



Theoretical background on the topic of song translation shows complexity in the approach and difficulty in achieving solid singable translations, particularly in canonized songs, without altering their original values. In this article, the issues to tackle and decisions to make are classified in a 3-level scheme. That model is applied to a *corpus* of Romance language translations of David Bowie's 'Space Oddity' song lyrics, after analyzing the original song. Particular focus is put on singable translations into Spanish. The results show the consequences of different choices at each level in the translational characteristics of the final product.

KEY WORDS: song translation, music-text linkage, singable, David Bowie, Space Oddity.

Decision-making in Song Translation: An Approach to the Spanish Translation of David Bowie's Song 'Space Oddity'

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Toma de decisiones en la traducción de canciones: una visión de la traducción al español de la canción de David Bowie «Space Oddity».

Los fundamentos teóricos del tema traducción de canciones ponen de manifiesto la complejidad en el enfoque y la dificultad de lograr traducciones cantables consistentes, especialmente de canciones emblemáticas, sin que se modifiquen sus valores originales. En el presente artículo, las cuestiones a abordar y las decisiones a tomar se clasifican en un esquema de tres niveles. Dicho modelo se aplica a un corpus de traducciones en lenguas romances de la letra de la canción de David Bowie «Space Oddity», una vez analizada la canción original. Se pone especial atención en las traducciones al español que sean cantables. Los resultados muestran las consecuencias de las diversas opciones en cada nivel en las características traductológicas del producto final.

PALABRAS CLAVE: traducción de canciones, vínculo música-texto, cantable, David Bowie, Space Oddity



CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

There are some outstanding features shared by most of the studies on song translation. First and foremost the scarcity, not only of translation scholars but also of practitioners, that have had a significant say on the matter. This may be in close relationship to the formidable complexity (Susam-Sarajeva, 2008:188) of elements and particular difficulty involved in the translation of a song.

In order to shed some light on that complexity, some contextual issues need to be considered. In this respect, songs can be found in a number of venues and contexts (theatres of classical music, opera and musicals, cinemas, TV, recordings, live performances, etc.). Moreover, songs can belong to different music subgenres (art songs, rock, pop, folk, ethnic songs, singer-songwriter music), to mention only some of them. In addition to this, songs appear in a huge variety of products and formats (sung lyrics, printed lyrics, programmes, subtitles, supertitles, inserts in CDs, DVDs, karaoke or other). In any case, songs can be composed emphasizing or prioritizing music or lyrics, adapting music to lyrics, lyrics to music or composing both simultaneously. Finally, each song has its own characteristics. All these factors give lyrics a different and relative value in a song, which is crucial when considering the constraints its translation is subject to.

As a result of that complexity, there are few studies, if any, that cover the totality of genres, subgenres and particular songs, products and formats. All the same, each study has developed theories and principles that can be partially applied to a wider range of songs.

As regards difficulty, song translation is a topic concerned with the controversial concept of translation itself, as opposed to adaptation,

replacement texts (Low, 2013:235-238), 'reprise', emulation and other forms of music cultural transfer (Marc, 2015:8-15), as well as the concepts of fidelity, equivalence and the like. On the one hand, it is not so easy to define what a translation *sensu stricto* is, particularly when applied to this and other types of texts. On the other hand, there are presumably quite few song translations which could clearly fall into this category. Translating a song frequently would imply major shifts from the original. As Low puts it, 'Even the best translations fall short of perfection' (2016: 22).

Finally, the question is made even more difficult in the case of a pair of languages with so many differences in, at least, metrics, phonetics and morphology as English and Spanish, not to mention the fact that English has become a *lingua franca* as well as the pop-rock genre language.

At this stage, the context in which 'song translation' is immersed should be justified. If so, the purpose of the present article would be the following: drawing on the main principles and conclusions shared among scholars in the field, to provide them, as well as practitioners, with a holistic methodological approach to the topic. This approach is then used as guidance for the empirical analysis of a *corpus* of Romance language translations of David Bowie's song 'Space Oddity'.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The general translation theory provides some fundamentals to this article, which will be referred to in the following paragraphs. Such is the case of functionalism or the questions of the original author's visibility, orientation to Source or Target culture, semantic vs. communicative approach, translation method, as well as the commonly standardized translation procedures.



Moving forward, song lyrics are specific types of text to translate. They fit in the so-called multimodal, subordinated or constrained translations (Mayoral, Kelly, & Gallardo, 1988) when translation is required not only of written texts alone, but of texts in association with other communication media (image, music, oral sources, etc.). In this respect, their more outstanding particularities are their linkage with music together with their characteristics as literary-poetic texts. Besides, as *plurisemiotic* translations (Kaindl, 2005), they share characteristics and constraints of the performing arts, almost in every case.

As a Music-Linked Text (MLT) (Golomb, 2005; Trávén, 2005), the translation of a song deals with the concepts of *singability*, the preponderance of music as a quasi-invariable element, the rhetoric, metrics and rhythm of both music and text as key technical elements to match, and the opposition of a *logocentric* vs. a *musico-centric* approach.

In order to specifically address the topic, this article relies on some principles and conclusions shared by most scholars. Those mainly considered herein are: the Pentathlon Principle (Low, 2005);¹ Franzons's (2008) five strategic choices² prior to embarking on a song translation; Golomb's hierarchies in views of MLT (2005:133-137); Franzon's (2008:389-391) prosodic, structural and semantic or rhetoric layers of the musical constraint, and the four translation methods referring to the music metrics (Cotes Ramal, 2005:78-79), hereinafter mentioned. Some of the principles have been partially reformulated, as will be noticed. A more com-

plete and detailed approach to the theoretical background of the topic song translation is addressed by García Jiménez (2013).

In addition to this, some articles in the field of literary translation, poetic and musical rhythm and comparative metrics of English and Spanish are also of relevance in song translation. Those mostly taken into account are the forms, methods and techniques of translating poetry (Holmes, 1969:92; Frank, 1991:129), the distinctions between natural or prosodic, poetic and musical rhythm in English (Pennock-Speck & Gea Valor, 2012: 95-96), together with the adequacy of the metric unit or 'measure' concept³ (Leech in Falces Sierra, 1997:158) as well as the poetic studies on the correspondence between English and Spanish metrics (Pliego Sánchez, 1996; Torre, 2000).

A question arises now: how to approach the translation-related processes. Here the concept 'process' is not meant in its cognitive sense or as a more or less prescriptive technical guidance, but as a complex decision-making dynamic. Particular focus is put on canonized pop-rock songs whose particular musical, poetical, semantic or linguistic elements cannot be initially disregarded. As a result, the degree of constraints stays at its maximum. So, what follows aims to be a scheme that is useful when prospectively planning, translating or retrospectively analyzing a song translation.

A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

This model is based on a holistic approach. It is split into three hierarchical levels, namely stra-

¹ Aggregate translation assessment based on *singability*, naturalness, sense, rhythm, and rhyme.

² Summarized in own words as not translating, translating as written text, rewriting new lyrics, prioritizing lyrics, prioritizing music.

³ '...a unit which is usually larger than the syllable, and which contains one stressed syllable, marking the recurrent beat, and optionally, a number of unstressed syllables. (Leech, 1969:105)'.



tegit, operational and technical. As to the three process phases or stages (prospective, translating and retrospective), they can be approached either on a top-down basis, when planning, or a bottom-up basis, when analyzing. It is assumed in any case that the translating process admits no prescriptions. What follows are the suggested levels and items to be dealt with in whatever direction the translation decision-making dynamic takes.

Choices at the strategic or contextual level: the whole project skopos

This level corresponds to every task prior to the translator's acceptance of his/her task. It could be identified as the planning and commissioning phase. It is dealt with by the functionalist *skopos* theory (Vermeer, 1989; Nord, 2014). It consists of a sort of *strategic marketing plan* containing the translation project to be commissioned to a translator. It is supposed to be drawn after considering the following points.

Thus, when someone engages in a translation project he/she should cope with the *needs to satisfy* or functions of the translated song (emotional, social, purely musical, dancing or others), the *actors involved* (composer, singers, agencies, target public and others) or the *technology at one's disposal* (music supports, formats, venues, performance media and others). The option for one specific item of each dimension would correspond to the *macrosegmentation* in the strategic marketing theory.

Initially, the original song contains the potential needs to be met and the issues to be tackled, which leads to the need to first classify and analyze it (Low, 2016, Chapter 2). In this respect, the assessment of the relative relevance and function of the lyrics (e. g. factual information, communication of ideas, expression of feelings, banal enjoyment, etc.), and the music-

linked verbal text characteristics will be crucial for the translation project.

The users and the target culture context come up as the most outstanding elements for what would be the *market demand* analysis. Special attention should be paid to the relationship between Source and Target cultural, social and musical contexts of each country. The scope of the article comprises exclusively Marc's translation/adaptation form of music cultural transfer. Likewise, the relationship between Source and Target language, whether they belong to the same or a distinct language family, is crucial for the whole project. Finally, a certain user/receiver type would be the project target or *client segmentation*, namely general audience, fans, different kind of singers, commissioners, scholars or even the translator him/herself. Each type is supposed to have particular needs, such as mere understanding, lyrics enjoyment, adapted *singability*, original song enjoyment or other.

On the side of *market supply*, commissioners initiate the process. They can be singers, song-writers, lyricists, agents of different types, amateur individuals, translators themselves, scholars or others. They are supposed to or may have their own purpose or *skopos*, namely commercial, amateur or academic, a specific target, or even a whole strategy to carry out.

As for the product and its format to be marketed, it represents the final step before a translator comes into play. The current technology offers the aforementioned variety of supports to the Translated Text (TT). Each kind of product results in different multimodal constraints: temporal, spatial, visual and or oral.

Choices at the operational or textual level: translational approach

This level corresponds to the options that the translator has, as to what characteristics, over-



all nature, even flavour that the TT may have as a whole, before starting his/her task. The existence of a translator's purpose or approach, a kind of *translatological skopos*, is assumed. It concerns most of the song's values which are to be preserved. Anyway, since the translator's activity is not subject to prescriptions, the final TT type may be decided or just arrived at during any moment of the translation process. This might also be implicit and can be noticed as a result of the analysis.

So, either because it corresponds to an aprioristic translator's option, according to norms of the target culture (Martí Ferriol, 2005:48-49), or just as a result of his/her task, the translated text will be of a certain type. Depending on the orientation to the Source or the Target culture and the relationship to the Source Text (ST), some *translatological* TT features will arise, such as foreignizing vs. domesticating, in L. Venuti's formulation, *overt* vs. *covert*, according to House's types of translation, or semantic vs. communicative (Newmark, 1988:71-72).

Moreover, at the same level the translator will deploy a method which ranges from the more literal and linguistic to the more oblique, textual, communicative, semiotic or poetic-emotional. That leads to different degrees of fidelity or type of equivalence, the result being a translation, an adaptation⁴, to some degree, or a replacement text.

The final and perhaps more specific *translatological* option concerning songs would correspond to the prioritization of constraints (temporal, spatial, aural and visual), some of them dependent on the product format. In any case, metrics and music being the main conditioning factors, there is a crucial option between

a *logocentric*, a *musico-centric* or a more balanced approach to the translation, partially adapting music and lyrics to each other.

Choices at the technical, or literary and music-linked level: translational solutions

This level corresponds to the translator's decision-making when accomplishing the task on a day-to-day basis. It concerns the translational units, items and issues that may pose particular difficulties in order to find an adequate solution. The pair of languages involved is a major factor of the task as a whole, in that many, more or less sharp, contrasts emerge.

Concerning the linguistic and stylistic layer, it encompasses the linguistic variety of use or dialects; user's register and cultural features or *culturemes*; rhythms of quantity, intensity, tone or line endings, such as number of words, syllables, phonemes, metric foot or metric unity, dieresis or hiatus; rhyme and other euphonic elements, such as sounds, alliteration, vowel value and length, type of syllables or consonant clusters; style and literary rhetorical figures, such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, parallelism, repetition, refrains, puns, homophones, etc; and key words and phrases, including references, proper nouns or title.

'Naturalness' when reciting or singing may be achieved or distorted depending on features such as stress on proper syllables or words, word order, other syntactical shifts or tongue-twisters.

As for 'Sense', the translator can resort to the most common written translation procedures and whatever other recourse he or she may have at his/her disposal. Those procedures⁵, to mention just some of them, can be of quantity (omissions, additions, condensation, *explicitation*, particularization, generalization), of quali-

⁴ '...a derivative text where significant details of meaning have not been transferred which easily could have been' (Low, 2016: 116).

⁵ They are based on those of Vinay & Darbelnet.



ty (minor changes, paraphrases, close synonyms, minor adaptations, compensation), or intrinsically linguistic (transposition, modulation or other). They can also include major semantic or stylistic shifts, due mainly to the musical constraints or the poetic style.

This aspect takes also into account all the contextual or intertextual features, textual functions (informative, appellative, expressive), and mood (dialog, narrative, self-assertive, public, etc).

Finally, the musical score-text linkage poses perhaps the most challenging difficulties. According to Franzon, as already mentioned, they could be classified in three layers. The first one is prosodic. This comprises melody, rhythm, note-values, bars, beats, anacrusis, syncopation, splitting or merging notes, slurs, ties, rests, *melismas*. The location of changes can be initial, medial or final. The shifts may involve minor changes in the melody. According to Cotes Ramal, likewise, the matching of both musical and poetical rhythms concerning number of syllables and stress position can be achieved by means of four main methods: 1) absolute mimesis; 2) relative mimesis, that is, same syllable count, in two variants: a) adjusting rhythm either to linguistic prosody or b) to melody); 3) increasing the number of syllables, musically matched by means of three variants: a) adding a note, b) covering a rest or c) taking advantage of an initial *melisma*, and 4) reducing it, in two variants: a) splitting a syllable, thus covering two notes (*melisma*) or b) substituting two original tied notes by one longer. Adding a rest is also mentioned (4c).⁶

The second and third layers are poetic-structural and semantic-expressive, which concern musical genre, arrangements, instruments,

voices, chords, time measure, movement, and others. This includes the concept of *singability* in Low's restricted⁷ meaning (2008: 192). It is based on types of syllables vs. notes, high and low pitch vowels, consonant clusters, open-ended syllables in long notes, adequacy of consonants for legato and staccato and key sound location, either vocal or instrumental.

The former scheme shows the stages and issues to tackle when approaching any of the song translation-related processes. They are contemplated on a top-down basis, i.e. from the strategic through to the operational and technical level. This article addresses the analysis of a translation *corpus* of David Bowie's song 'Space Oddity', to see how it works.

ORIGINAL SONG DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

As argued before, in any case study it is vital to first analyze the original song. It comprises a stylistic, textual (Marco Borillo, 2002) and a music-linked description.

Space Oddity sheet music and lyrics (Bowie, 1977: 121), (s. ST in Annex 1), belong to a canonized⁸ art pop-rock song⁹, which has become *mainstream*. It was issued in 1968 in England, at the start of the song-writer's career. The composer, initially a singer-songwriter, has since become a world cultural icon, particularly after his recent death in 2016.

The assumption here is the balanced mutual dependence between music and lyrics, because there is a sound synergy of value, connotations and effects between them. So, this is a song

⁷ It is focused on adequacy of sounds to be sung, instead of Franzon's broader sense (Franzon, 2008: 374).

⁸ Own assumption.

⁹ Official video (1972) retrieved from <https://youtu.be/iYYRH4apXDo>, published 2015-06-9, [accessed 2018-02-02].

⁶ Own interpretation.

where its lyrics have a high degree of relevance and may require a translation as faithful to the original as possible. As a result, this particular *skopos* is taken as a reference throughout the analysis.

Linguistic and literary features

To start with the linguistic variety of use, there are no dialect marks in the text. It is free of *culturemes* as well. As for the user's variety or register, it is quite standard in professional hierarchical contexts.

Concerning stylistic features, the text is almost free of literary rhetoric figures. No key images have been used in the song, but for the cliché 'tin can'. However, in addition to repeated initial and parallel lines, there are two key parallel couplets at the end of the second and third stanzas. It is a short refrain.

The naturalness of speech is not affected, but for a certain concise style when giving commands or informing, basically in the introductory stanza. However, there are some secondary stress features that should be considered in this respect, when it falls on non lexemic words, mostly conjunctions ('and', 'if', 'though'), when it is doubled ('different') to keep rhythmic scheme, or softened when two lexemic words come together ('stars look'). Anyway, those features are softened in connected speech, being English a stress-timed language. In conclusion, there is no major hindrance in the prosodic (stress) and syntactical (word order) flow of the sentences.

As for mood the text is mostly a dialogue. There are appeals, indications, wishes, statements, requirements, responses and also feelings that give the text an expressive character. In addition to that character, the lyrics are subject to metrics, rhyme and other euphonic elements. All those features give the text its poetic nature.

For the sake of the analysis, the lyrics have

been structured in 3 stanzas or sections of 6, 12 (the words 'For here...' have been included in the subsequent line) and 13 lines ('Can you...' likewise). The most frequent rhythmic scheme of intensity relies on binary metric units starting and ending with a stressed syllable, on an odd basis. There is no need to specify the metric foot. Otherwise, it would be iambic, missing, but not always, the initial syllable. As for quantity, the text is composed of nine seven-syllable lines, disregarding repetitions, eight eleven-syllabic, three nine-syllabic, two eight-syllabic iambic, and four five-syllabic lines, in the two mentioned refrains. Complementary line measures are also to be found.

The lyrics have a strong rhymed¹⁰ character, only nine different endings in 31 verses. So, the first stanza has the pattern AAAAAB, the second stanza ACDDAACCEFBB, the third stanza GHIIAAAAE BBBB. Besides, there are some internal rhymes (CC in 'made the grade'; II in 'knows-goes').

Concerning euphonic features, alliteration is very significant. There is a profusion of occlusive consonants in the three initial lines. It might convey a sense of severity in the appeal. Likewise, six nasal consonants in the fifth line could suggest some movement. Finally the nasals in parallel lines 15 and 28 ('sitting/floating in a tin can') are close in sound to that of the metallic pieces they refer to. This is meant without incurring any suggestion of symbolism, as a theory that gives sounds an intrinsic meaning value, irrespective of the words and context they belong to.

As for other euphonic features, the open vowels in the initial and fifth lines, when appealing, show perhaps clarity as well as grandiloquence. Closed vowels are used in lines expressing per-



¹⁰ Rhyme taken in a broad sense.



sonal sensations, as in lines 2 of the third stanza and the parallel verses quoted above. There are no particularly significant consonant sounds or clusters (only three of them come together at the most) which could make the song difficult to vocalize. Finally, homophony is to be found in the key line 28 ('Can you *hear/here* am I...'). The word, pronounced only once, accounts for both question and answer.

Other outstanding items are the proper name Major Tom, a significant intertextual character in Bowie's discography; a key double sense in the conclusive couplets or refrains, according to foot note in A. Manzano's translation (Manzano & Bowie, 2016: 67), where '*blue*' conveys the meaning of both colour and sadness, and the title, where the word *Oddity* might have been chosen due to its phonic resemblance with the word *Odyssey*, i.e. a pun based on paronomasia.

Now let us focus on the main textual features as a whole. As for its general structure and coherence, the text depicts a remote dialogue between A (a ground station) and B (an astronaut in a space mission) during three moments: launch, while orbiting and after problems arise.

There are several aspects of the vocative-appellative and representative-informative textual functions, at first and when problems are communicated. The expressive-connotative function is mainly with relevance to the astronaut, particularly in his wishes and feelings.

As far as cohesion is concerned, there are mainly juxtapositions of indicative, imperative and interrogative sentences, together with some coordinated ones through conjunctions 'and', 'though'. The only subordinated clause is introduced by the conjunction 'for'. The deictic pronoun 'this' is also found.

The context provides very significant references, some of them historical. Thus, two

crucial events act as a reference for the song. On the one hand, the previously shown Stanley Kubrik's film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, whose script was based on the Arthur C. Clarke's homonym novel. On the other hand, the historical first manned Moon landing in 1969, whose BBC's broadcasting was accompanied by this song. Other references to be found in the socio-musical sphere are the events of May '68 in France, the decline of the Californian 'flower-power', the end of the Beatles, the change undergone by Bob Dylan, from an acoustic to an electric singer-songwriter, and the dawn of progressive, symphonic rock.

Concerning intertextuality, the character of Major Tom reappears twice afterwards. Firstly in the song 'Ashes to Ashes' included in the 1980 *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)* album, where he is depicted as a 'junky'. Presumably, the character in the song 'Hallo Spaceboy' of the 1995 *1. Outside* album might be the same, although without any explicit mention of the name.

To conclude the linguistic and literary text features, let us make some comments on the overall Sense. The song depicts the launching into a space orbit of an astronaut. The spaceship is controlled by a ground station, which, for whatever unknown reasons, loses contact at some point. The consequences are uncertain as well as being pessimistic.

Some episodes and perceptions of the astronaut's life are also reflected, such as remoteness, weightlessness as well as vision of the Earth and intimate feelings. The content of the dialog has different melancholic connotations, i.e. loneliness, focus on the individual, emotional distance, dependence on a technology breakdown, escape, uncertainty of the final destiny and its wilfulness. A suicide impulse is not to be disregarded (Critchley, 2016: 38).



Wholly metaphorical interpretations are also possible, such as a psychedelic trip, very common at that time. Another possibility is the need of the individual to reinforce him/ herself against society, technology, family, even nature and other ties.

Music-text linkage

This is the feature that makes lyrics a different type of text to be translated. First of all, it should be useful to know, which the main elements of this strophic¹¹ musical score are. Its key signature is C major, most bars being in quadruple time, but two of them in two-four-time, corresponding to the refrains before the interlude and the end. The notes are mostly quavers, but some values turn to semiquaver plus dotted quavers, and two bars are based on semiquavers. The tempo ranges from slow to moderate, the intensity is marked *mf*, *crescendo* to *f* in the second part. The harmonic progression goes from chord C to a not concluded D7 in the initial and other appellative lines¹². There is an overlapping, spoken countdown during the first stanza, as well as some arrangements suggesting taking-off and distancing of the spaceship.

As far as prosodic-rhythmical matching is concerned, there is an almost perfect fit between bars to lines (starting on the second time in the initial stanza), syllables to quavers and stressed syllables to downbeats, but with some adjustments. The presence of some of them enables the translator to proceed likewise, without it being considered a significant change in the original melody. The first placing is achieved with the help of initial rest ('- Ground...'). The second one is sometimes achieved by initial

quaver or semiquaver anacrusis ('*Com-mencing...*') or turning to semiquavers ('*sitting...*'). On other occasions it is the syllable that adjusts to the note-value being pronounced longer particularly in case of a diphthong (*melisma*) at the line end ('*wear...*'). The third one has some exceptions by means of syncopation for the sake of emphasis inside a bar ('...*control...*', or '*Major*', '*on*', both including a *melisma*) or when lingering at the end ('...*Tom*').

The matching of the poetic and semantic-rhetorical, is achieved through the above mentioned items, orchestral and/or electronic arrangements (depending on version), spoken voice, two-part score, increasing intensity (*crescendo*), turning from recitative-emphatic to melodic parts, as well as the pure musical episodes.

Singability and key sounds location is the remaining aspect concerning music-text linkage, though not so crucial in popular songs as in classical art songs. The open vowels when appealing are probably the only items worth remarking. No other major synergies or hindrances are noticed in the lyrics, since there are no short-closed syllables in line-endings.

CORPUS DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

The analysis is based on the descriptive methodology (Toury, 1995), applied on a *corpus* of translated texts.

Introductory comments on the corpus characteristics, the analysis and their restrictions

Firstly, very few singable versions have been found, most of them on the internet. Moreover, it is assumed that few professional lyricists and translators have devoted their efforts to this task. As a result, the analysis does not aim to

¹¹ As opposed to 'through-composed'.

¹² As for changes in harmonic mood, see Trynka (2011: 130).



strictly compare and assess each individual translation but to draw summarized conclusions from the corpus as a whole.

Secondly, this article focuses mainly on Spanish, singable translations, mostly based on Franzone's strategy 'Adapting the translation to the original music' (2008: 386). Other versions are mentioned simply to note their existence, to be strategically classified and to occasionally help the core of the study. As a result, most of the choices at the strategic level are outside the specific detailed scope of the analysis. So, the present empirical study has been carried out in full only for the two remaining levels on a bottom-up basis, i.e. technical issues and shifts from the ST are first noted and then *translatological* choices are deduced.

Finally, there is one more restriction concerning the technical level of the analysis, in that it focuses on singable translations preferably to be audio recorded. Thus, visual, spatial and other semiotic constraints have been disregarded.

Corpus list

*Spanish sung versions*¹³

- A) Iskiam. Lyrics (Iskiam, 2016: 98), (s. Annex 2). Video <https://youtu.be/KPc7mcjOCQg>, published 2016-01-15, [accessed 2018-02-02]. Author profile: Iskiam Jara www.iskiamjara.com [accessed 2017-12-27]
- B) Txus Bengoechea (subtitled for karaoke). Transcription of the subtitles in Annex 3. Lyrics and Video https://youtu.be/LIn51fPA_Zo, published 2016-05-1, [accessed 2018-02-02]. Author profile <https://www.youtube.com/channel/>

UC4st8l7pkTHPpdE8rMem_Ow [accessed 2017-12-27]

- C) Alejandro Zapata Ventura. Transcription of the lyrics in Annex 4. Video <https://youtu.be/2bfhCICaChI>, published 2016-06-30, [accessed 2018-02-02]. Author profile <https://pr.linkedin.com/in/alejandro-zapata-7a4tb537> [accessed 2017-12-27]
- D) Azucarillo Kings. Own transcription of the lyrics in Annex 5. Video https://youtu.be/_WLNNdW3XVvk, published 2012-10-24, [accessed 2018-02-02]. Author profile <https://www.discogs.com/es/artist/328040-Azucarillo-Kings> [accessed 2017-12-27]

Spanish printed translation

- E) Alberto Manzano, translator (Manzano & Bowie, 2016).

Sung versions in other Romance languages

- F) Modol-David Bowie's Italian version. Video <https://youtu.be/3tPIPYuDZYs>, published 2012-07-24, [accessed 2018-02-02]
- G) El Niño de la Hipoteca's Catalan version. Video <https://youtu.be/tuvRsC9rH94>, published 2016-11-1, [accessed 2018-02-02]
- H) Gerard Palabrat's French version. Video <https://youtu.be/grWOxPcF7I4>, published 2016-04-28, [accessed 2018-02-02]
- I) Seu Jorge's Portuguese version. Video <https://youtu.be/CVeD-xwJh-k>, published 2010-10-7, [accessed 2018-02-02]

There are different kinds of versions, according to decisions made at the strategic level. So, version E is a printed, non-singable, free-verse translation schematically arranged on the page as poetry: type 6 according to Frank (1991:133), included as a reference. Version F, having the lyrics completely rewritten, corresponds to a 'replacement text' according to Low (2013:238).

¹³ A Bambikina's Spanish singable version has been recently performed on Radio 3 (rtve) <https://youtu.be/GD0jbymoxEk>, published 2017-08-18, [accessed 2018-02-02]



Versions H and I, mostly adapted lyrics, would be 'adaptations' likewise. Catalan version G is a singable translation, but outside the technical scope of this article. The remaining Spanish versions, from A through D, are the singable translations analyzed at the technical and *translatological* levels.

According to the methodology, on a bottom-up basis, the technical level analysis consists of a summary of the main types of shifts from the original to be noted in each version. It emphasizes shifts due to the musical and poetic constraints, considering mere linguistic procedures only occasionally. This process enables us to realize the sort of decisions made by the translators, which in turn provides us with a list of procedures or techniques, both literary and particularly music-linked, to resort to when addressing a singable translation, aiming to be as close to the original as possible, that is, a translation as faithful as possible. As a result of those decisions made at that level, the characteristics of the final product at the *translatological* level are shown.

Summary of the descriptive analysis

At the technical level, examples of the main shifts noticed in each version are summarized according to the items included in the methodology. Those not mentioned are supposed not to differ from the ST. At the end, some comments on the *translatological* aspects are included.

Technical level

Most of the shifts are found on the side of quantity rhythm and its subsequent prosodic-rhythmical Music-Text Linkage and are akin to those found in the ST. Thus, the syllable count is altered by means of the addition of

unstressed ones. Some of them are placed at the beginning of a line ('Control' in A line 1¹⁴). It leads perhaps to a lower degree of solemnity. This is solved by means of initial upbeat or anacrusis sometimes placed at the start of the second hemistich ('que' in C line 6). This could mean adding one more variant 3d to those of the increasing number of syllables or just fit into either 3a or 3b, depending on how it is sung (Cotes Ramal). Other shifts are medial unstressed syllables ('desde-control' in A line 7). This implies a change in foot patterns. It is musically solved by splitting one note into two (variant 3a). Finally, those placed at the end of a line ('viste', in A line 9) involve an original *melisma* placed on double or long vocalic phonemes in the words 'wear' and 'dare' (variant 3c).

Omission of syllables is also to be found, i.e. the loss of the unstressed first syllable ('Com-mencing' in B line 5). This involves the loss of an anacrusis or initial upbeat, and thus a new variant 4d in reducing the number of syllables. There is an omission of a syllable in C line 22, but it is uncertain to know which one. As a result, a note must be either doubled or stretched (variant 4a or 4b).

Compensation of syllables is found in the specially shaped line 3 of C, split into two hemistiches: an addition in the first one ('Com-puebe') supported by anacrusis and an omission at the start of the second one, supported by a rest (variant 4c).

Some metric possibilities are also used to match syllables and notes, such as dieresis ('la-inmensionad' in B line 16), hiatus ('ya-empezó' in D line 5), sinalefa ('Veó el' in C line 16).

Stress patterns undergo some changes as well. This implies an alteration in the natural-

¹⁴ Examples are given in parenthesis. Lines correspond to those of the original lyrics.



ness of speech, either by putting an emphatic stress on a monosyllabic word ('y' in A line 3) or shifting its position in a word ('suerte' in A line 6). The shift is mostly phonological, not musical (variant 2b), for downbeats do not alter their position. So, the melody is almost fully kept (variant 2b). But there are also examples of melodic, rhythmical shifts ('Control' in D line 1, variant 2a). A secondary accent is almost always placed on words having more than two syllables, for the sake of keeping the binary metric unit ('des-co-necto' in B line 24). No remarkable shifts in word order have been noticed.

As far as linguistic and stylistic features are concerned, all linguistic varieties are generally maintained. Nevertheless, turning to familiar register (astronaut's response 'tú' in B line 18 or 'amigo' in C line 6) or colloquial register ('dale' in D line 6, 'la mar de' in line 8) is also found.

Nevertheless, the overall mood is sometimes shifted. Particularly, B uses imperative tense and emphasis, ('atrévase', 'de una vez' in line 10). So does D, ('ponte' in line 6). The discretional diminutive form 'sentadito' is introduced in B line 28.

Rhymes are generally kept, particularly in the first stanza and refrains. It generally includes line 6, which leads to loss of contrast. There is simply a remarkable reduction in A, excluding lines 13-14. Further additions of rhymes are found in B lines 12, 20 and C line 22. Conversely, alliteration is generally lost. The exception is D in line 3, based on occlusive consonants, and some traces in B and C first stanza, based on the phoneme /k/. No solution for homophony *hear/here* is attempted, either. There is just an attempt to address it in D, by means of an interrogative interruption to facilitate the change of the person speaking.

As for other key poetic features, repetition is avoided in B, by unfolding the first lines.

Metonymy ('El Planeta Azul') is introduced in B and C. The cliché 'a mis pies' is added in A line 16 to compensate for 'far above the world'. No solution for *blue* is attempted. B just opts for 'triste', explicitly. The word 'Oddity' in the title is translated as 'Odisea' in C and D.

Finally, concerning Sense, there are few major shifts, mostly omissions ('take your protein pills' in A line 3), some covered by a redundancy (omission of 'your circuit's dead' in A line 24, covered by 'falló' plus 'está mal'). There are also additions ('comience la misión' in A, line 3), generalization ('ignition' vs. 'todo' in A line 6), compensation in line plus change of object ('compruebe el casco' in C line 3 for 'check ignition' in line 5).

Adaptation is widely used ('en esta incertitud' in A, line 18), which frequently involve a subjective interpretation. It seems clear that some omissions and partial adaptations are due to either the different nature, basically number of syllables, of both languages, or to the musical constraints.

Translatological level

Version A is based on a partially oblique translation, including minor features of an adaptation. It puts more emphasis on meaning than on euphony, though it is quite balanced anyway. It could be considered somewhere between a semantic and a communicative adapted translation, according to Newmark (1988), clearly *covert* anyway. It also keeps the foreignizing features proper name 'Tom' and title.

In conclusion, the translator of this acoustic version is probably concerned mainly with just making the song singable and understandable when sung whilst keeping as close to the composer as possible. This could also be referred to as his *skopos* at the *translatological* level.

Version B has fewer shifts in prosody than

the former version. It focuses more on euphony and rhythm and thus on the almost exact linkage to the music. However, other significant features characterize it, too. Firstly, there is some inconsistency in mood, as in the softening addition of 'por favor' in line 3, together with the already mentioned imperative tense and familiar register in the astronaut's responses. It probably involves the listener somehow ('como tú' in the refrain). Secondly, this version includes wishes and subjective interpretations of the ambiguous connotations involved in the original text. Particularly remarkable are the turning of belief in destiny to hope in return ('Ojalá' in line 21), the explicit connotation of sadness of the key word 'blue', together with a personal comparison and further added feeling of loneliness ('solo' in line 18). All of this might lend the translation remarkable signs of adaptation.

Anyway, it keeps the features of being foreignized, *covert* and fully communicative. The *translatological skopos* in this case could be quite similar to the former one anyway, though giving oneself the chance to be a little bit more creative.

Version C is closer to version A, in that there is only a minor subjective interpretation, involving fewer shifts of rhythm anyway. However, it seems to be less concerned with keeping as many details of meaning, and thus being as close to the ST, as possible. It falls more into the communicative rather than the semantic side.

Version D undergoes a total change of music genre, turned to a more popular, rhythmical one ('Spanish *rumba*'). It is consistent with some shifts in mood, which may have involved some options at the *translatological* level. So, the change of mood implies a lesser need to evoke ambiguous feelings, provided that the music's mood and tempo would not match them. The

music tempo has an impact on some key lines, as well.

According to the change of subgenre, features such as melody, formality, consistence and others have been affected. It is probably a translation more focused on the reception culture, and thus a fully communicative, adapted version, which makes it more distant from the original text. It could be stylistic emulation, according to Marc (2015:10).

Summary of the results and discussion

The analytical description shows a wide coincidence among the approach and techniques used by the different translators.

As for the technical level, mostly all versions share a limited addition of syllables. This is due to the fact that Spanish is higher in syllable count. At the same time, that leads to some minor shifts in the musical score, mostly adding anacrusis covering an added initial syllable, splitting a note value to a medial one and turning an original *melisma* at the end of a line-bar into two notes. These techniques are also found in reverse order, though less frequently. Further minor changes in stress patterns are noticeable as well.

Naturalness of speech is preserved throughout all translations, but for some minor shifts of stress. Conversely, rhyme, alliteration and other euphonic items seem to suffer slightly more, as do some specific vocabulary items, by means of corresponding omissions, due to the relative length of the Spanish language, fewer additions and other common procedures. Some of them can be considered adaptations. However, none of them alter deeply the overall meaning, apart from some subjective interpretations. Finally, the two translation problems (homophone, double meaning) are not directly addressed.

As a shared *skopos* at the *translatological* level,





all versions seem to try to properly preserve as many original characteristics and values as possible. The *translatological* approach to it shows some features of being foreignized, *covert*, semantic-communicative. Nonetheless, there are a few points that should be remarked upon. So, version A relies on some minor rhythmical shifts in the music-text linkage, version B focuses on phonetics and music-text linkage though displaying a certain creative touch, version C is similar to A but it focuses less on details of meaning to preserve linkage, whilst version D adapts itself to the musical change of genre, thus being a little bit looser in its criteria.

CONCLUSIONS

Two almost axiomatic statements give the article its starting point. Firstly, complexity is an inherent characteristic of any study aiming to approach the topic 'song translation', mainly due to the multidimensional context in which it is immersed. Secondly, practitioners meet extreme though challenging difficulties to properly translate art pop-rock songs. This is due mainly to the variety of constraints the task is subject to. In this respect, not only those concerning musical, performing or issuing features must be tackled, but also poetic style, frequently an intrinsic characteristic of the lyrics, is to be addressed, without being able to resort to a sound change of metrics pattern. So, the former point together with other socio-musical and socio-linguistic characteristics of the pop-rock genre and English language, lead to scarcity of both practitioners and scholars devoted to either translating art pop-rock songs or analyzing them.

All those limitations (complexity, difficulty and scarcity), become even more challenging in some of the particular circumstances addressed

in this article. This is the case when the pair of languages involved is English and Spanish, which differ so significantly in syllable count, stress patterns, phonetics, prosody, etc. But also when the song concerned does not allow for an easy option for a *logocentric* or a *musico-centric* approach that disregards the opposite.

Notwithstanding that, there have been some significant studies that have provided useful principles and tools to delve further into the subject. Based on them, this article has attempted to show the multiplicity of elements to be taken into account in every phase of the translation-related processes, the word process used here as a holistic dynamic concept encompassing all the activities involved, from planning through translating, issuing and analyzing the product. But at the same time, those different elements offer different choices to be prioritized, assuming that a fully 'equivalent' TT which meets all the details of the ST is a utopian goal to reach.

So, translating as well as translation analyzing, would be decision-making processes. As such, a methodological approach is hereto suggested. It consists of three decision-making levels: strategic, operational and technical. The first one, sharing some characteristics with those of a *strategic marketing plan*, can be dealt with under the scope of functionalist theories, which imply the existence of a specific *skopos* in the translation commission. The second one corresponds to the *translatological* choices. In this respect, a certain kind of *translatological skopos* may also be involved here. Finally, the technical elements, issues and solutions that a translator comes up with or are at his or her disposal, have been shown and classified (quantification is not addressed in this article). The full process can be prospective, addressed on a top-down basis, when planning and translating

or retrospective, a bottom-up description, when analyzing. In any case, the first step should be the thorough description and assessment of the original song genre and particular features.

This scheme is used in the descriptive analysis of David Bowie's 'Space Oddity' song Romance language translations and other kinds of versions. It is approached under certain restrictions, mainly the scarce number of them, most of which are non-professional and found on the internet. The song is assumed to be a canonized art pop-rock song, whose relative values between lyrics and music are balanced, as shown in the song analysis. Nevertheless, its translations need not totally meet the demanding, respectful standards of a classical art song.

The *corpus* illustrates some choices made at the strategic level. So, there is a 'printed, non-singable translation' and another one based on 'fully rewritten singable lyrics'. Both of them are prior to the translator's task. The remaining singable translations are subject to different approaches at the *translatological* level. The French and the Portuguese versions are mostly 'adaptations', whereas the Catalan version, not analyzed for language reasons, and all the Spanish ones could be considered 'singable translations', including some minor adaptation features. Their approach is foreignizing, *covert* and, to a different degree, semantic, phonetic, communicative or even creative. Musical style and arrangements may vary, but there is only one among them that changes the song genre. It could be considered 'stylistic emulation', as a kind of music cultural transfer. Every translated version aims to respect the overall meaning and values of the original song. Whether they have achieved it or not might be a topic for a further line of research.

The technical level description is only applied to four Spanish singable translations. It

has been shown that even when a high degree of constraints is involved, as in the case of such an evocative and balanced song, there are real possibilities and techniques to achieve a solid singable translated version. In fact, most lyricists have resorted to the same recourses and options to preserve the original song features. The most outstanding ones concern the music-text linkage. So, addition of unstressed syllables is used throughout all versions, supported by minor shifts in the musical score, an aspect considered 'sacrosanct' in art classical songs. Some shifts in stress patterns cause minor dysfunctions in the naturalness of speech. Most minor shifts deployed to match music and text rhythms are also found in the original sheet music in lines of similar structure. Therefore these sorts of strategies would not imply a major shift in melody. Finally, there is also the omission of less important details of meaning, which do not change the overall sense, but for some creative interpretations. Nevertheless, some translation problems remain unsolved. In this respect, most articles have a say as to which extent each feature, namely meaning, rhyme, etc, matters in the final result, according to the Pentathlon Principle. This article does not suggest any aprioristic position in this respect. A kind of quantitative and qualitative assessment of shifts, as Stephenson does (2014: 150), might also be a subject for another study.

As a result, it could be concluded that there are many strategic decisions to make, when embarking on a translation project. There are also different *translatological* approaches to a singable translation prior to or as a result of the task of translation. Finally, though challenging, there are plenty of recourses at the technical level to cope with the issues the translator must face, particularly in the case of a singable trans-





lation of a canonized song, without in principle disregarding any of its key features and values.

At the same time, there is still great scope for enhancement and improvement in the studies and the praxis related to translating songs that are singable. This might mean encouraging both practitioners and scholars to further devote their efforts to the topic, in terms of insights into recourses for the task of translating as well as further unexplored fields of research.

ANNEX I: SOURCE TEXT (DAVID BOWIE)

Space Oddity

1. Ground Control to Major Tom
2. Ground Control to Major Tom
3. Take your protein pills and put your helmet on
4. Ground Control to Major Tom (ten, nine, eight, seven, six)¹⁵
5. Commencing countdown, engines on (five, four, three)
6. Check ignition and may God's love be with you (two, one, liftoff)
7. This is Ground Control to Major Tom
8. You've really made the grade
9. And the papers want to know whose shirts you wear
10. Now it's time to leave the capsule if you dare
11. "This is Major Tom to Ground Control
12. I'm stepping through the door
13. And I'm floating in a most peculiar way
14. And the stars look very different today
15. For here am I sitting in a tin can
16. Far above the world
17. Planet Earth is blue
18. And there's nothing I can do

¹⁵ In brackets, voice-over.

19. Though I'm past one hundred thousand miles
20. I'm feeling very still
21. And I think my spaceship knows which way to go
22. Tell my wife I love her very much she knows"
23. Ground Control to Major Tom
24. Your circuit's dead, there's something wrong
25. Can you hear me, Major Tom?
26. Can you hear me, Major Tom?
27. Can you hear me, Major Tom?
28. Can you "Here am I floating 'round my tin can
29. Far above the Moon
30. Planet Earth is blue
31. And there's nothing I can do"

ANNEX 2: VERSION A (ISKIAM)

Space Oddity

1. Control de tierra a mayor Tom,
2. control de tierra a mayor Tom,
3. coja el casco y comience la misión.
4. Control de tierra a mayor Tom
5. la cuenta atrás ya comenzó,
6. compruebe todo y tenga la suerte de Dios.
7. Desde control de tierra a mayor Tom,
8. usted lo consiguió...
9. y ahora los medios quieren saber cómo se viste,
10. es el momento de salir, si usted se atreve.
11. Desde Mayor Tom para control,
12. estoy saliendo ya.
13. Pero ahora floto de una forma muy peculiar
14. y las estrellas hoy cambiaron su brillar.
15. Y aquí estoy, sentado en esta lata.



16. con el mundo a mis pies.
17. la tierra es azul
18. y yo en esta incertitud.
19. Aunque conseguí llegar aquí,
20. me siento tan inmóvil.
21. Creo que esta nave sabe donde ir,
22. díganle a mi mujer que yo la amé.
23. Control de tierra a mayor Tom,
24. algo falló, algo está mal...
25. ¿Puede oírme mayor Tom?
26. ¿Puede oírme mayor Tom?
27. ¿Puede oírme mayor Tom?
28. Y aquí... estoy sentado en esta lata.
29. Con la luna a mis pies.
30. La Tierra es azul
31. y yo en esta incertitud.

17. Y el planeta azul
18. Triste y solo como tú
19. Aunque voy a gran velocidad,
20. Me siento muy normal
21. ¡Ojalá mi nave sepa regresar!
22. Di a mi esposa que la quiero de verdad
23. ¡¡Base a Comandante Tom!!...
24. ¡¡El motor falló, se desconectó!!
25. ¿Puede oírnos Sr. Tom?...
26. ¿Puede oírnos Sr. Tom?...
27. ¿Puede oírnos Sr. Tom?...
28. Porque yo, sentadito en una lata
29. La luna crucé
30. Y el planeta azul
31. Triste y solo como tú

ANNEX 3: VERSION B (TXUS BENGOCHEA)

Space Oddity

1. Aquí base, aquí control
2. Base a comandante Tom
3. Lleve el casco y sus pastillas, por favor
4. Base a comandante Tom
5. Cuenta atrás para ignición
6. Rece a Dios para que aguante su motor
7. Aquí base a comandante Tom
8. Ha superado el test
9. Y la prensa todo lo quiere saber
10. ¡Atraviese la escotilla de una vez!
11. Comandante Tom a la estación
12. La puerta ya crucé
13. Y flotando en el espacio me quedé
14. ¡Qué distintas las estrellas hoy se ven!
15. Pues yo voy surcando en una lata
16. La inmensidad

ANNEX 4: VERSION C (ALEJANDRO ZAPATA VENTURA)

Odisea en el Espacio

1. Base a comandante Tom,
2. Base a comandante Tom:
3. compruebe el casco, comienza su misión.
4. Base a comandante Tom:
5. motores en marcha en la estación,
6. Buena suerte amigo, que te acompañe Dios.
7. Aquí base a comandante Tom,
8. la gran noticia aquí
9. y la prensa quiere saber todo de ti.
10. De la cápsula es momento de salir.
11. Comandante a base de control:
12. a punto de cruzar
13. esta puerta hacia el espacio y flotar
14. desde aquí los astros son de otro brillar.
15. Sentado sobre esta lata de aluminio,



16. veo el Planeta Azul
17. Miro alrededor
18. y no hay nadie, solo yo

19. Tras cientos de millas sin parar
20. viajando a algún lugar,
21. a mi esposa recordadle una vez más
22. que no la dejaré de amar jamás.
23. Base a comandante Tom
24. tus circuitos fallan y la conexión,
25. ¿nos recibe señor Tom?
26. ¿nos recibe señor Tom?
27. ¿nos recibe señor Tom?
28. Flotando sobre esta lata de aluminio,
29. Veo el Planeta Azul
30. Miro alrededor
31. y no hay nadie, solo yo.

14. Las estrellas son muy raras del espacio
15. Y aquí estoy flotando en esta lata
16. Tan lejos estoy
17. La Tierra es azul
18. Desde el norte hasta el sur

19. Hace ya mil años que marché
20. Estoy del todo bien
21. No sé si esta nave sabe adónde va
22. Dile a Mari que no la olvidaré jamás
23. Control Tierra a mayor Tom
24. Algo no va, funciona mal
25. Puede oírme mayor Tom
26. Puede oírme mayor Tom
27. Que me oye mayor Tom
28. Que me...aquí estoy sentado en esta lata
29. Tan lejos estoy
30. La Tierra es azul
31. Desde el norte hasta el sur

ANNEX 5: VERSIÓN D (AZUCARILLO KINGS)

Odisea Espacial

1. Control Tierra a mayor Tom
2. Control Tierra a mayor Tom
3. Toma tu pastilla y ponte en posición (diez)
4. Control Tierra a mayor Tom (nueve, ocho, siete, seis)
5. La cuenta atrás ya empezó (cinco, cuatro, tres, dos)
6. Ponte en marcha y dale al acelerador (uno, ¿?)

7. Aquí Control Tierra a mayor Tom
8. Lo hace la mar de bien
9. ¿Endereza el monte? y sigue recto
10. Y sal afuera al exterior durante el vuelo
11. Aquí sintoniza mayor Tom
12. Salí al exterior
13. Hace frío y me muevo muy despacio

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