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Singability and Naturalness in Opera Translation

Opera Çevirisinde İcra ve Doğallık

Alaz Pesen[1]

ABSTRACT

Singability in song translation has been a popular subject especially for the last two decades in the field of translation studies. Nevertheless, while only a few studies have satisfactorily problematized the musical aspect, even fewer have elaborated on the essential link between singability and naturalness in the target language. This study suggests a practical way to address such a shortcoming. It argues that accounting for singability in opera translation requires a theoretical approach integrating linguistics, musicology, and translation studies. Taking an actual opera translator's discourse as a point of departure, it demonstrates the importance of naturalness in creating a singable target libretto. Then, linking such practical observations to a theoretical discussion fusing linguistics, musicology, and translation studies, it argues that metadiscourse on singability and naturalness can and should go beyond intuitive interpretations and can be based on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, which is also demonstrated in the final part through the libretto translation analysis of Leonard Bernstein's one-act opera *Trouble in Tahiti*. The study also proposes a vertically-juxtaposed musical notation and lyrics method for a detailed comparison of the source and target librettos.

Keywords: Song translation, opera translation, translation studies, musicology, prosody

ÖZ

Şarkı çevirisinde icra, çeviribilim araştırmalarında özellikle son yirmi yılda popülerlik kazandı. Ne var ki, az sayıda çalışma çevirinin müzik boyutunu sorunsallaştırabilirken, erek dilde icra ve doğallık arasındaki olmazsa olmaz bağlantıyı ele alan çalışmalara ise neredeyse hiç rastlanmıyor. Bu çalışma, böyle bir eksikliği gidermek için pratik bir yol öneriyor: Opera çevirisinde icranın dilbilim, müzikoloji ve çeviribilimi arasında köprüler kuran kuramsal bir çerçeve gerektiğini öne sürüyor. Gerçek bir opera çevirmeninin söyleminden yola çıkarak, icraya yönelik erek librettolar yaratmada doğallığın önemine ışık tutuyor. Sonrasında da pratiğe yönelik bu gözlemleri dilbilim, müzikoloji ve çeviribilimin kesiştiği kuramsal bir tartışmaya bağlıyor: İcra ve doğallığa yönelik üstsöylemin içgüdüye dayalı yorumlardan öteye taşınarak disiplinlerarası bir çerçevede ele alınabileceğini savunuyor. Çalışmanın son bölümünde Leonard Bernstein'in tek perdelik operası Tahiti Macerası'nın libretto çevirisi çözümlemesine söz konusu kuramsal çerçeve bağlamında yer veriliyor. Çalışma, bir diğer yandan da, ayrıntılı bir karşılaştırmalı opera/şarkı çevirisi çözümlemesinde, kaynak ve erek notalar ile sözlerin alt alta sıralanması yönteminin önemini uyguluyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: Şarkı çevirisi, opera çevirisi, çeviribilim, müzikoloji, prozodi

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Introduction

The introduction of the opera genre into the Turkish cultural repertoire owes much to translation and musician-translators working under the patronage of Carl Ebert (Berk 2006, p. 11; Pesen 2019, p. 124; Şahin-Soy and Şenol 2020, p. 5). The Turkish State Opera institution itself was also founded thanks to such singable translations, the first of which was staged in July 1940 ("Devlet Operasının İlk Temsili", 1940). The Turkish State Opera and Ballet still performs translated operas in Turkish today, and one of the translators that the opera culture in Turkey has benefited from the most is Gül Sabar. Since the early 1980s, she has translated more than 10 operas for the institution. As Alexandra Ozarowska rightfully argues, both opera translation and its significance are rarely acknowledged (2017, p. 259). For this reason, it is not surprising but rather unfortunate that Sabar's translations, which contribute greatly to the Turkish cultural repertoire, have gone unnoticed - academically and otherwise. In this study, taking Gül Sabar's discourse as my point of departure, I aim to contribute to the theory and practice of naturalness in singable opera translation in three parts:

(1) Discovering the potential problematic aspects of opera translation by analyzing Sabar's discourse as an experienced opera translator,

(2) Contextualizing such aspects by combining theories of translation studies, linguistics, and musicology,

(3) Exemplifying the practical implications of such theoretical findings by means of libretto translation analysis.

Methodology

In what follows, I provide a study consisting of three parts, adopting a top-down approach that proceeds from a macro-level discussion towards one at the micro-level. In the first part of the study, analyzing the translator's discourse as my point of departure, I set out to redefine translation problems and strategies of singable opera translation with a focus on naturalness from the vantage point of a practicing translator. The discourse analysis carried out in this part is based on the face-to-face interview I personally conducted with Gül Sabar.[1] In the second part of the study, I establish theoretical connections between Gül Sabar's discourse on singable opera translation and scholarly articles from the fields of musicology, translation studies and linguistics. In passing, it should be noted that the exemplification of the suggested theoretical framework in this part is language-specific, that is, particular to the Turkish language. The third part of this article is devoted to a comparative analysis of Gül Sabar's translation of Leonard Bernstein's one-act opera *Trouble in Tahiti* in the light of the issues raised in the first two parts.[2] Due to space constraints, I carry out a descriptive translation analysis of only the first 6 lines of the "Prelude," the introductory part of the opera in question, which I believe to

1 G., Sabar, personal communication, April 09, 2019.

2 *Trouble in Tahiti* was the one-act opera written by Leonard Bernstein in the early 1950s. It premiered in Turkey almost 50 years later, in the early 2000s.

be very effective in representing the translation strategies used by Gül Sabar. This condense excerpt will allow me to further the discussion regarding singability in opera translation, mainly governed by the notions of naturalness in prosody, syllable count, musical note values, word stress and last but not least, content. In this final part, I propose a vertically-juxtaposed musical notation method to compare the source and target librettos more effectively.[3] I also provide back-translations from the Turkish libretto translation into English for informative purposes only.

Interview with the Opera Translator: Discourse Analysis

Gül Sabar, the translator of Leonard Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*, studied opera at the Municipal Conservatory of Istanbul. By the time she graduated from the conservatory, she had already been accepted to the Istanbul Municipal Opera as a member of the choir, which was followed by her promotion from choir singer to solo singer (Sabar 2011, p. 4). Throughout her career, she worked with various opera teachers and artists, and also worked as an instructor for Istanbul University State Conservatory from 1981 to 2008 (Sabar 2011, p. 4). As a graduate of the German High School in Istanbul, she translates from German and English (Sabar 2011, p. 4). One of the key issues she reflects upon is the importance of syntactic differences of the languages involved.

Syntax and content

Referring to the languages she translates from, Sabar exclusively underscores the interplay between syntax and content:

> I translate from German and English, but if the original language is Italian or French, I always look at the source text to compare it with the German or English translation. Based on such renderings I try to come up with an equivalent in our language, Turkish, because in some cases *you need to focus on the content and translate it differently to match the musical notes*. *This is because Turkish is a head-final language. German, English and French are the opposite, they have head-initial syntax.* They also have their differences, for sure, such as accentuation and stress, something rather problematic when put to music. The translator needs to watch out for such instances.[4]

Commenting on her preferred source languages, she also underscores the importance of accessing the ultimate source language if it is not one of the two languages she is fluent in. In this way, she can also observe (1) how others translated into another language and (2) how the source librettist lyricized the context. In addition to these, Sabar is well aware of the general

3 Klaus Kaindl rightfully points to how the musical aspect is usually neglected in translation studies (2005, p. 238). To further the discussion without neglecting music, I provide my own musical notation transciptions for such juxtaposition in the analysis.

4 Unless otherwise stated, all utterances by Gül Sabar in the present article are my translations of the excerpts from the interview I held with her. I am very grateful to Ms. Sabar for welcoming me into her house for the interview. I also extend my gratitude to Prof. Şebnem Ünal for introducing me to Ms. Sabar and sharing the translation document, a part of which I analyze in the third part of this study.

syntactic features and stress patterns of the languages she is working from and into and how such differences in languages potentially pose translatorial problems. Given the difficult nature of her task as an opera translator, she still adopts a modest attitude:

> I actually like some of my translations, I do. I was once told by the chorus master [*korapetitör* in Turkish] once how the maestro praised my translation of *Paris Hayatı* [Parisienne Life] during the rehearsal, I wasn't among the cast. Bella Bartok translated *Mavi Sakal* [Blue Beard]. You cannot imagine how difficult it is.

The modest attitude can in fact be linked to her awareness of the *metonymics*, in Maria Tymoczko's sense, of translating (1999, p. 42). Libretto translation is more often than not a part standing for the whole; in other words, a choice made between the verbal content and the music.

Verbal content and music

Sabar describes the content and music dichotomy as follows:

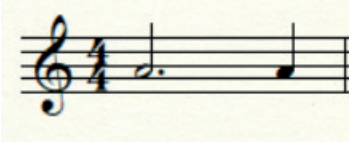
> You know your rendering of the content is not right, but there is nothing you can do about it. Alternatively, you can add new musical notes, in which case you will be distorting the music… Or you can divide a note into two in order to fit two syllables.

Along with this observation, which many translators with different fields of specialization would agree with, she provides the alternative: rendering the content at the expense of modifying the melody. As an opera translator, she attaches as much importance to the content as the prosody. Another comment she makes clarifies the fact that even if she translates from the original language, she also looks at other languages the particular opera was translated into: "I also checked the French version while translating *Bir Floransa Trajedisi*." Along with the original, *Eine florentinische Tragödie* by Alexander Von Zemlinsky, Sabar also looked at the translation into French, *Une Tragédie Florentine*. Sabar's motive for doing this seems to be the desire to fully grasp the context, in other words, she is interested in discovering to what extent other agents translating the opera deal with the issue of recreating the content. However, she is also interested in the prosody. It could be asserted that two or more ways of expressing the same theme can provide Gül Sabar with a more holistic picture of the content of the scene in question. Since librettos, just like poems, are condense, it is not always easy to fully grasp the content. In such instances, Gül Sabar's strategy of benefiting from the decisions made by other translators of the same opera provides her with the opportunity to make the necessary changes in content. In this way, she learns from other translators' versions of the same opera in other languages, and more specifically, she expands the options open to an opera translator in a particular libretto. In a sense, she benefits from other (re)creations in other languages while (re)creating a particular libretto in Turkish. However, can she make all the changes, or in Toury's terms, additions or omissions that would help her to express an utterance in a better way? What are the governing factors which lead, or even force, her to make modifications? As can be seen in the excerpt above, Sabar categorizes these as different syntactic features of the languages ("unlike English, French and German, Turkish has head-final syntax") and stress

("stress patterns are completely different"). Syntactic features of the head-initial English and the head-final Turkish challenge the translator to recreate the target libretto in the opposite direction, that is, in reverse. Nevertheless, in addition to an awareness of such syntactic features, the libretto translator needs to understand and reflect the relationship between prosody and naturalness.

Prosody and naturalness

Sabar's example on such a relationship is rather direct: "while singing the word *masa*, you cannot prolong the first vowel," she comments, for the language-specific stress pattern of the Turkish language does not allow it. In other words, Gül Sabar warns against translating the word "masa" into music as follows:



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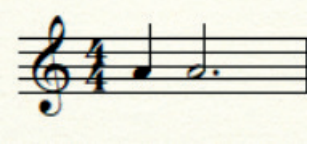
She maintains that, instead of prolonging the first syllable illustrated in the transcription above, the ultimate syllable of the word should be prolonged in a sung performance:



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This way, she explains, the naturalness of the Turkish language can be maintained when sung.

These can altogether be linked to what Gül Sabar refers to as prosody. Prosody can basically be defined as the harmony between the lyrics and the music, in other words, the form in which the music and lyrics come together. However, this poses a difficulty. Similar to the content/form dichotomy in poetry translation, song translation often urges the translator to choose between the music and the lyrics, i.e. fidelity to the lyrics or to the music. Gül Sabar is well aware of that: "You have no chance other than distorting the Turkish version." What she refers to as "bozuk yazmak" is to write target lyrics which do not conform with the stress and syllable length patterns of the target language. Such a strategy can only be overcome by changing the music: "Or, you can add new notes at the expense of distorting the music." "Bozmak/to distort" the music is the option a song translator can opt for in cases where s/he wants to remain loyal to the stress and syllable patterns of the target language into which s/he is working.

Being capable of appreciating prosody and recreating a libretto in another language therefore requires personal experience in singing. Another important aspect to consider while recreating the libretto in the target language is the ease of phonemes for certain vocal ranges. Even voices capable of delivering thrilling high notes such as the soprano for women and tenor for men might have difficulty in producing certain phonemes. The voiced uvular trill "r," for example, is extremely difficult to produce when sung on higher octaves. When translating a singable libretto, the ease of phonemes is also an important aspect to consider, and just like prosody, the ease of phonemes can be maintained thanks to the experience of the song translator herself as a singer:

> Since I sing, and I am also a singing instructor, I can almost figure out how singing can be made easier or more difficult for a particular vocal range. This is why phonemes matter. Sometimes you need to omit a word completely to ease the throat.

As a singer and a singing teacher, Gül Sabar is well aware of the partitions and phonemes which a specific voice, e.g. a tenor, can sing with ease. To increase the level of the ease of singing for the translator, another method she recommends is working in collaboration with the singer of the target text while deciding on the partition. In other words, the translator and the singer try different alternatives together and decide on the final version of the singable target text:

> We translated *Atilla* with the singer going over which letter was easier to sing, how we could tie notes more comfortably. Then he told me he sang it more easily on stage than the original Italian version thanks to our cooperation. We tried different versions of tied notes with different letters. Then, we ended up having an easily singable translation.

Collaborating with the singer of the target libretto therefore produces even more singable outcomes. This way, the singer of the particular libretto actively contributes to the translation process, which in turn results in a more singable opera libretto in terms of prosody and naturalness in the target language.

As an experienced and industrious opera translator, Sabar touches upon various aspects of singable opera translation such as syntax, content, music, prosody and last but not least, naturalness. Without doubt, a practicing translator's comments on such issues are invaluable for the field of translation studies; nevertheless, a theoretical understanding can help deepen what they might come to mean, and contribute much more extensively to both the practice and theory of opera translation. In what follows, I set out to establish links between Gül Sabar's comments on singable opera translation and scholarly works from the fields of linguistics, translation studies and musicology.

Singability and Naturalness Revisited: Towards an Interdisciplinary Theoretical Framework

Among the writers who have contributed to song translation studies since the early 2000s, two have critically underscored the interplay between naturalness and other aspects such as syntax, content, music, and prosody. In this part, after briefly reviewing their arguments

as regards singability and naturalness in translation, I will challenge them and propose an alternative framework.

Peter Low bases his approach to translating songs on Hans Vermeer's *skopostheorie*: if the skopos requires it, "source and target text may diverge from each other quite considerably" (Vermeer 2000, p. 223). Low compares translators whose *skopos* is to create singable target texts to pentathletes, who "must compete in five dissimilar events, and must optimise their scoring overall" (2005, p. 192): nobody expects the athlete to excel in all of these five games, it is the overall score that matters. These five categories in Peter Low's way of thinking are "singability", "sense", "naturalness", "rhythm", and "rhyme" (2005, p. 192). In fact, one of the shortcomings in Peter Low's argument is the logical error in his categorization. The *skopos* is already singability, it cannot receive equal ranking with the other four criteria, i.e. the other four criteria should be subsets of singability. In other words, singability is not something optional, as Peter Low himself puts forth at the very beginning of his discussion (2005, p.192), it is the *skopos*; therefore, the target lyrics should be singable. As I see it, Peter Low's approach can still be invaluable to song translation studies theories, albeit with a slight modification, which I would like to propose as "the tetrathlon approach," whereby the song translator competes in not five, but *four* events: sense, naturalness, rhythm and rhyme. Another shortcoming of Low's approach to song translation studies is his insistence on utmost fidelity to the verbal content, which he refers to as the second category under his pentathlon approach, namely "sense":

> This matter of sense still deserves high ranking, however, simply because we are talking about translation – interlingual translating. I note in passing that some people ignore sense altogether: they take a foreign song-tune and devise for it a set of TL words which match the music very well but bear no semantic relation with the ST. While this may at times be good and appropriate, it is not translating, because none of the original verbal meaning is transmitted. Such practices have no place in discussions of translation (Low 2005, p. 194).

While Low argues for notions such as functionalism and *skopos*, he ironically seems to shift his focus all of a sudden and place it on the verbal content. Furthermore, in a more recent work on the same subject, he advocates strongly against "mixing apples [adaptations] with pears [translations]", as this would "condemn us to unfocused discussions about disparate cases" (2017, p. 114). This rather prescriptive approach regresses song translation to times when the cultural turn in translation studies was not taken. Still, Peter Low is one of the few scholars underscoring the importance of naturalness in singable song translations: "Naturalness is one of the five criteria which the translator must strive for" (2005, p. 196). Linking naturalness to "various considerations" only two of which he overtly refers to as "register" and "word-order", Low explains the former as "archaisms" and the latter as "placing adjectives after nouns" (2005, p. 196). This way he establishes a connection between the naturalness of the target lyrics with the choice of words, in other words, verbal content. He also emphasizes the ordering of the parts of speech in the target language, in other words, syntax. These two concrete explanations for naturalness are still connected to Low's prioritizing verbal content.

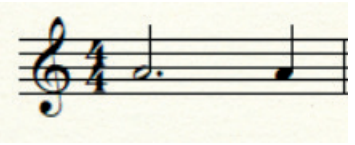
Johan Franzon, another writer commenting on singability and naturalness, maintains that if singability is desired, there are three choices open to a translator:

- Writing new lyrics to the original music with no overt relation to the original lyrics;
- Translating the lyrics and adapting the music accordingly – sometimes to the extent that a brand new composition is deemed necessary;
- Adapting the translation to the original music (Franzon 2008, p. 376).

The first choice above seems to suggest that although the TT and the ST are not the counterparts of each other, in other words they are not counterparts at the semantic level, such a practice can still be included within the framework of song translation. This shows that, for Franzon, what is important is regarding a song as consisting of various levels, and song translation as a compromise between those levels: "a singable song translation is inevitably a compromise between fidelity to the music, lyrics and performance" (2008, p. 377). Emphasizing the multidimensionality of singable song translation Johan Franzon, suggests three different criteria the song translator has to compete in: prosody, poetics and semantics (2008, p. 390). Among these, prosody is of utmost importance in relation to Gül Sabar's comments quoted and discussed above. Johan Franzon describes prosody as comprehensible lyrics that sound *natural* (2008, p. 390), and according to him, such naturalness is dependent upon "syllable count", "rhythm", "intonation", "stress", and "sounds for easy singing" (2008, p. 390). Johan Franzon overtly refers to various aspects a song translator needs to take into consideration for a natural performance in the target language. Among these, "syllable count" is in fact not new to translation studies. Writing on poetry translation, André Lefevere offers the term "metrical translation" for a target text consisting of the same number of syllables with the source text (2008, p. 37). This term is, in fact, directly applicable to song translation studies. However, metrical translation does not guarantee naturalness in singable translations on its own. "Stress," another aspect Franzon enumerates above, should also be considered together with metrical translation and the musical note values assigned to the syllables. Furthermore, "stress" poses a language-specific problem: a theoretical understanding of the stress patterns in the target language can offer translators insights into *why* certain patterns of stress can be preferred over others for the sake of naturalness. This way, not only the practicing translator but also the translation critic can adopt a descriptive approach rather than one that is prescriptive. In other words, Gül Sabar's "natural" and "unnatural" examples regarding the word "masa" in Turkish can be better accounted for from a scholarly approach.

Naturalness in singable translation

How can naturalness in singable translation be defined? To reformulate the question taking Gül Sabar's examples above as a point of departure, why *cannot* we sing "masa" as follows?



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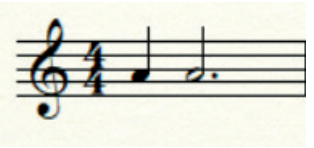
And why *can* we sing it as follows?



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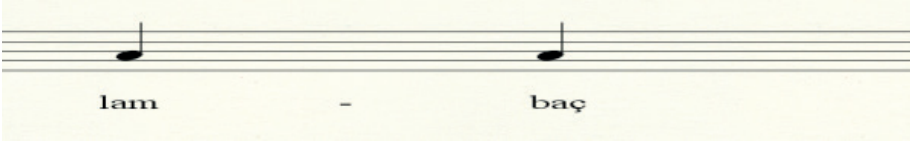
Moreover, are there any other natural ways to sing the same word in Turkish? To address all these questions from a scholarly perspective, we "need something other than the current mixture of intuition and practice" (Baker 2018, p. 5). In fact, to account for naturalness in both existing and future singable translations, we need a fuller understanding of how language works when combined with music. To do that, first, how a language *naturally* allows certain stress patterns needs to be detected. Then, how such *naturalness* can be kept when the word in question is put to song needs to be analyzed. In what follows, I turn to linguistics and musicology respectively to account for natural stress patterns in the Turkish language.

From the perspective of linguistics, stress can be defined as "the high pitch and loudness with which a syllable is pronounced relative to others in the same word or sequence of words" (Göksel and Kerslake 2005, p. 26). Prolonged syllable patterns can be divided into various categories in the Turkish language (Güldaş 2003, p. 50). However, in general terms, it usually falls on the last syllable of native words in Turkish (Göksel and Kerslake 2005, p. 26). Words such as "ka*dın*" (woman), "kalaba*lık*" (crowd), "cumhuri*yet*" (republic), "has*ta*" (ill/patient), "ku*tu*" (box), "bek*le*" (wait) and "öğ*ren*" (learn) can be given as examples of that rule (Göksel and Kerslake 2005, p. 26). The trisyllabic word "saklam*baç*" (hide and seek) is another such example. From the perspective of musicology, this fundamental rule in Turkish phonetics can have two kinds of repercussions when it comes to singing words naturally in the Turkish language. One of these options to ensure naturalness in Turkish is to assign equal note values to each syllable and disregard which one is to be stressed (Arel 1997, p. 36).

For example:



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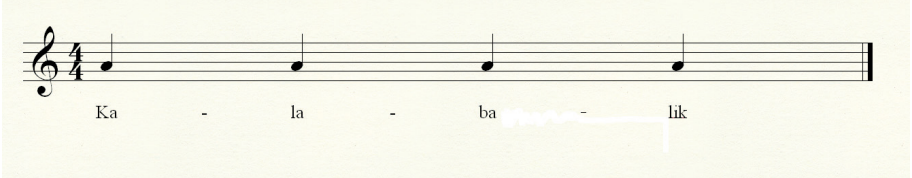
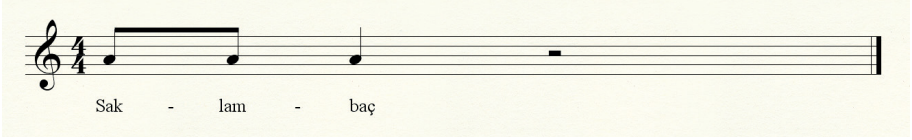
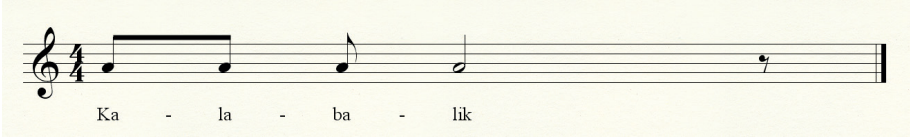


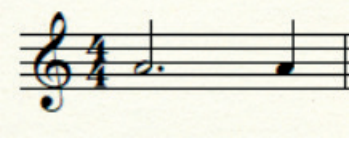
In the two examples above, equal note values are assigned to the trisyllabic word "saklambaç" and to the quadrisyllabic word "kalabalık", both of which have stress on their final syllable. Another possible way of reflecting natural stress patterns into lyrics in Turkish is to assign shorter note values to the syllables which are not stressed, and longer note values to those which are stressed (Arel 1997, p. 36). Here is the application of the latter rule to the same two words above:



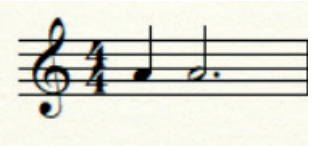
Or:



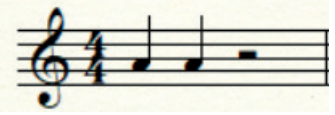
This time, the first two syllables of the trisyllabic word "saklambaç" and the first three syllables of the quadrisyllabic word "kalabalık" are assigned eighth notes, while final syllables, which are stressed, are assigned a quarter note and a half note respectively. This is exactly the reason why Gül Sabar intuitively states that the word "masa" *cannot* be sung as follows.



The reason why it cannot be sung this way, as discussed from the perspective of linguistics and musicology, is because the first syllable is assigned a longer note value than its ultimate syllable, which violates the stress rule, hence resulting in unnaturalness. Sabar's suggestion for a natural musical composition of the word was assigning a longer note value to the ultimate syllable of the word:



In addition to Gül Sabar's rendering of the word that achieves naturalness, we now know that another possible way to sing "masa" naturally, as discussed in relation to Arel, is to assign equal note values to both syllables of the word as follows:



In what follows, I will analyze Gül Sabar's translation of "Prelude" from Leonard Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*, focusing mainly on the interplay between naturalness on the one hand, and prosody, stress, syllable count, and last but not least content on the other.

Libretto Translation Analysis

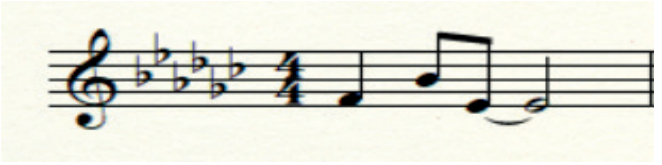
Leonard Bernstein began to write the one-act opera *Trouble in Tahiti* in 1951. It can be summarized as a close look at the troubled marriage of a young couple living in the suburbs ("Background"). The opera was first performed in Turkey in 2003 ("Tahiti Macerası", 2003). Here is the juxtaposition of the source and target lyrics of the "Prelude":

Source libretto	**Target libretto**	**Back-translation**[5]
1 Morning sun	Sabah güneşi	Morning sun
2 Kisses the windows	Sanki öpüyor	As if (it) kissed
3 Kisses the walls	Penceresi	(Its) windows
4 Kisses the windows	Ve duvarıyla	And (together with) its wall
5 Kisses the walls	Her yerini	Every single part of it
6 Of the little white house	Şu küçük hoş evin	Of the little nice house

5 I use the term back-translation to refer to the translation I made from Gül Sabar's Turkish version into English with the sole purpose of informing those who do not speak Turkish. The purpose here is to reflect the syntax, the suffixes and the verbal content of the Turkish version as closely as possible into English. For this reason, as Mona Baker states as regards back-translation, "the English used in the back-translations is not necessarily correct and not to be confused with natural English" (2018, p. 9).

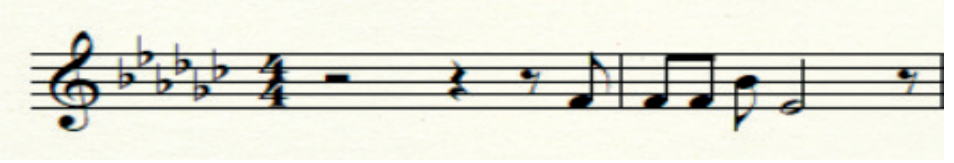
The excerpt sets the stage for the entire plot of the one-act opera: the little white house in this musical piece is actually the home where Sam and Dinah, the husband and wife, live. They are going through a difficult time in their marriage, hence the "Trouble" in the title of the opera, as in troubled marriage. The first line "Morning Sun" (three syllables) is translated as "Sabah Güneşi" (five syllables) which changes the meter, apparently for the sake of a content-focused translation. Since the sun here is an element carefully inserted into the source libretto by Leonard Bernstein, functioning as if it were a camera rising over the house where the main characters live, Gül Sabar must have preferred a content-focused translation over one that is metrical. Note the differences in number of syllables and changes in note values in the source and target versions below:

Line 1: the trisyllabic source libretto



Mor- ning sun

Line 1: the pentasyllabic target libretto

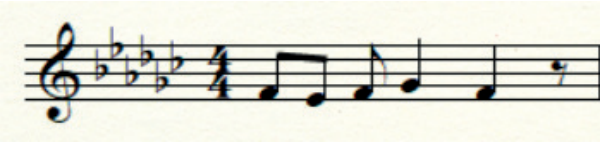


Sa- bah gü- ne- şi

The three syllables in the source libretto are translated into five syllables. As a result, the corresponding notes and their values also change. The quarter fa and the eighth si that "morning" is sung on are turned into an eighth fa and an eighth fa respectively ("sabah") to make room for the two-syllabic "güneş" and its possessive marker "-i," turning the monosyllabic "sun" in the ST into a trisyllabic word. This content-focused singable rendering, I must add, achieves naturalness since only the last syllable is prolonged in the target libretto, which is in conformity with the rules discussed above as regards linguistics and musicology. The compound noun "Morning sun" in line 1 is in fact the subject of all the other lines quoted in the excerpt above, and hence carries out a critical function for the rest of the plot. Here, Leonard Bernstein makes use of the personification of the sun, and it kisses the different parts of the house: the windows, the walls, the roof, the door and even the doorknob. Such imagery is critical in appreciating Sabar's translation in the second line: she renders "kisses the windows" as "sanki öpüyor" [as

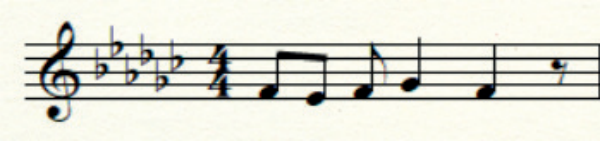
if it kissed], which at first sight does not seem to be a content-focused rendering. However, that is not exactly the case. “Sanki” [as if] is not entirely an addition to the source text, it just reinforces the personification of the sun. The reason for adding such an item is by no means arbitrary, but stems from both syntax and the number of syllables. Since English is head-initial and Turkish is head-final, the translator makes use of an inverted sentence to render the source as closely as possible. However, she still cannot translate the second line (“kisses the windows”) entirely, for the literal translation would necessitate adding even more syllables to the already wordy line consisting of five syllables: “kisses” would literally translate as “ö-pü-yor” (three syllables), and “windows” as “pencerelerini” (six syllables), amounting to a total of nine syllables. It is impossible to sing so many syllables without modifying the melody to the point of writing it from scratch. For this reason, the translator decides to move the noun to the next line. This is not enough to sort out the problem and “öpüyor” is left alone as a trisyllabic line. At this point, Sabar finds a very skillful solution by adding “sanki” both to reinforce the personification applied by Bernstein and to match the syllable count in the line, hence formulating a simultaneously metrical and content-focused translation:

Line 2: the pentasyllabic source libretto



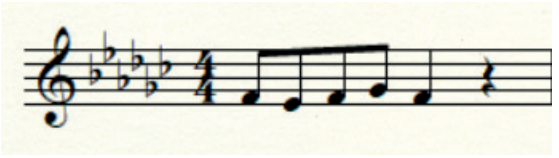
Kiss-es the win-dows

Line 2: the pentasyllabic target libretto



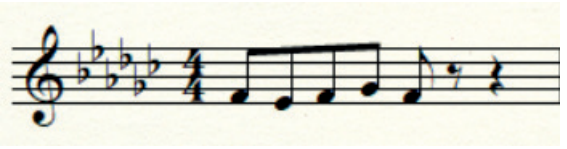
San-ki ö- pü- yor

Still, a metrical translation does not always guarantee naturalness. If the penultimate syllable “-pü” in “öpüyor” exactly follows the note values of the source melody when sung, since all three syllables are not assigned equal note values, this does not sound natural in Turkish. As discussed with regard to word stress in Turkish determined by studies in linguistics and musicology above, to maintain naturalness in a sung performance, either only the ultimate syllable “-yor” can be prolonged as in:



San-ki ö-pü-yor

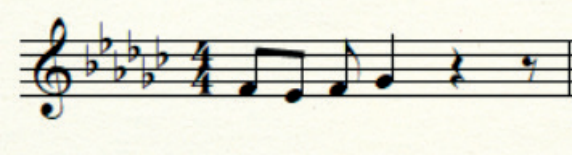
Or all the syllables should be assigned completely equal note values as follows:



San-ki ö-pü-yor

Even though there is no new note added, this is an example of Sabar's "distorting the melody" in her own words stated above. Or in Franzon's words, it can be given as a typical example of "translating the lyrics and [slightly] adapting the music" (2008, p. 376). I would like to note here that slight modifications of the note values assigned in the composition of any melody are always possible; therefore, the performance of the singer is also key in maintaining the naturalness of the target libretto. As can be seen so far, the solution of one translation problem leads to another, but Sabar skillfully displays the mastery of a good chess player calculating every single move. This is why she translates Line 3 as follows:

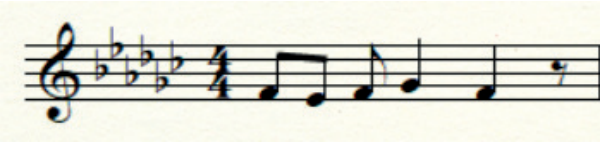
Line 3



ST Kiss-es the walls
TT Pen-ce- re-si

Because she does not have enough room to insert the quadrisyllabic "pencere" [window] into Line 3, she moves it a line down and achieves not only a metrical but also a natural match for the quadrisyllabic "kisses the walls" in Line 3, even without sacrificing the content, i.e. a content-focused match at the same time. In Line 4, the sentence still goes on, and Sabar is still one line behind.

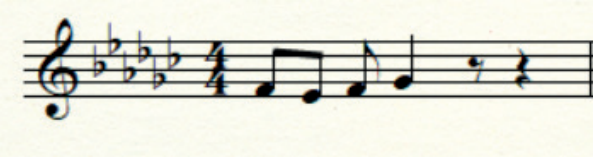
Line 4



ST Kiss-es the win-dows
TT Ve du-va- rıy- la

Here she makes up for ST Line 3 (“the walls”), a domino effect stemming from the word she was not able to translate in Line 2 due to too many syllables (“pencere” [windows]). Therefore, in Lines 3 and 4, she translates words from the previous Lines 2 and 3 from the source text. While making up for the missed content from previous lines, at the end of the word “duvar” she also makes use of the suffix “-la”, which is the contracted marker for “and” in Turkish. This very clever maneuver not only serves as a metrical pentasyllabic match, but also modifies the formation of the sentence stretching from Line 1 to Line 6. At this point, Sabar uses Bernstein’s repetition of Lines 2 and 3 in Lines 4 and 5 to her advantage and comes up with a very creative and content-focused, metrical and natural translation at the expense of such repetition. Instead of repeating “the walls” and “the windows,” she excellently demonstrates what she must have meant above by grasping the overall content:

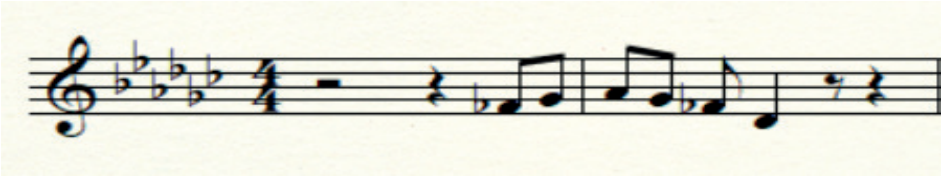
Line 5



ST Kiss-es the walls
TT Her ye-ri- ni

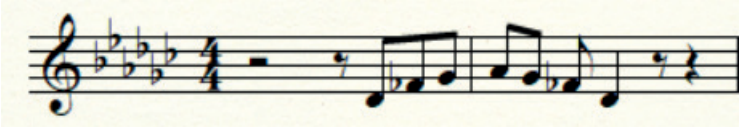
This creative transposition both renders the content and the meter of the ST, also resulting in a completely natural translation into Turkish: the prolonged quarter note falls on the ultimate syllable of “her yerini” [everywhere]. Completely deconstructing the source text, Sabar reconstructs it in a way only a master opera translator could, and completely catches up with the source libretto in Line 6:

Line 6



ST Of the lit-tle white house
TT Şu kü- çük hoş e- vin

Line 6 is a metrical and prosodic match: it consists of six syllables just like the source text and the equal eighth note values, except for the ultimate syllable, result in a natural singing performance without requiring any individual effort by the singers. The only difference in content in Sabar's target libretto is the adjective "hoş" [pretty, nice] used in the source libretto to describe the house. The original source word written by Bernstein is "white," which could be translated into Turkish as "beyaz". Making such a choice would have required a modification in the melody as follows:



Şu kü-çük be-yaz e-vin

Such a choice on part of the translator would also have required starting the D minor arpeggio with a D note instead of the original F flat, substantially modifying the music at the expense of the content. An alternative choice Sabar must definitely have thought of would be using the shorter Turkish synonym "ak" ["white"] to translate "white," but this time the voiceless velar plosive "k" in "ak" would have followed two already existing "k"s in the same line, resulting in a difficult line to sing: "şu *k*üçü*k* a*k* evin." Cancelling out these two possible choices, Sabar apparently prefers singability over content for this word, and replaces it with another word Bernstein uses to describe the house in the second verse of the Prelude: "pretty". There is by all means more than one way to render "pretty" in Turkish, but the one Sabar prefers is not surprisingly monosyllabic and easy to sing, especially as it forms a liaison: its final consonant S-cedilla ("ş") can be easily sung linking it to the first vowel of the word "ev": "Şu küçük ho*ş e*vin." In addition the S-cedilla also forms alliteration with the same letter at the very beginning of the line ("Şu"), forming a poetic match at the same time.

All in all, focusing on an exclusive line-for-line comparison of her translation might give the impression that Gül Sabar entirely sacrificed content at the expense of singability; however, the exact opposite can be argued: in an attempt to render the syntax and syllable patterns in

a singable translation in Turkish, she uses inverted sentences, reinforced personification and paraphrasing. In this way she achieves a prosodic match in terms of syllable count, rhythm, stress and above all, naturalness.

Conclusion

Syntax, content, music, prosody and last but not least, naturalness, have come to the fore as the key aspects of singable opera translation. The study has also revealed that among these, naturalness has not been satisfactorily accounted for from the perspective of translation studies. Problematizing the example given by the practicing translator in the first part, I set out to make a more concrete definition of naturalness in singable translation. Since the notion is directly related to syllables and stress, in other words, the language itself, adopting an interdisciplinary approach, I turned to linguistics and then musicology for a fuller understanding of naturalness. Revisiting the example given by Gül Sabar in the first part, I crosschecked her rather intuitive suggestion based on experience from a theoretical perspective. In fact, her suggestion overlapped with the theoretical approach of musicology. Still, musicology suggested an alternative possible musical composition of the same word. Integrating this expanded concept of naturalness with other aspects of singability, I demonstrated how singable translation analysis can be carried out from an interdisciplinary framework. In my analysis of Sabar's translation, I used a vertical juxtaposition notation and lyrics method to compare the note values and the lyrics of the source and target librettos more effectively.

At a language-specific level, the study expands the understanding of naturalness in singable opera translations. As a practical implication, this can serve as a practical guide to those willing to engage in singable translation as translators into Turkish. Furthermore, considering the resemblence of song translation and lyrics writing, it can also be of help to those engaging in lyrics writing in Turkish. From an international perspective, it can also serve as an example for future studies in other languages: taking this study as an example, similar studies on naturalness in singable translation into other languages can be carried out.

Taking all these into consideration, the study also has a salient theoretical implication: reviewing and challenging theories on singable translation, it expands not only the practical but also the theoretical understanding of the relationship between singability and naturalness from the perspective of an interdisciplinary approach integrating musicology, linguistics and translation studies. Naturalness in singable opera translation as well as singable translations of other genres is a notion begging to be further discovered. I can only hope this study will be an inspiration and motivation for studies wishing to do so.

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