>	<i>6</i>
Data & Method	8
<i>The data.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Method.....</i>	<i>8</i>
Analysis	9
1. <i>New lyrics - original music.....</i>	<i>9</i>
Semantic properties	10
Prosodic properties	10
2. <i>Translated lyrics – adapted music.....</i>	<i>11</i>
Semantic properties	12
Prosodic properties	12
Discussion.....	13
<i>Research question revisited.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Results from the analysis.....</i>	<i>13</i>
Conclusion	15
Reference list:.....	16
Discography:.....	17

Introduction

In an interview with a Norwegian newspaper, two members of the Norwegian band Hellbillies said that something dramatic happens when one goes from Norwegian to English or the other way around. The vocalist, Aslag Haugen, says that the voice gets a different tone and expression in English. The change is so dramatic that it almost sounds like a different song says Lars Håvard Haugen which is the lead guitarist, backing vocalist and co-producer (Grønnberg & Ottosen, 2012). In another interview Lars Håvard Haugen revealed that Aslag writes all of his songs in English, and that they are translated to Norwegian by their band member Arne Moslåttén (Adresseavisen, 2012). Sometimes the songs may be directly translated, other times not. Moslåttén is careful with his choice of words, he tends to pick words with the same effect as the English original (Adresseavisen, 2012). Hellbillies have found their trusted strategies when it comes to translation, but in 2020 at the Norwegian television show ‘Hver gang vi møtes’ a different Norwegian artist, named Chris Holsten, decided to translate one of Hellbillies’ songs based on a completely different strategy. I found this interesting and decided that I would like to know more about these strategies.

Research focus

This thesis intends to compare two different song translations, one in Norwegian and one in English, with different translation strategies. More specifically, this paper will look at singable translations. When one listens to a song, one can hear the singer, the musicians, the music as a whole and the text, together they complete each other. The same can be said about the ‘pentathlon principle’, a list of criteria created by Peter Low (2003) where every ‘principle’ must be considered in order to get a high overall result. These principles can be seen as criteria for singable translations and they should be seen as an ideal when practicing singable translation. I will use these principals in order to analyze two song translations, that are translated based on different strategies in order to classify one as the better translation.

Can Low’s ‘pentathlon principle’ be used in order to deem a singable translation better than another, when different strategies have been used?

The structure of the paper

This thesis contains several chapters which I deem necessary in order to answer my research question. The first chapter will be a theoretical background which will define the relationship between translation and music, define the term- and the use of singable translations, and present Low's 'pentathlon principle' which can be seen as 5 important criteria which should be considered in singable translations. After the theoretical background I will introduce the data for the analysis and the method I will use in my analysis. The method will be based on Low's pentathlon principle. The next chapter will contain the analysis, a descriptive and qualitative analysis of two different translations which are analyzed identically. The results from the analysis will be discussed in the following discussion, where I seek to use the results from the analysis to answer my research question. Lastly there will be a conclusion which will summarize the most important findings throughout this thesis.

Theoretical Background

Translation and Music

Music translation has been a neglected field within translational studies, until quite recently (Susam-Sarajeva, 2008). Susam-Sarajeva (2008) suggests that the complexities and challenges viewed from a methodological and a multi-disciplinary point of view, might be some of the main reasons behind this neglect. Musical material has traditionally been considered outside the borders of translation studies, this might be a cause for the limited interest in combining translation and music. One would think that a ‘text’ type which affects people in such a manner would be the first and most researched within translation studies, however, this has not been the case. It is difficult to explain how music works culturally and this might be one of the reasons why it is not taken sufficiently seriously (Susam-Sarajeva, 2008). The unclear boundaries between ‘translation’, ‘adaptation’, ‘version’, ‘rewriting’ and so forth, is another reason. However, there has been a shift in attitude in the recent years. *Skopos* is a term which in the 70’s got introduced to translation theory. It is a Greek word which means ‘aim’ or ‘purpose,’ and functions as a technical term for the purpose of a translation and of the action of translating (Munday, 2016). According to Susam-Sarajeva (2008) translated song-texts might have various purposes and considering the *skopos* theory is therefore highly relevant in the context of translation and music. In addition to the new mindset combined with *skopos* in song translation, recent research has begun to account for the diversity and the complexity of the practices involved (Susam-Sarajeva, 2008).

‘Singable’ translations

Susam-Sarajeva (2008) explains that there are several purposes linked to translation and music. Some purposes can be translating for musical films, translating international musicals or shows for local stages or translating popular songs for singable versions (Susam-Sarajeva, 2008). The possibilities are many, but Franzon (2014) expresses that there are mainly two factors one needs to consider when creating a translation of a song-text; “is the translation going to be singable or not?” (p. 374). This thesis will focus on translations which are ‘singable.’ Creating a singable translation is a complicated task, song-texts do not resemble the texts which translators usually handle. A song-text can sometimes resemble a poetic text and other times resemble those of drama (Low, 2003). When singable song translations seeks to be comprehended instantly and directly by their audience, they are especially valid, Low (2003) argues. Singable translation has been attempted frequently, and they have been used

often enough to give the task legitimacy (Low, 2003). We are surrounded by singable translations in many forms and variations, they can occur as operas, musicals, hymns and thousands of other songs sung in translation. According to Low (2003), singable translation attempts can often be marked as ‘defective.’ Low (2003) blames two reasons: the inherent difficulty of the task and the poor strategies of some people who have attempted it. The latter will be discussed in conjunction with this paper’s analysis.

As a term Franzon (2014) suggests that singability can be understood in two ways; Low’s restricted way where the words need to be easy to sing to particular note values, and the less restricted way where ‘singability’ can be linked to performability. Franzon’s (2014) ideal song translation allows the song’s essential values of music, lyrics and sung performance to be reproduced in a target language, however, this is an impossible ideal. Instead, Franzon suggests that one should allow some of the essential values from the original in order to create an acceptable song translation. This definition leaves the translator with a number of choices, according to Franzon (2016) he or she may:

1. Leave the song untranslated
2. Translate the lyrics without taking the music into account
3. Write new lyrics to the original music with no overt relation to the original lyrics
4. Translate the lyrics and adapt the music accordingly – sometimes to the extent that a brand-new composition is deemed necessary
5. Adapting the translation to the original music (Franzon, 2016).

Low's Pentathlon Principle

Most research articles on song translation are focused on *why* a song has been translated, Low (2003) on the other hand focused on *how* a song has been translated. Low (2003) uses Olympic pentathletes as a metaphor for his 'pentathlon principle'; Olympic pentathletes must compete in five different events in order to optimize their overall scoring. This means that a pentathlete must do good in javelin and discus, while also saving energy for the following 1,500 meters. The pentathlete cannot do amazingly in javelin throw while undermining the other events, that would not award a medal. According to Low (2003), the translator also has five criteria to satisfy in order to get good end result. These criteria are (Low, 2003):

1. *Singability*
2. *Sense*
3. *Naturalness*
4. *Rhythm*
5. *Rhyme*

Singability is the first of the five criteria, Low (2003) explains that this criterion is a top priority in singable translations, although he considers it to be pragmatic. Effectiveness on stage is a notion often used in drama translations and it can also be related to singability. This means that singable translations require 'performability' (Low, 2003). In addition to creating a translation which can be delivered at performance speed, being able to convey the meaning of the original song is one of Low's five criteria. The second criterion is called *sense*, which sets out to transfer the meaning from the original song text to the translated text. In informative texts semantic accuracy is essential, while song translations usually allow some exceptions in order to fit in with the other criteria. In singable translation, *sense* can be kept even though a precise lexical equivalent is replaced by a near synonym or particular metaphor which conveys the same meaning (Low, 2003).

A song text needs to communicate effectively on the first encounter, which means it must sound *natural* for the receiving audience (Low, 2003). In written text, slow reading and re-reading might be useful strategies in order to understand the meaning, however the processing time cannot be lengthened much in songs (Low, 2003). This is why *naturalness* is Low's the third criterion. *Rhyme*, which is the fourth criterion works especially well with the 'pentathlon principle.' 'The tail indeed wags the dog' is a metaphor Low (2003) uses for end-

rhymes in songs, and perhaps *rhyme* in the pentathlon principle. Low (2003) explains that in cases where rhyme can be lost without cost, this is a good option. In other cases, rhyme is important to retain the songs integrity. There might be instances where retaining the rhyme can cause loss of meaning and using imperfect rhymes may be necessary to prevent semantic loss. In short, rhyme should be included when translating songs, but with some margin of flexibility (Low, 2003).

Low's (2003) fifth criterion is *rhythm*. He explains that the number of syllables in songs can be a common problem for song translators. Some translators seem to consider it essential that e.g. the eight-syllable lines in the original must be rendered into eight-syllable lines in the translated song. Low (2003) emphasizes that this is highly desirable, but that it might be applied too rigidly. In situations where identical syllable count creates unacceptably awkward results or the melody is changed, a change in rhythm should be allowed (Low, 2003). Again, by tolerating some deviations and compromises in each of the five criteria, one can avoid severe translation errors in any single area. According to Low (2003), a translator who seeks to work according to the 'pentathlon principle' will attempt to score highly overall and allows slight deviations within each criterion in order to do so. There is a greater chance of a successful translation, if there are margins of compromise allowed (Low, 2003).

Data & Method

The data

The song translations I have chosen are comparable because they are from the same band, they involve the same languages and they are both singable. One translation goes from English to Norwegian and the other one goes from Norwegian to English, but that does not affect the results. Based on Franzon's understanding the translators have used common translation strategies where one changes the lyrics in order to fit the music, while the other one seeks to translate the lyrics while adapting the music, I want to find out which one of these strategies proves most successful.

Method

I will do a side by side comparison of the song-pairs using tables, as shown below. I will present the Norwegian song-text in the left field, a direct translation of the Norwegian version in the center (because this thesis is intended for English readers) and the English song-text in the right field. From each example I have chosen to focus on 2 verses and 1 refrain, the verses will be presented in blue cells while the refrain will be presented in red cells within the two tables. I have marked rhyme-pairs with corresponding colors, and they are also written in bold. After each table I will present a descriptive and qualitative analysis of the data in the corresponding table, this analysis will be based on Low's 'pentathlon principle' and will be divided into two parts. The first part will focus on the semantic properties, which includes Low's definition of *sense* and *naturalness*, and the second part will focus on the prosodic properties which is *rhyme*, *rhythm* and *singability*.

Analysis

1. New lyrics - original music

Table 1

T.U. ¹	TT ₂ : 'Det ingen andre ser' - Hellbillies	DT ₃ of the Norwegian version	ST ₄ : 'Seven Bridges Crossed' – Hellbillies
1 – V	Kæm æ'ru i dag?	[who are you today?]	Why do you come around?
2	Va spigjilen snill med fjeset?	[was the mirror kind to your face?]	It's time that i'm feeling lonely
3	Då æ'ru kansi i slag	[then you are probably in a good mood]	Without making a sound
4	Ell stod 'ru upp te ein kolsvart dag?	[or did you wake up to a pitch-black day?]	You slip in than stare out through my eyes
5 – R	Dæ'æ merkeleg at alt fargast av tanken du har	[it is strange that everything is colored by the thought you have]	A cool game to play , a strange night to a very strange day
6	Frå trist te lykkeleg , tanken forandra det meste	[from sadness to happiness, the thought can change the most]	It's hard to find your way , entering the twilight zone
7	Frå fint te skrekkeleg , men dæ'æ tanken du ser	[from nice to terrible, but it is only the thought you see]	Seems like yesterday , but its so very long ago
8 -V	Det fjeset som bur	[the face that lives]	with a riddle to solve
9	Bakom dogg på badet	[behind the dew in the bathroom]	I get tricked into your mind-game
10	Er noko du trur	[is something you believe]	Seven bridges to cross
11	Då ser du det ingen andre ser	[then you see something no one else does]	Know my way, but wind up getting lost.

¹ T.U. – translation units

² TT – target text

³ DT – direct translation

⁴ ST – source text

Semantic properties

The direct translation is intended to assist the notion of *sense*, or fidelity to the source text. By comparing the direct translation and the English source text one can see that the translators have not focused on staying faithful to the semantic meaning of the text. They have not sought to use precise lexical equivalents or near synonyms in the act of translation. They both share the same topic of sorts, but it is presented differently. When the vocalist performs the English source text, he sings about someone he struggles to understand, while in the Norwegian translation he sings about a someone who struggles to understand him- or herself. I believe that the naturalness in the TT cannot be questioned, the song-text communicates effectively, and it is understood on the first encounter, one would think that this song is originally written in Norwegian. The translation is also in the exact same music genre as the original. This means that an audience would not notice any unnatural language in the target text but could notice a difference in *sense* from the original song.

Prosodics properties

The rhyme-pairs are written in bold and with corresponding colors. By comparing the source text and the target text one can see that the translator chose to use a similar pattern in the translation. The rhymes in the translation do not end on the same consonants or vowels, due to a change of words, but the rhyme pattern is almost identical to the source text. There are some deviations, but especially the refrain (written inside red cells) shows a lot of similarity. Not only did the translators seek to retain the use *rhyme* in a similar pattern, they also sought to retain the *rhythm* and the *singability*. The number of syllables within each line is identical to the source text, and the syllables are stressed identically which makes room for an identical melody. The closeness in rhyme and rhythm allows for a successful singability. As mentioned, the vocal melody is carried over to the translation, if one does not consider the different words they use, the song sounds almost identical to the original. It seems like the translators' intention with target text was to create new lyrics in order to fit the same music.

⁵ Prosody concerns elements of speech or song related to intonation, tone, stress and rhythm

2. Translated lyrics – adapted music

3. Table 2

T.U.	ST: 'Søvnlau' - Hellbillies (Norwegian)	DT of the Norwegian version	TT: 'Sleepless (Søvnlau)' – Chris Holsten (English)
1 - V	Når tunge tanka truga,	[when heavy thoughts are present]	When every thought surround you ,
2	når du har hatt ein dårlig dag	[when you have had a bad day]	and every day is a rainy day
3	Når ingen løysning duga,	[when no solutions work]	When mighty change have found you
4	står løftet mitt ved lag	[my promise still stands]	I promise to remain
5 - V	Når ingen kjennes ved deg,	[when no one is around you]	And when you are feeling lonely
6	når gamle venner går forbi	[when old friends walk past]	and good old friends just pass you by
7	Når du bær noko med deg,	[when you carry something with you]	When every change comes slowly
8	som du aldri helt blir fri	[that you never will get completely rid of]	though I know how hard you try
9 - R	Kom nå te meg for eg vil deg vel,	[now come to me because I want the best for you]	Twin my head and let me make you smile,
10	e elska deg med kropp og sjel	[I love you with body and soul]	I'll love you till the day I'll die
11	Og det dei har tatt fra deg vil e	[and what they have taken from you, I will]	I'll heal the scars they left you with
12	gjerne gje deg att	[gladly give you back]	and make you feel alright
13	eg kan sjå at du har hatt	[I can see that you have had]	and together we will fight
14	nok ei søvnlaus natt	[another sleepless night]	another sleepless night

Semantic properties

First and foremost, this example stands out in comparison to the first example. The direct translation shows that the ST and TT are much closer in *sense*. In the translated version the translator has prioritized to maintain many of the elements in order to keep much of the song's integrity. The TT manages to maintain the meaning of the song because the translator has replaced lexical equivalents with near synonyms and some metaphors have been replaced with other metaphors. In scenarios where 'dårlig dag (bad day)' has been translated into 'rainy day' the intended meaning stays the same. When it comes to naturalness it is important to mention that the translation undergoes a change in genre. From country-rock to a soul-pop, Aslag Haugen (the vocalist in Hellbillies) said that Holsten's version sounded like Bruno Mars did Hellbillies (Støre & Bøe, 2020). I must admit that I am not a native English speaker, but I would say that Holsten presents a song that sounds natural.

Prosodic properties

Similar to the first analysis, the translator has chosen to maintain most rhyme-pairs from the ST, as shown with the words written in bold and with corresponding colors. Also similar to the first example, the translator has chosen to mostly maintain the number of syllables within each line. However, there are some deviations in this TT. In T.U. 14 'nok ei søvnlaus natt' consist of 5 syllables while the corresponding 'another sleepless night' has 6 syllables. As a result of the slight change in rhythm, the vocal melody is also slightly altered. This is perhaps a result of the shift in genre and with intention to allow for some more vocal improvisation. Despite the slight shift in rhythm and vocal melody the translation is absolutely 'performable', and the translation is successful when it comes to *singability*. The choice of words allows a similar pattern for stressed syllables, which allows for a vocal performance close to the original. As mentioned earlier, the song undergoes a change in genre where the vocalist is more in focus than in the original. The changes that have been made are probably done to suit the personal style of the artist in addition to highlight the vocalist more than the original does.

Discussion

Research question revisited

In this thesis, I set out to test if Low's 'pentathlon principle' could be used in order to deem one translation more successful than the other. I compared two translations which originated from the same Norwegian band, where the translators used different strategies and prioritized differently. Both the translated songs are closely related to the originals but in various ways.

Results from the analysis

The analysis showed a lot of differences between the two translations based on Low's 'pentathlon principle.' The first analysis showed that the translation of the song 'Seven Bridges Crossed' kept almost every prosodic element. The rhyme-scheme, the syllable count and the singability is close to identical in the translation and based on the criteria set by Low they are successfully used in the translation. In combination with the identical use of instruments and the identical prosodic elements in the translation, there is no doubt that these songs are closely related. However, this translated song is not completely identical to the original, the semantic properties are very much altered. The language is changed from English to Norwegian, this means that some changes are necessary, in this translation the perfect maintaining of Low's *rhythm, rhyme, singability and naturalness* seems to come at a cost to *sense*. In the analysis I argued that the topic portrayed in the song-text is somewhat similar to the original but that is it. If I were to use the same metaphor as Low, I would say that this the song translator of 'Seven Bridges Crossed' had excellent results in the first 4 events but scored badly at the last event, which means that the overall score was not that great.

On the other hand, the second translation, 'Sleepless (Søvnløs),' managed to get a high overall score, which means that the language barrier between English and Norwegian allows for successful song translations. Based on Low's criteria this translation did not maintain any elements identical to the original, but some deviation in every element resulted in a high score overall. This translation seems to be a part of Low's ideal singable translations, where the overall score is in focus. Low (2003) expresses that the objective of making a singable translation is a particular purpose or *skopos* in itself, but I imagine that another focus on purpose is necessary to substantiate the results from the analysis. Holsten's intention with his translated version of 'Søvnløs' was to honor the original version and its composers, it seems

like he sought to stay faithful to the original while adjusting it to fit his personal performance style. Holsten even cooperated with one of the original writers in order to create an English version of the originally Norwegian song (Støre & Bøe, 2020). Hellbillies translated their own song into Norwegian and honoring the original did not seem to be the focus. The band relies on a large Norwegian fanbase, when they wanted to produce an English album, they decided it was necessary to create a Norwegian version as well, in order to satisfy their Norwegian audience.

Hellbillies managed to create a successful song, but it is perhaps more of an adaptation than a translation. If none of the original meaning is transmitted, it cannot be labelled a translation, it is rather referred to as an adaptation (Low, 2013). It is possible to assume that Hellbillies created an adaptation of the original, because the TT seems to have a topic which is somewhat related to the first one. Low says that “a translation is a TT where all significant details of meaning have been transferred, whereas an adaptation is a derivative text where significant details of meaning have not been transferred which easily could have been” (2013, p. 237). By comparing the source text and the target text in ‘Det Ingen Andre Ser’, one cannot find many similarities in terms of meaning, but the topic is somewhat similar. Hellbillies changed the title of the song from ‘Seven Bridges Crossed’ to ‘Det Ingen Andre Ser (translation: what no one else sees)’, this can also be used as an argument when suggesting that the song is something different than a translation. All these assumptions are based on the results from the analysis, which shows that the ‘pentathlon principle’ can be used in order to deem one translation better than the other. Whether ‘Sleepless (Søvnløs)’ by Chris Holsten is a better song than ‘Det Ingen Andre Ser’ by Hellbillies is to each his own, however, based on the criteria set by Low ‘Sleepless (Søvnløs)’ is more successful for singable translation.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to investigate if one translation can be seen as more effective than another by using Low's 'pentathlon principle' as a mode of comparison. Based on Franzon's list of choices for a translator, I decided to compare a translation where one translation has new lyrics to original music and the other has translated the lyrics and adapted the music. I decided to do a qualitative analysis which discovered that one of the translated songs scored higher based on Low's criteria than the other. According to Low, a singable translation may be deemed successful if it manages to balance between the five criteria: *singability*, *sense*, *naturalness*, *rhyme* and *rhythm*. Compared to an Olympic pentathlon, the translation must have good results in every event in order to get a high overall score. Low allows slight deviations in every criterium in order to succeed overall, but he points out that the neglect of one or more events might lead to a low overall score.

I found out that 'Det Ingen Andre Ser' by Hellbillies got a low score as a singable translation, because it neglected *sense*, which is one of Low's criteria. This was perhaps a result of the identical use of all the other criteria. When a song-text is translated from one language to another some changes are bound to happen, Hellbillies sacrificed *sense* or meaning in order to maintain the rest. One could argue that Hellbillies created an adaptation or an alternative version instead of a translation, but as Susam-Sarajeva (2008) expressed the boundaries between translation and adaptation in song translations can be unclear. Holsten with the song 'Sleepless (Søvnløs)' succeeded in creating a translation which got a high overall score based on the 'pentathlon principle.' As mentioned, some changes are bound to happen when a song translation from one language to another seeks to fulfil Low's 'pentathlon principle,' but as he would argue himself, some deviations might be necessary in order to get the best possible overall result. It seems that Low's 'pentathlon principle' can be used in order to uncover the most successful strategies used in singable translations.

Reference list:

- Franzon, J. (2008). Choices in Song Translation: Singability in Print, Subtitles and Sung Performance. *The Translator: Translation and Music*, 14(2), 373-399.
- Grønneberg, A. & Ottosen, P. (2012, July 03). Hellbillies gjør det ingen trodde de ville. *Dagbladet*. Retrieved from: <https://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/hellbillies-gjor-det-ingen-trodde-de-ville/63223545>
- Munday, J. (2016). *Introducing translation studies : Theories and applications* (4th ed.). London: Routledge.
- NTB. (2012, July 03). Hellbillies synger på Engelsk. *Adresseavisen*. Retrieved from: <https://www.adressa.no/kultur/musikk/article3233793.ece>
- Low, P. (2003). Singable translations of songs. *Perspectives*, 11(2), 87-103.
- Low, P. (2013). When Songs Cross Language Borders: Translations, Adaptations and 'Replacement Texts'. *The Translator*, 19(2), 229-244.
- Støre, M. & Bøe, T. M. (2020, January 18). Haugens kveld i «Hver gang vi møtes» - VGs dom låt for låt. *VG*. Retrieved from: <https://www.vg.no/rampelys/i/kJGwG9/haugens-kveld-i-hver-gang-vi-moetes-vgs-dom-laar-for-laar>
- Susam-Sarajeva, S. (2008). Translation and Music: Changing Perspectives, Frameworks and Significance. *The Translator: Translation and Music*, 14(2), 187-200.

Discography:

Haugen, A., Haugen, L., H. & Aadland, T., R. (2016). *Søvnlaus*. On *Søvnlaus* [Spotify].
Norway: Caroline International/Universal Music AS.

Haugen, A. & Moslåtten, A. (2013). *Seven Bridges Crossed*. On *Seven Bridges Crossed*
[Spotify]. Norway: Caroline International/Universal Music AS.

Haugen, A. & Moslåtten, A. (2012). *Det ingen andre ser*. On *Tretten* [Spotify]. Norway:
Caroline International/Universal Music AS.

Holsten, C & Aadland, T., R. (2020). *Sleepless (Søvnlaus)*. On *Aslag Haugens Dag (Sesong 9)*. Norway: Mastiff Music.