

Call for Papers – WORKSHOP

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

University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna (Department of Musicology and Performance Studies) and University of Vienna (Department of Comparative Literature)

26-27 April 2024, University of Music and Performing Arts (Seilerstätte 26, 1010 Vienna)

According to Ágnes Heller (*Was ist komisch? Kunst, Literatur, Leben und die unsterbliche Komödie*), laughter is one of the ‘universal expressions of human life’ that ‘appear[s] in all kinds of cultural creations’ (Heller 2018: 46, our translation). If laughter is universal, is humour universal? Humour tends to be associated with specific cultures and languages, which is why translating the humour contained in puns or jokes for theatrical plays, television series or dubbed/subtitled films is an exceptionally difficult task. Translation studies have been dealing with this hotly debated issue for decades and even created a specific field – humour studies – dedicated to addressing the ‘(un)translatability of humour’.

But what happens when a comic line or scene is sung rather than spoken? Although studies on music and translation have been increasing since the 1990s, it is an incredibly complex, multidisciplinary field, as Şebnem Susam-Saraeva pointed out in a special issue of *The Translator* (2008) dedicated to translation and music (Susam-Saraeva 2008: 189–90). According to Susam-Saraeva, musicologists are not always familiar with the concepts and tools of translation studies while scholars from other disciplines are not always able to deal with intersemiotic aspects of translation involving music. The necessity of analysing such aspects from different perspectives is quite clear in the case of opera translations, so far one of the most-studied aspects in the field of music and translation, which also concerns humour in operatic scenes. Klaus Kaindl argues that opera is a textual form (*Textgestalt*) in which the different elements (libretto, music, staging) cannot be analysed individually since an opera is ‘something more and different than the sum of the individual linguistic components’ (Snell-Hornby 1992: 91, our translation); therefore, it is necessary to consider the operatic work in terms of the simultaneous perception of all the interacting elements (Kaindl 1995: 39–40).

The importance of researching intersemiotic aspects of translation in relation to humour is not limited to canonised Western vocal music (opera, oratorio, lied, etc.): it is even more relevant in non-canonised music such as popular and folk songs where, as Susam-Saraeva has pointed out, ‘it is often impossible – and, in [her] opinion, undesirable – to determine where translation ends and adaptation begins’ (Susam-Saraeva 2008: 189). A typical, well-known case of such a cultural adaptation is that of Tom Lehrer’s humorous song *Poisoning Pigeons in the Park*. Georg Kreisler came across this song while in exile in America during the Second World War and wrote a Viennese-German version of it (*Tauben vergiften*) in which he not only translates the lyrics but also transforms the music style into that of a typical Viennese waltz. Kreisler’s version was so successful that it is now better known than Lehrer’s.

Based on these considerations, we intend to organise a workshop on the translation of humour in vocal music from an interdisciplinary perspective, inviting speakers from various disciplines such as musicology, theatre studies, translation studies, comparative literature, media and film studies, etc. Speakers will be asked to present a 15-minute impulse talk that will lead directly into a 15-minute discussion. It is therefore important that these papers not only describe case studies but also pose questions that will spark interdisciplinary discussion. Possible topics include issues of intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translation involved in comic scenes or lines in vocal music. Although the workshop is being developed in the context of the opera-related FWF-stand alone project *Translating and rewriting Italian opera in German (1600–1750)*, the focus will be not only on canonised vocal music from the Western tradition (opera and operetta, oratorio, cantata, song) but also on stage and film musicals, musical cartoons, folk and popular music, and more.

Possible topics of interest may include, but are not limited to:

- Translation of comic scenes in opera
- Adapting comedy and satire for a different cultural context
- Supertitling/subtitling comic lines, puns, wordplay
- Rewriting a comic/satirical song/ lied in another language

Submitting a proposal

Please send a brief abstract (300 words) including a short biography to iseult.grandjean@univie.ac.at.

Submissions will be accepted until 31 December 2023. If your abstract is selected, we will cover your travel and accommodation costs.

Notifications of acceptance will be sent by 15 January 2024.

In order to encourage a stimulating international exchange, the workshop language will be English. We kindly ask you to take this into account in your abstract and presentation.

Organisers

Livio Marcaletti (University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, Department of Musicology and Performance Studies)

Iseult Grandjean (University of Vienna, Department of Comparative Literature)

Keynote speaker

Klaus Kaindl (University of Vienna, Centre for Translation Studies): *“For my laughter, do excuse me!”*. A multimodal framework for the translation of verbo-musical humour

References

- Margherita Dore, *Humour in Audiovisual Translation: Theories and Applications* (London, New York: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 2019).
- Ágnes Heller, *Was ist komisch? Kunst, Literatur, Leben und die unsterbliche Komödie* (Wien: Konturen, 2018).
- Klaus Kaindl, *Die Oper als Textgestalt. Perspektiven einer interdisziplinären Übersetzungswissenschaft* (Tübingen, Stauffenburg-Verlag, 1995).
- Mary Snell-Hornby, 'Der Text als Gestalt. Ganzheit in der Übersetzung', in: *Auf der Suche nach dem ganzheitlichen Augenblick. Der Aspekt Ganzheit in den Wissenschaften*, ed. Chr. Thomas (Zürich: Verlag der Fachvereine, 1992), 87–102.
- Hendrik Schulze, 'Opera and Comedy', *Early Music* 34/4 (2006), 690–692.
- Şebnem Susam-Sarajeva, Translation and Music, *The Translator* 14/2 (2008), 187–200.
- Thorsten Unger (ed.), *Differente Lachkulturen? Fremde Komik und ihre Übersetzung* (Tübingen: Narr, 1995).