

TRANSLATION AS NEGOTIATION: A MUSICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Discourse on translation studies is situated in this article outside linguistics, in musical studies. Contextualising and problematising issues when music from African choir culture is translated for non-Africans (Westerners) to perform, the main problem - *translation as negotiation* - is explored together with notions of hybridity, the 'Third Space', boundaries, identity, authenticity and cultural compatibility within performance contexts.

Cultural studies bring to linguistics a wider perspective of translation; how translation studies relate to other disciplines and expressive forms, like music. The researchers argue that translation of African choir music for performance by non-Africans can only be achieved in cultural dialogue.

Keywords: contemporary African choir music, cultural dialogue, translation, negotiation.

1. INTRODUCTION

One's language should never be a dead end. That is why I believe in translation: for us to be able to live together (Nelson Mandela quoted in Beukes, 2005:17).

Translation¹ as a practice has a long history, but not scholarly studies of the field (Youlan, 2005:189). This relatively new academic research area² consists of contemporary interdisciplinary fields combining linguistic, literary and cultural theory (Munday, 2001:181). Cultural studies have brought to the field of linguistics a wider perspective: the "social effects of translation and their ethical and political consequences" (Munday, 2001:334).

One of the outcomes of the "cultural turn" in linguistics, especially in the last decade, from "translation as text to translation as culture and politics" (Snell-Hornby in Munday, 2001:127), was the development of postcolonial translation theory in which this article is situated.

¹ The process of translation between two different written languages involves the translator changing an original written text (the source text or ST) in the original verbal language (the source language or SL) into a written text (the target text or TT) in a different verbal language (the target language or TL) (Munday, 2001:5).

² Translation studies/theory remained relatively 'static' in its debate on 'literal' (word-for-word) and 'faithful' (sense-for-sense) translation until the second half of the twentieth century (Steiner 1998:319).

Spivak's (1993) work³ is indicative of the close association and interaction between globalism, colonisation and translation over the past decade: that of power relations and hegemony, as stated by Niranjana (1992:2): "Translation as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism". Niranjana (1992:48, 49) also criticises translation studies' Western orientated approach, and the authors agree with his view.

This article is positioned at the intersection of postcolonial translation theory and translation studies. Within this interdisciplinary cultural framework, the article suggests that cultural translation could be presented in the form of 'negotiative' translation. This brings into perspective three important aspects regarding postcolonial theory: an unbiased approach concerning 1. the manipulation of translation for specific cultural, economic and political aims; 2. hearing and considering the different cultural and musical voices 'in their own right' from within their own cultural perspectives (see Bhabha under section 4 below); and 3. bringing together two different cultures/languages in a reciprocal relationship (Benjamin, 2000:17).

Negotiation is considered in this article between the musical languages of two different cultures: that of 'traditional' African⁴ choir music for non-African⁵, mostly Western, choirs. It theorises and critically reflects on a collection of 'traditional' African songs in a series of songbooks and videos, produced by the first researcher for the *Africa Music and Choral Trust*. The objective of the series is to make local choir music available as widely as possible, first to local musicians in response to their need for notated choral music and secondly to foreign musicians on an international level for performance purposes. The researchers argue that translation of 'traditional' African music requires cultural dialogue, within and between cultures. The series needs to be conceptualised in a space between cultures where it takes on a negotiated form and momentary truth between and for musicians, performers, editors and consumers. It is therefore centred on a new field of transdisciplinary research as cultural transfer: the interface of translation with cultural studies, focusing specifically on a musical perspective. The dynamics of the translation process as a form of negotiation are presented, as well as related issues arising from this research. The article's approach opposes certain perceptions of authenticity as well as strict requirements of musicology. Things 'happen' in the ever-changing field of translation and cultural studies. 'Traditional' African music is a language not previously notated, but handed down orally.

³ See Bengalese-born postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak's highly acclaimed work *The Politics of Translation* (1993/2000) on translation, transnational and colonisation issues.

⁴ African choirs, in this case, refer to South African choirs in the province of Gauteng. These choirs and their music, as performed by the choirs themselves, were recorded and the songs transcribed from their own repertoires of 'traditional' music, in order to make this available for non-African choirs, to be performed as part of their own repertoires.

⁵ The term 'non-African choirs' refers to choirs from cultures other than an African culture, such as white South African choirs and International choirs.

The translation process aims at the 'transplantation' of the music from an African oral history to a Western notational system, unable to accommodate a 'perfect' translation of music in 'another' system.

Susam-Sarajeva (2008) brings music studies into perspective with translation studies in her article on music and translation:

Interest in translation and music ... has so far been relatively limited, mainly because translation of musical material has been considered somewhat outside the limits of translation studies, as traditionally conceived. Difficulties associated with issues such as the 'musicality' of lyrics, the fuzzy boundaries between translation, adaptation and rewriting, and the pervasiveness of covert or unacknowledged translations of musical elements in a variety of settings have generally limited the research in this area to overt and canonized translations such as those done for the opera (Susam-Sarajeva, 2008: Foreword⁶).

Bringing cultural studies into perspective with musicology and translation studies, it is also worth quoting the eminent social anthropologist John Blacking:

Music is a synthesis of cognitive processes that are present in culture and in the human body: the form it takes, and the effects it has on people, are generated by the social experiences of human bodies in different cultural environments (Blacking, 1976:89).

Colwell (1992:736) adds to this: "accepting or rejecting a culture's music is, in fact, acceptance or rejection of the individuals within that culture".

The process of contemporary African choral music translation does not embrace set rules, but continual dialogue as a process of cultural interaction, where the form of translation is for the translator to 'understand' what is meant in the original from within its specific culture, in order for the 'other' culture, for which the translation is negotiated, to understand the translation. In this article the focus is on "musical dialogue of culture" (Seeger in Baumann, 1991:291).

2. DEFINING CULTURAL TRANSLATION

To produce cultural translation is not a question of replacing text with text (although this may well form part of the endeavor) but of co-creating text, of producing a written version of a lived reality, and it is in this sense that it can be powerfully transformative of those who take part (Jordan, 2002:98).

⁶ In this foreword to *The Translator 2008 (Special Issue)* on translation and music, Susam-Sarajeva writes that it "was conceived as an opportunity to take stock of what has been done on the topic of translation and music so far" (up to 2008) and to explore future research possibilities. A suggested bibliography on translation and music covering existing research in the field is also made available.

'Provisional sense making' or translation between cultures and between 'the self and the other' implies the existence of borders. Borders and boundaries give rise to discussion of related issues such as identity, hybridity and authenticity, to name only three integral parts of negotiational translation.

3. BOUNDARIES AND IDENTITY

A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which *something begins its presencing* (Heidegger, 1962:14).

'Difference', comments Pieterse, can be recognised by referring to pre-constructed boundaries: recognising difference recognises 'others'. Boundaries are "historical and social constructions ... cognitive barriers whose validity depends upon epistemic orders, which are ultimately of an arbitrary or at least contingent nature" (Pieterse, 2001:238). Some boundaries fade and disappear; others appear, but there is always some form of barrier or boundary in order for us to understand who we are and who 'others' are.

The 1990s witnessed research on the "identity forming power of translation, the ways in which it creates representations of foreign texts that answer to intelligibilities and interests of the translating culture" (Venuti, 2000:337). This not only determines how identities are created but also how the culture, presented through translation, perceives itself. Translation is a form of constructing meaning: "[m]aking sense of ourselves is what produces identity" (Spivak, 2000:397).

But what about those cases which are "between categories and combine identities?" Could it be that 'recognition' is actually a re-evaluation of existing boundaries, a "stretching [of] their meaning"? To what extent can 'change' or progress be measured when you seize a new developing identity, but leave behind an 'old' one? (Pieterse, 2001:219).

Identity is one of the most important related aspects of translation. Who has to negotiate their identities in translation? "The difference between self and perceived others is an issue that various theorists locate as central to the process of identity construction" (Hammond, 2004:105).

4. THIRD SPACE

Hybridity is negotiation *between* cultural boundaries/identities where cultural dialogue and interchange take place and from which 'new' hybrids evolve, belonging to 'everybody' and to 'nobody'. This grey area, or 'no man's land', where interchange and re-evaluation of existing boundaries takes place through a process of 'giving and taking', is referred to by Homi Bhabha (1994) as the 'Third Space'. In this neutral space a broader, undefined and creative interaction can occur.

It is in such 'third space' where translation between African and non-African music should be negotiated. In this process newness is created by "consciously, deliberately, weaving something fresh" (Jordan, 2002:101). Intercultural relations are strongly related to translation as negotiational practice. Here, too, the concept of Bhabha's (1994) Third Space aids understanding of this "state of in-betweenness" (Kapchan and Strong, 1999:245) between cultures, where the space is aptly described by Bhabha (1994:219) as "neither One nor the Other but something else besides, in-between" cultures.

Jordan approaches the Third Space as a "highly reflexive and constructive breathing space" where intercultural issues can be negotiated unhindered (Jordan, 2002:101). The researchers embrace Jordan's view, concluding that, from a musical perspective, the translation of contemporary African music for non-African choirs can be brought about within and between cultures by means of intercultural dialogue. A 'space' is created where not only translation can be negotiated but *new* hybrid styles and musics can develop. Through careful consideration and respecting the 'other' culture and one's own, being creative in the translation process in order to adapt to changing situations, translation not only 'brings over', but deliberately creates something new.

5. HYBRIDITY

Hybridity thinking is driven by the dual desire of connection and separation (Papastergiadis, 2005:61).

Hybridity thinking is never beyond the structures of identity and culture, but the "renegotiations and insertions within and between these identities can transform an understanding of the dynamics of these categories" (Papastergiadis, 2005:61). Bhabha states that

[c]ulture's *hybridity* ... is the 'inter' the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture ... by exploring this Third Space we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves (Bhabha, 1994:38,39).

'Newness' is part of hybridity dialogue and associated with "creativity in contemporary society" (Papastergiadis, 2005:47), including the world of music. Through interaction, change, adaptation, negotiation and creativeness of hybridity, newness 'happens' in the in-between spaces or Third Space (Papastergiadis, 2005:47).

Hybrid 'newness' implies the possibility of new musical material, styles and genres (Papastergiadis, 2005:47). The importance of hybridity is that it "problematizes boundaries" (Pieterse, 2001:220). Pieterse sees in-between space between cultures, the unhinging of forms from their rootedness in history and their recombination in novel ways as an explanation for the term

hybridity. Because this process of 'change' and difference is on a continuum, the mixing of the 'old traditional' and 'new contemporary' ideas and musics, influenced by time, spaces, politics, economics, etc., it develops new hybrid forms or genres of music over cultural difference barriers.

New styles in contemporary environments can be created when the represented forms of different cultures or backgrounds interact and negotiate, as in the recording of a video of 'traditional' African songs performed by an African choir, with the different inputs of specialised teams such as sound engineers. During translation processes all contributions affect the end product and many inputs are made by various role players. A new style emerges through the different domestic, national, commercial, international, traditional, personal, etc., perspectives. Input of the musicians themselves, as well as input by the producers, performers, (white) sound engineers, promoters and company management and marketing, Meintjes (2003:8) notes, who all simultaneously integrate their views about what African choral music should be, are part of the creation of 'newness'.

Keil and Feld (1994:9) remind us that although formal music elements define styles, they are given meaning and depth of emotion primarily through their "association with the socio-political positioning and social values of music participants", which now emerges from the simulated situation of recording sessions. That strong 'cultural brokering' can be detected in the studio scenario is raised by Meintjes. The producers

are critical gatekeepers into commodity production because they are institutionally positioned to negotiate between laborers (musicians) and management (the record and video companies) and between aesthetic and market concerns. In the South African case, especially historically, producers are also structurally positioned to broker black cultures for largely white capital and industrial executives, as well as crossover and foreign consumers ... producers hold the responsibility of mediating between blackness as fiction, rhetoric, and commodity on the one hand and blackness as sensibility and experience on the other (Meintjes, 2003:258).

"Authenticity is a key mediating figure in the shaping of style" (Meintjes, 2003:260). When two value systems interlink; where two cultures converge and constitute a mutual 'heteroglossia', a dialogue ensues over "what is good, true, natural, coherent, according to culturally specific codes" and "[b]oth are always provisional" (Meintjes, 2003:260). Bakhtin remarks (1981:324) that "[h]eteroglossia ... is another's speech in another's language"; ethics and aesthetics of different cultures melt together at a moment of contact and interaction and a new style is formed.

The market, politics and technology have a strong influence on culture and music (Meintjes, 2003:10, 11) and thus on negotiation of hybrid styles and

genres. During *production, the organisation of technology, the corporate structures and the surrounding labour relations* are important forms of negotiation of the mediation process that 'intervenes' in music translation. Usually these forms are mutually supportive and co-facilitating in the construction of 'newness' or a new genre (Meintjes, 2003:256).

6. A NEW HYBRID GENRE ON THE AFRICAN COMMODITY SCENE?

Producing and publishing the *Choral Music from South Africa Series*, the researchers experienced the full process of delivering a market-friendly, successful product from the outset of recording music sung by African choirs, until its final publication, as well as performances of this music on stage by a non-African choir. Throughout this 'translation', with the inputs of co-facilitators such as the technological section, bringing with them differing cultural values, we realised that a new style was developing. This 'newness' developed through a mutual aim: a choir product for the market, transcending cultural boundaries. We therefore question the creation of a new style, in the words of Meintjes (2003:257): "Is this hybrid 'process of translation' the beginning of the creation of a new style, a new genre?"

Kapchan and Strong suggest that new genres develop through the "re-marking, erasure, re-inscription, [and] redefinition" of boundaries. Genres are given to "multiple interpretations ... [which] defy uniformity of response". New genres are recognised with reference to their boundaries: "by what it is not" (Kapchan and Strong, 1999:243). Bakhtin's well-known view on genre (1981:288), as an expression of worldview and ideology, is developed further by Kapchan: that the most "obvious hybrid genres are those which combine ethnic identities", and "hybridity is effected whenever two or more historically separate realms come together in any degree that challenges their social constructed autonomy" (1996:6).

Although Bakhtin does not speak directly of hybrid genres, he refers to linguistic hybridisation, which he sees as "a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter ... between two linguistic consciousnesses" (Bakhtin, 1981:358), and which Kapchan (1996:243) calls "a split subjectivity of the utterance". Hybridisation, therefore, is characterised by bringing together many voices as one voice (Bakhtin, 1981:429).

We agree with Papastergiadis that the "critical challenge of hybridity is not an unending celebration and display of difference", but rather a "critique of the conditions that constrain the complexities and exclude the totality of cultural exchange" (Papastergiadis, 2005:58). The end product of translation of contemporary African music, specifically for publication and use by choirs, is neither inauthentic nor superficial. It is neither a 'traditional' nor a 'contemporary' African music genre, but has developed further as a hybrid. Through the translation process between the African choral music version and

the non-African choral music understanding and performance of this music, 'something new' has developed: a new hybrid genre on the African commodity choral scene perhaps?

7. AUTHENTICITY

During the transcription of translation of 'traditional' African music for non-African choirs, the researchers were constantly confronted with the question of whether "purity has [had] priority over hybridity" (Papastergiadis, 2005:48). Stross reflects (1999:258): "*Pure* in this context means relatively more homogenous in character ... having less internal variation. *Hybrid*, the opposite, is of course more heterogeneous in character, having more internal variation".

The classical definition of culture sheds light on the problem of numerous perspectives on authenticity:

Culture is the means by which a society defined a criterion for coordinating symbolic practices that affirmed a coherent identity and differentiated its way of life from others. The ideas and values that were perceived as unique to a specific community were also mapped with territorial boundaries (Papastergiadis, 2005:49).

Such definitions lead to debates around authenticity or non-authenticity in hybrid cultures and identities.

... the roots themselves are in constant state of flux and change. The roots don't stay in one place. They change shape. They change colour. And they grow (Hebdige, 1987:10).

There is an "unresolved anxiety of authenticity" in contemporary discourses, with clarification needed on "whether authenticity is bound to the 'roots' of traditional forms of attachment, intimacy and proximity, or whether the multiple 'routes' of modernity are the only pathways to freedom, criticality and innovation ... Does authenticity demand stillness? Does innovation require restlessness?" (Papastergiadis, 2005:48,49). Thus, are change and development part of the concept of authenticity?

This article suggests both continuous movement in the process of translation through negotiation and continuously moving between two 'othering' cultures in the translation process. The important question ensues: if all cultural systems, according to Monson, whether engaged with external influences or not,

are inevitably engaged in processes of reproducing themselves through time that include not only duplication but also contestation and synthesis (often intergenerational), then we may consider how

cultural authenticity is necessarily redefined and renegotiated in each generation at the nexus of changing local, regional, national, and global conditions (Monson, 2003:10).

Hebdige states (1987:10): "There is no such thing as a pure point of origin, least of all in something as slippery as music"; there are only the continual "processes of sustaining, remaking, and transforming 'traditional' culture through time" (Monson, 2003:10). "[T]here is now a general recognition within the theoretical debates on cultural identity that all identities and cultures are formed through negotiation with difference" (Papastergiadis, 2005:48).

To analyse cross-cultural translation with reference to contemporary African choral music, we therefore, through the words of Monson, reject the idea of 'static African culture' in favour of a more "continuously redefined and negotiated sense of cultural authenticity that emerges from generation to generation in response to larger geopolitical forces" (Monson, 2003:3).

8. TRANSLATION AS NEGOTIATION PRACTICE

Translation is always a shift not between two languages, but between two cultures ... A translator must take into account rules that are ... broadly speaking, cultural (Eco, 2003:82).

Negotiation can imply cooperation, compromise, finding the middle ground or give and take through translation (see *Thesaurus Microsoft* and Bosman et al 2003). In the words of Eco, negotiation is "a process by virtue of which, in order to get something, each party renounces something else, and that in the end everybody feels satisfied since one cannot have everything" (2003:6).

Touma explains 'translation through negotiation' with the translator in a more dominant and mediatory role, that of "cultural engineer[s]" (1991:246), intervening and partaking more aggressively in the translation process. Eco questions intervention in a text and at what stage the same 'effect' is still preserved without violation of the "equivalence in reference" (Eco, 2003:64). Seeger replies that cultural dialogue should be the aim in music translation rather than a "monologue *about* other people's culture" (Seeger, 1991:298).

'Cultural translation', as suggested initially, is not just a substitution of words or music in the other language, but the message has to be conveyed within its own cultural framework, in order for the 'other' culture to understand the original meaning. A master of translation-as-negotiation practice, Umberto Eco explains: "In order to understand a text, or at least in order to decide how it should be translated, translators have to figure out the possible world pictured by the text" (Eco, 2003:20).

There are no perfect translations because cultures, views, abilities, languages and intelligences vary, each with its own influence on the

translation process. There are also different methods of interpreting/translating texts: word-by-word, through non-verbal means, adaptations, transmutations, referring to the culture, using only dictionaries, etc. (Eco, 2003:192,193). The best method is first deciding whether the work is translatable; secondly aiming at translating and isolating its "deep sense"; thirdly negotiating the best solution, because translation is negotiation between reader, author, translator and even publisher, but still being able to hear the unique voice of the original author (Eco, 2003:88).

According to Bassnett, understanding translation includes rendering an SL text to a TL text while ensuring that the 'surface' meaning of the two will be more or less the same. The structure of the SL should be "preserved as closely as possible but not so closely that the TL structures will be seriously distorted" (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999:2). Translation is considered by Spivak (2000:400) as the "most intimate act of reading" and "unless the translator has earned the right to become an intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text". Translation aims to pass on "an understanding to people in their own language and create the same impact as the original text" (Galibert, 2004:1).

In no translation process can every detail be translated. The aim is to keep to the source text *and* remain faithful to the text message, although, very often, in order to explain the original to a 'foreign' culture, the translator has to deviate from the original to facilitate this negotiation process (Eco, 2003:49, 51). The translator must be inventive, trying to convey meaning by changing or rewriting. This process of deciding between a target-oriented or source-oriented text is a "*matter of negotiation to be decided at every sentence*" (Eco, 2003:100). Decisions have to be made about what to retain and bring over and what one should be prepared to 'lose'. "Translators are in theory bound to identify each of the relevant textual levels, but they may be obliged to choose which ones to preserve, since it is impossible to save all" (Eco, 2003:29).

During the processing or translation of 'traditional' African choir music, the researchers were constantly confronted with questions such as: What are we prepared to 'lose' of the original cultures in the processing of the music and what can we retain while transcribing contemporary African music for non-African choirs? Can translation be an equivalent of the 'original'?

Any text has multiple meanings. Translation is not just a study of *equivalence of meaning* in however many other languages, but also in *equivalence of expression* in the 'other' language. And there can be many levels of expression (Eco, 2003: 29). Although equivalence has become ingrained as part of our concept of translation, negotiational translation is based on the concept of difference, and, suggests Hermans (1998:51), we could "consider equivalence as part of the cultural construction of translation" and "the belief in equivalence is an illusion" (Hermans, 1998:64).

9. CONCLUSION

[T]he intersection of translation and music can be a fascinating field to explore, and one which can enrich our understanding of what translation is and how it relates to other forms of expression (Susam-Sarajeva, 2008:Foreword).

In this article the discourse on translation studies is situated outside the conventional linguistic sphere in the hitherto 'unfamiliar' field of musical studies. The aim of this unconventional approach is to broaden our understanding of what translation is and how translation studies can relate to other disciplines and to other forms of expression, such as music.

In sum, this musical perspective suggests the process of cultural translation through negotiation as integral to contemporary translation studies. From this may eventually evolve newness: new approaches and new techniques as part of future research possibilities.

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