

Laughs in Translation: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Translating Humour in Vocal Music

University of Music and Performing Arts | Seilerstätte 26, 1010 Vienna, Seminarraum A0201 | 26 – 27 April 2024



FRI, 26 April 2024

14 – 14.30 Introduction by Livio Marcaletti & Iseult Grandjean

14.30 – 15.30 OPERATIC LAUGHTER

- Marco Agnetta: The Barber of Seville: The Buffo Operas by Paisiello and Rossini in German Translation

- Julia Ackermann: What's Comic in Opéra Comique? Transfer of an Operatic Genre in 18th Century Vienna

15.30 – 16 Coffee Break

16 – 17 TRANSLATION AND WAR

- Juri Giannini: Translating Falstaff for the German Stage

- Alaz Pesen: Song Translation as Humour: Trevor Noah's Comic Versions of the German National Anthem

17 – 18 OF CATS AND GIRLS: AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION IN TV & FILM

- Yen-Mai Tran-Gervat: Subtitled Humour in the Songs of The Young Girls of Rochefort

- Carmela Simmarano: It's Always About the (Smelly) Cat: Comparative Analysis of Singable Adaptation Strategies in Three Sitcoms' (Cat) Songs

SA, 27 April 2024

9 – 10 Keynote by Klaus Kaindl: „For my Laughter, Do Excuse Me!” A Multimodal Framework for the Translation of Verbo-Musical Humour

10 – 11 FUNNY BOYS: SINGER-SONGWRITER IN TRANSLATION

- Anna Rędzioch-Korkuz: Multimodal Translation of Humour: A Case of A Boy Named Sue

- Jean-Charles Meunier: A Brand New “Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat”: Orality and Multimodality in the Translation of Bob Dylan's Humour

11 – 11.30 Coffee Break

11.30 – 12.30 FUNNY, NOT FUNNY, THEN FUNNY AGAIN: HUMOUR AND CONTEXT

- Karina Zybina: The Wonderful Adventures of The Cairo Goose: Translating Mozart's Opera Fragment

- Giovanni Raffa: Musical Parody in Audiovisual Translation

12.30 – 13 Conclusion by Livio Marcaletti & Iseult Grandjean

Marco Agnetta, Institut für Translationswissenschaft, Universität Innsbruck | *The Barber of Seville: The Buffo Operas by Paisiello and Rossini in German Translation*

This article focuses on Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais' Figaro trilogy, a work that is firmly established in the literary and even more so in the operatic canon, from which researchers and the interested public can still gain many insights. The story of the two comedies *Le barbier de Séville* ou *La précaution inutile* (1775) and *La folle journée* ou *Le mariage de Figaro* (1784), as well as the drama *L'autre Tartuffe* ou *La mère coupable* (1792), is still very much alive. *The new Tartuffe* or *The Guilty Mother* provides a rich source of material for historically oriented literary, music and, not least, translation studies, especially when viewed from an operatic-aesthetic perspective. While Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* has already been the subject of a number of translation studies in various German translations, other operas that are indebted to this operatic material still tend to take a back seat. Giovanni Paisiello's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1787) and Giachino Rossini's *Almaviva o sia L'inutile precauzione* (1816), later named *Il barbiere di Siviglia* as well, were similarly if not more successful in their time. However, the number of translations of these two works alone shows the selective interest of posterity in the buffo literature of the late 18th and early 19th centuries: The countless translations of Mozart's work contrast with a handful of German translations. Also, the discourse on 'opera translation', which in the 20th century tended to focus on the Italian works of the German-Austrian master, makes only a few references to the operas of his Italian contemporaries. The aim of this article will be to understand where in Paisiello's and Rossini's work comedy is created in the multimodal interplay and how this is changed by the new German version in terms of expression and impact.

Julia Ackermann, Institut für Musikwissenschaft und Interpretationsforschung, mdw | *What's Comic in Opéra Comique? Transfer of an Operatic Genre in 18th-Century Vienna*

The transfer of French opéra comique to Vienna in the second half of the 18th century is a multifaceted topic. During this time, the genre appeared in a variety of versions, in both French and German language and on many different theater stages between the Viennese court and suburbs. The talk first addresses a fundamental translation problem of the opéra comique: In its beginnings, this operatic genre was based on the re-textualisation of well-known melodies. Comedy arose above all through the intertextual references between the old text (thought by the audience) and the new text (sung on stage). But how can you deal with this phenomenon in translation when the lyrics of the initial melodies are not known to the new audience and so the intertextual level is omitted? In a second step, the specificity of the Viennese opéra comique transfer is examined: One aspect is that the strict moral standards of the Viennese court required the (supposed) "defusing" of lewdness in the translation. Also, the specific performance conditions shaped the transfer in each case, for example when the new version of a play was adapted to suit a specific actress and her characteristic comic stage talent. Various questions about comedy on the opera stage can then be discussed: Based on the vaudeville practice: how are text and music linked when they only mentally sound in the listener's ear but are not sung on stage? Where is the line between 18th century Paris and Vienna that divides suggestive humour and crude obscenity? How does the performance of an actor influence the comic effect of a role and how do we gain information on that around 250 years after the performance?

Juri Giannini, Institut für Musikwissenschaft und Interpretationsforschung, mdw | *Translating Falstaff for the German Stage(s)*

Giuseppe Verdi's and Arrigo Boito's "commedia lirica" *Falstaff* had a successful and immediate reception in the German theatrical world: The first German translation of this opera was made in 1893 (the same year of *Falstaff*'s premiere in Milan) by Max Kalbeck. 40 years later, the Munich State Opera commissioned a new translation from Hans Swarowsky for a production in 1941. As in Kalbeck's case, this translation was also immediately published and included in Ricordi's editorial catalogue. Due to its historical and literary sources, *Falstaff* deals among other things with models of humour rooted in late medieval culture, constructing many of its puns and jokes through the exaltation of corporeality and using the terminology of war in a metaphorical way.

Considering the fact that Swarowsky's translation was produced and performed during World War II, this paper will analyse selected passages and phrases of his text, examining whether in the translation process humour was "mitigated" or "altered" as a consequence of (self)-censorship procedures conditioned by the political and ideological context of the performance as well as by the daily real-life experience of the audiences.

Alaz Pesen, Department of Translation and Interpreting, Istanbul Atlas University | *Song Translation as Humour: Trevor Noah's Comic Versions of the German National Anthem*

Numerous scholars assert that the process of song translation entails the intralingual and/or interlingual rewriting of a specific song, irrespective of whether such rewriting closely aligns with the original content or not (Franzon 2008; Kaindl 2005; Pesen 2010, 2019, 2022; Susam-Sarajeva 2008, 2015). The target lyrics may significantly deviate from the source lyrics at the expense of singability (Franzon, 2008, p. 376). Furthermore, Kaindl challenges a limited perspective on songs as written texts, advocating a holistic approach considering music, lyrics, the harmony between the two and the visual aspects (2005, 240). These insights are also valuable in the context of translating songs for comic performance. Taking into consideration the changes in music, lyrics and visual aspects, my analysis focuses on Trevor Noah's comic performance of the intralingual and interlingual translations of the German national anthem. In his 2023 Netflix special, *Where was I?*, the comedian Trevor Noah highlights the significance of recognizing and learning from history, using Germany as a case in point. He recounts several post-World War II legal changes in Germany and amusingly illustrates the alteration of the national anthem's lyrics. Noah humorously performs the original German lyrics and then, in English with a German accent, sings it as "Germany, Germany over everything, over everything in the World." He playfully comments on the precision of the Germans, suggesting that, unlike most anthems, theirs is not merely theoretical (!). The audience responds with laughter. Subsequently, he vocalizes the post-war rendition of the German national anthem, initially in its native German and subsequently in a German-accented English rendition: "Unity and rights and freedom, for all the people who live in Germany." Concluding his performance, Noah introduces a distinct, humorously altered third version of the song, eliciting even heightened laughter from the audience. All in all, this impact talk analyzes and compares the three versions in English performed by Noah from a holistic perspective, inviting the audience to reflect on similar (or different?) cases of song translation as humour.

Yen-Mai Tran-Gervat, Département de Littérature Générale et Comparée, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle | *Subtitled Humour in the Songs of The Young Girls of Rochefort (Jacques Demy, 1967)*

The twins from Jacques Demy's 1967 musical *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort* describe themselves in their song as "aimant la ritournelle, les calembours et les bons mots" (subtitled in English as "who love catchy tunes, silly puns, and repartee"): in other words, as song and humour lovers, which reflects the tone of the whole film and of many other songs which may not be as famous as this one. In this paper, I aim to study how the humour present in the various songs of *The Young Girls of Rochefort* was translated (by Lenny Borger and Cynthia Schoch) for the English speaking audience through subtitles that had to follow the rhythm, if not strictly of the songs themselves – you may not always be able to sing the translation –, at least of the musical structure and image flow.

Carmela Simmarano, Faculty of Philology, Universidad de Sevilla/Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro | *It's Always About The (Smelly) Cat: Comparative Analysis of Singable Adaptation Strategies In Three Sitcoms' (Cat) Songs*

This short paper aims to shed a light on some of the most popular songs among the viewers of modern TV comedies and the challenges in their cross-cultural adaptation in dubbing from English into Italian and Spanish. As a matter of fact, sitcom is one of the most complex, and hence interesting, intermedial product among TV series, because of the funny sketches, the cultural and

linguistic wordplays and its comic turn on situations of everyday life (López, 2008: 17). Vocal music, in the form of ditties or even entire original songs, often take an important role in this shows, becoming signature pieces reenacted inside and outside the series. The dubbing translators of this kind of music pieces thus carry the burden of a very complex intersemiotic task: to deliver funny, catchy verses that match the character, the story, the type of humor, but also the underlying music, while being able of standing on their own in another language and culture (Susam-Serajeva, 2008). This is why this talk will focus on some pieces of the two most popular sitcoms to date: *Friends*' song called "Smelly Cat", and *How I Met Your Mother*'s songs on photo montages made by the character Marshall, as coincidental as it is, both concerning a cat. By starting with the analysis of the music pieces and their adaptations to Italian, Peninsular Spanish and American Spanish, the paper will lead to a wider discussion on music pieces in sitcoms and their cultural, linguistic and rhythmic adaptation. Comparing the songs from the two shows intends to stimulate the dialogue on commercial and strategic adaptation choices, cultural impact of translations, the difference in humour between music and TV series but also on no-translation as a form of translation.

Klaus Kaindl, Zentrum für Translationswissenschaft, Universität Wien | "For My Laughter, Do Excuse Me!" A Multimodal Framework for the Translation of Verbo-Musical Humour

Humour plays an important role in numerous musical genres from opera, operetta, musicals to pop songs, country songs, rap, and hip hop among others. In many cases, these verbo-musical texts are also translated, but research has rarely addressed this connection between humour, music, and translation. This may be due to the complexity of the subject matter, but also to the difficulty of getting a theoretical and conceptual grip on terms such as humour and translation as both occur in different contexts, are dependent on time and culture and are therefore immensely mutable. In this presentation, the first step is to clarify what can be understood by humour and translation especially in the context of music. To this end, the various attempts to explain and define humour and translation phenomena will be critically examined and placed in relation to each other. Then, on the basis of a socio-semiotic framework, the functional relationship between language and music is presented as the basis for an approach to the translation of humour in verbo-musical texts, with the aim of developing a taxonomy of translation forms and strategies that can build a basis for both the theory and practice of verbo-musical humour translation.

Anna Rędzioch-Korkuz, Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw | Singable Humour: Reinforcing the Comic Effect Through Multimodal Translation

The aim of the paper will be to present a multimodal analysis of the Polish singable translation of the song A Boy Named Sue written by Shel Silverstein and performed by Johnny Cash. The source text will be a video recording of the live performance delivered in 1969 at San Quentin State Prison, whereas the target text will be the Polish translation done by Wojciech Młynarski and presented in a TV performance by the character actor Mieczysław Czechowicz in 1970. The main focus will be placed on the multimodal dimension of the translation, which will demonstrate how changes at various levels helped to reinforce the comic effect. The analysis will include the examination of the lyrics, vocal melody and instrumentation, performance as well as the visual dimension. Accordingly, the understanding of translation will be expanded beyond purely linguistic transfer and will include the three building blocks of the multimodal approach, i.e. the concept of mode, medium and genre (Kaindl 2020). It seems that despite the difficulties inherent in humour translation and singable translation as well as the obvious socio-cultural distance, the effect was cleverly recreated in the target song and, subsequently, led to the creation of a series of spinoff songs about funny adventures of a cowboy named Zuzia.

Jean-Charles Meunier, Faculté des Lettres, Langues, Arts et Sciences Humaines, Université Polytechnique Hauts-de-France | *A Brand New “Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat” Orality and Multimodality in the Translation of Bob Dylan’s Humour*

Bob Dylan’s songs are characterized by a number of distinctive traits, such as the marked orality of his writing, and his frequent use of humour, usually for satirical purposes. The author uses a whole range of tools, such as rhyme schemes and a perfect command of timing, comparable with that of a stand-up comedian. The influence of Woody Guthrie’s talking blues to convey humour is palpable, in particular, in the song “Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat,” released in 1966 on the influential double album *Blonde on Blonde*. Dylan derides the consumer society in the United States, both through the content and the form of this piece. The only existing French translation was recorded by French-speaking Swiss singer-songwriter Sarclo, who is one of the main translators of Dylan’s works. He has recorded nearly 30 different French adaptations in the last 10 years. The analysis of “Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat” and its French translation shall demonstrate how the target work recreates Dylan’s humour multimodally, not only through the linguistic variation in the text, but also through the vocals, as well as the musicians’ performance.

Karina Zybina, Department of Musicology, Uppsala University | *The Wonderful Adventures of The Cairo Goose: Translating Mozart’s Opera Buffa Fragment*

In 1782, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart informed his father about a new commission: a brand-new opera buffa for the Italian troupe engaged for the next season in Vienna. The composer had just started his part of this commission when the entire project had to be abandoned. In the end, only several aria and ensemble drafts survived from this endeavour. They came to be known as *L’oca del Cairo* (*The Cairo Goose*). In 1855, the German printer Julius André published these incomplete scores and thence commenced the story of this goose’s wonderful adventures. In 1867, the goose celebrated its stage debut in the Théâtre des Fantaisies-Parisiennes as opéra bouffe en deux actes, *L’oie du Caire*. To enable it, the Paris-based Belgian music critic, translator, and writer Victor van Wilder combined the goose fragments with excerpts from Mozart’s opera settings, translated all the original texts into French, and tied the newly created combination of vocal pieces up with a series of spoken dialogues. Later this year, the German musician Thuisikon Hauptner brought this goose to the next stop on its European journey, turning the opéra bouffe into the komische Oper in 2 Akten, *Die Gans von Kairo*: He translated Wilder’s texts into German and adapted the Parisian production for the Friedrich-Wilhelmstädtisches Theater in Berlin. In 1870, the goose made its appearance under its original name, *L’oca del Cairo*, this time on stage of the Drury Lane Theatre in London, ‘cooked’ by the Italian poet Giuseppe Zaffira. This paper zooms in on a single scene from the initial goose story and juxtaposes it with its music-linked translations (the term coined in Golomb 2005) into French, German, and Italian. Delving deep into the libretto extracts, it discusses linguistic and technical issues and ponders on historical and sociological factors behind chosen translation strategies.

Giovanni Raffa, Department of European, American and Intercultural Studies, Università degli studi di Roma “La Sapienza” | *Musical Parody in Audiovisual Translation*

Parody, and its inherent humour, is a recurring presence in audiovisual texts as well as a challenge for their translation, both because of its stylistic configuration and its ties to intertextuality. Parodic and pseudo-parodic styles (Nash, 1985), compared to jokes, often have a much harder to detect humorous discharge (a punchline of sort), or none at all, making their translation a daunting task if one intends to maintain the humorous content in the target text. Furthermore, the wide use of musical numbers as parodic intermissions in TV series and films means that this type of humour is multimodal and polysemiotic in addition to being intertextual. By providing a qualitative analysis of the use of musical extracts from the librettos by Gilbert & Sullivan and Sondheim being parodied in *Family Guy*, this study discusses useful theoretical concepts for the analysis of musical parody numbers in filmic medias, based on selected parameters of the General Theory of Verbal Humour (Attardo 2017, 2023). In turn, by observing the translation strategies employed in the Italian dubbing of the case study, and comparing them

with the Italian subtitling of Flo & Joan, a comedy duo that writes song-based comedy numbers to perform on stage, this study intends to discuss the relevance of prioritising the recognisability of parodied elements in translation and to address the instrumentalization of metrics in the Italian versions of the texts. Additionally, by highlighting semantic opposition as a key element of verbo-musical humour, the content of the study intends to prompt a discussion on the importance of adapting (or non-adapting) the strictly musical component when translating musical parody for a different cultural context and on the respective advantages of different translation modes.