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**A LOW'S PENTATHLON ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATIONS OF
ESTONIAN SONGS IN THE EUROVISION SONG CONTEST**

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ABSTRACT

The translation of song lyrics is one of the more complex fields of translation. While translations of song lyrics are relatively rare compared to other types of translation, one of the common occurrences of them is in the Eurovision Song Contest. Using English translations provided by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), this study aims to identify issues and notable aspects of translating songs from Estonian to English.

The translations are analysed using Low's (2005) Pentathlon Principle and compared to the musical notation to reveal how the aspects of singability, sense, naturalness, rhythm and rhyme influence the performability of a translation. The EBU translations are then compared to sung translations to show how different approaches can produce considerably different results in terms of singability. The results of the analysis are used to exemplify how aspects like stress and rhythmic match have a considerable effect on the singability of a translation and how semantic flexibility can allow the translator to work within the limitations posed by the musical aspects of melody and rhythm.

The thesis consists of an introduction where the background of the translation of song lyrics and the aim of the study are given, a literature review where an overview of theoretical approaches, linguistic background and earlier research are presented, a Pentathlon analysis of the EBU translations of *Kuula* (2012) and *Et uus saaks alguse* (2013) based on the theoretical materials, and a discussion of the findings of the analysis and their implications. The thesis ends with a conclusion summarising the work that was conducted.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As one of the oldest disciplines in the world, translation is one of the most important practises ensuring the accessibility of information in countless disciplines. As a means of delivering cultural products like art, music and literature between communities with different languages and backgrounds, translation is crucial in familiarising different cultures with each other and providing access to the aspects of a culture which would otherwise be exclusive. Due to this, the quality of translations is of high importance, often demanding a deeper understanding of both the target and source materials. Translation of song lyrics is one of the more complex and controversial fields of translation due to the added difficulties posed by the musical aspects of a song, especially rhythm and sound. Translations of song lyrics can be divided into two groups: singable translations which focus on matching the text to the music and literal translations which disregard the musical aspects in favour of staying true to the source text (Gomez Regalado 2020).

Interest in translations of songs is relatively low due to their rarity (Franzon 2008). However, one of the more notable modern occurrences of the translation of songs is in the Eurovision Song Contest. While some countries choose to subtitle songs in their national broadcasts of the event, the European Broadcasting Union also provides their own translations for many songs online. As these translations are likely to be a main source for people discovering foreign songs through the ESC, their quality can influence a listener's first experience with a foreign culture. Songs in the Eurovision Song Contest can be considered representative of their nations and cultures, thus their translations are also representative of their heritage to a foreign audience. As such, the quality of the translations can also influence how a foreign listener perceives the songs. As a prominent and regular occurrence of song lyric translation, these translations can also provide an insight to how

and why songs are translated. This study aims to analyse and assess English translations of Estonian songs, focusing on translations of *Kuula* (2012) (Eng. *Listen*) by Ott Lepland and *Et uus saaks alguse* (2012) (Eng. *New Beginning*) in the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) provided by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) using Low's Pentathlon Principle combined with a comparative notation analysis to identify the key difficulties of song translation from Estonian to English as well as provide guidelines for future translations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical approach

When choosing the approach for translating song lyrics, Franzon (2008) suggests that it depends on the aim of the translation. He points out that the decisive factor is whether the translation should be singable or not. If the aim of the translation is to merely convey the meaning of the lyrics to a foreign audience, then a literal translation will suffice. However, if the translated song is to be performed then the translation will have to account for singability to achieve a “musico-verbal unity between the text and the composition” (Franzon 2008: 375). He goes on to assert that song translations are not only distinguished by a need for functionality in relation to the music but also to the situation of use in the form of a singing performance. Franzon's distinction of purpose provides a good baseline for choosing the approach to translating a song and his explanation of the importance of singability ties into one of the most cited theoretical approaches in the field.

One of the dominant theoretical approaches in song lyric translation is Low's (2005) 'Pentathlon Principle'. Low (2005: 185) describes it as “a deliberate balancing of five

different criteria – singability, sense, naturalness, rhythm and rhyme”. The balance of these aspects is the basis for creating a translation that is both accurate to the original and can be performed in the target language.

In the description of singability Low (2005: 193) points out the relationship between phonetics and musical notes, specifying aspects like matching vowels to note length and emphasised words as important factors when making choices in the translation. To provide the flexibility necessary to achieve singability, Low’s (2005: 194) approach to sense calls for a broader definition of acceptable accuracy, sacrificing some semantic accuracy for more options to get matching syllable counts and a better phonetic fit. Stretching sense allows it to be balanced against the other criteria of the pentathlon to ultimately achieve a translation that, ideally, creates the illusion of the music being designed for it instead of the other way around.

Low (2005: 195—196) considers naturalness as one of the more underrated aspects of song translation. He points out register and word-order as some of the more important considerations when producing a natural translation. Low suggests that unnaturalness can be a product of strict semantic accuracy, a tendency to use archaic language and syntactic alterations. He argues that naturalness demands a more strategic approach and that a singable translation is not worth the effort if the target text does not make sense to the listener when first hearing the song.

While rhythm is perhaps one of the most crucial aspects of song translations, Low (2005: 196—198) suggests that while matching syllables to the musical source as closely as possible is a desirable goal, some flexibility is still required. In cases where a translator finds a phrase with matching syllable counts to be “insolubly, unacceptably clumsy” (2005: 197), addition and subtraction may become viable options. However, such modifications should

only be done in acceptable places where they least affect melody. He suggests that adding syllables works better on a melisma (a syllable stretched across multiple notes) while the best place to subtract them is on repeated notes. Modification of the melody may not be out of the question as a subtle tweak to the music may provide a more pleasing result for the lyrics, though this is somewhat discouraged. Should the target text suffer from a shortage of syllables, addition of words or phrases is once again an option. These should, however, be relevant to the subtext of the source text. Other options include repetition or dropping notes. Finally, Low (2005: 197) points out that languages like English demand more focus on syllabic stress. He asserts that rhythm is not equivalent to poetic metre and that song translation requires attention to be paid to vowel lengths as well as rests to create a match for the existing music rather than a replication of the source texts metrical form.

The final aspect of Low's Pentathlon is rhyme. Low (2005: 198—199) identifies the major issue with rhyming in song translation to be the excessive focus on it. He points out that a rigid focus on matching the rhyming scheme of the source text comes at the cost of other aspects of the Pentathlon, especially meaning, sometimes resulting in outright unusable translations. He suggests that in cases where rhyme can be lost without significant cost, it may be fine to do so. In situations where rhyme is to be maintained, however, a more flexible approach should be taken as a strict focus on perfect rhymes can end up with lines where "the tail indeed wags the dog" (2005: 198). Low's more flexible approach opens up various options to deal with rhymes: choosing which lines to rhyme as well as accepting imperfect rhymes gives the translator more freedom to create a more natural text and retain semantic accuracy. Thus, a more lenient approach to rhyme can result in a overall higher quality translation.

Additionally, Low warns translators not to take a too narrow approach focusing on the characteristics of the original text and, like Franzon, suggests focusing more on the purpose of the translation.

2.2 Phonology and rhythm

Song is naturally bound to the sound of language. As such, it is also important to consider the similarities and differences between languages when analysing translations of songs.

As also mentioned in Low's (2005) Pentathlon, rhythm and stress play a crucial role in singability and naturalness. When it comes to stress, Estonian has a fixed stress on the first syllable of a word (initial stress) while English has no fixed stress, with stress instead being more based on phonological weight (Goedemans, van der Hulst 2013a). The phonological weight of syllables is determined by factors such as vowel length and syllable closure with longer vowels, for example, resulting in heavier (and thus more stressed) syllables (Goedemans, van der Hulst 2013b). Both Estonian and English feature heavy weight on long vowels, however English additionally puts weight on closing consonants (consonants following the vowel in a syllable) after short vowels (Goedemans, van der Hulst 2013b). Combining stress location and phonological stress, the difference between Estonian and English becomes apparent – stress in Estonian primarily falls on the initial syllable of a word while English features more variety in stress location. This is supported by Asu and Nolan (2006) who found that while Estonian and English are both strongly rhythmical, Estonian tends to have a more even rhythm. Thus, when looking from a musical perspective,

the “front-heavy” stress of Estonian might not translate well into the more varied stress patterns of English.

2.3 Previous studies on translations in the ESC

When introducing his discussion of song translation, Franzon (2008) points out the low interest in the field due to its relative rarity compared to other types of translation. However, one of the recurring appearances of song translation is in ESC broadcasts. To determine the importance of song lyric translations in the ESC, Astikainen (2018) analysed the reception and quality of subtitles in broadcasts of the contest in Finland. Her analysis focused on the subtitles as part of a holistic experience – she argues that the subtitles are not a separate entity but rather are part of the audio-visual experience in conjunction with the original music and the performance. As such, the translations of song lyrics not only convey the meaning of the original song but also affect the entire experience of the show. By conducting viewing sessions and discussions with groups of casual viewers and more dedicated ESC fans, Astikainen (2018) found that the subtitles contributed positively to the viewing experience but also found some oddities in them. Overall, the subtitles are a welcome addition among viewers and only occasionally distracting, thus confirming the value of song translations when experiencing foreign music.

A relevant study on Finnish ESC subtitles conducted by Siitonen (2014) focused more on the song translations themselves. Her analysis using Low’s Pentathlon Principle found that the ESC translations seemed to be mainly based on sense, focusing more on the meaning of the song rather than trying to match the music. Some of the oddities found in her study include the mixing of colloquial and formal register and the overall fluctuation in

accuracy to both the original text and the music with some songs being closer to the original rhythm while sacrificing some of the meaning while others are more disconnected from the music. Similarly, the naturalness of the songs varied depending on the translation choices. She also points out the restrictions of subtitling forcing the translations to match with the performance at least to some extent. Siitonen concludes that both literal and singable translations are present in the broadcasts resulting in inconsistency between songs while also recognising the lack of prior research on the topic as one of the main hindrances in analysing song translations.

The analysis of song translations is a relatively recent topic in the field of translation studies and, as mentioned, the lack of prior research poses a challenge to analysing songs. There appears to be a particular lack of studies concerning translations of Estonian songs with no studies on the topic being easily found, although there might be some that are unpublished or have flown under the radar. Due to this, an analysis of translations of Estonian songs in the ESC on the basis of the main theoretical studies on the topic could be a starting point for further research on song translations in Estonia.

3. PENTATHLON ANALYSIS

The songs *Kuula* (2012) and *Et uus saaks alguse* (2013) were chosen due to their popularity and relative success in the Eurovision Song Contest as well as their more informative nature providing an opportunity to exemplify issues that impact the singability of a translated song. The translations will be analysed using Low's (2005) Pentathlon Principle by analysing each aspect of the Pentathlon individually to reveal whether the EBU translations meet the criteria and what factors cause issues in each aspect. At the end of both analyses, the EBU translations will be compared to sung translations of the songs to bring out differences in informative and singable translations and to determine what methods allow

for a translation that can also be performed. The results will then be discussed to show what factors impact singability and what should be taken into consideration when translating a song from Estonian to English.

3.1 KUULA / LISTEN

Kuula (2012) (EBU Eng. title *Listen*) performed by Ott Lepland was Estonia's entry in the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest in Baku, Azerbaijan (EBU 2021). The lyrics are written by Aapo Ilves with the music written by Lepland himself. The song reached fourth place in the second semi-final and finished sixth in the grand final, making it the eighth Estonian entry to make it to the top 10 of the ESC finals (EBU 2021).

This analysis will focus on the translation provided by the EBU on the official page of the entry. However, before proceeding, it is important to acknowledge that Ott Lepland has also released his own English version of *Kuula* under the title *Hear Me* (2012) translated by Stanislav Bulganin and featured on the record *Kuula - EP* (2012) along with Spanish and Russian versions as well as the Estonian original (Ilves, Bulganin 2012). For the purposes of this analysis, the EBU translation will be used due to its wider relevance and accessibility as the official Eurovision music video on YouTube uses the Estonian version and the description directs to the EBU page which features their translation (Eurovision 2012).

The English translation will be analysed using Low's Pentathlon Principle to identify issues and difficulties that may arise when translating songs from Estonian to English. The

translation will be analysed from perspectives of singability, sense, naturalness, rhythm and rhyme based on examples from the lyrics as well as comparisons with the musical notation.¹

Let us begin with the first two verses of the song:

	English	Estonian
1.	Listen to the horizon	Kuula, mis räägib silmapiir.
2.	Listen to how far it takes you	Sa kuula, kui kaugele ta viib.
3.	Listen to what the wind has to say	Kuula, mis tuulel öelda veel.
4.	Listen	Kuula nüüd...
5.	Watch as darkness approaches	Vaata, kui pimedus on teel,
6.	Wait – the light remains within us	Oota, meis valgus püsib veel.
7.	Listen to how your land breathes	Sa kuula, kuis hingab sinu maa.
8.	Listen now	Kuula nüüd...

Fig. 1: English translation of verses one and two (left)(EBU 2021) and Estonian original (right)(Ilves 2012)

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 65$. The lyrics are written below the notes, with English on the left and Estonian on the right.

System 1 (Measures 1-4):
 English: Lis - ten to the ho - ri - zon Lis - ten to how far it takes you
 Estonian: Kuu - la, mis rää - gib sil - ma - piir Kuu - la, kui kau - ge - le ta viib

System 2 (Measures 5-8):
 English: Lis - ten to what the wind has to say lis - ten
 Estonian: Kuu - la, mis tuu - lel öel - da veel, kuu - la nüüd...

System 3 (Measures 9-12):
 English: Watch as dark - ness app - roach - es Wa - it the light re - mains with - in us
 Estonian: Vaa - ta, kui pi - me - dus on teel, oo - ta, meis val - gus pü - sib veel

System 4 (Measures 13-16):
 English: Lis - ten to how your land breathe - es Lis - ten now
 Estonian: Kuu - la, kuis hin - gab Si - nu maa, kuu - la nüüd

¹ Comparisons regarding musical elements (singability, rhythm) are drawn between corresponding points in the music and the examples may not match as translations.

Fig. 2: Estonian original (upper staff)(Ilves 2012) and English translation (lower staff)(EBU 2021) compared to the musical notation.

Singability

According to Low (2005), the two main aspects of singability are phonetics and syllable counts. When comparing the English translation with the Estonian original from this perspective, a few things become noticeable.

On the first line, the first thing that stands out is a mismatch in syllable count between the Estonian *räägib* and English *the*. The English translation replaces a two-syllable word with a one-syllable word which creates an odd match with the rhythm of the music at the corresponding point (further discussion below in the *Rhythm* section). As a result, the short vowel [ə] in *the* is stretched across two eighth notes which, combined with the slow tempo of the song (65 beats per minute), causing it to linger awkwardly.

On the second line, a notable discrepancy is the considerable difference in vowel-consonant ratios between Estonian *ta* and English *takes*. Phonetically, the Estonian *ta* [ta] features one consonant and one vowel (1:1) while the English *takes* [teɪks] features three consonants and two vowels (3:2). According to Low (2005: 193), clusters of consonants can cause problems with diction. Based on this, the additional consonants in the English translation could be considered a less-than-optimal option, however, as the word is sung on an eighth note (a relatively short duration, half of a beat) and is immediately followed by a singable approximant ([j] in *you* [ju:]), it might not be as severe of an issue as it might seem at first glance.

Sense

When it comes to meaning, the English translation follows the Estonian original very closely. The translation clearly aims to replicate the original as accurately as possible, sacrificing some singability as a result. This becomes more apparent as the song progresses, especially in the bridge where, with more complex lines and rhythms, the translation becomes more mismatched. Low's (2005: 194) idea of stretching sense could certainly help this translation as the adamant faithfulness to the original text creates oddities when compared to the music and produces some borderline unusable lines in the latter half of the song. As is, this translation is more informative than singable and that does seem to be its primary purpose, however, singability should not be disregarded here as this is the translation that most people would find coming from the official ESC video.

Naturalness

As already mentioned above when discussing sense, the translation stays very true to the original text. It does, however, use structures more natural in English in parts where more direct translations would be odd. This, again, comes at the cost of singability, however. As mentioned, the bridge part falls apart musically – while the English lyrics make sense on paper, they do not match well with the music. Regarding naturalness, the translation is more readable than singable.

Rhythm

Rhythm is arguably the most important part in determining whether the translation works with the music or not. Several issues with the translated lyrics struggling to match the

music have already come up when analysing other aspects of the Pentathlon. Some oddities like the stretched vowel in line one could be fixed with minor adjustments to the melody (such as extending the prior note to the first note of the stretched word, moving it forward by a note). The end of the first verse also features an odd omission on line four, where *now* is strangely missing after *listen* creating an awkward stretch; this is fixed in subsequent occurrences of the phrase. However, the most problematic part rhythmically is the bridge section.

	English	Estonian
12.	The path has passed into shadow	Varjudesse tee on mööda läind.
13.	I look and keep on looking	Ma vaatan ja otsin ikka veel.
14.	Silence has the power to resound	On vaikusel see võim – heliseda
15.	I wait for you here, halfway there	Sind ma ootan siin just poolel teel,
16.	Listen to my voice calling you	sa kuula, hüüdmäs on mu hääl.

Fig. 3: English translation (left)(EBU 2021) and Estonian original (right)(Ilves 2012) of the bridge section

Var - ju - des - se - tee... on möö - da läänd,
The path has passed in - to sha - dow

ma vaa - tan ja ot - sin ik - ka veel, on vai - ku - sel see võim,
I look and keep on loo - king Si - lence has the po - wer

he - li - se - da! Sind ma oo - tan siin, just poo - lel teel,
to re - sound I wait for you here half - way there

sa kuu - la, hüüd - mas on mu hääl
lis - ten to my voice call - ing you

Fig. 4: Estonian original (upper staff)(Ilves 2012) and English translation (lower staff)(EBU 2021) of the bridge compared to the musical notation.

From line 12 onwards, the translation struggles with matching the rhythm of the music. In this case, the bridge is the most rhythmically intense part of the song. While the rest of the song follows a simple line-by-line structure, the bridge is much more packed and rhythmic, featuring syncopations throughout. Fig. 4 shows an attempt at aligning the translation with the rhythm and reveals some serious issues.

First, most English lines have less syllables than the Estonian originals. On its own, this could be compensated for by adjusting the melody slightly but due to the intensity of the song in this part, it could be argued that the English translation feels comparatively “thinner”.

The arguably bigger issue is the stress. On line 12 for example, Estonian *varjudesse* corresponds to *the path has passed* in English. The shift in stress becomes apparent on the first two syllables: in Estonian the first syllable (*var-*) is stressed (which also corresponds to the eighth note in the music) while in English, the stress would more naturally fall on the second syllable (*path*).

Rhyme

The EBU translation abandons rhyme almost entirely. The only consistent phonetic repetitions occur where words repeat (such as *listen* at the beginning of lines), these could, however, be considered incidental rather than intentional attempts at creating rhymes as these mostly occur as direct translations of the original.

It is clear at this point that the EBU English translation of *Kuula* is not intended to be a singable translation. Rather, the translation is meant to be a more direct representation of the original lyrics to convey the exact words being sung to a listener who does not speak the language.

It is here, where the translation by Bulganin (2012) should be discussed as it provides some solutions regarding aspects of Low's Pentathlon where the EBU translation fails.

	EBU	Bulganin
1.	Listen to the horizon	Hear me in every nature's sounds
2.	Listen to how far it takes you	Hear me in whispers of the ground

3.	Listen to what the wind has to say	Be near me through murmurs in the dark
4.	Listen	Do you hear me?
5.	Watch as darkness approaches	See me in every face you stare
6.	Wait – the light remains within us	And hear me from almost everywhere
7.	Listen to how your land breathes	This evening my heart will say it all
8.	Listen now	Just hear me

Fig. 5: EBU (2021) translation (left) of the first two verses and the sung translation by Bulganin (2012) (right).

Perhaps the key aspect to Bulganin’s translation being superior in terms of singability is that it is more liberal regarding semantic accuracy. By abandoning strict line-by-line accuracy and taking a more intimate approach in expression (using noticeably more personal expressions with a greater focus on the pronoun *me*), Bulganin’s translation has much more liberty in constructing more natural phrases in English. Some notable techniques include moving certain expressions to different parts of the song (for example concepts of nature and searching being swapped between the first two verses) and replacing some altogether with lines that fit better with the more personal mood of the song while also sounding more natural than a more direct translation perhaps could. Unlike the EBU translation, Bulganin’s version also features noticeable rhymes in the form of end rhymes between the first two lines of both verses (*sounds – ground; stare - everywhere*). When compared to the EBU translation, the functional difference between the two translations is evident – the EBU translation is meant to accurately translate the text of the original while Bulganin’s translation is written to be a performable song. Thus, Bulganin’s translation also exemplifies how semantic flexibility allows for a more singable translation compared to a translation that is strictly accurate to the original.

3.2 ET UUS SAAKS ALGUSE / NEW BEGINNING

Et uus saaks alguse (2012) (EBU Eng. title *New Beginning*) by Birgit Õigemeel (now Sarrap, married) was Estonia's entry in the 2013 Eurovision Song Contest in Malmö, Sweden (EBU 2021). The music is composed by Mihkel Mattisen and the lyrics are written by Mattisen and Silvia Soro. The song reached 10th place in the first semi-final and finished 20th in the grand final (EBU 2021).

As with *Kuula* (2012), there also exists a different recorded translation of *Et uus saaks alguse* sung by Birgit Õigemeel featured on one of the single releases of the song under the title *New Way to Go* (2013). However, information on the release featuring translated versions of the song is scarce and the author of the English translation could not be identified at the time of writing this thesis. The CD appears to be out of production, nor does it appear on any streaming services and the closest thing to an official release is an upload on the YouTube channel of Õigemeel's manager (and now husband) Indrek Sarrap (2013). The credits in the description of the video, however, do not mention a translator, although Mart Sander is credited as a lyricist but whether he was the author of the English lyrics appears to be unconfirmed (Sarrap 2013). Due to this, the EBU translation will be used again due to its higher relevance and accessibility to modern audiences.

The translation will once again be analysed on the basis of Low's Pentathlon Principle. The EBU translation of *Et uus saaks alguse* faces similar issues as the translation of *Kuula*, but also features some curiosities of its own.

	English	Estonian
1.	I still remember	Ma mäletan veel

2.	That feeling, so overwhelming, settling on my soul	Kui tuli mu hinge, et jääda, see tunne nii suur.
3.	And yet I'm standing on the road	Samas nüüd seisan ma teel
4.	Searching my heart, battered by the wind	vaadates südame sisse, seal viliseb tuul.
5.	And I know, I know	Aga tean, ma tean,
6.	That things can get better	Kõik võib muuta heaks.
7.	Every door that closes eventually opens again	Iga uks, mis kord sulgub, see avaneb taas.
8.	The ice will melt and the bare trees burst into leaf	Veel sulab jää ja õide puhkeb raagus puu.
9.	Every ending is just a new beginning	Iga lõpp ei ole mud, kui algus uus.
10.	We need the night so the day can bring us light	On vaja ööd, et päev tooks valguse,
11.	For things to start anew	Et uus saaks alguse
12.	Leave what's passed in the past	Mis möödunud, jäägu kaugele,
13.	For things to once again start anew	Et uus saaks taas alguse
14.	The curtain is being raised once more	Kardin avaneb taas.
15.	The second act is starting, where I pick myself up and dust myself down	On algamas järgmine vaatus, kus tõusta saan mast.
16.	The same person, only with a different game to play	Sama hing, kuid uus mäng veel ees -
17.	What lies ahead has changed, I'm taking a different path	Muudetud saab minu saatus, saab uueks mu tee.

Fig. 6: English translation (left)(EBU 2021) and Estonian original (right)(Mattisen, Soro 2012). Note: the last chorus has been omitted due to repetition.

Singability

The choice of words in the translation creates some instances of odd stresses. Some examples include line 2, where the short vowels and consonant cluster of *settling* feel awkward with the rhythm of the music and line 3 featuring shifted stress due to the *road* ending up one note later than in the original.

While the translation opts for a more accurate translation, there are lines that could be slightly changed to better fit the music with little to no loss in semantic accuracy. For example, the line “Every door that closes eventually opens again” (Est.: “Iga uks, mis kord sulgub, see avaneb taas.”) (line 7) does not match well with the melody, losing a syllable between *that* and *closes* while adding too many with *eventually*. A better option here could be “Every door that **once** closes, **will open** again”. This retains the syllable corresponding to *kord* in Estonian while also matching the syllable count and rhythm of the last phrase.

Perhaps the most notable blunder of the translation is that it is missing the first word of the chorus (line 8). In the original *veel* is sung as a notably emphasised note when compared to the rest of the song, standing out in both length and pitch. Low (2005: 193) mentions that certain words may be musically highlighted by the composer to give them special prominence. In this case, *veel* has the role of ushering in the chorus, creating a notable contrast compared to the verse. It could also be argued that in regards to meaning, the highlight of *veel* serves to emphasise the message of hope that the song carries. Thus, the lack of a fitting replacement in the translation is a crucial mistake, one only made more severe with every repetition of the line.

Sense

The English translation follows the Estonian original closely, opting for direct translations while sacrificing singability. What stands out, however, is that, as discussed above, there are lines that could be slightly changed to better fit the music with little to no loss in semantic accuracy. On the other hand, there are lines where words are changed for no apparent reason, such as *hing* (Eng. *soul*) being translated as *person* on line 16 (this also creates a conflict with rhythm due to different syllable counts) or there are arbitrary additions such as adding an unnecessary idiomatic phrase (“/.../ and dust myself down”) on line 15.

While the strict accuracy to the original is apparent, the translation also seems to take some artistic liberties which end up producing a text that is both unsingable and not entirely accurate to the original.

Naturalness

Most of the points brought up in the analysis of sense also apply to naturalness. Some of the more word-for-word translations create odd word orders and structures that align with what Low (2005: 195) calls “a kind of translationese which results from failure to assess the naturalness of both ST [source text] and TT [target text]”.

Rhythm

Rhythmically, the quality of the translation varies between good matches, words needing minor melodic adjustments due to syllables and stress, and lines with excessive syllables that do not fit into the melody or outright missing syllables.

The figure shows a musical score with two staves. The upper staff contains the Estonian original lyrics, and the lower staff contains the English translation. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 78$. The score is divided into six systems, each starting with a measure number (1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 20). The lyrics are as follows:

Ma mä-le-tan vael, kui tu-li mu hin - ge, et jää - da see tun-ne nii suur Sa-maa
I still re-mem-ber That fee-ling so o - ver-whel-ming sett - ling on my soul And yet

nüüd sei-san ma teel, vaa-da-tos sü - da-me sis - so, seal vi - li - seb tuul A - ga
I'm stan-ding on the road ? Search-ing my heart bat - tered by the wind And I

teun, mu teun, kõik võib muu - tu heaks I - gu uks, mis kord sul - gub see u - va - neb laue
know, I know (That) things can get bet - ter eve-ry door that clo-ses (Eventually) o-pens a - gain

Veel - su-lab jää ja õi - de puh - kob raa - gus puu l - ga löpp ei o - le muud, kui al - gas
? The ice will melt and the bare trees (will) burst in leaf Eve-ry en-ding is just a new be-gin - ing

uus On va - ju ood, et päev tooks val - gu - se, et uus sauks al - gu - se Mis
We need the night so (the) day can bring us light For things to start a - new leave

möö dund, jää - gu kau - ge - le. Et uus sauks taas al - gu - se
what's passed in the past For things to start a - new

Fig. 7: Estonian original (upper staff)(Mattisen, Soro 2012) and English translation (lower staff)(EBU 2021) compared to the musical notation. Question marks (?) indicate missing syllables, brackets indicate excessive syllables/words.

Looking at the first verse and chorus as an example, two key issues become apparent: missing and excessive syllables.

In the given example, there are two notable instances of missing syllables. First, on line 4, the phrase “Searching my heart” is missing three syllables in the beginning (or at the end, depending on how one would attempt to match it to the melody). Regardless of which

way the translation is matched to the music, omission is not good as it creates awkward pauses when compared to the original text and melody.

The second and more crucial issue is on the first line of the chorus (line 8). The translation effectively lacks a word on the first note of the chorus. Note that *the* is not an optimal option in this case because it has a short vowel which would be placed over a long and emphasised note. This not only creates a glaringly obvious pause but also, as mentioned under singability, leaves a void in the place of the most emphasised note in the song.

Excessive syllables and words appear to be mainly caused by suboptimal translation choices. How some lines could be improved with some adjustments was already discussed in examples in previous parts of the Pentathlon. Lines 6—10 feature words that are hard to find a place for in the melody (Fig. 6, in brackets), although most of these could be implemented with small adjustments to the melody adding notes; however, a better option would be to optimise the translations with simpler structures and shorter words.

The oddly extended translation of line 15 is also relevant here: aside from its aforementioned redundancy, there is no place in the melody of that line where the added “/.../ and dust myself down” would fit.

Rhyme

The EBU translation is, again, lacking in rhyme. As with *Kuula*, rhymes mainly occur coincidentally (such as *night* and *light* in line 10) and do not appear with any consistency or identifiable intention.

Once again, it is apparent that the EBU translation of *Et uus saaks alguse* is more informative than singable. The translation rather strictly follows the source text, although it also makes some odd choices in its approach to accuracy in places. Like the translation of *Kuula*, the approach of staying true to the original lyrics proves one of the main arguments of Low's Pentathlon (2005) – a singable translation requires semantic flexibility.

This is also supported by the English release *New Way to Go* (2013) which takes more liberties in its wording to produce an overall more pleasant result.

	EBU	Sung translation (from Sarrap)
1.	I still remember	I remember the time
2.	That feeling, so overwhelming, settling on my soul	When everything seemed so amazing, I felt so alive
3.	And yet I'm standing on the road	Today I'm standing alone
4.	Searching my heart, battered by the wind	Before me the crossroads to nowhere, where have I arrived?
5.	And I know, I know	But I know, I know,
6.	That things can get better	every way I'll go
7.	Every door that closes eventually opens again	What I'm leaving behind was a lifetime ago
8.	The ice will melt and the bare trees burst into leaf	There I can see the winter pass and flowers bloom
9.	Every ending is just a new beginning	Every ending is a start for something new

10.	We need the night so the day can bring us light	Without the night the day can't start again,
11.	For things to start anew	can't warm my heart again
12.	Leave what's passed in the past	What's over can't be changed – and so
13.	For things to once again start anew	I'll find a new way to go

Fig. 8: EBU translation (2021) (left) of the first verse and chorus and the sung translation from Sarrap's video (2013) (right)

Like Bulganin's (2012) translation of *Kuula*, the sung translation of *Et uus saaks alguse* uses a more semantically flexible approach to create a more singable translation. In this case, the sung translation follows closer to the original text in terms of meaning but instead takes more liberties with expressions and structures. Semantic shifts are not as pronounced, occurring only on certain lines (for example, line 4 replaces the *heart* metaphor with *crossroads*). End rhymes are also present, although not always corresponding to the patterns of the Estonian original. Most importantly, the sung translation fixes the start of the chorus (line 8) where the first long note is lacking in the EBU translation. Overall, *New Way to Go* (2013) is an example of a more balanced translation, following the source text where possible, using subtle changes to phrasing, while also taking liberties when necessary in order to achieve a singable translation.

4. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the EBU translations of *Kuula* by Ott Lepland (2012) and *Et uus saaks alguse* by Birgit (2012) reveals some notable aspects of translating songs from Estonian to English.

Due to the vocal nature of singing, phonology and phonetics are an important factor when writing lyrics for music composed for another language. The issues with singability and rhythm revealed in the Pentathlon analysis of the EBU translations illustrate how translations of songs between two languages with differing (albeit in this case similar) stress patterns demand attention to be paid to the stress patterns in the song. The analysis shows that the two main issues regarding phonetics and phonology are mismatched vowel length and awkward stresses.

In the translations of both songs, vowel length issues are partly due to mismatched syllable counts which sometimes leads to short vowels landing on long notes. However, the phonetic and phonological differences of seemingly suitable translations are also an important factor. The first word of *Kuula* can already exemplify this issue: while both the Estonian *kuula* and the lexically appropriate translation *listen* have matching syllable counts (2), the length of the first vowel differs; the [u:] in *kuula* is longer than the [ɪ] in *listen*. Considering that the corresponding first note in the melody is rather long (matching the long, stretched vowel in Estonian), trying to sing the shorter English vowel over it may feel slightly awkward. Although this is not the most problematic example, it shows how even slight differences in phonetics can potentially lower the singability of the translation.

Closely related to vowel length issues, awkward stresses in the translations are likewise often a result of syllable count issues. However, phonological elements also play a

role here. As closing consonants in syllables have more influence on stress in English (Goedemans, van der Hulst 2013), issues can arise when the translated word features, for example, consonant clusters. *Settling* in line 2 of *Et uus saaks alguse* illustrates this as the consonant cluster in the middle of the word makes it awkward to sing to the rhythm of the melody with the consonants becoming unnaturally stressed by the even rhythm. This is partly due to *settling* being stressed on the first syllable while the two syllables it replaces (*see tun-*) are both stressed. Thus, awkward shifts in stress can make the translation feel unnatural to sing.

The detrimental effects of mismatched syllable counts are present in nearly all aspects of the Pentathlon analysis. However, the most crucial and obvious aspect related to syllable counts is rhythm. The syllable counts in the translation directly affect how the text aligns with the melody. Excessive syllables in the translation cause problems when trying to fit the text to the melody (lines 6—10 in *Et uus saaks alguse*) while having considerably less syllables than the original can lead to awkward pauses or stretches to compensate (the bridge in *Kuula*). These issues in turn contribute to the aforementioned problems with stress, such as placing unstressed syllables on emphasised notes. While slightly adjusting the melody to better fit the translated lyrics is an option, the heart of the problem lies in semantic accuracy. Due to the inherent differences in languages, simply translating the text will likely result in a translation that struggles to match with the music that was written for the source language.

As Low's (2005) Pentathlon Principle suggests, translations focusing too much on remaining accurate to the source struggle with singability. While the EBU translations are clearly not singable nor are they seemingly meant to be, they do exemplify why semantically strict translations are suboptimal for song lyrics, especially when compared to the more semantically flexible sung translations. The EBU translations stick to the source texts rather rigidly and this approach results in very strong accuracy in terms of sense while sacrificing

nearly every other aspect of the Pentathlon. What becomes apparent when analysing such unsingable translations using Low's Pentathlon is a kind of hierarchy between the aspects of the method.

From an analytical perspective, Low's Pentathlon approach to song translation pivots on semantic accuracy. The semantic flexibility of the translation has a considerable effect on how the other criteria of the Pentathlon are met. Based on the analysis of the unsingable EBU translations, it can be argued that strict semantic accuracy (sense) can lead to a translation that does not match the melody (rhythm) which in turn leads to odd shifts in stress and phonetics (singability). Excessive semantic accuracy can lead to the translation using structures that may be unnatural (naturalness) in the target text (an issue exemplified by some of the more word-for-word translations mentioned in the analysis) while rhyme inherently demands deliberate insertion, thus it can sometimes almost be at odds with semantic accuracy. The effect of semantic accuracy on the singability of a translation is evident in the EBU translations which strictly follow the source texts, thus further emphasising Low's (2005) argument that singable translations demand semantic flexibility.

Based on the analysis of the EBU translations and their comparison to sung translations on the basis of Low's Pentathlon Principle, the core factor of translating songs is semantic flexibility. Having the liberty to modify expressions and phrasing allows the translator to create a text which fits the original music and, as evident in the sung translations (Bulganin 2012; Sarrap 2013), being able to balance creativity and accuracy can result in a translation that can still convey the emotion and message of the original song, even if it is semantically shifted.

From the perspective of translating from Estonian to English, differences in stress and vowel length should be taken into consideration. Understanding how factors like

consonant clusters affect stress in English differently than in Estonian can help to avoid translations which might seem fine in text but could be awkward to sing. Semantic flexibility, again, allows for more options to circumvent these issues.

While the Pentathlon analysis and discussion of the EBU translations revealed several notable aspects and difficulties of translating songs, it is also important to acknowledge the shortcomings of this study.

First, the lack of prior studies on Estonian—English translations of songs means that the analyses are mainly based on general theoretical concepts of song translation and more extensive research on the specific aspects of translating songs from Estonian to English (such as stress and vowel-length in relation to musical rhythm) could be done based on some of the findings this study. Additionally, different approaches of translation could also be considered as this study focuses rather narrowly on Low's Pentathlon.

Second, the usage of translations that are not meant to be sung provided several examples of issues that make a translation unsingable, however, they provided little new information aside from confirming the requirements of Low's Pentathlon Principle. A more in-depth comparison of the unsingable and singable translations could reveal more specific aspects of what techniques and methods could be used for making singable translations from Estonian to English.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to identify difficulties and aspects of translating songs from Estonian to English by analysing the English Eurovision Song Contest translations of *Kuula* (2012) and *Et uus saaks alguse* (2013) provided by the European Broadcasting Union. The

translations were analysed using Low's (2005) Pentathlon Principle combined with a comparison to the musical notation to identify issues in singability, sense, naturalness, rhyme and rhythm in the EBU translations. The translations were then compared to sung translations of the same songs to exemplify how different approaches affect singability.

The Pentathlon analysis found that the translations provided by the EBU are not singable and are most likely meant to be informative. Despite their intended purpose, the poor singability in the translations revealed several aspects of singable translations that should be taken into consideration when trying to produce a translation of a song that is meant to be performable. The main aspect that influenced all other aspects of Low's Pentathlon was semantic accuracy. Strict semantic accuracy limits the options the translator has to make the translated text fit with the original music. By following the source texts closely, the translations of both songs struggled with issues of shifted stress, poor rhythmic match and structures that are awkward to sing while elements like rhyme were disregarded almost entirely. Comparisons to sung translations also revealed that the more semantically flexible translations met the criteria of Low's Pentathlon noticeably better, producing translations that fit the music better and felt more natural while introducing some semantic shifts, changing expressions and phrasing in some parts (*Et uus saaks alguse*) or taking a different approach in the overall mood of the song (*Kuula*). These examples show how semantic liberties allow for translations that are more singable in the target language while still preserving the message and emotion of the original song.

The key aspects of translating songs from Estonian to English revealed in the study are differences in stress and phonetics which can cause problems in terms of singability and rhythm. The study found that the differences between the languages demand semantic flexibility to achieve translations which could be performable. The restrictions posed by the musical aspects of melody and rhythm limit the extent to which a sung translation can remain

accurate to the original and ultimately more creative approaches are needed to make the target text work with music written for the source language.

The study of the EBU translations of Estonian songs revealed several difficulties and points of consideration in translating song lyrics, however, the overviews provided here are rather general. More in-depth analyses could be done on the translations of the songs individually to perhaps reveal some more unique aspects of translating from Estonian to English. While Low's Pentathlon Principle is one of the main theoretical approaches to singable translation, other approaches could also be considered as this study features a rather one-sided analysis. Overall, more in-depth research could be done on translations of Estonian songs to reveal more aspects of this complex field.

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RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Raimond Lai

A Low's Pentathlon Analysis of Translations of Estonian Songs in the Eurovision Song Contest / Eestikeelsete eurolaulude tõlgete analüüs Low Pentatloni baasil

Bakalaureusetöö

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Laulusõnade tõlge on üks keerukamaid tõlke valdkondi. Üks peamisi näiteid laulutõlgete esinemisest tänapäeval on Eurovisiooni lauluvõistlus. Käesoleva töö eesmärgiks on tuua välja laulusõnade tõlke raskusi ja omapärase eesti-inglise suunal, analüüsides Eesti Eurovisioonilaulude *Kuula* (2012) ja *Et uus saaks alguse* (2013) tõlkeid Low (2005) Pentatloni Printsii bi alusel. Analüüsitakse Euroopa Ringhäälingute Liidu (European Broadcasting Union) inglisekeelseid tõlkeid.

Low Pentatloni alusel analüüsitakse tõlkeid lauldavuse, tähenduse, loomulikkuse, rütmi ja riimi perspektiividest. Analüüsi illustreerimiseks kasutatakse võrdlust meloodia noodikirjaga. Põhifookus on aspektidel nagu rõhk, silbiarvud ja rütmiline sobivus. Seejärel võrreldakse Euroopa Ringhäälingute Liidu tõlkeid lauldavate tõlgetega, et tuua välja aspektid ja meetodid, mis aitavad luua tõlkeid, mis on ka esitatavad.

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