

Mamma Mia, A Singable Translation!

ABSTRACT

The article discusses and analyzes approaches to translating singable texts. It presents a linguistic (prosodic, lexical and structural) analysis of the Slovenian translation of the musical *Mamma Mia!* The aim of the qualitative and quantitative study is to investigate the translation strategies used to produce a singable target text. The results of the analysis suggest that producing a prosodic match is a basic requirement, whereas the lexical, structural and/or poetic characteristics of the source text are subject to changes. Overall, the findings show that the function and the purpose of the translation play a crucial role in the prioritization of translation strategies.

Keywords: singable translation; sung translation; translation strategies; prosody; lexical analysis; rhyme; musical; Abba; *Mamma Mia!*

Mama mia, prevod pétega besedila!

POVZETEK

Članek predstavi in razčleni pristope k prevajanju pétihi besedil. Osredini se na rezultate jezikovne (prozodične, leksikalne in zgradbene) razčlembe slovenskega prevoda muzikala *Mamma Mia!* Cilj predstavljene kvantitativne in kvalitativne študije je proučevanje prevajalskih strategij, ki se uporabljajo pri prevajanju pétihi ciljnih besedil. Rezultati razčlembe pokažejo, da je prozodično ujemanje osnovna zahteva, medtem ko so leksikalne, zgradbene in poetične lastnosti izvirnega besedila podvržene številnim spremembam. Lahko torej potrdimo, da funkcija in namen prevoda igrata ključno vlogo pri izbiri prevajalskih strategij.

Ključne besede: prevajanje pétihi besedil; péto prevajanje; prevajalske strategije; prozodija; leksikalna razčlemba; rima; muzikal; Abba; *Mamma Mia!*

Mamma Mia, A Singable Translation!

1 Introduction

“In a sense, sung words are the least translatable of all words,” states Newmark (1993, 21) in his *Paragraphs on Translation*. Indeed, when the product of translation is a singable text, its analysis, or even evaluation, should rely on more than the well-known criteria of translation faithfulness and translation equivalence. The translator of a singable text is faced with the task of not only translating the words of the original but also considering other factors – both musical and linguistic – that may influence the final product; prosody, rhyme, note duration, and singability of certain sounds are but some of them.

Focussing on the interaction between the above mentioned factors, the article first presents different approaches and strategies to translating singable texts, and then examines a set of linguistic properties observable in singable translations. The study that follows is based on the translations of twenty-three songs from the musical *Mamma Mia!*, presenting a comparison of the prosodic, lexical, structural and poetic characteristics of the source texts (ST) with those of the target texts (TT).

Section 2 of the article discusses the current research in the field of singable translations with an emphasis on functional approaches to translation of this text-type. Section 3 presents the study of the Slovenian translations of several songs from the musical *Mamma Mia!* In the final sections (4 and 5), there is a discussion of the results, followed by some concluding remarks.

2 Literature Overview

2.1 Translation of Singable Texts

Translation of singable texts is not a widely researched topic despite the abundance of such translations in various languages and despite the fundamental role of music in people’s lives. The studies that do exist centre mainly on “the fusion of verbal and musical discourse” in the translations of opera (Gorlée 1997, 235) or “art songs” (Low 2003b, 91). Less attention is devoted to the translation of pop song lyrics or other contemporary forms of singable texts.

Franzon (2008, 373–74) claims that the weak academic focus on translation of singable texts may be due to the “lack of clarity as to the professional identity of the people who do translate songs.” In fact, such translations typically fall under the heading of “special translation tasks” (Low 2003a, 87) and their translators are usually a diverse group of professionals that encompasses not only professional translators but also music fans, theatre professionals, singers, and others.

Nonetheless, according to Susam-Sarajeva (2008, 188–89), a much more likely reason for the small number of studies in this area is the “huge can of worms” that such projects open for researchers attempting to tackle them. Not only do they have to deal with the complexities of multimodal material by studying the relationship between, for instance, words (lyrics), music (melody) and visual elements (staging), but they may also encounter the issue of translation becoming an adaptation, which makes the TT too dissimilar to the ST to be analysed as a translation. With regard to this problem, Low (2005, 194) points out that adapted texts that “bear no semantic relation with the ST [...] have no place in discussions of translation.”

The study of translation of singable texts can still be a rewarding undertaking, or, as Gorlée (2005, 8) describes it, “an imaginative enterprise” as it offers the opportunity for the linguistic analysis of texts to be extended to other disciplines. For instance, the researchers of singable translations can focus on cultural aspects of the TT, its musical features (prosody, singable vowel harmonies, ...), the poetic devices used (rhyme, metaphor, ...), the intended purpose, the function, and similar.

2.2 Purpose-Centred Approach to Translation of Singable Texts

Low (2003b, 92–94) finds the concepts of purpose and function especially pertinent in the translation of singable texts. He discusses the issue in terms of Vermeer’s *Skopos* theory (1978), which is centred on the functional properties of the ST and the TT, and places the purpose of the action of translation at its core. Vermeer’s theory thus extends the often-discussed notions of translation equivalence or faithfulness: it deemphasizes the type of translation that relies too heavily on recreating the linguistic properties of the ST, and adopts a more functional and TT-centred approach to it. In the words of Nord (2010, 121–22), “the prime principle determining any translation process is the purpose (*Skopos*) of the overall translational action, which takes place between cooperating parties across language and culture boundaries.” Hence, in the framework of *Skopostheorie*, “the target text’s functionality or adequacy [...] sets the standard for translation evaluation” (Nord 2010, 122). Consequently, the singable TT should be a product of a translation process that is consistent with the demands of the medium, the audience, and the type of performance.

Since translations of singable texts can never be full equivalents of the ST, the attention to *Skopos* helps “a translator to decide which features to prioritise in a given case and which may be sacrificed at less cost” (Low 2003b, 93). From the perspective of singable texts, the TT should adhere to characteristics of the music and performance type. The focus on the purpose may also lead the translator to introduce certain adaptations to the TT to match the culture and the context of the audience.

Low (2003b, 105–6) claims that a translator of a singable translation (in classical music) is “subject to huge constraints imposed by the pre-existing music, because they cannot ignore the rhythms, the note-values, the phrasings or the stresses of the music [...]”. Due to these limitations, the singable TT may seem awkward on paper but much more suitable for singing. To illustrate, Low (2003b, 106–7) provides his own translations of Baudelaire’s sonnet “La vie antérieure”, which was set to music by Henri Duparc. The first verse (1a) and its translations with different *Skopi* (1b–f) are repeated here.

- (1)
- a. ST: *J’ai longtemps habité sous de vastes portiques*
 - b. TT (performer’s crib): *For a long time I lived under vast porticoes*
 - c. TT (recording insert): *For a long time I lived under vast porticoes*
 - d. TT (programme text): *For a long time I lived by the sea in a palace*
 - e. TT (spoken text): *In a previous life I lived by the ocean in a tall palace*
 - f. TT (singable text): *For a long time I dwelt under porticoed halls*

Low (2003b, 108) describes the singable translation in (1f) as “clumsy”; however, he defends its awkwardness by showing that the text is “based not on the prosody of the French poet [...], but on that specific music – which varies from two to six syllables per measure and seldom places the longest notes at the downbeats.” As can be seen above, the version in (1f) lexically,

structurally and poetically departs from the original, but this is mostly due to the requirements of its function in the target language.¹

2.3 Layers of Purpose-Centred Approaches to Translation of Singable Texts

As part of his ‘pentathlon principle’, Low (2005) proposes that the criteria of (1) singability, (2) sense, (3) naturalness, (4) rhythm and (5) rhyme be applied in the translation of singable texts. With regard to ‘singability’, the translator should pay attention to consonant clusters and (short) vowels that may be difficult to articulate while singing. The criterion of ‘sense’ refers to the transfer of meaning: a true lexical equivalent of a word in the ST may not be a viable choice in a singable translation for various reasons (for instance, the number of syllables can represent a constraint). To continue, the ‘naturalness’ criterion refers to a singable TT still being natural in relation to, for example, register and word order.² The criterion of ‘rhythm’ is linked to the number of syllables – in singable translations this number usually has to be identical in the ST and in the TT. And finally, with regard to ‘rhyme’, the translators have the option of keeping it, removing it entirely, or keeping only some of the rhymes.³ Crucially, Low (2003a, 101) states that none of these criteria should be considered “sacrosanct.”

From a similarly functional perspective, Franzon (2008, 390–91) distinguishes three types of matches between a singable lyric and its translation: (1) a prosodic match is related to melody (the number of syllables, type of rhythm, vocalizable sounds); (2) a poetic match that revolves around the structure (rhymes, lines, and location of key words); and (3) a semantic-reflexive match with regard to expression (story, mood, description, and metaphor). Of the three layers, the prosodic one is described as the most basic, since it makes the TT singable. However, similarly to Low (2003a, 2005), Franzon (2008, 296) sees translation as a decision-making process and describes the options related to the three layers as merely “theoretically available to song translators.”

2.4 Some Properties of Singable Translations

The translator has an arduous task when asked to produce a singable translation, especially if they are not allowed to adapt the original music in any way or to change the message of the ST. Keeping in mind that they also have to render a TT that is functionally equivalent to the ST, it is not surprising that such translation undertakings are challenging.

According to Franzon (2008, 386–88), some translation strategies that are characteristic of such projects include loose approximations of the ST, paraphrases, omissions and additions – all are well-documented translation strategies (see Baker (1992) and Newmark (1993) for examples and discussion). Paraphrases are rewordings (different lexical or lexicogrammatical realizations) of the original message that do not substantially add to or take away from the meaning of the ST. Omissions include any material (words, phrases, lines) that is removed in the TT, whereas additions represent material that only appears in the TT.⁴

¹ Other types of and reasons for the differences between the English source texts and their Slovenian translations have been recently discussed by Rot Gabrovec (2015), Hirci and Mikolič (2014), Pisanski Peterlin (2013) and others.

² Newmark (1993, 166) speaks of “a struggle between sense and naturalness.”

³ See Graham (1989) for more on the (un)necessary insistence on rhyme.

⁴ These definitions also apply to the analysis presented in the following sections of the paper.

To illustrate the various translation strategies employed by translators, Franzon provides a set of examples from the musical *My Fair Lady* and its translations into other, mostly Germanic languages. A few lines from his discussion (the translations and their back-translations) are repeated here to illustrate the type of changes that can be identified in the translations of musicals (see Franzon 2008, 386–87).

- (2) a. ST: *Don't talk of stars / burning above*
 b. TT (Norwegian): *Ikke forklar / stjernenes brann*
 [Don't explain / the fire of the stars]⁵
 d. TT (German): *prich nicht vom Mond / den du mir schenkst*
 [Don't talk of the moon / that you will give me]

The examples in (2) reveal that the Norwegian translation of the two lines is relatively close to the original. In (2b) the ST verb 'talk' is replaced by the nearly synonymous 'explain', whereas the reduced relative clause in the ST that describes the stars as 'burning above' becomes the (nearly synonymous) headword of a nominal phrase 'the fire of the stars'. In contrast, the German version in (2c) departs from the ST substantially – 'stars' are now 'the moon', and the '[stars] burning above' become '[the moon] that you give to me'. A word-by-word analysis shows that the translators adopted different approaches to the task. The Norwegian text loosely paraphrases the ST, while the German one omits parts of it and substitutes them with new (contextually appropriate) content. The linguistic shifts identified in such translations may thus involve both vocabulary and syntax.

As elaborated by Franzon (2008) and Low (2003), the changes presented above are mostly the result of the constraints that are imposed on the translator by the criterion of singability/prosody, particularly the metric structure and the rhyme scheme of the TT. If Franzon's and Low's models are applied to the examples in (2), we can observe that both translations follow the prosodic structure of the ST by using the same number of syllables and by adhering to the iambic rhythm of the original, which is illustrated in (3).⁶

- (3) a. Don't – TALK – of – STARS / burn–ING a–BOVE
 b. *Sprich – NICHT – vom – MOND / den – DU – mir – SCHENKST*

To achieve a prosodic match between the ST and the TT, the translator has no choice but to avoid word-by-word translation. Consequently, the second verse of the ST consists of two disyllabic words, whereas the second verse of the TT consists of four monosyllabic words.

The analysis of examples (2) and (3) thus supports Franzon's (2008, 388) claim that our "assessment of the fidelity of a singable translation should be based not so much on word-by-word comparison, but on contextual appropriateness" – that is, the TT should fit the music (especially its prosody and the prominent syllables/notes) and the context of the performance.

⁵ The back translations are given in square brackets.

⁶ The syllables that are stressed in the song are in capital letters; the dash is used to show the syllable boundaries.

3 The Study

3.1 The Corpus (and Its Background)

The analysis of singable texts in the article is based on the Slovenian translations of twenty-three songs from the musical *Mamma Mia!* The jukebox musical written by Catherine Johnson incorporates songs composed by Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, members of the internationally renowned 1970s Swedish pop group Abba. The show premiered in London in 1999, and has been performed world-wide ever since. According to Wikipedia (2016), it has been played in more than forty countries and translated into twenty languages.

The Slovenian premiere of the musical was on June 15, 2015. Featuring a cast of well-known Slovenian performers, the show closely follows the structure of the original musical. The reception of the musical has been very positive – the major media outlets described the project as “having justified, if not exceeded the expectations of the audience” (Pelk 2015 for *24ur.com*).⁷ According to the web portal *Siol.net* (Mrevlje 2015), the audience “went crazy with excitement over the musical,” which featured “Slovenian translations of the songs and amazed [the spectators].” In his review of the musical for the main Slovenian broadsheet *Delo*, Smrekar (2015) describes the musical as a “pleasant surprise” – his critique is very favourable and praises virtually all aspects of the performance: the music, direction, scenography, choreography, and acting. With regard to the translations, Smrekar states that the lyrics are fluidly translated and adapted, despite the occasional awkwardness in songs such as “Chiquitita”.

The songs were translated into Slovenian by Tomaž Domicelj, an established Slovenian singer-songwriter who studied English and Slovenian and is also an experienced translator. As reported by *Delo* (Krečič 2015), Domicelj described the twenty-three translated texts as “related to the content of the musical, sounding like the original, and, most importantly, remaining understandable.” The project took him three months to complete and the greatest challenges were the vowels, rendering the text into the dual, and Slovenian words such as the amphibrachic *ljubezen* (‘love’) because they are much longer than their equivalents in English (K. A. 2015). According to *Siol.net* (Mrevlje 2015), the translator wanted to make the songs as Slovenian as possible without resorting to too much slang and while still retaining their vitality.

The musical contains twenty-three songs (see Appendix for the complete list). All are included in the analysis presented herein.⁸

3.2 Methodology

The study aims to identify and quantify the changes that occurred in the process of translation of the English musical lyrics into Slovenian. The TT represents the starting point of the analysis. First, each line of the TT was matched to its corresponding line in the ST – for instance, wherever various repetitions in the TT were omitted (and marked by the ellipsis), the same amount of the ST was removed. The features of the ST and the TT were analysed manually or, where possible, using electronic tools (Lextutor Concordancer, on-line syllable counters, and MS Excel). The songs were analysed with regard to their prosodic, lexical, structural and poetic properties:

⁷ Translations of the reviews and media reports by the author of the article.

⁸ The author would like to thank the production company Prospot d.o.o. and especially the translator, Tomaž Domicelj, for providing the written translations of the songs and thus making this analysis possible.

- To analyse the translation of prosodic features, the number of syllables in each line of the ST and the TT was counted and the syllable-per-word ratios calculated.⁹ The syllables were counted manually, as the on-line electronic counters can be inconsistent in their output.
- In the analysis of the lexical features of the ST and the TT, the Corpus Concordance English on-line tool (<http://www.lex Tutor.ca/conc/eng/>) was used to calculate the number of types (different words) and tokens (running words). The word lists were then examined manually to count the number of lexical/grammatical items and to determine their lexical density in terms of Ure (1971) and Halliday (1985). Also, to examine the lexical shifts in more detail, a line-by-line analysis was conducted to count the number of paraphrases, omissions and additions.
- Related to this, the changes in the syntax were observed to identify any re-ordering of the content across lines.
- Finally, the rhyming patterns in the ST and the TT were identified, counted, and compared.

3.3 Research Questions

The main hypothesis of the study is that the translation strategies employed by the Slovenian translator were constrained by the function and purpose of the TT. Since the TT is a singable text meant to entertain audiences, the Slovenian translation should exhibit a close prosodic match to the ST, while also preserving the storyline and its artistic value. Hence, it was expected that the translator would eschew precise, word-by-word translation and create a loose approximation of the original.

To test this hypothesis, the following research questions (RQ) were formulated.

RQ1: If a prosodic match is a fundamental feature of a functional singable translation, to what extent does the analysed TT preserve the prosody of the ST?

RQ2: If a singable TT is at least partially adapted to fit the constraints of its function and the properties of the target language, what are the most frequent lexical and structural modifications?

RQ3: Related to RQ2, what are the changes related to the poetic properties of the ST?

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Prosodic Features

The analysis of prosodic features was limited to the comparison of the number of syllables in the ST and in the TT. It shows that most of the songs contain exactly the same number of syllables. Minor variation can be observed in four of the songs.

In three cases (“Mamma Mia” (Song 6), “Chiquitita” (Song 7), and “Lay All Your Love on Me” (Song 9)) the difference is in a single syllable. For instance, in (4), the TT has an extra syllable.

- | | | |
|-----|---|----------------|
| (4) | a. ST: <i>why, why did I ever let you go</i> | [9 syllables] |
| | b. TT: <i>naj, naj tisti čas se (spet po)vrne</i> | [10 syllables] |
| | [let, let that time come back again] | |

⁹ In this paper the term prosodic features refers to the division of words into syllables. The analysis of intonation patterns or sentence stresses was unfortunately not possible since the complete corpus of translations was available only in written form.

The brackets in the TT translation of “Mamma Mia” in (4b) were added by the Slovenian translator. They suggest that the word *spet* (‘again’) and the prefix *po-* are optional. Omitting one of them yields a match in the number of syllables. Nevertheless, in one of the recordings of the Slovenian songs that are currently accessible on Youtube, both syllables are present in the song. The fragment from the music sheet in Figure 1 shows how this is possible: the ST monosyllabic word *go* is set with a two-note melisma (*go-o*), whereas in the TT, each of the two notes corresponds to a whole syllable (...*vr-ne*).

The figure shows a musical staff in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The melody consists of the following notes: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), B4-A4 (beamed eighth notes), G4-F4 (beamed eighth notes), E4-D4 (beamed eighth notes), C4 (half). The lyrics are written below the staff, with brackets under 'ev-er' and 'vr-ne'.

why why did I ev-er let you go
 naj naj tis - ti čas se spet po - vr - ne
 [let, let that time come back again]

FIGURE 1. The bars in “Mamma Mia” (Song 6) that illustrate the distribution of syllables in relation to notes, see example (4).

Examples (5) and (6) show a similar, single-syllable difference (from “Chiquitita” and “Lay All Your Love on Me”, Songs 7 and 9, respectively).

- (5) a. ST: *you will have no time for grieving* [8 syllables]
 b. TT: *ker ne boš več jokala* [7 syllables]
 [because you will not cry anymore]
- (6) a. ST: *now every man I see is a potential threat* [12 syllables]
 b. TT: *kot da vsak moški, ki vidim ga, osvaja te* [13 syllables]
 [as if every man I see is hitting on you]

In only one case, in the song “The Name of the Game” (Song 12), the difference between the ST and the TT is in two syllables, see example (7).

- (7) a. ST: *I wanna know, oh yes, I wanna know* [10 syllables]
 b. TT: *hočem vedeti, o, ja, hočem vedeti* [12 syllables]
 [I want to know, oh yes, I want to know]

As Figure 2 illustrates, the extra TT syllables in (7) fall on crochets that are followed by pauses. Potentially, the singer can replace each crochet with two quavers and thus accommodate the number of syllables in the TT. Alternatively, the final vowel in *vedeti* (‘know’) could be omitted, thus changing the trisyllabic *ve-de-ti* into its disyllabic spoken form *ve-det*.

... *I wan-na know* *oh yes I wan-na know*
 ... *ho – čem ve-de-ti* *o ja ho – čem ve-de-ti*
 ... *ho – čem ve-det* *o ja ho – čem ve-det*
 [I wasn't to know, oh yes, I want to know]

FIGURE 2. The bars in “The Name of the Game” that illustrate the distribution of syllables in relation to notes, see example (7).

The attention of the translator to the number of syllables in the TT is also evident in the layout of the translations. There are numerous instances where the translator indicated (by using the combining breve) that two words are to be joined and sung together. In this manner the syllable count per line in the TT was reduced to fit the prosody of the ST; see example (8).

- (8) a. ST: *even if you fail* [5 syllables: e-ven – if – you – fail]
 b. TT: *nič ne izpodleti* [5/6 syllables: ... neiz-pod .../ ... ne – iz-pod ...]
 [nothing fails]

It is also noteworthy that the analysis shows a noticeable difference between the ST and the TT in the number of syllables per word. While the English texts exhibit a mean of 1.3 syllables per word, the Slovenian ones have a mean of 1.5 syllables per word. Figure 3 shows that the number of syllables per word is consistently higher in the TT.

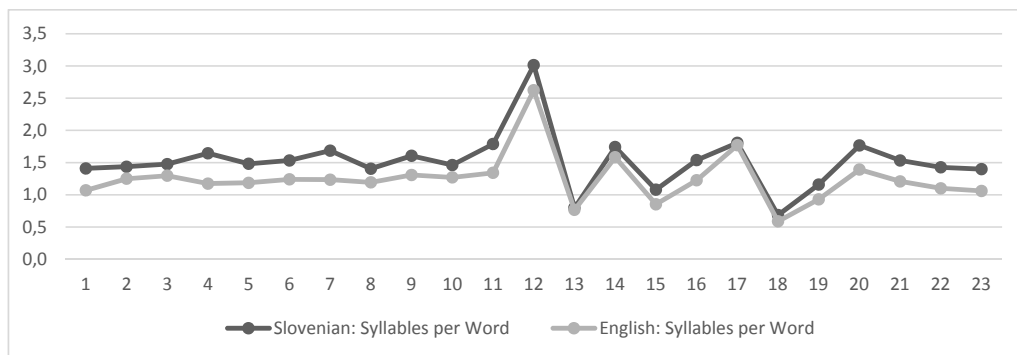


FIGURE 3. The number of syllables per word in the ST and in the TT across the twenty-three songs.

Figure 3 also shows that the translations closely follow the ST with respect to syllable-to-word ratio. For instance, the ST song with the highest mean syllable-to-word ratio (2.7), keeps a correspondingly high ratio in the TT (3.1) – see Song 12 (“The Name of the Game”). In contrast, “Knowing Me, Knowing You” (Song 18) has the lowest syllable-to-word ratio in both languages (0.7 in Slovenian and 0.6 in English). The correlation between the sets of data for English and Slovenian is very high: 0.96.

To illustrate the effect of the syllable-to-word ratio on the translation, examples (9) and (10) are provided.

- (9) a. ST: *the – love – you – gave – me / no–thing – else – can – save – me, – S.–O.–S*
 b. TT: *tvo–ja – lju–be–zen / me – lah–ko še re–ši – na – po–moč!*
 [your love / can still save me – help!]

The lines in (9a) have a mean of 1.3 syllables per word, while their Slovenian equivalent in (9b) has a mean of 1.8. Semantically, the monosyllabic word *love* is the key word in the first line of the ST. Since it cannot be omitted and since the Slovenian equivalent has three syllables, the translator solved the problem of excess syllables by paraphrasing the rest of the line. The monosyllabic noun *love*, which is preceded by a monosyllabic determiner and postmodified by a trisyllabic clausal postmodifier, has been replaced by a trisyllabic noun preceded by a disyllabic possessive pronoun. Hence, five words of the ST are rendered as two in the TT.

As the mean numbers can be misleading, an example should also be provided where the number of syllables per word is higher in the ST. In the English line in (10a) the mean is 1.5 syllables per word, while in the Slovenian line in (10b) the mean is 1 syllable per word – the example is from “Knowing Me, Knowing You” (Song 18).

- (10) a. ST: *know–ing – me, know–ing – you*
 b. TT: *tu – si – ti, – tu – sem – jaz*
 [here you are, here I am]

3.4.2 Lexical Features

The word count reveals that the ST contains noticeably more words than the TT: 3985 vs. 3250. In both the ST and the TT the function words represent the (weak) majority of tokens, yielding a lexical density of 47.2 percent for the ST, and 48.4 percent for the TT. This distribution is illustrated in Figure 4.

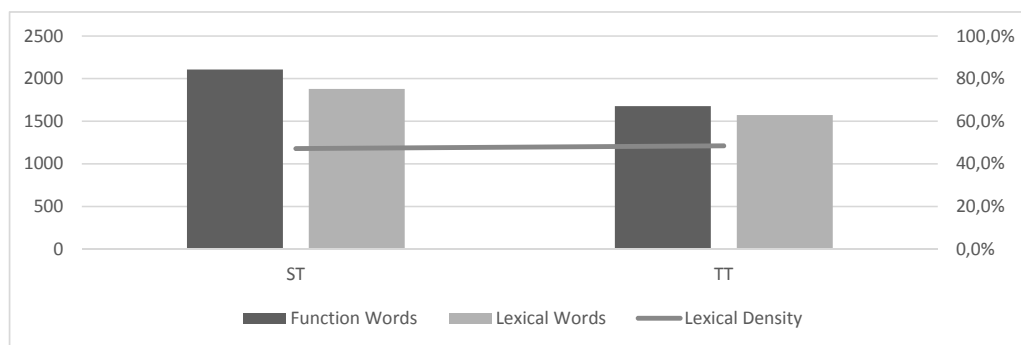


FIGURE 4. The distribution of lexical and function words in the ST and in the TT.

A closer analysis of translation strategies related to the lexical characteristics of the ST and the TT (for all twenty-three songs) indicates that paraphrasing was the most common translation strategy: 59.5 percent of the TT lines contain paraphrases of the ST. After paraphrases, omissions and additions are also frequent; they can be found in 39.1 percent and 34.7 percent of the lines, respectively. The least-used translation strategy is word-by-word translation, as only 10.6 percent of the lines are translated in this manner. The results are presented in Figure 5.

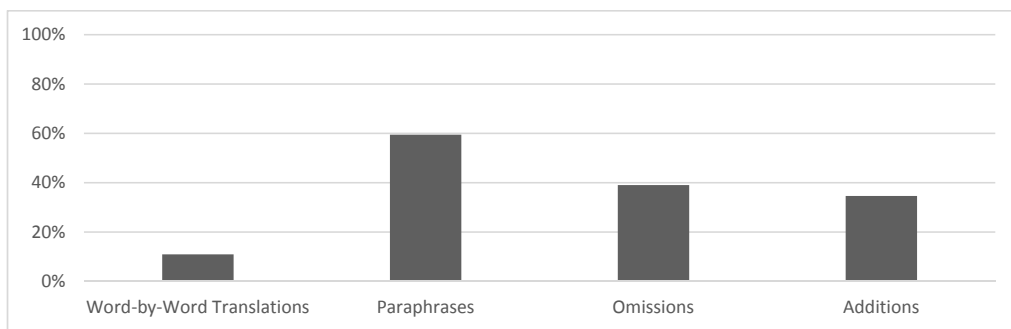


FIGURE 5. The translation strategies identified in the twenty-three translated songs. The percentages refer to the number of lines where an individual strategy was used.

Looking at the individual songs, it can be observed that word-by-word translations fluctuate from being used in none of the lines (for instance, in Song 14, “Under Attack”) to being used in 25 percent of the lines (Song 13, “Voulez-Vous”), where the high percentage of such lines is also caused by repetition.

The example in (11) is from “Take a Chance on Me” (Song 22). It shows that, with the exception of language-dependent factors, such as the overt subordinator and the second-position clitics in Slovenian, the translator provided a word-by-word translation of the ST.

- (11) ST: *know I’m gonna get you*
 TT: *vem, da te bom dobila*
 [I know that I’m going to get you]

A stark contrast can be observed, however, between the frequency of word-by-word translations and the frequency of paraphrases in each song. This comparison is presented in Figure 6.

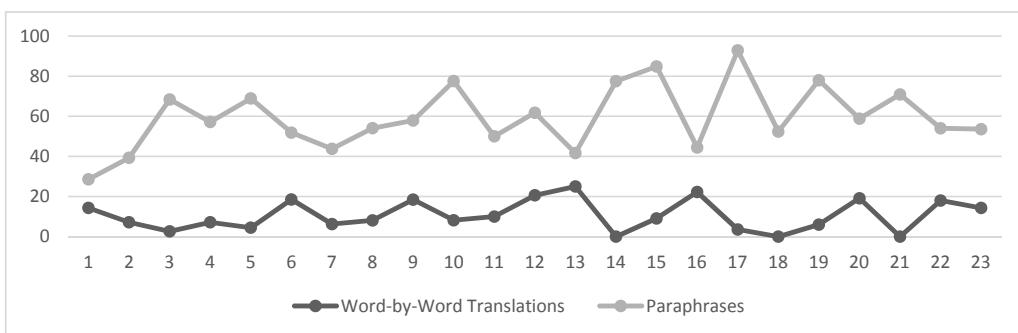


FIGURE 6. The frequency of lines (percentage per song) that were either translated word-by-word or paraphrased.

As Figure 6 shows, the “Prologue” (Song 1) has the lowest percentage of lines containing paraphrases, that is, 29 percent. On the other hand, in the song “Does Your Mother Know” (Song 17), 93 percent of the lines were categorized as paraphrases of the ST. An example of a line from “Voulez-Vous” (Song 13) that was categorized as a paraphrase is presented in (12).

- (12) ST: *ain't no big decision*
 TT: *majhna odločitev*
 [a little decision]

The analysis of omissions and additions reveals that omissions can be found in the range between 21 percent (Song 12, “The Name of the Game”) and 67 percent of the lines (Song 18, “Knowing Me, Knowing You”). An example of a line that contains omitted content is in (13). It is noteworthy that both lines consist of the same number of syllables but differ in their content: the ST information on the location of the caller (Glasgow) is omitted in the TT. The example is taken from “Super Trouper” (Song 10).

- (13) ST: *when I called you last night from Glasgow*
 TT: *ko klicala sem te sinoči*
 [when I called you last night]

The number of additions in the TT is generally slightly lower. They are least frequent (12 percent) in “Super Trouper” (Song 10) and most frequent (57 percent) in “Knowing Me, Knowing You” (Song 18). In most cases the additions can be associated with omissions (the correlation is relatively high, 0.71) – that is, both can usually be found in the same lines. An example of a line containing both from “Thank You for the Music” (Song 5) is given in (14).

- (14) ST: *she says I began / to sing long before I could talk*
 TT: *in pravi, da sem / kar s petjem premagala jok*
 [and she says that I / overcame crying by singing]

The added lexical meaning in the TT in (14) is that of singing instead of crying (see the second part of the example). The omission, on the other hand, includes the word *began* in the first part of the example and the clause *long before I could talk* in the second part.

The frequencies for the two translation strategies of omissions and additions can be compared in Figure 7.

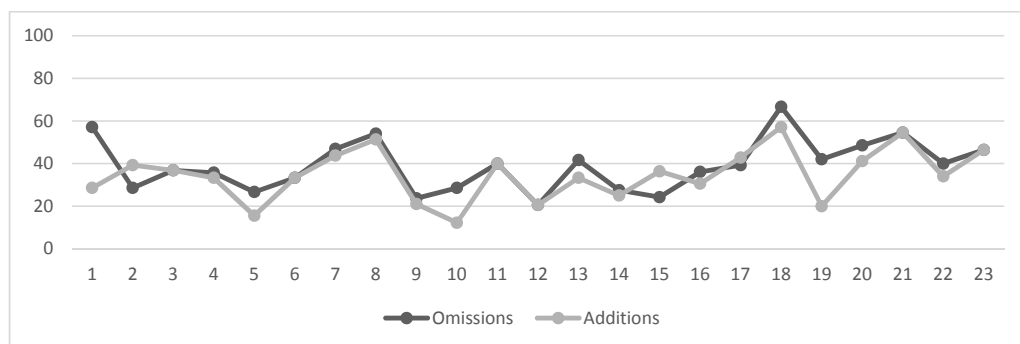


FIGURE 7. The frequency of lines (percentage per song) that contain omissions and/or additions.

3.4.3 Structural Features

Due to a variety of language-dependent factors that affect the word order and the phrase structure, the analysis pertaining to structural changes was limited to the structural differences

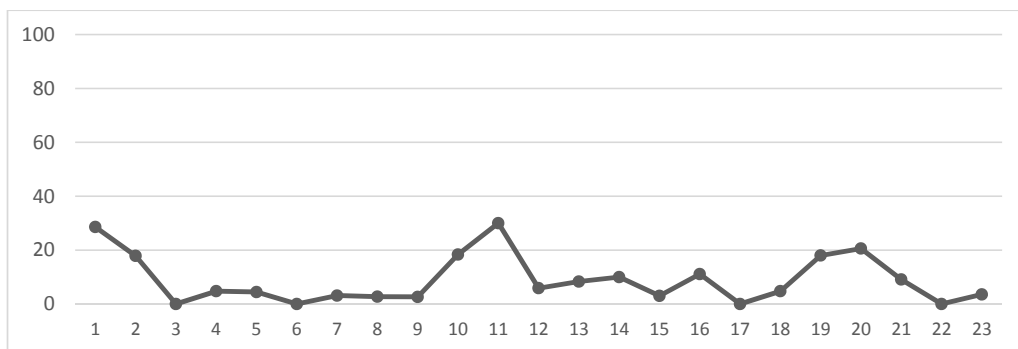


FIGURE 8. Structural changes in the TT across the twenty-three songs.

between the ST and the TT on the level of song lines. In other words, the results presented here show how often the messages were reorganized and the content of a ST line moved to some other line in the TT.

Figure 8 illustrates that the percentage of the ST lines whose content was transferred to some other TT line is consistently low. The range is between 0 percent (Songs 6, 17, 22) and 30 percent (Song 11), with a mean of 9.0 percent across all songs. To illustrate, an example of such a change from “Slipping through My Fingers” (Song 20) is provided in (15).

- (15) ST: *and I have to sit down / for a while*
 TT: *in za nekaj časa / obsedim*
 [and for a while / I remain seated]

3.4.4 Poetic Features

Two-hundred and thirteen (213) instances of end rhymes were identified in the twenty-three ST songs. The majority (65.7 percent) were also recreated in the Slovenian translation. Figure 9 shows the distribution of end rhymes by song in both languages.

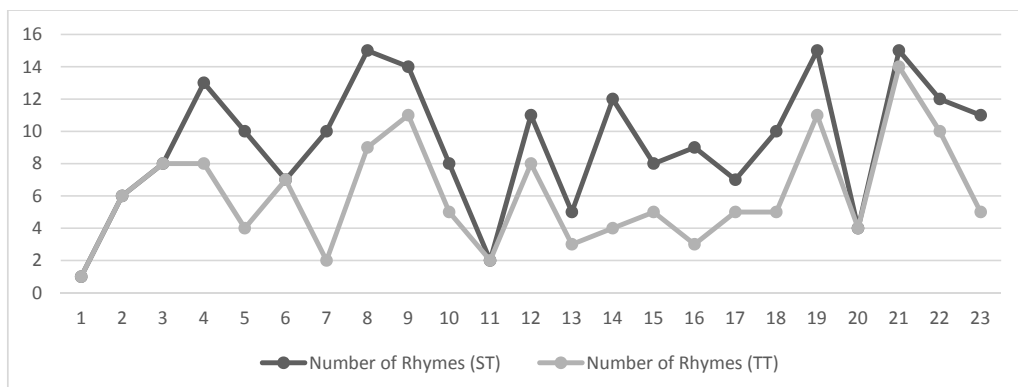


FIGURE 9. The number of end rhymes across the twenty-three songs.

Figure 9 shows that the number of rhymes either remains unchanged in the TT (see Songs 1, 2, 3, 6, 11, and 20) or is less frequent (in all other songs). In some songs the discrepancy is more noticeable than in others: Songs 7 and 14 (“Chiquitita” and “Under Attack”) represent the extremes in the group.

An example of a recreated rhyming pattern can be observed in (16). It is taken from the song “Mamma Mia” (Song 6).

- (16) ST: *look at me now / will I ever learn / I don't know how*
 TT: *glejte me zdaj / nič me ne izuči / kdove zakaj*
 [look at me now / I never learn / who knows why]

In contrast, example (17) from “Super Trouper” (Song 10) shows that the TT does not always keep the end rhymes in the ST.

- (17) ST: *but I suddenly lose control / there's a fire within my soul*
 TT: *spet naenkrat zgubim nadzor / v duši ogenj mi zagori*
 [again I suddenly lose control / in my soul a fire is ignited]

Another change that can be observed is the addition of end rhymes in the TT. In “Super Trouper” (Song 10), the last eight lines end in the following rhyming pattern, (18).

- (18) ST: *... arrive / ... you / ... me / ... alive / ... arms / ... tight / ... mean / ... tonight*
 TT: *... prišel / ... tu / ... zazdi / ... oživim / ... zdrvim / ... izgubim / ... vem / ... nocoj*
 [... come / ... here / ... seems / ... alive / ... rush / ... lose / ... know / ... tonight]

The pair of ST end rhymes ...*arrive* / ... *alive* and ...*tight* / ... *tonight* is not kept in the TT. Instead, a new rhyming pattern ...*oživim* / ... *zdrvim* / ... *izgubim* is introduced in nearly the same spots in the TT (though the new rhymes rely on the predictable Slovenian verbal morphology).

The study of rhyming patterns also reveals that the TT does not only very consistently follow the rhymes of the ST but that it also contains a number of instances where the translator mimicked the vocalic characteristics of the original text by choosing Slovenian vocabulary with the same or similar vowels. The example in (19) from “Honey Honey” (Song 3) shows that the front General British (GB) vowel /i:/ appearing at the end of the ST lines is rendered as the Slovenian /i/.¹⁰

- (19) ST: *... least / ... beast*
 TT: *... tič / ... hudič*
 [... character / ... devil]

To continue, the example in (20), from “Dancing Queen” (Song 8), indicates that the above strategy is not coincidental: the assonant diphthongs in *low* /ləʊ/ and *go* /gəʊ/ are rendered as *nov* /nəʊ/ (‘new’) and *lov* /ləʊ/ (‘hunt’) in the TT. The translator even indicates this pronunciation by providing the non-standard, phonetic spelling of the two words: *nou* and *lou*. The focus on the two vowels can be associated with their prominence and duration in music.

¹⁰ The transcription of English and Slovenian is in accordance with the IPA conventions (International Phonetic Association 1999; Šuštaršič, Komar and Petek 1999, 135–39).

- (20) ST: *Friday night and the lights are low / looking out for the place to go*
 TT: *pride čas, ko večer je nou / pozna noč prava je za lou*
 [the time comes when the evening is new / the late night is right for the hunt]

The example of *lou* in (20) also shows that such phonetic similarities are not limited to vowels – namely, the pair *low* (ST) and *lov* (TT) are cross-linguistic homophones. Another similar example from “Thank You for the Music” (Song 5) is presented in (21), where the English line final *chance* /tʃɑːns/ is rendered as the Slovenian *čas* /tʃas/ (‘time’), thus repeating most of the vowels and consonants from the original.

- (21) ST: *what a joy, what a life, what a chance*
 TT: *kakšen raj, kakšen smeh, kakšen čas*
 [what a paradise, what a laugh, what a time]

Some other phonetically similar ST/TT pairs that have been identified in the analysis include: *again* /əˈgeɪn/ and *grém*¹¹ /grɛm/ (‘go’) in “Mamma Mia” (Song 6); *met* /mɛt/ and *me* /mɛ/ (‘me’) in “Lay All Your Love on Me” (Song 9); *do* /du/ and *tu* /tu/ (‘here’) in “Dancing queen”; *tu* /tu/ (‘here’) and *truth* /truːθ/ in “Chiquitita” (Song 7); and *best* /best/ and *pest* /pest/ (‘fist’) in “Take a Chance on Me” (Song 22).

Another related finding is that even though the sound effects that include sequences of the same vowel or similar vowels are not always recreated using homologous TT phonemes, they may be recreated with a different set of (assonant) vowels. The example in (22) from “I Have a Dream” (Song 2) shows how the sequence of GB front close vowels /i: – i: – ɪ/ that appears in line-final ST words was rendered into Slovenian as a sequence of front close-mid vowels /e – e – e/.

- (22) ST: *... see / ... dream / ... sing*
 TT: *... dlaneh / ... smem / ... grem*¹²
 [... palms / ... may / ... go]

Presented in (23) is another instance of sound effects being transferred to the TT. In “Money, Money, Money” (Song 4), the ST word *money* /mʌni/ was rendered as the TT pronoun *meni* /meni/ (‘to me’), thus largely mimicking the sounds of the original.

- (23) ST: *money, money, money*
 TT: *meni, meni, meni*
 [to me / to me / to me]

4 Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine the language of singable translations. By comparing the Slovenian translations of the songs from the musical *Mamma Mia!* with their English originals, the qualitative and quantitative study investigated the hypothesis that the translation strategies

¹¹ The Slovenian word *grem* (‘I’m going’) can be pronounced with the open-mid or with the close-mid front vowel. The circumflex in the translation (‘*grém*’) was added by the translator to represent the open-mid variant, which is typically used by Slovenian speakers as an analogue of the General British /e/ or the General American /ɛ/.

¹² Here the word *grem* (‘I’m going’) is not marked with the circumflex – the expected pronunciation is with the front close-mid vowel /e/.

used to produce the Slovenian translation were conditioned by the function of the TT. The hypothesis was tested through three research questions pertaining to prosodic (RQ1), lexical/structural (RQ2) and poetic (RQ3) characteristics of the TT.

4.1 Prosodic Features

With regard to RQ1, the results confirm some previous observations (Fenk-Oczlon and Fenk 1999; 2004) on the cross-linguistic differences between English and Slovenian: the former has, on average, a lower number of syllables per word. The consistently higher values in the TT show no deviations in the translations with respect to this. More importantly, it has been established that the TT fully preserves the prosodic structure of the ST. A few minor variations (the difference in one or two syllables in four lines) can be accommodated for either by the music (by adding notes) or by introducing alternative divisions of syllables.

The finding on the constraints of prosody is expected since the function of the translation is that of a singable text; in this respect the result also supports the basic tenets of the *Skopos* theory and confirms Low's (2003a, 2003b, 2005) and Franzon's (2005, 2008) claims about certain features of translations being prioritized over others in order to satisfy the function/purpose of the translation product. In our case, it has been shown that the constraints of singable translations do not leave much room for changes on the level of prosody. Low's 'rhythm' (2003a) and Franzon's 'prosodic match' (2008) thus represent the aspect of the original that is obligatorily recreated in the TT. Section 3 illustrates that the Slovenian translator of *Mamma Mia!* paid careful attention to the prosodic layer – this is evidenced in the punctuation of the lyrics: the combining breve is used a number of times to signal to the singer when to join two words into one in order to manipulate the syllabic structure of the text.

4.2 Lexical and Structural Features

RQ2 compares the lexical and structural properties of the ST and the TT. The lexical density identified for the ST/TT is relatively high, especially if we consider that according to Ure (1971) the lexical density of above 40 percent is typical for English written texts. This finding can be explained if we consider the medium. The lyrics of pop songs are often a product of writing and rewriting; in addition, as in any type of poetic language, the texts include lines that contain fragmented language that may omit many of the function words that would be otherwise present in, for instance, prose. An interesting finding is also that the translation strategies of paraphrasing, omitting and adding resulted in the TT of (virtually) equal lexical density.

Notwithstanding the above, from a lexical perspective, the TT represents a noticeable departure from the ST. Specifically, the analysis shows that the translator only rarely provides a faithful translation of the original. Since he had to preserve the prosodic characteristics of the ST, the option of resorting to word-by-word translation was only rarely available. Indeed, a perfect illustration of the issue was provided by the translator himself when he compared the monosyllabic English *love* with its trisyllabic Slovenian equivalent *ljubezen* (reported in the media; K. A. 2015). The prioritization of prosodic features thus results in a translation that consists mainly of paraphrases. Nevertheless, the TT also contains numerous omissions and additions. In combination with the strategy of paraphrasing, the nearly equal proportion of omissions and additions also supports the finding showing a very similar lexical density for the ST and the TT.

The interplay of prosodic constraints and lexical choices has also been observed by examining the

structural properties of the TT (included in RQ2). The analysis shows that a transfer of content – this includes words, (para)phrases and clauses that contribute to the plot of the musical – across lines is relatively rare, which proves that the majority of lines may have been paraphrased or slightly adapted (omissions/additions) but their messages remain located in the same spots in the TT. This is expected, as the location of the message is vital for the progression of the plot and for keeping the basic sequence of events intact to support the context of the performance.

4.3 Poetic Features

RQ3 addressed some poetic characteristics of the ST and the TT. The analysis showed that a full recreation of the rhyming patterns in the TT is rarely an option for the translator of a singable translation, which is in agreement with the analyses presented by other authors – for instance Graham (1989). The Slovenian translator has been able to preserve about two-thirds of the rhymes of the ST. This was achieved either by following the line-by-line rhyming patterns exactly (in most cases), or by replacing the ST pattern with a new one in the TT. The analysis of the poetic features associated with rhyme was complemented by the discussion of a number of instances where the sound imagery of the original was preserved or at least imitated. It has been found that the prominent sounds of the ST, especially vowels crucial for the singability of the text, often resurface in the TT.

5 Conclusion

The article presented a discussion of approaches and strategies employed in the translation of singable texts. Its main focus was on a set of linguistic features typical for the text-type. The study of these features encompassed twenty-three Slovenian translations of songs by Abba from the musical *Mamma Mia!* By comparing their prosodic, lexical, structural and poetic characteristics with those of the ST, the analysis confirmed the hypothesis that the function of the translation plays a crucial role in the prioritization of translation strategies. Even though the constraints on the prosody prevailed over other observed translation strategies, especially over the approach of providing a faithful, word-by-word translation, it can be concluded that the translator was still able to render a translation that represents a functional equivalent of the ST. This was achieved by paraphrasing, by adding/omitting lexical material, and by maintaining or building on some poetic/phonetic features of the original.

The study also points out some challenges of researching singable translations. The author cannot but agree that this “imaginative enterprise” (Gorlée 2005, 8) is a “huge can of worms” (Susam-Sarajeva 2008, 188), as it calls for diverse types of linguistic analyses to be combined with musicological theory. Even though a lack of attention to a more interdisciplinary approach is a limitation of this study as well, some avenues of research in this field remain attractive for linguistic analysis. For instance, the additions and omissions that were quantified and illustrated in the article could be addressed in more detail in terms of what they entail and how they affect the messages/plot of the musical. Also, new topics, such as sentence/line stresses, intonation, variations in register, metaphoric language, and syntactic changes remain open for exploration.

Appendix: Songs Analysed

Song No.	ST Title	TT Title
Song 1:	Prologue	-
Song 2:	I Have a Dream	Zdaj sanjat' smem
Song 3:	Honey, Honey	Ta moj ljubi
Song 4:	Money, Money, Money	Meni, meni, meni
Song 5:	Thank You for the Music	Hvala za vso glasbo
Song 6:	Mamma Mia	Mamma mia
Song 7:	Chiquitita	Čikitita
Song 8:	Dancing Queen	Plesna kraljica
Song 9:	Lay All Your Love on Me	Le mene ljubi ti
Song 10:	Super Trouper	Snop svetlobe
Song 11:	Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!	Najdi, najdi, najdi
Song 12:	The Name of the Game	Kam naj pravzaprav grem
Song 13:	Voulez-Vous	Voulez-vous
Song 14:	Under Attack	To je napad
Song 15:	One of Us	Tista sem, ki joče
Song 16:	SOS	Na pomoč
Song 17:	Does Your Mother Know	Ali mama ve
Song 18:	Knowing Me, Knowing You	Tu si ti, tu sem jaz
Song 19:	Our Last Summer	Čez poletje
Song 20:	Slipping Through My Fingers	Mi polzi med prsti
Song 21:	The Winner Takes It All	Ko radi zmagamo
Song 22:	Take a Chance on Me	Ker počasen si
Song 23:	I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do	Naj bo, naj bo, naj bo

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