

When Accessibility Becomes Performance: Sign Language Interpreting in Music and Live Concerts as “Performative Rewriting”

Abstract

Accessibility is a key concept in audiovisual translation (Matamala, 2020). In recent years, the importance of equal access not only to information, services, and media, but also to the arts has been gaining more attention (e.g. Greco, 2017). Accessibility provisions to popular music, however, have not been as comprehensive as to other types of music (Desblache, 2020). In order to provide access to music to Deaf and hard-of-hearing signers, a generation of interpreter-performers started to embody nonverbal elements of the ‘text’, such as rhythm, pitch, tempo, etc., when translating a song into sign language (Clementi, 2020; Galloway Gallego, 2016). This practice, which is a form of audiovisual translation, is gaining momentum and has been object of analysis in other disciplines (e.g. Musicology or Deaf Studies), but is under-investigated within Translation and Interpreting Studies. This article argues that the perspective from Translation Studies scholars, which has thus far been lacking, can provide new insights to this audiovisual translation practice whilst also enhancing our understanding of it. Working from studies in signed songs (Maler, 2015), from the work of Grant (2013, 2015), and from Marinetti’s (2018a) notion of translation as “performative rewriting”, I aim to show that performativity, intended as an action related to performance, but also with transformative potential, can become an element and a carrier of accessibility, and is at the core of these interpreting practices. The distinction between accessibility and access, however, must also be taken into account (Greco, 2016), and whether these practices actually provide access remains to be established by the Deaf community.¹

Keywords: Sign Language Interpreting, Music, Performance, Performativity, Accessibility.

1. Sign Language Interpreted Music: Types, Scopes, and Definitions

The aim of this article is to analyse the practice of sign language interpreters-performers who translate a hearing-centric music world into a visual one by transposing songs and live concerts into sign language. The frames of analysis chosen for this article are built at the intersection between Translation and Performance Studies through the lens of performativity. The notion of performativity is here understood both as ‘related to performance’ and as an action with potential for social transformation, as we shall see in section 3, and with this article I argue that performativity is a vector of accessibility.

While the practice of sign language interpreting in music is gaining momentum, and has been analysed in other disciplines, no Translation Studies scholar has yet investigated this form of audiovisual translation (AVT) which is becoming more and more popular, also thanks to platforms such as YouTube. Even though the practice is somewhat controversial, as explained below, it deserves a systematic analysis, since currently there is no theoretical

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framework within Translation and Interpreting Studies (TIS) to analyse what is, *de facto*, a translation and performative practice. To avoid confusion, however, it is important to distinguish between the different types of song signing. Following the categorisation of signed songs used in the Deaf community put forth by Bahan (2006), J. H. Cripps, Roseblum, Small, and Supalla (2017) distinguish between “percussion songs” and “translated songs”. “Percussion signing [...] involves the use of rhythmic patterns of signs [...]. Translated signed songs typically involve translating spoken or written songs into a sign language” (Mangelsdorf, Listman, & Maler, 2021, p. 161). Percussion songs are usually created and performed by members of the Deaf community, while translated songs are performed by either Deaf or hearing interpreters who translate a vocal song into sign language. Musicologist Anabel Maler (2015) provides a further distinction based on the performer and the function. Maler (2015, 76-77) distinguishes between “live music interpretation services”, “live performances by song-signing artists”, “videos featuring the performance of an original song”, and “videos featuring the performance of a preexisting song”. This latter is by far the most common on YouTube, and consequently the type of song signing most people are exposed to. There is a further, even more relevant distinction proposed by Maler that takes into account whether the song signer is Deaf or hearing. Maler also notes that the motivation behind song signing can differ, and maintains that “hearing song signers are generally motivated by a desire to express themselves musically *through* sign language, while Deaf song signers are more often motivated to create music *in* sign language” (Maler, 2015, p. 74, original emphasis). She also notices how sign language courses often ask students to sign their favourite song as assignment, which contributes to the proliferation of amateur song signers on social media. I will not focus on songs signed by Deaf performers as an “inter-performance art” (J. H. Cripps et al., 2017), as it would fall outside the scope of my study and beyond my competence. I will also not focus on those song signing practices, whether by Deaf or hearing performers, whose purpose is self-expression through sign language,² but I will focus exclusively on the phenomenon of “translated song” interpreted into sign language with the specific purpose of providing access to music to Deaf and hard-of-hearing (HoH) signers. According to Maler’s classification, this encompasses “live music interpretation services” and “videos featuring the performance of a preexisting song”, but only those performed by professional interpreter-performers (IPs) with

² For an extensive discussion on the topic, see Maler (2015).

the specific goal of providing access to music,³ since that is the area where TIS could shed some light.

According to Deaf Studies scholars Cripps et al. (2017, 3) “[t]he deaf community expresses a variety of opinions reflecting mixed feelings related to translated signed songs”. Similarly, Fisher (2021, p. 2) points out that “not all d/Deaf people are interested in signed song interpretations. It can be argued that a form which gives precedence to a hearing-oriented stimulus is irrelevant and even detrimental to Deaf culture.”⁴ Aware that there are mixed feelings about this practice, the data nonetheless reveal that there is a growing interest and request for this type of translation and performance practice (Webster, Brennan, Behr, Cloonan, & Ansell, 2018), and therefore further research is required to fully understand it and frame it within the context of the current global entertainment industry. The experience of TIS scholars in researching translation and performative practices, networks of translation, and notions such as agency and appropriation could provide a valuable contribution to the discussion.

At this point I wish to acknowledge Cripps’s (2018) stance that scholars should be wary of rushing into doing research on translated songs available on YouTube, and that this could be considered cultural appropriation. While I understand that forms of song signing have their origins within the Deaf culture, and therefore can be analysed only by members of the Deaf community, I believe that the practice of the translation of existing songs into sign languages for accessibility purposes can and should be studied from different perspectives, including TIS. According to music and translation scholar Lucile Desblache (2020, p. 723) “[t]he theorising of music accessibility varies fundamentally according to the (inter)disciplinary lens from which it is considered.” While acknowledging the notion that *signed music* as intended by Cripps et al. is “wholly autonomous from auditory experience” (2017, p. 4) and is therefore a prerogative of the Deaf community, I see what J. Cripps (2018), following Bahan (2006), defines “translated songs” as, precisely, a translation and performative practice which has been carried out by both Deaf and hearing interpreter-performers (IPs) with close ties with the Deaf community, for which they aim to provide a service. Mindful of the mixed feelings about this service, the data nonetheless reveal that there is a growing interest and request for this type of translation and performative practice. Further research is therefore required to fully understand it and to theorize it, and scholars in TIS could fruitfully contribute to the debate. Rather than

³ There is a proliferation of amateur and unskilled signers who translate songs and post their video on YouTube (Holmes, 2017). These performances fall outside the scope of the present article.

⁴ An in-depth discussion of this pivotal issue is not only beyond the scope of the present article, but also beyond my limitations, given that I am a hearing TIS scholar.

more exclusivity, a greater cross-disciplinary engagement is desirable. Ultimately, I would like to acknowledge the notion of cultural appropriation and cultural products as “accidental property” as put forth by Susan Scafidi (2005, p. 24), who argues against “commodification or reduction to ownership” of cultural products. Despite the mixed emotions on the practice of translating songs into sign languages for accessibility purposes, a recent report reveals an upward trend in sales of tickets for live music events made accessible for Deaf audiences (Webster et al., 2018). The 2018 UK Live Music Census reveals that the number of Deaf customers purchasing tickets to live music events is continuing to increase. Well over 3 million Deaf and disabled fans attend these types of events every year, and ticket sales for Deaf and disabled people increased by 70% alone in 2016 (Webster et al., 2018, p. 41). Meanwhile in the Netherlands Deaf IP Robin Frings during an interview claimed that there is a need for sign language interpreting in concerts, and while the popularity of sign language is increasing, he laments that the increased visibility is not quite enough, particularly in the field of music. He claims that in the Netherlands 10% of the population is Deaf or HoH. The average concert attendance is 30,000 people per event, which statistically works out as 3,000 people who have partial or no access to music. His interview concludes with an appeal to hearing people to listen to Deaf and HoH people more (Frings, 2022). These data and the literature on the topic confirm that the attitude towards the practice of song translation is far from homogeneous. The theoretical perspective from TIS that this article provides, and which has thus far been scarce in other work on this topic, could not only be useful to other disciplines, but also increase our understanding of these practices in the current cultural milieu which favours a universalist view of the notions of access.

The notions of accessibility and access are central to my investigation, as they are at the core of the practice of sign language IPs who, with their interpreted performance, aim to provide access to music for Deaf and HoH signers. In the past decades we have witnessed a shift from a “reactive approach” to a “proactive approach” to accessibility (Stephanidis & Emiliani, 1999). In the “traditional approach”, a person with limited access was an ‘after thought’, and a service was made accessible *a fortiori* to people with potentially limited access. Adaptations would be made to meet the needs of people with disabilities and/or to satisfy the requirements of individual users who would otherwise be unable to access a service and/or information. Given that adaptations to services and/or products are not always possible, in recent years, more and more service providers have adopted a proactive approach to accessibility, and a universalist account of access. This latter implies to project a product or a

service that *a priori* is made accessible to the widest possible audience, rather than considering 'special needs' *a fortiori* (Stephanidis & Emiliani, 1999).⁵ In relation to accessibility to music, Lucile Desblache notices how, while a lot of progress has been made in the last decades to make media and some music more accessible (e.g. opera), “these services have not extended widely to popular music, and overall, progress in accessibility provision for music has been less comprehensive than in media overall” (Desblache, 2020, pp. 713-714). This is where there is a huge gap not only on the part of institutions and agents that should proactively see that access to music is granted to all, but also and particularly on the part of the cultural institutions that should proactively investigate those practices aimed at granting access to music, i.e. academic and other cultural organizations. A lot of work is being carried out across the globe to ensure that Deaf and HoH people can have access to concerts and popular music, and usually these are *bottom-up* practices: individual interpreters and/or not for profit organisations provide live music interpretation service such as *Auslan Stage Left* in Australia, *Attitude is Everything* in the UK, and *Muziektolken* in the Netherlands, just to name a few. Among the individual interpreters we find Deaf IP David Cowan and hearing IPs Amber Galloway Gallego and Holly Maniatti in the USA, Giulia Clementi in Italy, Julie Doyle in the UK, and Deaf IP Robin Frings in the Netherlands, among others. With this article I aim to provide a theoretical framework to analyse their work within the contemporary “performative turn” (Bigliuzzi, Kofler, & Ambrosi, 2013) in TIS by combining the notion of performativity intended as ‘potential for social transformation’ (Baldo, 2019; Bermann, 2014), and that of performativity intended as ‘related to performance’. The concept of performativity as intended in Performance Studies (Grant, 2013, 2015) will be combined with Scott’s notion of the translator’s “being-in-the-world” (Scott, 2019, p. 89) to establish performativity as a key element and carrier of accessibility.

While the practice of translating songs into sign language has been defined in different ways, I will adopt yet a new definition which in my opinion better encapsulates the nature of this practice. As previously mentioned, Maler (2013, 2015) talks about “signed songs” and makes the distinction between the different types of song signing outlined above. She also scrutinises the difference between Deaf and hearing song signers, both at the production and at the reception level (Maler, 2015). Fisher (2021), instead, who analyses only the production of “translated songs”, talks about “embodied songs”. This definition captures the very nature of this practice, which is visual, spatio-temporal and physically incorporated in the performer’s body movement. Practitioners in the Netherlands often refer to their art as *muziek tolken* (which

⁵ See also Greco (2019).

literally translates as “music interpreting”) or “signdancing” (de Raaf & Stolk, 2015-2022). Personally, I believe that the definition “signdancing” could be confusing, as there are some Deaf artists and performers such as Shaheem Sanchez who integrate dance moves with sign language interpreting (Sanchez, 2022), and their practice is different in form and scope from the one here analysed. Interestingly, the name given to this practice changes according to the discipline of the scholar analysing it. Working from the perspective of musicology Maler (2015) defines them “signed songs”; Vicky Fisher’s research at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen “integrates approaches from dance practice, multimodal linguistics and cognitive psychology” (“Max Planck Institute For Psycholinguistics,” 2022), and she defines them “embodied songs”. I use the definition “Sign Language Interpreted Music” to describe the practice of those sign language IPs who translate popular music for accessibility purposes, because in TIS, the interpreter is the person who facilitates communication between parties speaking different languages in face-to-face and/or real-time interaction, while in Performance Studies, the interpreter is the performer. In the Cambridge dictionary, under “interpreter” we read “someone whose job is to change what someone else is saying into another language”, but also “someone who performs a piece of music or a part in a play, etc.” (“Interpreter,” No Date). I therefore believe that “sign language interpreted music” better describes these practices, and “interpreter-performer” is a more comprehensive definition for a practice in which the performer’s body becomes a vessel to access. This is connected to the idea of performativity as vector of accessibility, which is theorised in section 4. The definition of “accessibility” and “access” by Gian Maria Greco (2016) will provide a starting point for me to establish the centrality of performativity for accessibility.

2. Accessibility and Access

In order to establish how to grant or gain access to something, it is important to define the notions of access and accessibility, which are far from uncontroversial. Since the approval of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2008 the debate on whether accessibility is itself a human right has been central in Accessibility Studies (Greco, 2016). However, “within the human rights debate” the claim that accessibility is a human right per se “is not unanimously embraced” (Greco, 2016, p. 13). The debate revolves around whether accessibility is a human right or a tool for achieving human rights. Before diving into

the debate, which is relevant to the discussion on accessibility to music, it is necessary to define what a right is, and how rights are classified.⁶

A right consists of five elements:

1. A right holder (*the subject of the right*);
2. The object they have a claim to (*the object of the right*);
3. Which they can “assert or demand or enforce (*exercising the right*)” (Greco, 2016, p. 13);
4. The demand is made to the *bearer of the correlative duty*, i.e. the individual or group who has the duty to see that the right is met;
5. The *justification of the right*, i.e. the support of a claim on the part of the right holder on particular grounds.

Rights are further divided into positive and negative rights. A right is negative “when it is a claim of non-interference; it is positive when it is a claim that demands action by the related duty-bearer” (Greco, 2016, p. 14). Accessibility is clearly not a negative right. Positive rights, however, require acknowledgement that certain goods, be it material or immaterial, and/or services must be available to everyone. Accessibility, thus, is not a positive right either, because accessibility is not a material or immaterial good or service per se, but rather a *precondition* to enjoy the material or immaterial good or service, which is the actual object of the right. Analysing the documents and the General Comments on Article 9 of the CRDP, Greco (2016) notices how we sometimes read ‘the right to *x*’ and ‘the right to access to *x*’. The difference is not just a matter of semantics, but lies in the *object* of the right. Another way to interpret ‘the right to access to *x*’ is to connect it not to the object of the right, but to the correlative duty, hence to the duty-bearer. Taking the case of music and paraphrasing Greco (2016) we can say that while music is a good in itself, access to music is not. Access becomes, then, a *necessary requirement* on the part of the duty-bearer to satisfy the right to access to music that the right-holder has. Interpreted in this way accessibility is a *proactive principle* for achieving human rights, and access is a *necessary requirement*. As a principle, accessibility requires that the duty-bearers “proactively intervene in order to fulfill that right” (Greco, 2016, p. 23). In addition to (re)defining accessibility as a proactive principle, Greco also underlines the importance of access to the arts (Greco, 2017), and music is unarguably a form of art.

⁶ The five elements of rights, the notion of positive and negative rights, and the division of rights into first, second and third generation rights are from the classifications summarised in Greco (2016).

Following Greco's detailed analysis and classification of rights and accessibility, we can say that accessibility to music is the principle according to which the duty-bearers (artists, the music industry, music venues, etc.) should proactively intervene in order to guarantee that all individuals can enjoy their human right, i.e. they should provide access to a music performance. Access to music is then the necessary requirement to guarantee the enjoyment of this right. While there is a number of organisations and interpreters across the world who strive to make music accessible to Deaf and HoH signers, scholarly articles on this interpreting practice are very scarce in TIS, and therefore our understanding of it is very limited. It is this gap in the scholarship that this study addresses, and establishing performativity as an element and a carrier of accessibility is only a first step.⁷ An increased understanding and popularisation of sign language interpreting in music might lead to enhanced visibility of this under-investigated practice, and potentially to greater inclusivity. In order to establish the link between performativity and accessibility, however, a brief overview of the notion of performativity is necessary.

3. Performativity

The notion of performativity is very complex and, unsurprisingly, in TIS the concept has been theorised at the crossroads of translation and performance, stemming from the linguistic notion of performativity. Translation scholar Douglas Robinson was among the first to argue that translation is itself performative: a performative activity with perlocutionary effect (Robinson, 2003). Since then, a number of scholars have engaged with and analysed the notion of performativity in translation, so much so that in the last decade, TIS has been experiencing a "performative turn" (Bigliuzzi et al., 2013, p. 1). The notion of performativity in translation has been analysed mainly in two distinct (yet related) directions:

1. Performativity as activism in translation;
2. Performativity related to the actual practice of performance.

The latter has been primarily analysed and theorised by scholars working in theatre translation, first and foremost by Cristina Marinetti (2013, 2018a, 2018b). The contemporary performative turn in stage translation has departed from the concept of performativity, which was highly debated in the 1990s (Bassnett, 1991, 1998; Nikolarea, 2002, among others; Pavis, 1992) in

⁷ This article is part of a larger project with homonymous title, which has received funding from the European Union's *Horizon 2020* research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Grant Agreement No. 101024733.

favour of theories such as that of “performative force” (Worthen, 2003). Working from theatre scholar William Worthen, Marinetti claims that the theatre translator should not wonder about the performability of a translated text, but rather about:

the force the text has in performance, what “it does” and how it functions “as performance” [...] A performative understanding of translation in the theatre involves a reconceptualization of the role played by *spectators* as well as a rethinking of more general notions of reception (Marinetti 2013, 311, original emphasis).

This notion of what the text “does” in (but also outside) performance overlaps with the idea of performativity as activism in translation. In a book chapter titled “Performing Translation”, Bermann states that since the cultural turn in TIS (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990), the scholarship has redirected its attention from issues of linguistic equivalence to the actual “acts of translation and what these *did* in particular contexts” (Bermann 2014, 288, original emphasis). Bermann argues that the discipline has broadened its focus to encompass “the cultural and political *acts* and *effects* of translation” and to examine “the *doing* of translation [...] but also the *doing* of translators, readers, and audiences” (Bermann 2014, 288, original emphasis). Sandra Bermann focuses on “translation’s own productive and transformative potential, both in [...] art and in what we call ‘real life’” (Bermann, 2014, p. 288). This notion of performativity as transformative potential can also be scrutinised “in terms of an activist translation, understood as a political activity aimed at achieving social transformation” (Baldo, 2019, p. 74).⁸ We can see how the notion of performativity, intended as ‘related to performance’, and that of performativity as ‘related to the effects of the performance of the translator’ are related and are two distinct ‘sub-notions’ of performativity, if you will.

This project hinges on an understanding of translation as a performative practice, where “performative” is intended both in its potential for social transformation, and as a creative practice on the part of the translator. While it is easy to see how the practice of sign language interpreting in music can bring about a social transformation, since it might increase inclusivity of a segment of the audience, the idea of translation as a creative and performative practice requires even further elucidation.

According to performance theorist Richard Schechner:

[p]erformativity as understood by performance studies is part of, or closely related to, postmodernism. One of the decisive qualities of postmodernism is the application of the “performance principle” to all aspects of social and artistic life (Schechner, 2013, p. 129)

⁸ On the topic of translation and activism, see also Tymoczko (2010), among others.

Schechner hypothesises that “[a]ny behavior, event, action, or thing can be studied ‘as’ performance” (Schechner, 2013, p. 41 [2002]). Working from these premises, theatre translation scholar Sirkku Aaltonen sees translation and “the translation process *as performance*” (Aaltonen, 2013, p. 386, original emphasis). That process, as Bermann (2014, 288) states, will have an effect, both on the translated work of art and “in what we call ‘real life’”.

The notion of translation as performance has been analysed by Dominic Cheetham (2016), who scrutinises the implication of the TRANSLATION IS TRANSFER metaphor and the TRANSLATION IS PERFORMANCE metaphor. Cheetham works from the Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (2003 [1980]), according to which more or less consciously we understand and categorize many concepts through metaphors. Since translation is a complex human activity, translation, too, is often understood through metaphors (Cheetham 2016). Cheetham claims that the TRANSLATION IS PERFORMANCE metaphor is better suited to describe the work of the translator, since it allows us to see “the final product as the outcome of the translator’s creative practice” (Tarantini, 2018, p. 83), rather than a transfer from one place to another, or from one audience to another. In my work I move beyond considering translation as performance, or performance as a metaphor through which we understand and theorise translation; rather, I argue that in the performing arts (Tarantini, 2021), and particularly the practice of sign language interpreting (Tarantini, Under Review), translation is inextricable from its performance component. The performative element of translation is embodied in the translator/performer’s practice, so much so that Fisher (2021) talks about “embodied interpretations.”

One of the first scholars to advocate for a greater interaction between the translation and the performance interface is Cristina Marinetti, who has theorised the notion of translation as “performative rewriting” (Marinetti, 2018a). According to Marinetti, the stage functions as a “translation zone”, where:

translation [...] occurs not only discursively, through subsequent rewritings of a foreign text, but also performatively, through the negotiation of *multiple languages in performance* and the creative juxtaposition of those languages with the actor’s body [...]” (Marinetti, 2018b, p. 129).

Marinetti analyses the issue from the perspective of theatre. However, that is applicable to translation practices in the performing arts more broadly, and particularly to the work of sign language IPs, who physically embody nonverbal elements of music in their interpretation. In

her analysis of cross-modal meaning-making Fisher (2021) notices how in translated songs, notions from the Conceptual Metaphor Theory are embodied by the interpreter. While TRANSLATION IS PERFORMANCE is a metaphor within the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, in the practice of sign language interpreted music, translation *is* performance and performance *is* translation. Notions from the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (e.g. HAPPY IS UP or SAD IS DOWN/HEAVY) become embodied metaphors through which the performer interprets the emotions of the song, but also other nonverbal elements such as rhythm, pitch, intensity, instrumentation, etc. when translating music and lyrics into signs and movement, both conceptually and performatively.

As previously mentioned, the TIS theories on translation and performativity are usually developed working from Performance Studies. Perhaps less known among TIS scholars is the work of performance theorist and philosopher Stuart Grant (2013, 2015), who recognises the need for more clarity and better definitions of terms related to performance and performance theory. According to Grant, there is:

a persistent confusion in performance studies, caused by the historical accident that, in English, the word 'performance' can be used to designate a number of different phenomena. No doubt the collapse of sign and referent in Austin's performative utterance contributes to this situation (1975, 5-6) (Grant, 2013, pp. 127-128).

With the theorisation of the performative utterance in linguistics, in which "the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action [...]" (Austin, 1975, p. 5), the boundaries between the *saying* and the *doing* have collapsed. While that was "a founding moment in the discipline of performance studies" (Grant, 2015, p. 214), it undoubtedly contributed to terminological confusion, hence the need to draw a distinction between "*the performative event, performance, the moment of performance, and the theatrical as opposed to the performative*" (Grant, 2013, p. 127, original emphasis). According to Grant, the *performative event* could be "a ritual, a theatre show, a sports game, a ceremony, a rehearsal, a social occasion such as a date or a job interview, a presidential inauguration speech, the cooking of a meal, the painting of a picture, a prayer" (Grant, 2013, pp. 128-129). The term *performance*, instead, "refers to that moment of the performative event in which it performs, in which it is performed [...]" performance is understood here as a kind of essence which makes performative events performative" (Grant, 2013, p. 129).⁹ Stuart then introduces the concept of the *performative moment* (or *moment of performance*) which is a moment bound in time, and is

⁹ Elsewhere, Grant (2015, p. 216) defines this as "the essence of performance".

“the moment of *decision*” (Grant, 2013, p. 129, original emphasis), when the performer chooses between the options available to them in that particular instant. No matter how well rehearsed a show is, that moment is always improvisational, Grant claims. To better understand this moment, which is bound to its temporality and to its fleeting nature, it is necessary to operate a distinction between the *theatrical* and the *performative* (Grant, 2013).

The *theatrical* dimension of the performative event is the showing-to, the attempt to represent, make predictable and repeatable, to communicate with or affect another, the endurance of the sign, the material, the temporal. The *performative* dimension is the flash of the moment of the coming-forth, the almost imperceptible, unencompassable, and inexperienceable inceptive occurrence, the doing, which, in its apprehension, ceases to function as what it was, and joins the apparatus of the theatrical, the enduring. The performative temporalises, the theatrical is already in time; in the theatrical, the representational gap of metaphysics has already opened, the performative occurs as the unfolding of Being. A performative event is always, in these definitions, a combination of the theatrical and the performative. The two dimensions always work together as complementary axes of the temporality of performance. In the performative event, the theatrical and the performative cannot exist without each other (Grant, 2015, pp. 216-217, original emphasis).

Working from Heidegger’s concept of *Augenblick*, Grant embarks in a philosophical quest to define, distinguish, and clarify these terms (the performative event, performance, the performative moment and the theatrical vs the performative).¹⁰ This distinction will be applied to the work of IPs, and will be combined with the theories of TIS scholar Clive Scott, who argues that translation should become “a philosophical enquiry into its own functions and possible relationships with the translator’s being-in-the-world” (Scott, 2019, p. 89).

Scott’s idea of the translator’s function and their “being-in-the-world” combines with Grant’s notion of *performance* and *performative moment*. According to Grant, it is in the *performative event* (i.e. during a show) that the *essence of performance* manifests itself and makes the *performative moment* performative. The practice of sing language IPs is bound to the performative moment, when the translator’s “being-in-the-world” is not a philosophical enquiry into their function, but rather, a materialisation and an embodiment of their transformative potential.

4. Performativity as an element and carrier of accessibility

¹⁰ Grant (2013, 2015) uses the terms *performative moment* and *moment of performance* interchangeably, as well as *performance event* and *performative event*.

This article argues that sign language interpreting in music is a performative practice, both in the sense of ‘related to performance’ and in the sense of ‘transformative potential’ because of its potential to make a change and to have a positive impact on society (see Bermann 2014). The aim of the practice of sign language IPs is to give access to music to Deaf and HoH signers (Galloway Gallego, 2018). Fisher (2021) has demonstrated how IPs embody non-verbal elements of the text (rhythm, tempo, pitch, etc.) in their performance for the purpose of granting access to music to Deaf and HoH signers. By identifying the practice of sign language IPs as performative, then we can claim that in sign language interpreted music, performativity is *embodiment*, because accessibility to nonverbal elements of a song (rhythm, pitch, etc.) materializes through the performer’s body, through interpretations where vocal and musical elements of a song are embodied.

The practice of sign language interpreting in music speaks to Grant’s (2013; 2015) view of the performative as the attribute of the performance event. In this practice, the *performance event* is a live concert, or a song signing practice aimed to provide access to music for Deaf and HoH signers. The *performative moment* is the moment in which the IP chooses among the range of possibilities available to them: it is the moment of decision, no matter how well rehearsed the show or the text is,¹¹ and it is a moment that is irremediably bound in time. It is the moment of *performance*, as defined by Grant (2013) in which the performative event performs. Performance is the “essence which makes performative events performative” (Grant, 2013, p. 129).¹² As Grant (2013, 217) states “[a] performative event is always [...] a combination of the theatrical and the performative”: the theatrical being what is ‘scripted’ and predictable and known before the performative moment, and the performative being the unknown, the improvisational moment before the audience. This is the moment when accessibility becomes performance: when the theatrical and the performative combine in the performative event, and the performative events perform. This is where the notion of performativity in Performance Studies and in Translation and Interpreting Studies converge, and the very notion multiplies exponentially, embodied in the performer’s practice. Marinetti’s idea of translation as “performative force”, and an enhanced understanding of what the text

¹¹ In some cases, some interpreter-performers interpret in real-time, having done some research on the artist before the gig, but without access to the texts or the program beforehand, so their interpretation is actually improvised (Celeste Di Pietro, interpreter-performer, personal communication 06/02/2022). In other cases, such as concerts of famous singers, popular and highly requested interpreter-performers such as Amber Galloway Gallego do a lot of research and a lot of preparation before the show (Caswell, 2017). Regardless of how much preparation there is behind a performance, the *performative moment* is always improvisational and bound in time, according to Grant (2013, 2015).

¹² Elsewhere, Grant (2015, p. 216) defines this as “the essence of performance”.

“does’ and how it functions ‘as performance’” (Marinetti 2013, 311) is functional to theorising performativity as an element of accessibility. In what Grant (2013, 2015) defines as the performative moment, the translator and their “being-in-the-world” reach their transformative potential during a performative event, hence combining the notion of performativity as the potential to achieve social transformation with that of performativity as the translator’s creative practice. The idea of translation as “performative rewriting” where different languages, but also different modalities (aural, visual, and embodied) are juxtaposed and merge on the performer’s body make performativity itself an embodied notion, incorporated in and inextricable from the practice of translation. Hence, we can no longer consider performance as a metaphor through which we understand translation, because performance *is* translation. Scott puts forth the proposition that translation is synaesthetic, and states that “the central motor principle of translation is morphism, a sliding across languages or linguistic material, across the senses, across the *participating body*, in order to achieve an ever-changing *inclusivity*, a variational play” (Scott, 2019, p. 89, my emphasis). Understanding that in sign language interpreted music the performative event is itself a translation allows us to see performativity as embodiment, and translation as synaesthetic. The performativity of sign language interpreting in music as explained above is the key element that strives to make music accessible. Performativity thus becomes an element and a carrier of accessibility. Whether that actually grants access to music, though, it is for d/Deaf and HoH audiences to decide.

5. Conclusions and further research

Grant’s distinction between the essence of performance, the moment of performance, the performative event, and the theatrical and the performative has provided the basis to analyse the practice of sign language IPs. During the performative event, in the moment of performance, the essence of performance makes the event performative. If we understand performativity not only as relational to the performative event, but as relational to the audience in its potential to bring about social transformation, we can see how the performative moment, when the interpreter embodies nonverbal elements of the text, is the moment when performativity becomes an element and a vector of accessibility. In sign language interpreted music, then, translation becomes a practice of “performative rewriting” through the interpreter’s “participating body”, to use Scott’s words (Scott, 2019, p. 89), and performativity is thus embodied.

Accessibility, as we have seen, is the responsibility of the duty-bearer, but despite the growing number of Deaf people attending live concerts, the 2018 UK Live Music Census highlights that “there is still more to be done around accessibility for Deaf and disabled customers.” One of the recommendations put forth by the census is for event organisers to “[d]evelop policies to incorporate [...] accessibility for Deaf and disabled artists and audiences” (Webster et al., 2018, p. 42). On that topic, however, Pierre Schmitt (2017) argues that Deaf performers rather than hearing interpreters should be given more visibility, and should be provided a space for artistic expression. This would also be functional to providing access for Deaf and HoH signers. While I do not necessarily disagree with Schmitt, this debate is beyond the scope of the present article, and beyond my limits as a hearing TIS scholar working in translation and performance. Schmitt’s stance does, however, speak to one of the greatest limitations of the research on the topic, i.e. the lack of collaboration across different disciplines, for a greater understanding of sign language interpreted music. Further research is required to evaluate whether the practice of sign language IPs is actually effective in granting access to music for Deaf and HoH signers. This article therefore concludes with a call for greater cross-disciplinary engagement and more collaboration among scholars from different disciplines in conversations with the Deaf community, as more interdisciplinary work is needed to fully understand and contextualise such a complex practice and evaluate its efficacy, or lack thereof.

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