


Beyond the libretto: Searching for the source text of intersemiotic surtitles prepared for modernised opera productions

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays both intra- and interlingual surtitles are an inherent element of almost all opera productions and, partly thanks to this technology, opera is now going through a renaissance. The trend of staging operas in a modernised fashion is especially popular these days, but it represents a particular challenge for surtitlers. It is argued in this article that while surtitles accompanying traditional opera productions are usually intrasemiotic, as their source text is just the libretto, modernised productions often have intersemiotic surtitles. The article analyses fragments of surtitles prepared for four different operas staged in the Metropolitan Opera House, Bayerische Staatsoper and Royal Opera House. The result shows that while traditionally surtitles provide the viewers with the meaning of the libretto, the role of intersemiotic surtitles is much more extended, as they provide the audience with more comprehensive information about the whole opera production.

Keywords: translation, opera, libretto, surtitles, subtitles, intersemiotic, signs, source, production

Onkraj libreta: v iskanju izvornika medznakovnih nadnapisov sodobnih opernih predstav

IZVLEČEK

Dandanes so tako znotrajjezikovni kot medjezikovni nadnapisi nujni del skoraj vseh opernih predstav, hkrati pa prav zahvaljujoč tehnologiji, ki nadnapise omogoča, opera trenutno doživlja renesanso. V sedanjem času so posebej priljubljene sodobne postavitve opernih predstav, a za nadnaslavljalca te predstavljajo poseben izziv. V članku postavimo tezo, da so v tradicionalnih opernih predstavah nadnapisi navadno znotrajznakovni, saj je njihov izvornik le libreto, sodobne operne predstave pa pogosto vsebujejo medznakovne nadnapise. V članku so analizirani fragmenti nadnapisov štirih različnih opernih predstav, postavljenih na odrih Metropolitanske opere, Bavarske državne opere in Kraljeve operne hiše. Rezultati pokažejo, da tradicionalni operni nadnapisi občinstvu sicer predstavijo vsebino libreta, medznakovni nadnapisi pa sežejo mnogo dlje in občinstvu predstavijo bolj celostne informacije o operni predstavi.

Ključne besede: prevod, opera, libretto, nadnapisi, podnapisi, medznakovni, znak, izvornik, predstava

1. Introduction

Nowadays surtitling can hardly be named a new or even a budding area of Translation Studies, as the first surtitles were introduced in the early 1980s (Burton 2010, 180) and operatic surtitling, especially in the Western world, is “one of the best documented areas of research in in the field of music translation” (Desblache 2019, 225). Initially faced with great criticism from traditionalists (Holden, 2005), opera surtitles have since become a necessity, and audiences do not hesitate to express their dissatisfaction if opera houses do not provide them (Burton 2009, 62). Numerous opera houses are currently working on developing their accessibility – surtitling is one of the most important ‘tools’ to achieve this, while another is Audio Description, which, in the operatic context, is also popular among translation scholars (see Di Giovanni 2018). Long gone are the days when the translations of libretti were available only in printed programmes, or the vast majority of operas were sung in translations and audiences struggled to understand the singing, even if in their native language. However, the translations in the form of surtitles are not always tailored for each production, and often seem outdated.

Providing different productions with the same translation in the form of surtitles becomes especially problematic in the case of modernised opera productions, i.e. in which the original action is moved in time and/or space. At the end of the 20th century many opera houses were criticised for being too old-fashioned and filled with “waddling prima donnas, woodenly semaphoric tenors, shambolic choruses, and far too much quite unmotivated warbling” (Savage 2001: 408), and currently the modernising trend is enjoying great popularity. The music, libretto and general outline of the story in modernised productions remain the same, and singers always sing the original libretti with no changes, but what the audience sees on the stage may very well have little in common with the composer’s original concept of the opera.

There are a number of reasons for modernising operas, the first of which is attracting new and younger viewers; at the end of the 20th century opera did not enjoy much popularity (Ożarowska 2017a, 233), and as Mariusz Treliński, one of the most popular Polish opera directors, observed, “People were blackmailed by the pomposity of opera, and its fossilised form was served as an obligatory canon” (in Janowska 2002, my translation). However, directors realised that “opera needs saving from itself” (Savage 2001, 408), and one of the solutions was bringing opera closer to the contemporary world. Opera directors also want to create unique performances, which would be “interestingly different” (Savage 2001, 403) from the ones that have already been staged.

Traditionally, the source text of surtitles is just the libretto, but it seems that in many cases of modernised productions the source text is extended and includes not only the text itself, but also the stage design, costumes, props and acting. Subsequently, such a

translation becomes intersemiotic. In this article I argue that while surtitles accompanying traditional opera productions are usually intrasemiotic, as their source text is just the libretto, modernised productions often have intersemiotic surtitles. I will analyse fragments of surtitles accompanying four modernised opera productions and attempt to define both the elements of the libretto and the additional elements, and the reason for extending the original libretto in translation.

2. Intersemiotic translation and opera

The topic of intersemiotic translation in subtitling has never enjoyed much popularity in the area of translation studies, with one notable exception, Gottlieb's 1994 article "Subtitling: Diagonal Translation", in which he examines the semiotic nature of subtitles and their source text. He then further develops this idea in his later articles; in "Subtitling and International Anglification" (2004), where he claims that subtitling "constitutes a fundamental break with the semiotic structure of sound film", and he acknowledges the semiotic complexity of media by defining subtitling as "diasemiotic translation in polysemiotic media (including films, TV, video and DVD), in the form of one or more lines of written text presented on the screen in sync with the original dialogue" (2004, 220–221). Gottlieb explains the term "polysemiotic" by stating that it "refers to the presence of two or more parallel channels of discourse constituting the text in question" (2004, 227) and, interestingly, he, unlike many other scholars (for example, Virkkunen 2004, 91; Mateo 2007, 135), uses the word "polysemiotic" and not "multisemiotic".

Gottlieb's definition of translation became the basis (or a springboard) allowing him to propose a new translation taxonomy, which consists of four "translational dimensions"; he specifically focuses on potential alternations in the semiotic composition of translations, which can be "isosemiotic (using the same channel(s) of expression as the source text), diasemiotic (using different channels), ultrasemiotic (using more channels) or infrasemiotic (using fewer channels than the original text)" (2018, 50). In his early work Gottlieb referred to ultrasemiotic and infrasemiotic translation as, respectively, supersemiotic and hyposemiotic translation (2005, 4), (2008, 45), but later he used the new version of these terms (2018, 50). Irrespective of their changing names, all types of translation differ one from another according to the communicative channel they use¹. Gottlieb also uses the concept of semiotic channels to define intersemiotic translation, as he claims that in intersemiotic translation "the one or more channels of communication used in the translated text differ(s) from the

1 A "communicative channel" is, according to Gottlieb, a "channel of expression" (2004, 219) or a "semiotic channel" (2018, 46).

channel(s) used in the original text. In other words, the source and target text are semiotically non-equivalent” (2005, 3).

Gottlieb’s typology can be used for the classification of surtitles, because opera as a genre also consists of different semiotic systems, and it “projects its sense via different modes of communication” (Minors 2020, 14). As has been already noted, research on operatic translation is not new in Translation Studies because, for example, in 1995 Kaindl wrote a book on translating libretti for singing with regard to individual staging. While he focused solely on singable translations, his work provides numerous invaluable insights which may be applied also to surtitles.

Kaindl underlines the role of semiotics in operatic translation and argues that an operatic text consists of numerous signs, such as music, gestures, facial expression, and costumes, which should be treated as a whole (ibid, 27), because the dramatic effect in opera is not created solely by the words of libretti. Moreover, “the better the relations between symbols are recognised by the recipients, the better they will understand the text” (ibid, my translation) and the translator, as one of the original recipients of the text, needs to understand it well.

Multimodality also plays a significant part in Kaindl’s research into operatic translations. He builds on Gambier’s statement, according to which no text is multimodal (2006, 6), and claims that

multimodal texts are not only those texts – written or oral – that combine visual (images of graphics), acoustic (sounds and music) and linguistic elements, but also all those texts that are ostensibly purely linguistic as they have multimodal elements like typography and layout. (2013, 257)

He also refers to Holz-Mänttari’s and Van Leeuwen’s observations on the complexity of texts and states that “translation cannot be reduced to language transfer, but it designs texts across cultural barriers” (2013, 258); however, in order to produce such a text, translators need to cooperate with people specialising in other modes than verbal texts. Due to the complex character of such texts, Holz-Mänttari calls them *Botschaftsträger in Verbund*, which Kaindl translates as “message conveyor compounds” (ibid). He argues that in operatic translations different media cannot be simply regarded as a group of additional elements, and that full examination of a libretto requires taking into consideration the relationships between the verbal and non-verbal signs used in opera, as they all influence the meaning of the source text (1995, 37). The translator needs to become a part of the production team, just like Holz-Mänttari suggests – otherwise finding and preserving the skopos of the translation becomes just an empty

formula (ibid, 260). Furthermore, according to Kaindl, the more the translation and performance are connected, the more relevant and relatable the meaning of the translation is (1994, 119).

Kaindl's views on operatic translation may be used alongside Gottlieb's classification of opera translations. According to Gottlieb, isosemiotic translation, which uses the same semiotic channels as the original – and includes both monosemiotic texts and polysemiotic texts (2018, 51) – can be illustrated by printed translations (2005, 4), such as novels, which are typically isosemiotic, so in the operatic context an example of isosemiotic translation is a printed translated libretto (and included, for example, in programmes). Diasemiotic translation uses different semiotic channels than the source text, but the number of channels is not changed; for example, “the transfer from written into played music” (Gottlieb 2018, 51) is an instance of diasemiotic translation, so the music played by the orchestra looking at the opera score may also be called diasemiotic translation. In supersemiotic translation “the translated text displays more semiotic channels than the original” (ibid), and it can be illustrated by a whole operatic production, which is based on libretto and score, but in its final form includes music, singing, surtitles, stage design and acting. The last type, infrasemiotic translation, uses fewer communicative channels than the original, and it can be exemplified by operatic audio description providing verbal information about the visual aspects of an operatic production, namely stage design, acting and props. Traditional surtitles are of isosemiotic nature, as their source text consists solely of the original libretto. However, surtitles may also be infrasemiotic when they have a written form, but their source text comprises of a number of semiotic channels. The most common infrasemiotic surtitles are the surtitles accompanying modernised productions.

Kaindl's singable translations and Gottlieb's intersemiotic texts promote the idea of establishing a new, specific source text for each translation. Kaindl noticed that “semiotic resources of the stage are seen as an interactive part of the translation analysis” (2013, 263); similar ideas were expressed by Virkkunen (2004) and Griesel (2005). Kaindl argues that all relevant semiotic elements should be part of the source text because “in opera, linguistic, musical and stage elements are not just mere additions ... The translator's task consists now in creating a textual world for a new cultural space with the use of specific operatic tools” (Kaindl 1994, 117, my translation).

3. Methodology

In my research I used a number of surtitles, subtitles or seatback titles² (for the sake of clarity I shall be using the word “surtitles”) prepared for modernised operatic productions. The productions were staged by the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, Royal Opera House in London and Bayerische Staatsoper (Bavarian State Opera) in Munich; these institutions were chosen because of their worldwide recognition, high quality of staged productions and comprehensive approach to surtitles, which are tailored for each production, be it traditional or modernised. Their surtitlers are often a part of the production team and usually the translator and the surtitles operator (or the cue caller) are two different people. In addition, for example, in the Metropolitan Opera House the Met Titles are prepared by the Met Titles team. I analysed their translations, and, using Gottlieb’s taxonomy, checked which channels were used to convey the message of the source text. The analysis of the nature of the source text was used to outline the complexity of the source text for intersemiotic surtitles.

4. Examples of surtitles and discussion

The source text of surtitles usually depends on each opera house. Some institutions treat surtitles mainly as an informative medium. In such cases, surtitles are regarded as a functional translation (Ożarowska 2017b, 181) and, using Vermeer’s term, they become an “offer of information” (Vermeer 1982, 97). However, some directors decide to extend surtitles’ source text, and thus integrate them into the whole production. In such instances it needs to be decided which communicative channels are to be included in the source text, as that decision shapes the specificity of the information provided by the surtitles. For example, sometimes certain specific elements of the libretto need to be appropriated with the production. Such changes are especially challenging in the case of historical operas.

One example of such an opera translation is *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Gaetano Donizetti. This opera is set in the 17th century in the Lammermuir Hills of South-East Scotland, and at one point one of the characters mentions two British monarchs, Mary II and William III. Table 1 presents the original libretto, my gloss translation and two translations prepared for different productions. The first production was staged in 2016 by the Royal Opera House in London and second one premiered in 2015 in the Bayerische Staatsoper

2 Instead of using surtitles, some opera houses provide their audiences with seatback titles – in such cases the translation is displayed on the small screens on the back of each seat; viewers may operate their screens and, if such an option is available, choose a translation in a different language or turn it off completely.

in Munich. The former was set in late 19th century, and the latter was modernised and transferred to the 1950s, which means that references to Mary II and William III would be problematic. The translations of this fragment are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Excerpt from Act II of *Lucia di Lammermoor* by G. Donizetti.

Original libretto	Gloss translation	Translation provided by the Royal Opera House	Translation provided by the Bayerische Staatsoper ³
M'odi, Spento è Gulielmo, ascendere vedremo in trono Maria.	Listen, William is dead, We will see Mary ascend the throne.	Now that William is dead, Mary will be crowned queen.	A change of government takes place.

The Royal Opera House surtitles preserved the names of Mary and William and the translation by this opera house may be regarded as isosemiotic, as it communicates through the same channels as the original, while the source text is solely the original libretto. The Royal Opera House usually does not adjust surtitles to their productions and tries to remain faithful to the original wording. The translation provided by the Bayerische Staatsoper follows the stage design more closely and, subsequently, it is infrasemiotic as its source text is not just the original libretto, but also the stage concept: instead of Scottish nobles some of the main characters are politicians, the title character is modelled on Jackie Kennedy, and the inspiration for the character of her lover in this production is James Dean. The surtitles omit specific information, and this translation can be looked upon as a general summary of the original fragment.

There are, however, a number of surtitles whose source text is more specific and includes costumes and set design; subsequently, certain concepts from the original libretti are changed in order to avoid a dissonance. For example, originally, Mozart's *Così fan tutte* takes place in the 18th-century Naples, but in 2018 the Metropolitan Opera House staged a production of this opera set in the 1950s in New York. The surtitles (or, in fact, seatback titles called the Met Titles) were adjusted to the production and several items were changed so that the libretto could follow the action onstage. In Act I, two main characters talk about drawing a sword (in order to defend their beloveds' honour), but sword fight becomes a problem in the 2018 production since the two characters are turned into naval officers dressed in contemporary uniforms without swords. The translation is presented in Table 2.

3 Bayerische Staatsoper provides surtitles in both German and English.

Table 2. Excerpt from Act I of *Così fan tutte* by W. A. Mozart.

Original Italian libretto	Gloss translation	Translation provided by the Metropolitan Opera House
FERRANDO E GUGLIELMO Fuor la spada! Qual di noi più vi piace.	Draw your sword! Choose which one of us you prefer.	Put up your fists! Fight one of us!
DON ALFONSO Io son uomo di pace, E duelli non fo, se non a mensa.	I am a peaceful man. I do not fight, I find satisfaction at the dining table.	I am a peaceful man. I duel only at the gambling table.

In the translation “put up your fists” a sword or any other cold weapon is not mentioned, but it may be argued that the meaning of the original is preserved, as the men say they are ready for a duel. In this case the translation may also be considered as infrasemiotic – the surtitles show not only what was originally in the libretto but also what is visible (and invisible) on the stage; therefore, the information from various semiotic channels – the original libretto, costumes, and so on – became the source text in these surtitles. The line “I duel only at the gambling table” can be regarded as a modern version of the original joke and is well-adjusted to the general mood of the scene and the playful character of Don Alfonso.

A similar case, where the surtitles’ source text is extended may be observed in the following example from the same production of *Così fan tutte*.

Table 3. Excerpt from Act I of *Così fan tutte* by W. A. Mozart.

Original Italian libretto	My translation	Translation provided by the Metropolitan Opera House
Bella vita militar! Ogni dì si cangia loco Oggi molto, doman poco, Ora in terra ed or sul mar.	Military life is beautiful! Every day brings something new. A lot today, little tomorrow, Now on land and now at sea.	Hail the sailor’s life! Every day a change of scenery. Today plenty... tomorrow poverty. Sometimes on land, then at sea.

In this scene a group of soldiers (with whom the above-mentioned characters are supposed to go to war) sing a song praising the military life. In this production the line *bella vita militar!* was not translated as, for example, “hail the soldier’s life!”, which would be closer to the original sung by the choir, but as “hail the sailor’s life!”. This phrase also accommodates to the production, since the two characters are naval

officers and the scene takes place at a harbour. Here, just like in the previous example, the source text for this infrasemiotic translation consists of more semiotic channels than the original: the stage design, costumes and libretto.

An example of concepts that are not present in the original libretto but appear in intersemiotic surtitles may be a fragment of *Faust* by Charles Gounod staged by the Metropolitan Opera House in 2011. Traditionally set in the 16th century, this opera was modernised and transferred to the 20th century, with Faust represented as a scientist working on an atomic bomb. In Act I, when Faust meets Méphistophélès for the first time, the devil talks (or rather sings) about his attire, but in this production both characters are dressed according to contemporary fashion and the viewers are presented with the description of the contemporary clothes. The original, gloss translation, and translation by the Metropolitan Opera House are included in Table 4.

Table 4. Excerpt from Act I of *Faust* by Ch. Gounod.

Original libretto	My translation	Translation provided by the Metropolitan Opera House
Me voici! – D'où vient ta surprise? Ne suis-je pas mis à ta guise? L'épée au côté, la plume au chapeau, L'escarcelle pleine, un riche manteau sur l'épaule. En somme, un vrai gentilhomme!	Here I am! Are you surprised? You dislike my dress? My sword, a feather in my hat, Money in my pouch and my rich cloak. All in all, a true gentleman.	Here I am! Why are you so surprised? I'm not what you expected? With the cane and Panama hat, Dressed to the nines... Altogether: a real gentleman.

In this fragment the costume was given priority over the original words and there is no mention of a sword, feather, pouch or cloak. Moreover, this translation goes one step further and the fragment *L'escarcelle pleine, un riche manteau* is translated as “Dressed to the nines” – it is neither obvious nor direct, but it seems that the author(s) of the surtitles did not want to focus only on the clothing; this phrase reflects the general interpretation of this character, who is presented as a modern, elegant and self-confident man. Therefore, the source text for the surtitles consists of more channels, but in the translation the message is transmitted only through the written form.

In all of the examples presented above the source text is, first of all, the original libretto, but there are (longer or shorter) fragments where the source text is extended and covers other aspects of the production.

There also exist, however rare, examples of surtitles in which the production's interpretation, stage design, acting, costumes and props become part of the source text

for the whole translation. Such an example is the 2013 production of *Rigoletto* by Giuseppe Verdi, staged in the Metropolitan Opera House. In this production the action does not take place, as in the original, in 16th-century Italy, but in 1960s Las Vegas, and, consequently, its whole translation fits into this setting. As Michael Mayer, the director of this production, claimed: “in terms of the tone, we wanted to capture some of that ‘bada-bing,’ that sort of swinging, Rat pack ‘Fly Me to the Moon’ language” (Wakin 2013). Table 5 presents a dialogue between the Duke, who in this production is a casino owner (and a singer modelled on Frank Sinatra) and one of his lovers, who is modelled on Marilyn Monroe.

Table 5. Excerpt from Act I of *Rigoletto* by G. Verdi.

Original libretto	My translation	Translation provided by the Metropolitan Opera House
DUCA Ma dee luminoso In corte tal astro qual sole brillare. Per voi qui ciascuno dovrà palpitare. Per voi già possente la fiamma d'amore Inebria, conquide, distrugge il mio core.	DUKE But such a bright star Should be shining at my court like sun. Every heart beats here for you. The flame of love is already burning for you And it conquers and consumes my heart.	Stay! Your movie-star looks really light up the place. Every heart in this club should be beating for you. You're irresistible, baby! You make me burn with love! You send me to the moon!
CONTESSA Calmatevi!	COUNTESS Calm down!	Take it easy, fella!
DUCA Per voi già possente la fiamma d'amore Inebria, conquide, distrugge il mio core.	DUKE The flame of love is already burning for you And it conquers and consumes my heart.	My heart's on fire. I'll follow you anywhere.
CONTESSA Calmatevi!	COUNTESS Calm yourself!	Play it cool!

The meaning conveyed in both texts is the same, but the manner in which it is done is completely different. Firstly, the register in surtitles is much more informal because of slang like “baby” or “fella”; even the word *calmatevi* is translated in two very informal ways. In addition, the Duke’s original flowery style is also translated into the more concise and playful wording of the Duke from Las Vegas. Also, in the original the word “club” is absent and there is no mention of any movie stars. The source text for these fragments thus includes, besides the libretto, the costumes and stage design. In addition to that the translation is also shaped by specific cultural references (“You

send me to the moon!” referring to the famous song “Fly Me to the Moon”). Thus, the source text for those infrasemiotic surtitles is particularly complex: as a result the surtitles reflect the specific reconfiguration of the original opera, by evoking the production’s atmosphere of the contemporary, licentious Las Vegas.

All of the above-mentioned surtitles have their source-text extended, and, subsequently, their role altered. Traditionally, surtitles were only supposed to facilitate the audience’s reception of the opera and be as invisible as possible – as Burton states, “people have come to see the opera not to read your titles” (2010, 180). However, in the examples above the audience was expected to notice the surtitles, to appreciate them and see them as a part of the whole performance. In the cases of *Lucia di Lammermoor* or *Così fan tutte*, the source texts were extended so that the acting on stage did not clash with the text on the surtitling screen. Such surtitles preserved the coherence of the performances (Ożarowska 2017a, 181) and ensured the audience’s strong identification with the stage narrative. Moreover, if the audience is familiar with the original libretti, then there is also a clash between what is being sung and what is being read and seen on the stage. The directors often accept and even endorse such inconsistencies to either promote or legitimise the originality of their artistic vision – that is the reason why they use the surtitles and through them attempt to preserve the cohesion of the production. In *Faust* and *Rigoletto*, the surtitles do not only support the logic of the production, but amplify the interpretation. They either create certain characters or help the viewers to become immersed in the atmosphere of the production. In the case of *Rigoletto*, the surtitles became as much a part of this individual production as, for example, the costumes and setting.

It also needs to be noted that unlike in the case of traditional productions, where the author of the source text, i.e. the libretto, is the librettist, the authorship of the source text in modernised productions is not so obvious anymore. Even if the main author is still the librettist, then the co-authors include the director, dramaturg or sometimes even the translator, as often they all discuss the form the surtitles will take.

5. Concluding remarks

While Gottlieb’s typology is not designed specifically for Audiovisual Translation, it allows a complex and detailed analysis of surtitles, especially in the case of operatic surtitles of modernised productions. Sometimes such surtitles are perfect examples of intersemiotic translation, as their source text may be comprised of non-verbal sign system(s): it may include not only verbal libretti, but also stage design, acting, and props. This plethora of semiotic channels also relates to the multimodal character of opera, which, according to Kaindl, is characterised by the fact that all its media are not separate

but rather interwoven (Kaindl 1995: 35). While with a singable translation the translator is heavily constrained, surtitles allow for greater creativity, but the degree to which this is used depends on the cooperation between the director and translator.

Preparing surtitles for modernised productions also poses a challenge due to the technical constraints – the translation still needs to bear (some) resemblance to the original libretto, include all the other semiotic elements of the production, and adhere to the technical rules for surtitles. Moreover, in order to properly and creatively translate operatic surtitles, the surtitlers should have wide and versatile knowledge of translation, music and literature (Ożarowska 2017c, 78).

However, the preference for infrasemiotic surtitles cannot be explained only by the need to avoid confusing the audience. Surtitles tend to be tailored for each individual production and are “put into context with all the semiotics of the production and their relevance is ever-changing, fluid and flexible” (Palmer 2020, 37). Modernising operas can be risky – the action may be, for example, characteristic for the 16th century and not for the 20th century, even if singers are dressed in modern clothes – and it is actually the surtitles that can prevent a disorientating clash; therefore, their function is not just informing the audience about the plot, but also saving the production’s coherence. Surtitles may also “help to comprehend music and acting” (Virkkunen 2004, 93), and recently opera directors have started to recognise their potential. Cases of using surtitles in support of modernised productions of an opera are still experimental and rare, but as the trend continues to spread it is very likely that there will be more such translations. The whole operatic production communicates its messages via numerous semiotic channels; surtitles use just one channel of expression, but they may include the full semiotic composition of their source text.

The analysed fragments of libretti show that their source texts include many semiotic channels and, for example, the costumes and props of the modernised setting become an important element of the source text. Such intersemiotic surtitles save the coherence of the production and help to enhance the idea of *Gesamkunstwerk* – all the semiotic channels present onstage create meaning which is then synthesised in surtitles. As Virkkunen puts it, “surtitling opera is about seeing and hearing, reading and writing” (2004, 96) and only semantically annotated surtitles can complement, support and enrich the whole operatic production.

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