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The Language(s) of Contemporary Music Analysis

ABSTRACT

Comprehension of the 20th and 21st century repertoire requires, more than ever before, a thorough theoretical and analytical apparatus. While intensive migrations and rapid development of means of communication enhanced language contacts and largely contributed to global spreading of compositional theories and ideas, their plurality and multilingualism loaded the contemporary analytical discourse with complex semantic issues. In its attempts to enable propulsivity of international communication among field experts by building multilingual terminological databases, contemporary terminography, which is based upon the standards determined in Wüster's General Theory of Terminology (GTT), strives to capture the linguistic treasure of special field vocabularies. However, languages for special purposes (LSP), especially in the humanities, often cannot comply with GTT's demands for univocity and interlinguistic bijectivity. This paper attempts to illustrate variation in terminology usage based upon a specialized corpus of 20th century literature on music theory and analysis in various languages. Furthermore, it deals with the most important terminological issues, such as synonymy, polysemy and linguistic false friendship. Through a brief historical sketch, a review of standards of terminology work and the case studies of the terms *series* and *serialism*, this paper aims at helping translators and music professionals in finding a proper interlinguistic path. Finally, the author attempts to shed light at the position of speakers of minor languages who, in the course of their professional activities, often deal with difficulties in filling lexical voids by means of linguistic borrowing.¹

1. INTRODUCTION

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. Some of them were born out of pure necessity, in order to label newly conceived concepts and ideas; sometimes, however, the choice of a different terminology or invention of a new term in spite of the existing one was a pure manifestation of identity, attitude, orientation. In his *Reflections...* Berger (2002, 85) noted:

New terms were to be expected, and so were concepts that would be difficult at first. But I am not sure many of us were ready for a situation in which language formation would become an end in itself. It seemed, moreover, to have been spawned by a desire at

first to keep the discoveries private, and little attempt was made to define the proliferation of new terms for the outsider.

'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. Given the circumstance that the Western academic music theory and analysis still strongly gravitates towards the preference of progressive, avant-garde authors who paved the way for the establishment of the new academic music, which, both as an object of scholarly discourse, and as a desirable outcome of artistic production, occupied the pedestal formerly given to the common practice repertoire canon, the fact that a huge number of such authors were forced to leave their native countries in order to survive and/or pursue their philosophy cannot be overemphasized. In their list of 'scholars [...] principally musicologists, or made contributions to musicology and theory' who 'emigrated from Germany, Austria and Central Europe ca. 1930-1945' list 136 members² of the 'honor roll' of those whose collective contributions to musical scholarship were significant, influential and of lasting value³ (Nettl *et al.* 1999, 341). The period after the Second World War was by no means less intensive in terms of exchange of concepts and ideas, as the new means of transport and communication enhanced their propulsivity more than ever before.

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 and life in general. Upon his arrival to the United States in 1933, Schoenberg felt 'speechless' and 'languageless' (Feisst 2011, 112), so he struggled to embrace English as his new primary language by all means. However, even during the last years of his life the great composer still did not completely master the language of his final destination which 'remained colored by Germanisms' (Feisst 2011, 112), 'simply never became idiomatic at all' (Babbitt 1987, 11), while, *vice versa*, his German, tended to be greatly influenced by English vocabulary and grammar (Feisst 2011, 112).

Upon their arrival into new contexts, theories, terms and their respective concepts developed and changed, gradually diverging from their initial contents influenced by local ana-

¹ The research is a part of a larger terminology standardization project Conmusterm <conmusterm.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 its results will be available by the end of 2018 in open access databases such as the Croatian national terminology database Struna, whose standardized structure enables further international terminology exchange. The author has been contributing to the formation of this terminological database since 2014.

² However, the grand total of migrant musicians in this period was certainly much higher, taking into account estimates such as the one given in the *Biographical Lexicon of Persecuted Musicians 1933-1945 [Lexikon verfolgter Musikerinnen und Musiker der NS-Zeit]*, which mentions more than 10,000 'relevant names' <https://www.lexm.uni-hamburg.de/content/brand/vorwort_en.xml>.

³ Interestingly enough, Arnold Schoenberg, who was certainly one of the central figures regarding his influence of lasting value in terms of contributions to both theory and musicology, was not (perhaps due to the lack of formal musicological training) included as a 'relevant name' in this list which, however, 'cannot claim to be comprehensive' (Nettl *et al.* 1999, 341).

lytical traditions, terminologies as well as compositional practices. A classic example may be the immense influence of Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique on the development of the North American serial theory, practice and terminology, especially in the writings of Milton Babbitt and the members of the Princeton School.

The immense influence of other extramusical factors such as 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. As a result, 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 open space for a variety of divergence in lexical usage, which significantly compromises terminology management in the field.

2. STANDARDS OF TERMINOLOGY WORK

Contemporary standards for terminological planning and standardization (such as ISO 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2012 etc.) generally rely on Eugen Wüster's General Theory of Terminology (GTT, Wüster 1985). This theoretical framework, which began to develop in the late 1950s, was heavily influenced by the trends in general linguistics, especially by Saussurean structuralism. The case was similar within other major European terminological traditions (Temmerman 1997, 52–53). Such positivistic approach presupposed the existence of concepts meanings of which are definite, which can be strictly delimited, labelled using only one term (i.e. avoiding synonymy), and, vice versa, every term should have only one meaning, i.e. denote only one concept (thus excluding any possibility of polysemy). Furthermore, the diachronic dimension of language was denied, ignoring historical changes and developments of concepts and concentrating on the most recent, synchronic state of the art.

The main source of incompatibility between all humanistic terminologies and the GTT directives is its onomasiological approach, which, as previously described, departs from the (ideally unchangeable) concepts that are to be named following strict terminological rules. Most humanistic terms are, however, diachronically polysemous and tend towards a continuous change of their denotational scope without abandoning their historical meanings in specialized discourses.

The 1980s cognitive turn in linguistics offered new insights into the nature of terminology usage, regarding it as a living entity, which is subject to constant rethinking and redefining in every aspect, including the semantic one. In spite of that, international standards of terminology work remained faithful to the GTT and its main principle, univocity ('within a given subject field, a given term is attributed to one concept' and 'a given concept is represented by one preferred term', ISO 2009a, 35). Ambiguity is reduced by preferring one term over its synonyms, following the general principles of term formation: transparency, consistency, appropriateness, linguistic economy, derivability, compoundability, linguistic correctness and preference for native language (ISO 2009a, 38–39). In a standardized terminological database, a *preferred* term is the one showing maximum compliance with the general principles of

term formation, while its synonyms are considered *admitted* — an admitted term is an acceptable synonym for a preferred term, which shares the same definition, but is however not to be used interchangeably with a synonymous preferred term within a one and the same discourse — or *deprecated* terms — terms rejected as synonyms for a given preferred term, i.e. for denoting the same concept, which may however be appropriate and preferred to designate a different concept, with a different definition.

The univocity principle also prevents one term from designating more than one concept, which means that within standardized terminologies polysemy should also be strongly avoided. A good terminological database entry should give the user an opportunity to distinguish preferred terms from the deprecated ones and lead them towards a harmonized, univocal communication. A harmonized discourse, however, is rarely a product of natural employment of language. In an interlinguistic context, such harmonization is even harder to achieve, as local traditions and historical events strongly influence language sensitive changes of concepts, which often tend to transform after being adopted in a new language community.

Of all semantic consequences of the historical plot described in Chapter 1, synonymy and polysemy seem to be the most frequent issues that affect contemporary attempts of harmonizing and standardizing terminology.

3. SOME SEMANTIC ISSUES IN THE TERMINOLOGY OF MUSIC ANALYSIS

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 theory in early American English examples or Leibowitz's (1949) thought and successive compositional practice may reveal some possible causes of the semantic issues one faces when trying to interpret or analyse their lexical choices. Further developments based upon the practice of the Viennese school led to the more complex violations of interlinguistic translational bijectivity. Variety in lexical usage in an intralinguistic sense frequently led to severe polysemy and synonymy, which can roughly be described in terms of different terminological traditions between Germanic and East European on the one hand, and Romance and Anglo-Saxon linguistic communities on the other.

The term 'series' builds up a large scale of degrees of semantic overlapping with terms such as *row*, *pitch succession*, *pitch collection*, *set* etc., together with other significant technical terms derived from Schoenberg's compositional theory. As seen in Newlin or Black translations of his essays (originally written in German, Schoenberg 1950, 1975) or different English interpretations of his *Harmonielehre* (e.g. Schoenberg 1948 and 1976), the choice of terms in the recipient language makes strong impact on the conceptualization of music. If the terminology exchange process reverses, as happened in the translations of Schoenberg's English texts into German (e.g. Schoenberg 1976), the transfer of ideas brings even more ambiguity into discussion.

3.1 Synonymy

The term *synonymy* (which itself appears to be highly polysemous within linguistic semantics) denotes a phenomenon which 'many theories of semantics would restrict the notion of

[...] to [...] descriptive synonymy: identity of descriptive meaning' (Lyons 2006: 63). In terminology, synonyms are different specialized lexical units that share (partly or in whole) their denotative meanings and can be used interchangeably in some or all contexts within a field. One of the most interesting terms employed in the analysis of the 20th century music, *series*, offers a fertile ground for the research of synonymy, while its related term *serialism* incorporates aspects of synonymy, polysemy and interlinguistic false friendship which will be discussed in further chapters.

3.1.1 Some Interlinguistic Equivalents of the Schoenbergian Term *Reihe* ('Series') and Their Synonyms in Early American English Examples

The equivalent of the German term *Reihe*, the term *series*, denoting an ordered set of 12 notes of the chromatic total, appears along with a series (*sic!*) of other synonymous terms such as the (*twelve-tone* or *tone*) row, *Grundgestalt*⁴ (*fundamental gestalt*, *basic set*, etc.), or *set*, with different levels of synonymy. Adoption of Schoenberg's concept of the German term *Reihe* in the United States and the creation of its American English equivalents reveals an interesting development of terminological variety.

Straus (2008, 355) dates the arrival of the 'Schönbergian technic' (Weiss 1932) to the United States of America back to May 1927, when Adolph Weiss returned from Europe, where he studied with Schoenberg. According to his first written document on the topic published in the United States, Weiss, a native speaker of American English and one of the Schoenberg's close disciples and translators, used the term *twelve-tone series*, and its abbreviation, *series*, to denote 'a definite arrangement of all tones of the chromatic scale in a set order' (Weiss 1932, 102). The term was also confirmed in other texts published in the early 1930s on the pages of the same journal, the *Modern Music* (cf. Reich 1930 and 1932, Stein 1930, etc.). The reasons why Schoenberg himself never embraced this term, which generally dominates the discourse on the topic within the English-speaking community, remain unclear.⁵

In a well-known lecture Babbitt (1987, 11–12) recalls the reasons of Schoenberg's own diachronic variation in terminology in the last decades of his life. Upon his arrival to the United States, Schoenberg was disappointed when he found out that his term die (Ton-)Reihe was accepted as a loan translation, which was the tone-row, or, abbreviated, row, as used in the writings of Richard S. Hill (e.g. 1936). Unsatisfied with this solution because

to him row suggested left to right — something in a row — and that's what it doesn't connote. And this connotation was a part of all this misunderstandings about the twelve-tone notion having to

do with some sort of thematic, motivic thing that went from left to right' (Babbitt 1987, 11).

Schoenberg later accepted Babbitt's suggestion to switch to the term *set*, which was not burdened with musical meanings by then, but was disputable for other reasons. Although it 'does not mean anything ordered' (which later enabled its usage in the musical set theory), the term *set* could, however, imply 'an ordered set and that's a familiar structure, too, in abstract relation theory' (Babbitt 1987, 12) by adding modifiers such as *twelve-tone* or *twelve-pitch-class* to the word *set*, which Schoenberg 'was delighted with' (Babbitt 1987, 12). Finally the latter consented with someone else's proposition of an equivalent of the German term *Grundgestalt*, namely the compound term basic set, 'as if there were some a priori basic set' which 'can induce as much confusion as anything else' (Babbitt 1987, 12). The cognitive process of a non-native speaker of a language thus resulted in an individual set (*sic!*) of terms which, by the way, did not resolve the composer's doubts about their reflection of the inner order of the concept due to inherent polysemy and synonymy.

Schoenberg's writings composed in English reflect this terminological inconsistency. In his *Composition with Twelve Tones* (1950; written in 1941) he insisted mainly on the term *set*, but did not restrict himself from using the terms *row* ('the row of tones', 1950, 114) and *series* (107), showing a certain terminological inconsistency which was not typical for the master's writings in his native language. The editor, Dika Newlin, decided not to intervene, respecting the author's wish to preserve his original expression, as he did 'not want to parade adorned by stylistic merits of another person' (1950, vi).⁶

Babbitt himself, on the contrary, a speaker of German and a native speaker of English, gave preference to the term *series* (Babbitt 1987, 11),⁷ which was the same solution offered by Adolph Weiss, one of the first scholars to disseminate the idea in the United States. The definition of the term and its respective concept later expanded to include series of values of any other musical parameter (duration, dynamics, timbre, formal constituents etc.). The German term *Reihe* and the French, *série*, which represent the basic material of both the twelve-tone and serial composition, followed a similar line of conceptual development. Therefore, in the current usage, one should conclude that the English *series*, German *Reihe* and French *série* represent interlinguistic equivalents⁸, although their semantic coverage may differ within particular contexts.

3.2 Equivalence and False Friendship

Equivalence of terms in languages for special purposes (LSP)⁹ across different discourse communities is thus a matter of semantics and ontology, rather than etymology or

⁴ The term *Grundgestalt* is also heavily polysemous in the theory of twelve-tone music; its semantic content varies in respect of the number of tones included (twelve, less or more than twelve), the degree of synonymy with other terms (motive, idea, row, etc.), material base (rhythm-based or pitch-based), etc. Some aspects of the twelve-tone *Grundgestalt* will be discussed in chap. 3.2.

⁵ Babbitt (1987, 12) mentions that Schoenberg was poorly advised by some German friends, who thought that the scope of the term *series* was restricted to certain functional mathematical meanings and was thus unsuitable as an equivalent of the German term *Reihe*, which can have free intervallic structure.

⁶ Unlike Newlin, another translator of Schoenberg's words on music, Leo Black (Schoenberg 1975), preferred the same set of terms the author himself used in his English texts (*set*, *basic set*), although one could notice several exceptions to this rule (the sporadic use of the term *series*).

⁷ Babbitt uses the term *series* interchangeably with the term *set*. The latter gradually prevailed in his texts and lost any connotation of orderness, which is in accord with own compositional development, as well as with the mathematical meaning of the word (cf. Babbitt 2011).

⁸ In terminology, equivalents or equivalent terms are terms in different languages representing the same concept (cf. e.g. ISO 2012/2, 4).

⁹ LSP is 'the traditional term for the various linguistic variants used in professional settings' (Gunnarson 1997, 105).

morphology. Furthermore, depending on the plurality and nature of language contacts and theoretical frameworks applied, there is a high possibility of conceptual variation within a language, as well as existence of manifold equivalent terms which are never completely equivalent in a general sense of the word — i.e. representing the completely identical concept.

New concepts and their respective terms rarely (if ever) arise in more than one language community at the same time. When a new concept leaves its original discourse community and enters a new, foreign language community, recipient language speakers face a *lexical void* (a lack of lexical representative of a newly acquired concept), usually filled by introducing of a new term in the recipient language. A new term may be newly coined (*semantic calque*) or created as a loan translation from the donor language, but can also preserve its original, foreign form (*loan word*), with or without minor modification (e.g. adaptation to the phonetic or inflectional system of a recipient language), which is particularly frequent a case with terms built from classical (Greek or Latin) roots.

Even if at first it may seem that the preservation of the original form could guarantee the preservation of the original meaning (in case of terms built from classical roots, due to the static semantics of the source languages, which are considered to be ‘dead’), local terminological traditions frequently influence semantic changes resulting in *generalization* (conceptual widening) or *specialization* (conceptual reduction) of a term’s meaning. Pairs of terms that ‘may be synonymous or not depending on their contexts’ (Chamizo-Domínguez 2008, 38) are referred to as *partial false friends*. Unlike the concept of partial synonymy, which focuses on mutual semantic content of two terms within the same language, the concept of *partial false friendship* deals with the interlinguistic aspects of otherwise equivalent terms.

For instance, the English term *serialism* has intralinguistic and interlinguistic false friends (words with similar forms, but different meanings) across the globe, often depending on the (non-)hyponymic¹⁰ relationship of the *twelve-tone music* and *twelve-tone technique* with the former term. Within some discourse communities the term *twelve-tone music* may be a hyponym of the term *serialism*, while others rather treat them as denotations of related, but separate concepts. The British and American English usage recognizes the term *serialism* since the 1950s, first in respect to Schoenberg’s twelve-tone technique, and later in its integrative meaning of ‘a method of composition in which a fixed permutation, or series, of elements is referential’, as listed in Griffiths (2001), as an umbrella term encompassing the twelve-note serialism, serialism with other pitch-class collections, rhythmic serialism and total serialism.

On the contrary, standard German usage prefers a clear delineation between *serialism* (*Serialismus*, *serielle Technik*, *Reihentechnik*) and *twelve-tone technique* (*Zwölftontechnik*) (e.g. in Blumröder 1985), emphasizing the polysemy of the French term *sériel* (which belongs to the theories of both twelve-tone and integral serialism), claiming that the notion of *serial* (*das Serielle*) as an ‘unambiguous concept of musical technique’ first emerged in Germany around 1950 (Eimert and Humpert 1973, 307). The consequence in terms of translation

is evident in the partial false friendship between the English *serialism* denoting Schoenbergian twelve-tone technique and the German term *Serialismus* in terms of total serialism — which is however rarely used in German literature on the topic, where preference is given to the expression *serielle Technik/Musik*. In other words, translation of the German term *Serialismus* into the English *serialism* tends towards generalization, while the reverse procedure may implicate conceptual specialization.

One should however bear in mind that, in the course of history, ‘pairs of terms which are full or partial false friends in a particular synchronic moment may frequently stop being so’ (Chamizo-Domínguez 2008, 19), or vice versa. For instance, some recent German sources show inclination toward the use of the term *Serialismus* in its generalized meaning which was until recently more typical for English speakers, as in the syntagm ‘*Schoenbergs Serialismus*’, recently found in some translations of the texts originally written in English (e.g. Shelleg 2017), in German texts by the English authors (e.g. Griffiths 2018), but also in some sources by native speakers of German.¹¹ Time will show if this generalization will prevail over the conventional, more specialized usage as recommended by Eimert and Humpert (1973).

4. LINGUISTIC BORROWING IN MINOR LANGUAGES

Previous chapters brought examples of linguistic borrowing and term creation from German as a donor language into the English and French as recipient languages, together with the semantic changes, differences and issues that appear in some of the most common major language communities. The same process happens within the discourses in the so-called minor languages, which usually draw content from the sources from both donor and recipient major languages, which often happens simultaneously.

A relatively humble number of their native speakers, dealing either with field literature in a foreign (often a major) language or translations into their mother tongue, have interest in creating terminology in a minor language. As majority of terms and concepts originate in foreign linguistic communities, speakers of ‘small languages’ have to face local language lexical voids, often filled by foreign loan expressions. This can lead to domain loss, the inability of expressing concepts in a local language — most frequent cases are e.g. analysis of electronic music, new genres, genres absent from local compositional tradition, etc. Moreover, the impact factor for local publication (the professional status that comes with local publication in a local language) is usually lower than the one for international publication (in a major language). This additionally discourages members of minor language scientific communities in developing terminologies on local or national levels.

However, most countries have positive legal aspects towards their linguistic heritage, often including an obligation to pre-

¹⁰ A word is a hyponym of another word (hypernym) if its sense includes the sense of its hypernym (cf. Lyons 2006, 125).

¹¹ Cf. following web resources (accessed 29/07/2023): <https://www.nmz.de/online/zeichen-und-wunder-zwei-duesseldorfer-konzerte-widmen-sich-schoenberg-und-der-schoenberg-pfle>; <https://www.nmz.de/artikel/produktiver-eigensinn-von-der-insel>; <http://www.udofalkner.de/kritiken.html>; <http://omgdir.com/file/serialismus-aleatorik>, etc.

serve, cultivate, plan and build terminologies in local languages. Field experts play an indispensable role in the process, helping the official language planning institutions pave their way through networks of field theories and multilingual traditions.

Depending on the needs of the target community, terminology management teams should decide on the following issues:

1. Which/whose denotational/analytical approach should be accepted: target-oriented, recipient-oriented, or origin-oriented (author-appreciation) approach?

2. How to establish a terminological norm: by following GTT rules, common in official terminological databases; by describing and labelling additional features with special attention to individual theories?

3. Which term form to choose in case of near-synonymy: international term (in its original or assimilated form?) or local/national term (loan translation/calque/neologism, etc.)?

Examples shown in previous chapters prove that the answer to the above questions lies in finding an optimal proportion between standards of terminology work and requirements of the discourse community. Semantic aspects of language contacts and conceptual transfers require thorough philological expertise.

5. CONCLUSION

Contemporary professional communication in all fields of human activity depends on establishing balance between globalization — which typically implies the domination of English and other major languages — and preservation of local traditions — which often includes artificially imposed terminology management and term formation in order to enable interlinguistic propulsivity among field experts. Multilingual terminological databases may be the places where these goals could be achieved, but their rigid structures, complying with international standards of terminology work, often represent serious obstacles on that way. On the one hand, some aspects of those standards, such as the univocity principle, stand in direct contradiction with the state of lexical material in the field, which, due to the diachronic perspective and with respect to the poetic license of authors, should not be sacrificed for the benefit of terminological standardization. On the other hand, absence of terminological normativity may lead to misunderstandings among the experts from different language communities in contexts such as international knowledge transfer, exchanges, migrations and translations. Terminology of music analysis and music in general represents no exception in this respect, and musical terminography should rely upon diachronic research and thorough discourse analysis in order to display its richness in an appropriate manner.

KEYWORDS

Analysis, 20th Century Music, Linguistic Variation, Terminology Management, Translation.

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