



False Friends: Translation and Musical Theatre

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Overview

- ▶ Introduction: Issues in Theatre Translation and Linguistic Translation
- ▶ Song Translation: Singability and Dramaturgy
 - ▶ *Frozen/La Reine des Neiges*: French Translation of “Let It Go”
 - ▶ *The Sound of Music*: Do-Re-Mi in French and Spanish
- ▶ Translating Nostalgia for Musical Theatre
 - ▶ *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*: Fanette and False Friendship

Issues in Theatre Translation

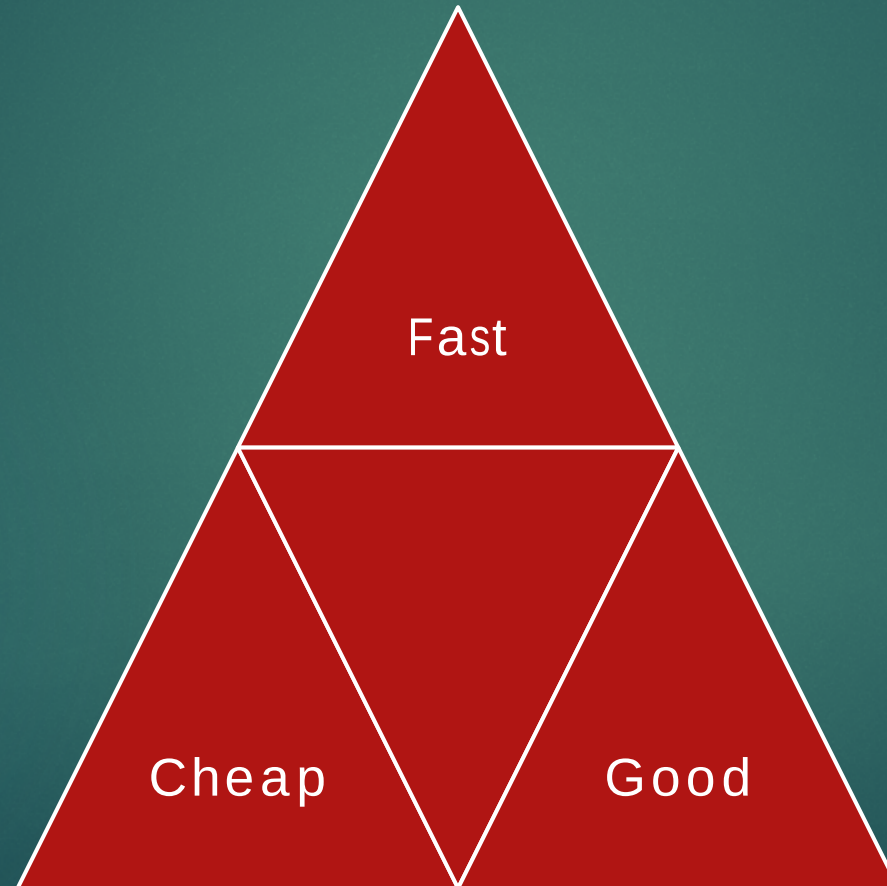
- ▶ Playability/Performability (Susan Bassnett; Eva Espasa)
- ▶ Collaboration (Geraldine Brodie)
- ▶ Culture (Patrice Pavis; Gunilla Anderman)
- ▶ Visibility (Lawrence Venuti; Dorothy Chansky)
- ▶ Dramaturgy (David Johnston, James Magruder, Adam Versenyi)

- ▶ Musical Theatre Translation adds “Singability” as well as further complexity with regard to Collaboration

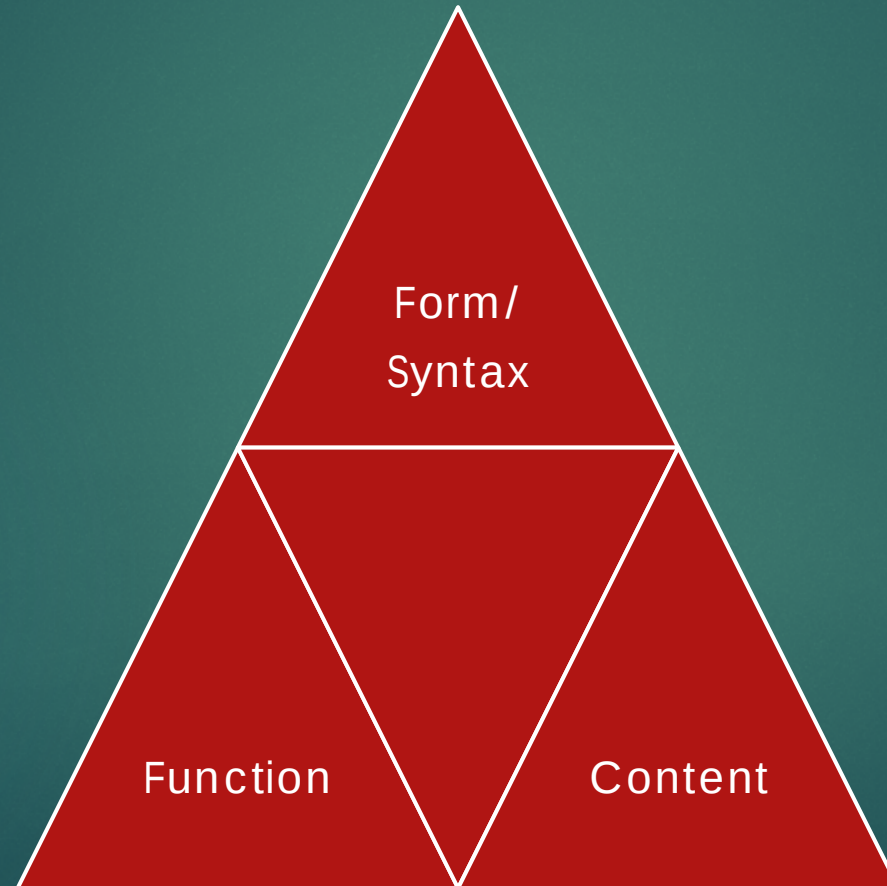
Issues in Linguistic Translation

- ▶ Italian proverb: Traduttore, Traditore. (Translator, traitor.)
- ▶ French translation: Traduire, c'est trahir (To translate is to betray)
- ▶ English translation options:
 - ▶ Translator/Traitor or Translator, Traitor
 - ▶ To translate is to betray
 - ▶ Translation is Betrayal
 - ▶ The translator is a traitor

Translation entails Sacrifice: Business Comparison



Translation as a Complex Decision-Making Process



Singability: Johan Franzon “Choices in Song Translation (2008)”

- ▶ 1. Leaving the song untranslated;
- ▶ 2. Translating the lyrics but not taking the music into account;
- ▶ 3. Writing new lyrics to the original music with no overt relation to the original lyrics;
- ▶ 4. Translating the lyrics and adapting the music accordingly – sometimes to the extent that a brand new composition is deemed necessary;
- ▶ 5. Adapting the translation to the original music. [Most typical strategy in musical theatre.]

Singability and the Spirit of the Text:

Frozen/La Reine des neiges

English (Lopez/Anderson-Lopez)

Let it go, Let it go

Can't hold it back anymore

Let it go, let it go

Turn away and slam the door

I don't care what they're going to say.

Let the storm rage on

The cold never bothered me anyway.

French (Houria Belhadji)

Libérée, délivrée

Je ne mentirai plus jamais

Libérée, délivrée

C'est décidé, je m'en vais.

J'ai laissé mon enfance
en été

Perdue dans l'hiver

Le froid est pour moi le
prix de la liberté

Back Translation (Smith)

Liberated, delivered

I will never lie again

Liberated, delivered

It's decided, I'm on my way

I left my childhood behind
in summer

Lost in winter

The cold is the price of my liberty.

Dramaturgy of Song Translation: “Let It Go” / “Libérée, délivrée”

- ▶ French translation prioritizes the Theme of the Song and the Character’s Arc
 - ▶ More generally about freedom and deliverance, rather than specifically about magical powers
 - ▶ Doubles down on coming out narrative (“I’ll neve lie again.”)
 - ▶ Character Arc: Turning away from summer and toward winter
 - ▶ Justification vs. Expression of Confidence: The cold is the price of my liberty.

Dramaturgy of Song Translation: Do Re Mi

- ▶ *The Sound of Music*
 - ▶ French: *La Mélodie du Bonheur* [The Melody of Happiness]
 - ▶ Spanish: *Sonrisas y lagrimas* [Smiles and Tears] in Spain; *La novicia rebelde* [The Rebellious Novice] in Latin America.
- ▶ Dramaturgical Logic of the Song: Define solfege terms using puns on English words to create a mnemonic device for teaching singing.
 - ▶ Action: Teaching
 - ▶ Rhythm and Scansion
 - ▶ Solfege
 - ▶ Wordplay
 - ▶ ~~Rhyme~~

Translating Wordplay and Concepts: Do-Re-Mi

English
(Rodgers/Hammerstein)

Do, a deer, a female deer

Re, a drop of golden sun

Mi, a name I call myself

Fa, a long, long way to run

So, a needle pulling thread

La, a note to follow So

Ti, a drink with jam and bread

That will bring us back to Do

French (Jacques Mareuil)

Do, le **Do** il a bon **dos**

Ré, **rayon** de soleil d'or

Mi, c'est la moitié d'un tout

Fa, c'est **fa**cile à chanter

Sol, la terre où vous marchez

La, l'endroit où nous allons

Si, c'est **siffler** comme un merle

Et nous revenons à **Do**

Back Translation (Smith)

Do, Do is a good suspect

Ré, a ray of golden sun

Mi, it's the half of a whole

Fa, it's easy to sing

Sol, the ground where you walk

Là, the place we are going

Si, it's whistling like a robin

And we come back to Do

Translating Wordplay and Concepts: Do-Re-Mi

English
(Rodgers/Hammerstein)

Do, a deer, a female deer

Re, a drop of golden sun

Mi, a name I call myself

Fa, a long, long way to run

So, a needle pulling thread

La, a note to follow So

Ti, a drink with jam and bread

That will bring us back to Do

Spanish (2011)

¿**D**ónde empieza la lección?

Recordando la canción.

Mi, si algo tuyo es.

Fa es fácil de cantar.

Sol, que siempre da calor.

La, la nota antes del si.

Si, si cantas junto a mí.

Y volvemos con el do, oh, oh, oh.

Back Translation (Smith)

DO-[Whe]re does the lesson begin?

RE-membering the song

MI, if something belongs to you.

FA, it's easy to sing.

SOL, [the sun] is always hot.

LA, the note before SI

Si, yes sing along with me.

And we return to do.

False Friends: Translating Jacques Brel's "La Fanette"

- ▶ False Cognates

- ▶ Words that look the same can have very different meanings in different languages
- ▶ Preservatives $\neq$ Préservatifs

- ▶ False Friends

- ▶ The narrative of the song "Fanette" hinges on the word "friends" and the speaker's feeling of betrayal
- ▶ In the English translation by Mort Shuman and Eric Blau, the speaker and Fanette were "two friends in love" and eventually "never two friends."
- ▶ Brel's French version includes a surprise third character, the friend who stole Fanette from the speaker.

Fanette and Translating Ambiguity

- ▶ “Faut dire” is ambiguous in French. Translation options might include: “I must say,” “You must say,” “One must say,” “I have to admit,” “You have to admit.”
- ▶ Blau and Shuman suggest this multiplicity (or sidestep) by prioritizing scansion:
 - ▶ She was (x2), She was (x2), I was, But we
 - ▶ I saw (x2), They saw (x2), You see, Oh no
- ▶ Blau/Shuman version tends to use conditional mood where Brel uses future or interrogative, and first-person testimony where Brel uses passive voice.
 - ▶ “I’d like to tell you...” vs. “It was that very day.”

Resultant Ambiguity

- ▶ In the French text, Fanette is clearly dead. She and her lover have drowned after a confrontation with the speaker. The ambiguity lies in how culpable he is. Did he murder them?
- ▶ Blau and Shuman's translation shifts the ambiguity to whether or not Fanette is dead. Maybe she drowned, maybe the relationship just ended and the speaker is fondly reminiscing about his lost adolescent love.

Nostalgia

- ▶ Removing some of the darker subtext of this song is part of a more expansive effort by Blau and Shuman to evoke nostalgia in *Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*
- ▶ Less specifically Belgian and more generally French (except in Marieke where they keep some Flemish lyrics)
- ▶ Incorporating patriotic American lyrics (“By the dawn’s early light”) and references (Chez Eugene becomes “Eat at Joe’s”)
- ▶ See Scott Miller, “Inside *Jacques Brel Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*” in *Rebels with Applause* (2001)