

# **Making a Case for a Descriptive-Explanatory Approach to Song Translation Research: Concepts, Trends and Models**

Greenall et al. 2021 ([annjo.k.greenall@ntnu.no](mailto:annjo.k.greenall@ntnu.no))

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## **1. Introduction**

A fundamental characteristic of music is that it is made to be *shared*, with a few or many people, in different situations, within or across cultures. In the course of this sharing, both the words that often accompany the music and the music itself undergo *changes*, in form or content. Translation – both in a narrow and broader senses – is often involved in such processes, in various ways: words get translated from one language to another while the music remains unchanged, both words and music undergo alterations, the words travel unchanged while the music changes, and so on.

Residing until recently in the outskirts of disciplines such as musicology, translation studies and literary studies, academic interest in music and translation is currently rapidly growing.<sup>1</sup> A great range of articles and a sizeable number of substantial works on the topic have appeared over the last ten years. Helen Julia

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<sup>1</sup> At least in the Western world, see Jun (2017: 93) on the apparent lack of interest in studying song translation in China.

Minor's *Music, Text and Translation* (2013), an anthology presenting a diverse range of case studies of opera, art songs and popular songs, focuses on the mutual influence of lyrics and music in translational processes. Finnish translation scholar Irmeli Helin's *Nachhaltige Botschaft in den Stürmen der Geschichte: Kirchenlieder der Lutherzeit in ihren alten und neuen finnischen Übersetzungen* (2017) compares a selection of Martin Luther's hymns with their various Finnish translations. Two further monographs, Şebnem Susam-Saraeva's *Translation and Popular Music: Transcultural Intimacy in Turkish-Greek Relations* (2015) and Lucile Desblache's *Music and Translation: New Mediations in the Digital Age* (2019), focus on music and translation as cultural exchange, delving more deeply into the interrelationships between text, music, sociocultural and sociohistorical factors in translational processes within popular music and opera, respectively. Popular music and art music are also the respective main pivots in two influential books with a primarily practical or instructive intent written by authors who are also seasoned practitioners within music and translation, namely Peter Low (*Translating Song: Lyrics and Texts*, 2016), and Ronnie Apter and Mark Herman (*Translating for Singing: The Theory and Craft of Translating Lyrics*, 2016).

Every new, substantial contribution to a field needs to prove itself to be doing a job that previous works have revealed the need for, either by somehow neglecting it or expressly inviting it, and the current book is of course no exception. And the following is more or less how we see our mission: the literature referred to above has provided the field with many interesting case studies from all around the world, enlightening readerships on a multitude of genres (folk songs, jazz, Christmas carols, rock songs, pop songs, hymns, Lieder, schlager music, opera, musicals, hip-hop, spirituals, etc.) looked at from the vantage point of a wide range of academic perspectives, such as literary adaptation studies, semiotics, dubbing and subtitling, fan studies, translation studies, music studies and accessibility studies. Opera and translation being a field that is relatively well covered in the literature (from Calvocoressi 1921 to Wilson-deRoze 2017), we turn our attention, here, to the song format. Previous studies of song translation have provided us with the beginnings of a broad overview of different translation practices at various times in various regions, and the field has become equipped with several new concepts explicitly tailor-made to the study of music and

translation, such as *intercode translation* (Gorlée 1997), *singability* (Low 2003, 2017; Franzon 2008, 2009, 2015), and *interlingual covers* (Susam-Saraeva 2016, 2018). Two broad tracks are identifiable within the field: on the one hand, lyrics-focused studies which often, explicitly or implicitly, revolve around giving advice to translators on how to translate, and on the other, studies of song translations as historical and sociocultural acts and objects. In this book, we would like to place lyrics centre stage, but from an expressly non-instructional, non-evaluative, *descriptivist* angle, an approach which also entails a historical and sociocultural focus. In his seminal book, *Descriptive Translation Studies – and Beyond* (1995), Gideon Toury encourages researchers to build up a body of descriptive studies focused on patterns of textual shifts and their sociocultural explanations. In this volume, we take inspiration from this approach, as well as from Susam-Saraeva’s (2008) call for

more descriptive and systemic studies [in the field of music and translation], focusing on questions such as: Who translates material that involves music? Where do they disseminate their translations? What is translated in the first place? For whom? **What kind of translation strategies, choices and decisions are adopted? And most importantly, why?** (195, our emphasis)

In this book, we present a set of descriptive studies largely – but not exclusively – turned towards the latter two of this set of questions. These studies demonstrate the wide variety of different contexts that music lyrics enter into dialogue with, such as musical, linguistic, performative, visual, medial, social, historical, cultural and technological. From different angles, they can all help answer the question of ‘why’ various strategies, choices and decisions, are adopted.

In the following, we briefly discuss some concepts central to the sub-field of ‘song translation studies’, before presenting a visualization – a map – of where this sub-field might conceivably be situated within a hierarchy of related (sub-)fields. Next follows a broad overview of the theoretical and empirical ground covered by previous works that we perceive as falling within the sub-field, before we introduce the volume’s various contributions.

## 2. The Basic Concepts

When studying song lyric translations, one needs to have an idea of what one means by *song*, *lyrics*, *translation* and *context*. Hence, in the following we discuss some definitional criteria for each of these concepts.

### 2.1. Song

*Song* can be defined generally and simply as a piece of music performed by a single voice, with or without instrumental accompaniment (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed October, 2019). More elaborately, *The Harvard Brief Dictionary of Music* (Apel/Daniel 1971) has characterized it as a short composition for solo voice, usually accompanied by the piano, based on a poetic text and composed in such a way as to enhance rather than overshadow the significance of the text. Others, who have compared operatic arias to songs, have pointed out that the former is characterized by an emphasis on the musical elaboration, while in songs the words and the music are of equal importance (Apel/Daniel 1971: 278). Yet others have characterized songs as “plurisemiotic artefacts” (Fernandéz 2015: 270) or “mediated multiple text” (Kaindl 2005b: 241). In all of these cases, the providers of the definitions and characterizations have a particular genre in mind (here, art song vs. popular song), meaning some aspects of the characterizations will not fit songs from other genres. For example, popular songs, while they most often have a lead vocal, are not always performed ‘by a single voice’: often, there are several voices involved, even large choirs. And a German *Lied* performed live in concert is perhaps not best portrayed as a mediated multiple text. Hunting for a definition of song that fits all genres is not an easy task, but the following may be a starting point: a song is “a piece of music and lyrics – in which one has been adapted to the other, or both to one another – designed for singing performance” (Franzon 2008: 367). In order to distinguish it from for example opera, however, reference also has to be made to the song’s length: a song is generally thought of as a delimited entity; compared to a full opera, it is short. Finally, songs typically have a recognizable form: many genres

of song have elements such as verses and choruses, refrains and bridges, although here there is of course a lot of variation.

## **2.2. Song lyrics**

By *song lyrics*, we simply mean words bound to a piece of music in a song. Consequently, a lyric is a text which has been adapted to music (either through original writing or through translation) or has had a piece of music adapted to it. Song lyrics are predominantly oral texts meant for singing. Discussing translation, however, we need to bear in mind that lyrics can be translated for the purpose of understanding rather than singing (see e.g. Low 2003b: 94–95; Kaross 2013; Susam-Saraeva 2015: 63–95). If lyrics are made for singing performance, the relationship between the words and the music operates on the levels of both content and form. On the level of content, song lyrics, like poems, often implicitly suggest meanings rather than spell them out in lucid detail, and these meanings interact with musical meanings to form meaningful wholes. On the level of form, lyrics can shape conventional (or unconventional) patterns of verse, or patterns in a phonetic, vocal flow, through the distribution of stressed and unstressed syllables over strong and weak beats, open syllables over long notes and closed syllables over short notes. As mentioned in 2.1. songs are typically short, but there are genres, such as traditional ballads, that have long, epic, detailed narratives.

## **2.3. Translation**

*Translation* is understood here, broadly, as a textual or non-textual operation which can be (but is often not) geared towards maximum semantic closeness to a given source text. The degree of closeness or distance from the source text is governed by contextual factors, where the *purpose* of the translation – such as singability in the case of song translation – is one such, all-important factor, demonstrating the clear relevance of functional translation studies for song translation research (Nord 1997, 2005, 2011). Inherited normative conceptions of translation (““equivalent” translation is good translation’) and a lack of awareness of the importance of context and purpose may be the reason the emerging field of

song translation studies still seems preoccupied with the impossible task of drawing a line between translation and what cannot be regarded as translation. Nevertheless, there is obviously a gliding scale from a situation with strong intertextual links between a source text lyric and a target text lyric, on the one hand, and very few or no such links on the other (see e.g. Susam-Saraeva 2008: 189; Franzon 2008; Kvam 2018: 272ff.).

Both close and not-so-close interlingual translation of verbal matter in song translation is frequently accompanied by changes to the non-verbal (musical, visual) elements of the song because of changes in the lyrics, as motivated by new functions of the song in the target environment and new cultural contexts (cf. Minors 2013; Desblache 2019: 4, 67). Changes at this level may or may not appear to warrant description by means of the label ‘translation’. Susam-Saraeva has recently proposed a new concept – *interlingual covers* – to designate recordings or performances of songs resulting from interlingual activity, thus “covering all the various linguistic activities which may be deployed during the process: translation, adaptation, appropriation, and rewriting of the lyrics from scratch” (Susam-Saraeva 2018: 2). Such covers may include a switch in performer, and changes to the music and/or accompanying music videos (Susam-Saraeva, this volume). By mentioning the most important levels on which changes typically occur (lyrics, performer, musical arrangement and visuals), this definition comes across as a good alternative to the split notion of translation/adaptation within song translation research. The concept is not universally suitable, however, and may for example be less fitting for such song genres as art song, since we do not usually talk about ‘covers’ in those genres. Moreover, it excludes the phenomenon of intralingual song translation, which is also an interesting and important part of the larger picture (see the respective chapters by Fryer and Salvarani in this volume).

## 2.4. Context

A final concept that plays a crucial part in this book is that of *context*. Context can be looked at and talked about in two fundamentally different ways. Perhaps most commonly, context is thought of as elements that have some kind of independent

existence outside of the perceiving individual, in other words “situational information” (Abowd et al. 1999: 304), used in the interpretation of a given focal element such as a word, a textual passage, a musical element, a material object, an action or a situation. Others take a socio-cognitive stance, holding that all such knowledge cannot be seen as independent of human socio-cognitive environments but is rather filtered through such environments. In this volume, the predominant view of context aligns itself with the first of these two stances. Lyrics are seen as surrounded by various ontologically grounded (but also cognitively apprehended, of course) forms of situational information, spanning from the most immediate context, that is the musical context, via the functional context (as constituted by the purpose of the translation), to various forms of sociocultural context, encompassing ideologies, the temporal dimension, institutions, audiences, and so on.

### **3. Translation Studies and Song Translation: A Map**

Interdisciplinary by nature, studies of songs and song lyrics in translation have emerged from a number of different overarching fields, mostly musicology and literary studies but occasionally also popular music studies, theatre studies and, increasingly, translation studies. Because of this broad provenance, a multitude of different and valuable perspectives have been accumulated, but contributors have also often operated without much knowledge of one another, leading to a typical lack of interconnectivity between works and thus to a certain lack of a common momentum. A possible remedy would be to consolidate the position of song translation research within translation studies, which is an interdisciplinary field (see e.g. Snell-Hornby et al. 1994) and thus well-suited to accommodate a complex object of study such as songs in translation, functioning as a meeting-place for researchers within the discipline. Looking at song translation research as a sub-branch of translation studies might moreover invite a somewhat closer attention to some of translation studies’ central concepts and insights, honed and distilled for decades within that field, that are equally basic to song translation research but are not always taken sufficiently into account or properly understood. Although many song translation scholars are familiar with translation studies, they

sometimes show traces of assumptions and concepts that have largely been left behind in such studies. One such assumption is that it should be possible to objectively identify a clear cut-off point between the phenomenon of ‘translation’ and ‘non-translation’, with the latter often labelled ‘adaptation’. Another is that the notion of ‘original text’ is something that can be unproblematically used to label the point of departure for a given translation: in fact, especially when it comes to song translation, the notions of ‘original’ and ‘originality’ are often extremely relative.

Translation studies could furthermore, we believe, add general perspectives and provide useful methodological tools for song translation research, such as those developed within descriptive translation studies, which we are drawing on in this volume. Conversely, bringing music into the field of translation studies might also broaden the horizons of scholars within that larger discipline (a point also noted by di Giovanni 2017: 15 and Desblache 2019: 6).

The top node in our Figure 1 below is thus *translation studies*. This node is connected to a several established sub-fields which we do not name (for reasons of lack of space), apart from *audiovisual translation*, which, as will be argued below, can be reasonably conceived as the mother node for translation and music. Below that node are several concepts used for labelling translation studies subfields. The map<sup>2</sup> in Figure 1 further attempts to see various subcategories of song translation research in relation to each other.

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<sup>2</sup> Other overviews of music and translation exist in the form of so-called maps, which are useful and give important insight into the relationships between various aspects of music and translation, e.g. Kaindl and Desblache’s (2013) map in Desblache (2019: 220), and Qin Jun’s map (Jun 2017: 94). The former, however, is too comprehensive for our purposes, and the latter not comprehensive enough.



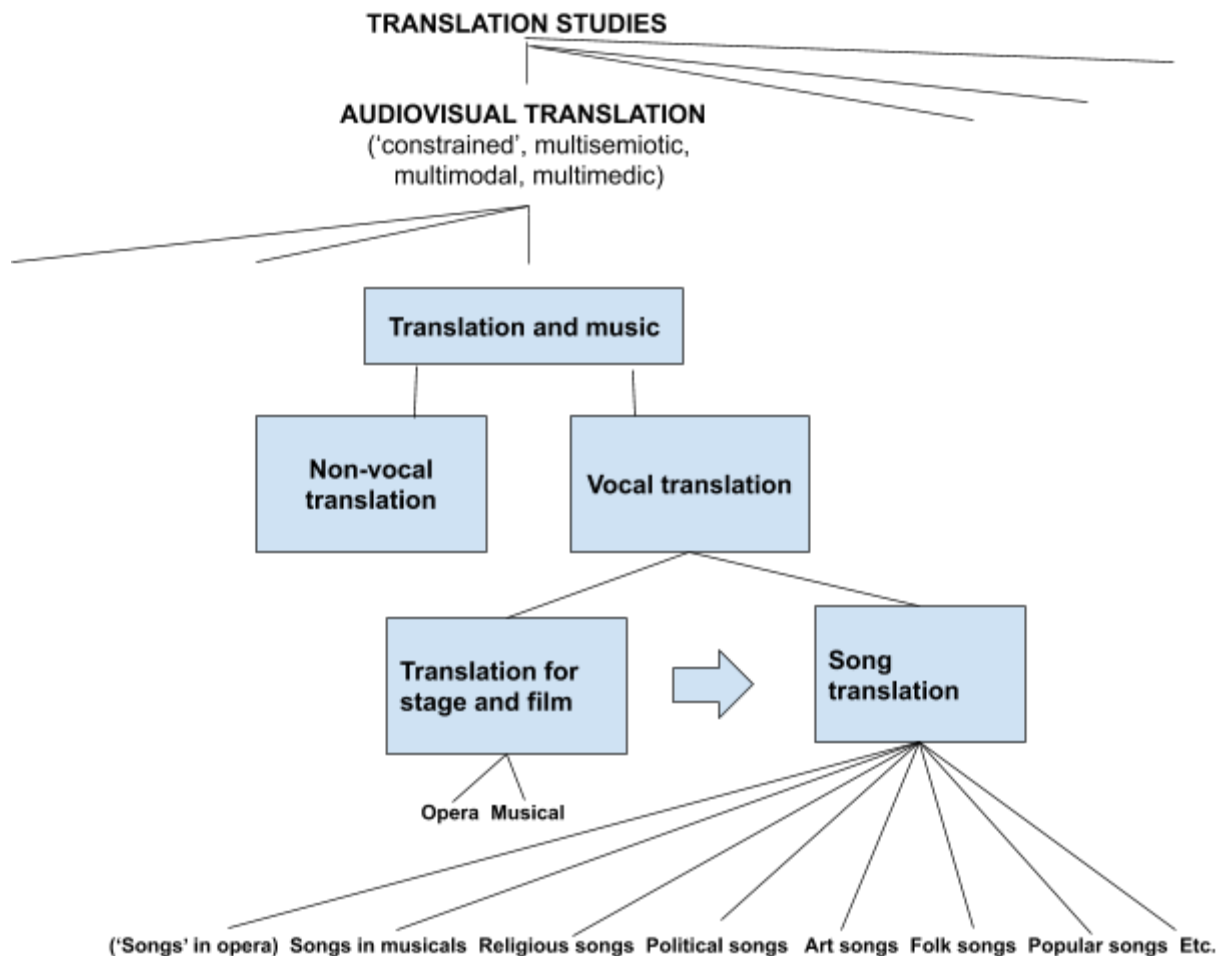


Fig. 1. Translation studies and song translation research: A map

Within translation studies, audiovisual translation (AVT) is one of the relatively new sub-fields that have experienced rapid growth in the last few decades, and now finds itself solidly established. Several scholars have argued that AVT and song translation have much in common. Susam-Saraeva (2019) and Jimenéz (2017) both point to general similarities and an overlap of data within the two fields: the object of study is in both cases *multisemiotic* (several semiotic codes, and not just the verbal one, communicate alongside and in interaction with each other), *multimodal* (several modalities, e.g. sound and visuals, are often involved), and *multimedial* (different media – TV, radio, the internet – are used in dispersing the product in question). Moreover, both AVT and song translation are forms of *constrained translation* (a term coined by Titford 1982: 113ff. to characterize prototypical AVT; see also Mayoral et al. 1988, and Cintrão 2009: 814–815). This notion refers to the idea that the translator of the verbal elements enjoys less

freedom in terms of choosing the form of the translated utterance because the verbal content depends so greatly on other aspects of the intersemiotic, multimodal and multimedial whole. In subtitling, for example, the translation generally has to be shorter than the dialogue it is based on, given the limited amount of space and time allowed for each piece of dialogue on the screen. In dubbing, lip syncing is a major factor in allowing which and how many words it will be possible to fit in. In singable song translation, the existing music exercises a similar constraint.<sup>3</sup> In all three cases, these constraints often lead to a translation where the verbal content is further removed semantically from the source than current *expectancy norms* (Chesterman 1997: 64ff.) for many other kinds of translation usually ‘allow’. Finally, as music and songs are ubiquitous in many kinds of AV products, AVT theorists have already had the opportunity to discuss all the various ways they are being dealt with in translation. We thus consider translation and music, on the most general level, as a sub-branch of AVT.

*Translation and music* (e.g. Susam-Saraeva 2008; Minors 2013; Desblache 2019) seems to have established itself as a generally accepted overarching term, encompassing research on any musical genre, with or without lyrics, regardless of theoretical or methodological approach.<sup>4</sup> Below this node, we find *non-vocal* and *vocal translation* (Gorlée 2005). Purely non-vocal (i.e. instrumental) music undergoing some kind of versioning can also be (and has been) looked at through the prism of the notion of translation, particularly through an extension of Roman Jakobson’s notion of intersemiotic translation (see e.g. Desblache 2019). Vocal music – although it does not always involve words, as in the case of vocalises or in Sami yoik (understood as partly hum or chant in Anderson 2005) – usually involves verbal and non-verbal matter in fluid combination. Vocal translation is further subdivided into *translation for stage and film* on the one hand – singing integrated in larger musical structures<sup>5</sup> – and *song translation* on the other. This

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. also the notion of non-verbal semiotics as a specific constraint for song translations (Kvam 2018: 281–284).

<sup>4</sup> *Music-linked translation* (Golomb 2005) is a similarly general term, which has gained a little currency.

<sup>5</sup> Larger musical structures include such differing genres as oratorios as well as oral epics sung in traditional cultures all over the world and arguably comparable to a staged performance. For various such traditions compared and discussed as performances, see for example Reichl (2000).

distinction cannot be drawn too tightly, since the former category can be seen to contain ‘songs’ (at least ‘parts’, such as arias, recitatives, trios, etc.). The justification for separating these two genres into two boxes is, however, rooted in generic differences that require different types of analyses and treatment and typical differences in research focus,<sup>6</sup> which has led to a largely shared perception of the two as separate areas. In other words, we find there to be good reason to recognize song translation research as an independent category. Figure 1 lists, below the song translation box, a number of different types or genres of song – this list is of course not exhaustive. As will be seen, research has been carried out on many such types/genres, but not on all, and not extensively.

#### **4. Some Trends in Current Song Translation Research**

The field of song translation research is no longer as understudied as it was a decade or two ago: a great number of studies have been produced recently, and interest seems to be on an upward trajectory. But the field does still seem somewhat disparate and even fragmented: because of its aforementioned interdisciplinarity, research may become buried, so to speak, within different disciplines, thus being easily missed and hence sometimes overlooked by researchers from other disciplines.

This fragmentary state of the field makes it challenging to see patterns or trends in the research. As in most other academic fields, it is possible to distinguish between predominantly conceptual/conceptualizing works on the one hand, and predominantly empirical works on the other. Both types tend to take a particular genre as their point of departure or focus, such as operatic songs, songs in musicals, religious songs and political songs. Empirical work can be further

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<sup>6</sup> As noted by Susam-Saraeva (2019), research on translations of opera and other art music typically focuses on accessibility (i.e. the purpose of increasing the number and type of audiences that are able to enjoy the artistic output). Studies on opera translation also encompass aspects of production history and cultural politics in parallel with theatre translation studies. An exponent of this field of study is the forthcoming volume edited by Şerban and Chan titled *Opera and Translation*. Research on non-canonized – popular – musical genres (typically songs) in translation usually focuses on their journeys within and across cultures (Susam-Saraeva 2019: 351).

subdivided into work that looks at how lyrics are translated in (and as a result of) their varying contexts and how songs travel within and across cultural contexts. In addition, a branch of what we might call *applied song translation studies* has been developing, one preoccupied with the role of song translation and translated songs in for example accessibility and pedagogical contexts.

Contributions to the more conceptually-oriented and concept-providing branch include the frequently cited works of Peter Low (2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2016) and Johan Franzon (2005, 2008, 2015). Low, a seasoned practitioner within music and translation, has produced several models for analysis of lyrics in translation, among others the pentathlon principle (2003a, 2005), which outlines five different parameters that song translators need to navigate among and within when translating:

- sense
- singability
- naturalness
- rhyme
- rhythm

Intended to guide song translators in their striving towards optimal translations (and perhaps also to assist researchers in identifying such optimal translations), Low's work and his categories have also been put to good use in some more descriptively oriented studies. Both Low and Franzon have gone into depth with regard to the crucial notion of the singability of lyrics, which the latter defines as “a musico-verbal fit of a text to music” (Franzon 2008: 373). Taking popular music as his point of departure, Franzon, too, offers tools for analysis of lyrics in translation, for example his much-used list of options available to the budding song translator, namely “not translating the lyrics, translating the lyrics without taking the music into consideration, writing new lyrics, adapting the music to the translation, and adapting the translation to the music” (ibid.).

While work by Low, Franzon and similar scholars tends to focus on the translation of lyrics in their musical, but also functional, or purposive, context, other predominantly conceptual studies have dispersed the spotlight more broadly, moving slightly or fully away from lyrics and towards further contexts, for

example the interplay between the various semiotic layers involved in song translation (e.g. Kaindl 2005a, 2005b, 2012, 2013). Yet other studies have focused on the role of the song translator him or herself, also an important part of the context: for example, Greenall (2014, 2015, 2017b) looks into the motivations of singer-translators of popular music for carrying out translations (tribute, artistic, pedagogical and political), and into the role of the translator's *voice* (metaphorical and non-metaphorical) in shaping the translated product. A substantial group of researchers, such as Susam-Saraeva (2015, 2018), Okyayuz (2016) and Desblache (2019), have focused on music and translation as cultural exchange, theorizing around the interrelationships between text, music and sociocultural and sociohistorical factors in translational processes.

Some of the predominantly empirical studies on song translation, especially those adopting the more instructionally oriented representatives of the literature as a point of departure, tend to be overtly or more subtly evaluative, assuming a 'right' or 'wrong' way of translating songs, which is fine, of course, as long as the work in question is open about its prescriptive/evaluative aim. This is, unfortunately, not always the case – many a work that strongly or weakly professes scientific objectivity ends up slipping into evaluative subjectivity (see, e.g. Aminoroaya/Amirian 2016). A majority of recent analyses, however, can be characterized as non-evaluative or descriptive, or more precisely, *descriptive-explanatory*, a term that more precisely captures the nature of descriptivist research, proposed by Saldanha and O'Brien (2013: 50). Most of them preoccupy themselves with one single genre, for example art song, where we find works by for example Beavitt (2018), who looks at the translation of Schubert's *Winterreise* into English, Apter and Herman (2012), who analyse Rachmaninoff's *Six Choral Songs*, and Kvam (2016), who examines English translations of Schubert songs into English. Furthermore, Helin (2017) investigates the genre of religious songs, comparing a selection of Martin Luther's hymns with their various Finnish translations. Popular and folk music genres are of course also strongly represented: Amini et al. (2018) looked at English Christmas carols translated into Chinese and Indonesian, Risso (2016) studied the translation of hip-hop from English into Italian (see also Taviano 2012, 2016; Tervo 2014), while Opperman et al. (2018) took as their object of study the translation of songs written by a

specific singer-songwriter (i.e. Leonard Cohen; see also Mus 2018, 2019; and Angelsen/Mitchell, this volume). Bontrager (2011) analysed musical songs from animated Disney movies translated from English into Spanish. Musical songs, whether in Disney movies or not, are currently a popular topic among song translation researchers (see e.g. Khoshsaligheh/Ameri 2016; Stopar 2016; Di Giovanni 2017; Metin Tekin/Isisag 2017; Reus 2017, 2018). One particularly interesting example is constituted by Liubinienė and Beniušytė-Milašienė's (2014) study of the translation of songs from the 2004 animated feature film *Garfield* for a Lithuanian audience. The authors found that the main strategies used were to replace the original soundtracks by Lithuanian popular and folk songs, to transcreate lyrics, and even to put additional songs in the movie, employing voices of popular local actors who were well-known to Lithuanians, strategies that led to great commercial success.

Other noteworthy (sub-)genres that are represented on the popular music side are mid-century, commercial hit tunes or schlager music (Schmitz-Gropengießer 2012; Smith-Sivertsen 2016), country music (Haapaniemi/Laakkonen 2019) and *chansons* (Tinker 2005; Fernandez 2015). When it comes to the large category of folk music, which may contain vastly different types of lyrical and musical forms in different cultures, we find, among others, studies of Jordanic folk songs translated from Arabic into English (Al-Azzam/Al-Kharabsheh 2011), Kurdish folk songs translated into Turkish (Öner 2008) and spirituals translated from English into French (Desblache 2001). Al-Azzam and Al-Kharabsheh (2011) in particular demonstrate problems characteristic of songs in an oral tradition, such as even understanding the source text rightly.

Some of these studies, as well as others that have yet to be mentioned, centre on specific composers or artists. This holds for Cintrão (2009), where the topic is the Brazilian artist (and previous minister of culture) Gilberto Gil's translation of songs by Anglo-American pop artists as well as translations of his own songs into English. Finally, some researchers present case studies of single songs, for example Guthrie (2007), who looks at various English-language reinventions of Weill and Brecht's "Die Moritat von Mackie Messer" (often as "The Ballad of Mack the Knife"), and Fochi (2019), who traces the sociomusicological and linguistic journey of the Italian song "O sole mio" into the American market.

Finally, Haapaniemi and Laakkonen (2019) examine Hank Williams' "Ramblin' Man" in translation into Finnish, with an interesting focus on the materiality of the song as sung and refashioned by the translator himself.

Finally, song translations are discussed in relation to a variegated canvas of *contexts*, from the immediate, musical context (e.g. rhythm, rhyme, musical meaning), to technological, visual, paratextual, functional, artistic, literary, institutional, historical, biographical, social, cultural and political contexts (see e.g. Senior 2001). In fact, much of the newer work within song translation research focuses less on the translated lyrics or songs and more on precisely the historical, social, cultural and political contexts that surround this activity. One representative of this branch is Fruela Fernandez, whose study of Jacques Brel as covered by the American artist Scott Walker is focused on how cultural products are produced and disseminated, with the ultimate aim of showing "how the study of translation can become an exploratory tool in historical and cultural analysis" (Fernandez 2015: 269). Susam-Saraeva characterizes this branch as research that investigates "the travels of non-canonized genres across linguistic and cultural borders and the role translations play in these travels" (2019: 351). Susam-Saraeva's own work, mentioned here again because of its empirical emphasis, is a strong representative of this focus, especially her 2015 book on the role of translation in the Turkish-Greek rapprochement in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Marc's (2015) work on 'travelling songs' in general and Rollason's (2007) case study on Bob Dylan in the Spanish-speaking world also belong here, as does, arguably, Hayakawa's (2010) study of German *Lieder* in Japan.

We mentioned at the outset of this section that some scholarship orients itself towards what could perhaps be characterized as an applied branch of song translation studies. Many works on accessibility – translation for the visually impaired and deaf/hard of hearing – are focused on opera translation and hence not on song as such; one notable exception, however, is Maler (2013), who studies the translation of English-language songs into American Sign Language (cf. Viljanmaa, this volume). Another fast-growing sub-field deals with the role of song translation and song translations in second or foreign language learning (e.g. Hewitt 2000; Kaross et al. 2012; Greenall 2017a).

A miscellaneous set of studies which may point to future trends within song translation research includes two studies focused on especially complex intersemiotic relationships between the source, the target and their contexts. In Yeung (2008), the author analyses intertextual aspects of the way Gustav Mahler's "Das Lied von der Erde" is translated into a semiotically complex modern Chinese dance, while Nadiani and Rundle (2016) present an account of interlingual translations between non-musical and musical texts (more precisely, they report on a creative project where "poems in Romagnolo dialect [a variety of Italian] are transposed into English and performed as blues songs, and in which songs from the Anglo-American blues/roots/folk tradition are transposed and performed as poems in Romagnolo dialect" (Nadiani/Rundle 2016:125)). Reception studies may also prove a fruitful avenue for song translation research. We might mention here Aleksandrowicz' (2019) study on the reception of subtitled song, where he investigated whether song-like – as opposed to plain prose – translations in subtitles made a difference to the audience's appreciation of the film (he found that they did not).

## **5. A Descriptive-Explanatory Approach to Studying Lyrics in Context**

As stated in the introduction, the aim of the book is to place lyrics and their translation centre stage. A descriptive approach typically investigates translation strategies, patterns in the use of such strategies, and how the choice of translation strategy is influenced by various aspects of the surrounding context (Toury 1995). Song translation research also investigates strategy use in song translation, and some researchers have borrowed and/or adapted categories from precisely translation studies. Kvam (2014, 2018), for example, adapts Christiane Nord's approach (Nord 1997, 2005), while Aminoroaya and Amirian (2016) borrowed the 12 micro-strategic categories formulated by Schjoldager et al. (2008) (direct transfer, calque, direct translation, oblique translation, explicitation, adaptation, etc.) in their study of songs in Persian dubbed animated movies, finding that direct translation and adaptation were the strategies most often deployed by the dubbing



translators, and that this and other, less prominent results could largely be explained with reference to constraints in the dubbing situation. Amini et al. (2018) made use of Ana Guerra's (2012) list of 15 translation strategies (adaptation, borrowing, calque, compensation, omission, description, equivalence, etc.) in order to look for patterns in the translations of English Christmas carols, finding that the most used strategy in Chinese translations was equivalence, as motivated by a linguacultural mismatch between English and Chinese, while for Indonesian translations omission was more common, as motivated by a desire to recreate rhythm and rhyme. Finally, Risso (2016) used strategy labels from works on poetry translation (notably from Lefevere 1975) to identify what translators of rap do, finding that they generally produce rhyme translations, free-verse translations and mixed translations.

Strategies specific to song translation have also been suggested in some of the more conceptually-oriented song translation research. Many of these, often-cited categories were originally proposed with a prescriptive intention, but they can easily be (as they often have been) re-interpreted as descriptive categories, since what some scholars ask translators to do is often what translators typically do anyway. We have subsumed these specific strategy categories under three headings, reflecting the journey from initial to increasingly more specific strategic decisions:

**Macrolevel strategies:**

1. The decision not to translate
2. The decision to translate, which triggers the need for the next level of decisions, whether to:
  - a. Translate non-singably, or
  - b. Translate singably

**Mezzolevel strategies:**<sup>7</sup> Approximation vs. redoing: rewriting / domesticating / formally adjusting

**Microlevel strategies:** Detailed strategies for approximation or redoing

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<sup>7</sup> See Kelandrias (this volume), whose Schjoldager-inspired 'macrostrategies' cover both our macrolevel and mezzolevel strategies.

The decision whether to translate a given song or not is not as obvious as it may seem, hence the two major macrolevel strategies, to translate or not to translate. Penrod (2017) reports on the conflict, among art song enthusiasts, regarding whether such songs ought to be sung in the original or whether it is acceptable to translate them, and Greenall (2014a) discusses the fact that though many artists choose to cover pop songs in the original language, translating them and performing them in one's own language could produce a greater degree of perceived authenticity. Furthermore, when the decision has been made to translate the song, the next major decision is whether to translate it non-singably or singably, a decision governed by the song's purpose, or *skopos* (see Low 2003b; Kvam 2019: 185ff.). In subtitles, for example, the *skopos* may be to give the hearer/reader the gist of a given song lyric, or it may be to enable the audience to sing along to the tune using the words of the translated lyrics, something that will require two very different translations. If the song instead is dubbed and hence performed as a song, a singable target lyric is the only alternative – unless some non-sung voiceover précis of the song could be conceived of as being a possibility.

Once the decision to translate singably has been made, the mezzolevel strategies come into play. Decisions need to be made on whether some degree of approximation to the source is to be aimed at, or whether one wants to completely redo the song on different levels:

- rewrite the lyrics
- domesticate the cultural content, and/or
- formally adjust the song's rhyming, rhythmical and other singability-related properties

At the level of microstrategies, Low's pentathlon principle (2005: 191ff.), presented briefly in section 4, spells out areas attended to by translators in the translation process when trying to approximate to the source and/or make the lyrics work in their new environment. Sense, rhyme and rhythm are obvious areas; naturalness pertains to target-language idiomaticity, and singability pertains to choices to do with phonological aesthetics vs. ease of vocal performance. These are aspects, according to Low, that a song translator needs to balance in the

process of translation. Franzon (this volume), furthermore contributes a set of song-translation-specific strategies ordered in terms of a stepwise degrees of closeness:

- near-enough translation
- perspective shift
- lyric hook transposition
- single-phrase spinoff
- phonetic calque
- all-new target lyric

While all of the mentioned strategies are typically triggered by the need for adjusting the lyrics to the music and the song's wider context, it is important to remember that this is not always just a one-way movement, for instance in those cases where the music has been adapted to fit the translation (Franzon 2008: 373). Apter and Herman (2012: 28, 2016: 14–20) suggest different ways in which such musical adaptation can be done, for example by splitting, combining, adding or deleting notes. But the translation can also be seen to influence the music in more subtle ways, since the song's "total effect changes with lyrics in a different language" (Gorlée 2002: 191). Translations can also be seen to influence more widely than just the immediate, musical context. This is discussed by Di Giovanni (2017), who argues that the current shift towards re-dubbing Disney songs into a highly formal, written version of Arabic is re-shaping the diglossic situation in the Arab world and influencing identity formation among younger generations. These and other examples point to what Kaindl (2013: 152) characterizes as a dialogical relationship between text, music and their wider semiotic environments. It seems likely that both descriptivism within translation studies (where the focus is largely on the one-way movement from contextual influence to translational output) and song translation research which employs descriptivism would greatly benefit from incorporating this perspective.

One of the specific characteristics of song translation is that the lyrics of songs may enter into dialogue with a very wide range of contexts. Most central is the musical context. Indeed, the relationship between lyrics and music is so crucial that it is possible to argue that the music should not be relegated to the role of

‘mere’ context.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, like other forms of context, music may certainly influence the way lyrics are translated, for instance by determining the metre and other formal aspects, or by suggesting (by virtue of its essential properties of symmetry, contrast, segmentation and harmonic progression) a structure which the verbal text may somehow follow up on or not, through rhymes or other means.<sup>9</sup> On a cultural level, various associations brought on by genre characteristics, dance connections, orchestration, customary use or presentational arrangement of songs may or may not interact with the non-translated or translated, verbal content of the song. There are certainly perspectives, such as in literary or thematic translational analysis, that primarily focus on the lyrics, but on the whole, the music aspect of songs is hard (and many would say wrong) to ignore.

At the next contextual level we would like to place purpose, or *skopos*: facts to do with the current and intended use of the song, in the source and the target environment, respectively. A researcher might be well advised to take into account, if empirically possible, the who, where, when, how and why behind the original song, and for whom and why a translation was commissioned. Is the target situation interested in what Nord (1997, 2005) calls translation’s documentary function, that is in getting the most out of whatever was present in the source situation, or rather in its instrumental function, that is in using the material for some new, possibly quite different purpose, such as having a local hit tune or subtitling a song that was originally sung? A change of purpose will often cause changes to or expansions of the lyrical-musical source text: a song lyric may be used or translated for the purpose of being part of a musical play, concert repertoire, song book or prose text; the song may become enwrapped not just in new music and arrangements but in a whole multimodal (plurisemiotic) situation involving visuals, staging, film-making, dancing or other communal, real-life activities. These kinds of material and corporeal contextual factors may not

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<sup>8</sup> The intricate relationship between oral text and music was introduced into current translation studies by Gorfée (1997) and gets its most in-depth treatment in Apter/Herman (2016).

<sup>9</sup> In certain song translation assignments, such as singable opera translation, the formal aspects are of primary importance, presenting uncompromisable demands on the basic, phonetic level. In other cases, for example the subtitling of songs, the strophic verse or stanza shape may function merely as an indication of rhythm or tempo.

always be the focus of a given study, but one can hardly escape the possibility that they may have influenced the translation product.

Beyond *skopos* there is the larger sociocultural context. This is a big category, perhaps in some ways too big, considering all of the different sociocultural factors that in some way or other affects or explains the creation, use, perceived quality, significance or importance of a given song and its translation. Again, the relationship between the source and target situation becomes central. Is the song part of a cultural tradition, of a distinct artistic or political intention, or is it sung, promoted or popular because it ties in with some cultural value, institutional practice, intertextual discourse or national mentality? Furthermore, has the individual decision-making translator or the culture or value system acting through her/him somehow affected the process as evidenced in the product? This may also be where the interdisciplinary nature of song translation research most clearly comes into evidence. Going beyond the musical context, where one is best supported by musicology, and the *skopos* context, dealt with by the functionalist school within translation studies, the study of the sociocultural significance of songs potentially involves input from a large array of disciplines – including semiotics, ethnology, anthropology, cultural studies, social studies, literary studies, theatre or performance studies, fan studies, adaptation studies, linguistics, stylistics, popular music studies, digital technology, acoustic physics, neurocognitive research or psychology – all according to the research interest at hand.

## **6. The Contributions**

In this book, we present a wide range of descriptively oriented studies which all demonstrate the intricate relationships between lyrics or songs and their contexts. Additionally, they showcase a wide variety of ways in which these relationships can be studied. The chapters are sorted into three sections: the analysis of popular songs, historical approaches, and multimodal and didactic approaches.

### **6.1. Analyses of Popular Songs**

The first section consists of studies of one single, albeit intensely multi-faceted genre, namely 20th-century popular music.

In Chapter 2, *Panayotis Kelandrias* presents a study of English and Italian popular songs translated into Greek, from Riccardo Cocciante's "Per Lei" and Chris de Burgh's "The Revolution" to Fabrizio De André's "Dolcenera" and Florence Reece's "Which Side Are You On". Looking at different macrostrategies used in 80 songs and their translation, Kelandrias finds that the most frequently used strategy is what he calls *translational transformation* – the writing of new lyrics to the existing tune. A hypothesis that there would be differences in strategy use at different points in time (i.e. across different temporal contexts) turned out not to be confirmed: the frequency of use of different strategies in the corpus seems to have remained more or less unchanged since the 1970s until today.

In Chapter 3, *Johan Franzon* looks at a collection of American popular songs by composers such as Jerome Kern, Burt Bacharach and Dolly Parton and their translation into Swedish. Franzon finds that the majority of the songs are translated by means of the strategy he calls *near-enough translation*, defined as a translation which is "fairly close, with allowances". Franzon finds considerable variation in strategy use in the period 1916–2015, leading him to propose the existence of four different eras in Swedish song translation: the sheet music and revue era, the no-holds-barred vinyl era, the translation-phobic anglophone era, and the new-fidelity era.

In Chapter 4, *Marcus Axelsson* goes into depth regarding the journey of Tom T. Hall's country pop tune "Harper Valley P.T.A" (1968) to two Nordic countries, Norway and Sweden. The study compares the American version of the song with the Norwegian and the Swedish target texts, focusing on how the theme of hypocrisy is both kept and changed in two different contextualizations. It is shown that the Norwegian translation strengthens the hypocritical message of the original by evoking a religious context.

The next two chapters are also case-based. *Anja Angelsen* and *Domhnall Mitchell* (Chapter 5) investigate the interlingual versions of three of Leonard Cohen's songs by three different Norwegian performers, all of whom are women. Taking the notion of *recontextualization* as their analytical point of departure, the

authors mainly focus on how the textual changes from source text to target text interact with the change in the gender of the performer and with the performances themselves, to create intricate and interesting changes in the interpretative potential of the songs, and on their effects on audiences.

*Sebnem Susam-Saraeva* (Chapter 6) looks at a song by the Israeli/Arab/French singer Riff Cohen, “Dans mon quartier”, translated into Turkish as “Miş miş”. Susam-Saraeva investigates the interaction of source and target lyrics with music and performance in music videos, showing how the song products both draw on and shape socio-cultural contexts, with a focus on ethnicity and values of diversity and equality, community, gender relationships, truthfulness and justice.

In the final contribution in this section, Chapter 7, *Annjo K. Greenall* applies semantic scenes-and-frames theory to her own Norwegian translation of a 1990s Norwegian, English-language pop song (“A Kind of Christmas Card”, with lyrics by Håvard Rem). Greenall shows that scenes-and-frames semantics, which holds that verbal elements evoke chunks of knowledge in readers’ or hearers’ minds, can be a useful tool for analysing the semantic relationships between source and target lyrics, since it is capable of teasing out and representing the intricate details of how ‘lost’ semantic content is often compensated for in other parts of the target lyric. It is argued that scenes-and-frames semantics also shows promise as a tool for merging an analysis of lyrics and music in translation, since musical elements evoke scenes and frames, too.

## **6.2. Historical Approaches**

The second section features studies of songs belonging to different genres in different historical contexts.

In Chapter 8, *Mattias Lundberg* presents a study of the translation of the mediaeval Latin liturgy into Swedish vernacular in the 1530s. With Reiss and Vermeer’s functional translation theory as a point of departure, four different translational challenges are identified, and it is shown how translators responded to these in the context of 16th-century Sweden, when limited literacy meant that Swedish was still a predominantly spoken language. The author suggests that a

change of strategy may be discernible, from translating literally into awkward Swedish and to adapting the whole content of the song to the norms of the spoken vernacular.

In Chapter 9, *Sigmund Kvam* looks at Norwegian composer Edward Grieg's Norwegian songs translated into German, and his German songs translated into Norwegian. The author demonstrates the analytical usefulness of a model of pragmatic text analysis consisting of the translational-intertextual categories invariance, correspondence and variance, and concludes that there are most likely specific intertextual constraints on the translation of art song, which more than anything is dependent on the purpose of the translation within its historical context.

*Jürgen F. Schopp* (Chapter 10) gives insight into the fascinating journey of a 19th-century Finnish, but Swedish-language student song turned into a 20th-century Finnish-language national anthem. The original song from 1848, patriotically titled "Vårt land" ['Our land'], was initially given a new melody, something which sparked added popularity, although not as much as that engendered by its translation into Finnish in 1867. Historical circumstances contributed to this version of the song becoming accepted as bilingual Finland's national anthem in the early 1900s, and the whole story illustrates a change of function and a process leading to a translation taking the place of its source.

In Chapter 11, *Anastasia Parianou* investigates traditional children's songs, such as "Mary Had a Little Lamb", in interlingually as well as intralingually translated versions. She shows how changes to both lyrics and music in these versions are attributable to changes in the song's function, such as when blues and rock versions of the song by Buddy Guy (1968), Paul McCartney and Wings (1972) and Stevie Ray Vaughan (1983) address young people and adults rather than children.

*Daniel Fryer's* contribution in Chapter 12 also exemplifies intralingual translation, that is rewriting within the same language. Fryer gives an account of how the popular hymn "The Sweet By-and-By" (1868) was turned into a parody song – "The Preacher and the Slave" (1911) – by labour union man and satirist Joe Hill. The chapter looks at the lexicogrammatical and semantic choices made



by Hill in the transformation of the original song – about the promise of a better world in the afterlife – into a song about creating a better world in the here and now for early 1900s workers, in the context of the American labour movement.

### **6.3. Multimodal and Didactic Approaches**

The third and final section presents four examples of a broadening of the scope of song translation research.

In Chapter 13, *Anu Viljanmaa* looks at how Finnish sign language interpreters view the assignment of translating singing into signs. 13 interpreters responded to an online questionnaire on the topic. The responses show a split in the views of the interpreters, with some regarding it as just as any other task, choosing to translate the lyrics only, while others see it as an opportunity to portray the whole musical performance. Most of them, however, find that the most important thing is to convey the general feeling or spirit of the song.

*Britt W. Svenhard* (Chapter 14) explores intersemiotic translation, looking at the Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen’s mythopoetic figure of the troll from his poem and play *Peer Gynt*. Svenhard traces the concept’s recontextualization in Edward Grieg’s music through to the role it and this music plays in DreamWorks’ animated musical film *Trolls*. Combining translation studies, semiotics and adaptation studies, and referring also to a modern pop song by Justin Timberlake, Svenhard concludes that the concept – especially as carried by the central melody “In the Hall of the Mountain King” – both connects with Ibsen’s original, idiosyncratic conception of the troll and breaks down and reinterprets it.

The volume closes with two accounts of translation in a didactic context. In Chapter 15, *Berit Grønn* reports from a classroom experiment where students of Spanish as a foreign language experimented with translating a rap song. The translation task was assigned with the aim of practising reading comprehension, increasing the pupils’ linguistic and cultural awareness as well as their awareness of aspects of the translation process. The study also looks at what tools the pupils used (online dictionaries, contextual information) to help them perform the task, and what translation strategies they used.

*Luana Salvarani*, whose contribution (Chapter 16) concludes the volume, discusses how classic music theatre pieces by Grieg, Bernstein and Brecht and Weill were translated by the author herself into Italian for the purpose of being performed by 11- to 13-year-old pupils. Salvarani describes the hallmarks of a successful didactic song translation (e.g. a clear pedagogical focus, an engaging re-creation of ST-cultural features, ensuring ease of singing for untrained performers) as well as the kinds of skills and attitudes that are required of the didactic song translator. A final, important observation made in the chapter is that in an overarching sense, all translations are in some way didactic because each one has to take into account and adapt itself to both the users of the translation and the situation of use.

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