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The Language(s) of Contemporary Music Analysis

ABSTRACT

Background

The 20th century left behind an astonishing number of music theory treatises, analytical theories and compositional practices that use a large set of newly-coined special terms. ‘The century of war’ also brought severe migrations of New Music composers whose ideas often travelled together with their smiths, introducing new concepts to different language communities. The terms and their respective concepts developed and changed in new contexts, gradually diverging from their initial contents influenced by local analytical traditions, terminologies as well as compositional practices. Migrating composers and analysts were often compelled to express their ideas in a non-native language, which not only challenged their expressive potential, but also modified their conceptualization of music.

Among the examples shown in this poster the twofold critical reception of Schoenberg’s compositional theory in Europe and in the USA respectively builds an elucidating case study. Following the impact of Schoenberg’s underlying theory in Babbitt’s (e.g. 1955) or Leibowitz’s (1949) thought and successive compositional practice may reveal some possible causes of the semantic problems one faces when trying to interpret or analyse his lexical choices. Further developments based upon the practice of the Viennese school led some the more complex violations of translational bijectivity. The polysemous English terms ‘series’ and ‘serialism’ have linguistic false friends (words with similar forms, but different meanings) across the globe, the inequality depending on the (non-)meronymic relationship of the ‘twelve-tone music’ with the latter term. The term ‘series’ builds up a large scale of degrees of intralinguistic and interlinguistic semantic overlapping with terms like ‘row’, ‘pitch succession’, ‘pitch collection’, ‘set’ etc., together with other significant technical terms derived from Schoenberg’s compositional theory. As seen in Newlin and Black translations of his essays (originally written in German, Schoenberg 1950 & 1975) or different English interpretations of his *Harmonielehre* (e.g. Schoenberg 1948 and 1978), the choice of terms in the target language makes strong impact on the conceptualization of music. If the terminology exchange process is reversible, like in the case of translation of Schoenberg’s English texts into German (e.g. Schoenberg 1976), the transfer of ideas brings even more ambiguity into a musicological discourse.

The immense influence of other extramusical factors like developing technologies, multimodal and interdisciplinary

approaches on conceiving, composing and analysing music also contributed to emerging terminological inconsistency, as well as to the variety of individual composing theories and corresponding author-specific terminology usage.

A contemporary music scholar has to deal with a diversity of semantic variation within his field. Cases like synonymy, polysemy or various metonymic relations between the conceptual contents and/or their scopes in a multilingual context can open space for a variety of divergence in lexical usage and are hence unsuitable for contemporary attempts of terminological planning and standardization. Each term and concept must therefore be carefully observed and described according to strict internationally accepted frameworks that cannot be applied without a culturally and diachronically sensitive approach, often in discord with contemporary terminographical practices. Terminology databases in music scholarship, as well as in humanities in general, must therefore allow space for contextual definitions and detailed descriptions, at the same time not abandoning international standards for terminology management.

The main theoretical framework of this research are the prevailing standards used in contemporary terminological databases (ISO 704: 2009, 12620: 2009, 860: 2007 etc., all based upon Eugen Wüster’s General Theory of Terminology, Wüster 1985), which determine evaluation and translation criteria for musical terms under consideration.

All terms are extracted from a specialized 20th century corpus consisting of various musicological referential publications (e.g. Riethmüller & Eggebrecht 2012, Root: *op. cit.*, Gligo 1996 etc.), music analysis treatises, textbooks and compositional theories. The epistemological fields to be considered are music theory and analysis, as well as contrastive linguistics and sociolinguistics. The research is a part of a larger terminology standardization project Conmuster conmuster.eu aimed to develop multilingual terminological databases. The project is fully supported by the Croatian Science Foundation (project no. 5355/2013, project supervisor: Nikša Gligo) and the results will be available in open access databases like the Croatian national term-bank Struna, whose standardized terminographical structure enables further international terminological exchange.

Aims and repertoire studied

The aim of the research is to show variation in terminology usage based upon a specialized corpus of 20th century music analysis literature in various European languages as well as to systematize existing interlinguistic terminological issues. The subject of the study is 20th century music analysis terminology

with special reference to national and regional traditions. This research aims to enable translators and music professionals to recognize these differences and find a proper interlinguistic path.

Methods

Comparative and contrastive corpus analysis through interdisciplinary approach.

Implications

The result of the work in consideration is a new systematization of terminology of contemporary music analysis which enables better interlinguistic understanding and a valuable descriptive resource for translators and scholars, especially speakers of so-called “small languages”.

Keywords

Analytical theory, contemporary music, national or regional character (of musical terminology), music theory, contrastive linguistics.

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