

Cross-linguistic Interpretation of Figurative Expressions in Collaborative Language Learning: Gaps as Instances for Learning

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore how students approach, try to understand, and interpret figurative expressions in the context of language learning. Interpreting figurative language represents a challenge as languages are rich in metaphorical expressions and contextual/local references. The empirical study was carried out in the context of collaborative work in classrooms with students 12 to 13 years of age, translating two songs, one in English and one in Swedish. The results show that the students struggle to capture the sense of the lyrics. Addressing these difficulties, students engage in language-related episodes (LRE's) where they topicalize language, meta-communicate and inquire into acceptable cross-linguistic interpretations that preserve the metaphorical nature of the expressions. Their linguistic sensitivity and familiarity with specific metaphorical expressions, contextual and local references are challenged, and their learning process involves an increasing capacity to talk about and reflect on the meaning potentials of linguistic expressions.

Keywords: cross-linguistic interpretation, idioms, language learning, lyrics, metaphors, pragmatics, semantics, songs

1. Introduction

Learning languages is a major curricular activity in most educational systems across the world. Languages are complex and constantly evolving sign systems. Learning and mastery require not only knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, but also many other types of knowledge such as sensitivity to specific oral and written linguistic genres and to registers of a language, as they are used in various settings and for various purposes (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

The specific knowledge interest of this study is to analyse a cross-linguistic activity as it evolves as a collaborative activity in a school context (Barnes, 2021; Gultekin, 2021; Pintado Gutiérrez, 2021). Our focus is on how students handle the challenges of understanding and interpreting song lyrics where figurative language is frequently used. In such contexts, students grapple with problems that occur when standard translations and dictionary meanings are not sufficient. Figurative language, as defined by Gibbs and Colston (2012), is when “speakers mean something other than they literally say” (p. 1). Metaphors and idioms are examples of the use of figurative language (Littlemore, 2004, 2010; Carrol, Littlemore & Dowens, 2018). Songs and song lyrics are often rich in metaphors and idioms as they attempt to communicate emotional and personal messages to the listener. In addition, such lyrics are also contingent on performative dimensions of singing, such as rhyme, prosody and accentuation, combined with musical features.

Empirically, we have analysed a class of Swedish students in Grade 7. During an English lesson, the students were given a task of translating one English and one Swedish song, from English to Swedish and from Swedish to English, respectively. Analytically, we focused on their attempts to bridge between languages when they realized that a straightforward translation does not work.

2. Lexical Meaning and Situated Sense: A Sociocultural Approach

In theoretical terms, we approach this problem from a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1986; Lantolf et al., 2020). One of the most fundamental assumptions of this perspective is that language “mediates” (Vygotsky, 1986) the world for us. This implies that we learn to know the world, and to interpret events, through the linguistic categories and discourses that we appropriate during ontogeny (Wertsch, 2014). In Vygotskian (1986)

parlance, an element of translation is to struggle with the relationship between “meaning” and “sense”, i.e., to consider how the lexical meaning of a word or an expression relates to the situated sense of the word as part of an utterance in a particular setting. Lexical meaning represents the standard, dictionary meaning of an expression, and sense refers to the realization of meaning in a specific context. Vygotsky’s distinction between sense and meaning implies a recognition that the relationship between dictionary meaning and situated use of an expression is complex and dynamic. Thus, and to exemplify the kinds of challenges the students run into, the word “blue” has different senses when someone claims that the sky is blue, or that I am feeling blue or that there is a day of the year called Blue Monday. In the first case, the dictionary most likely will provide an adequate (literal) translation between two languages, while in the latter cases languages will not necessarily be parallel.

2.1 Collaborative Language Learning, Linguaging and Cross-linguistic Awareness

In the literature on language learning, there are studies of how students discover and handle cross-linguistic expressions (Ballinger, 2013; Ballinger, Man Chu Lau, & Quevillon Lacasse, 2020; Bell, Fortier, & Gauvin, 2020; Woll & Paquet, 2021; Nitisakunwut, Nutayangkul, & Liang-Itsara, 2023; Kim & Sim, 2024) when languages differ in terms of figurative expressions and in the connotations of such expressions (cf. Park, 2015; Rutherford, 2009; Guo & Xiang, 2023). One of the observations reported in this literature is that cross-linguistic exercises (Sato & Angulo, 2020) often invoke activities which may be referred to as linguaging, i.e., processes by means of which people make meaning in collaborative and dialogic settings (Swain, 2009; Jørgensen & Møller, 2014; Love, 2017; Galloway & McClain, 2020; Suzuki & Storch, 2020; Gray, 2022).

An analytical concept of specific interest here, used for example in analyses of French immersion education in Canada, is “gap” (e.g., Swain & Lapkin, 1995, 1998; Swain, 2000; Swain & Watanabe, 2013). The concept implies that when students produce language, they may notice a gap between what they want to say and what they are able to say. In such situations, they may engage in testing new hypotheses and reflecting on them through meta-communicating, or in another words, talking about language (Swain, 1993, 2005; de Jesus Sales, 2020). Such gaps may concern lexical issues when focusing on meaning and form (Swain & Lapkin, 2013) or grammatical issues (Storch, 1998). In our perspective, a gap may also be seen as a learning opportunity when students identify a language issue when translating between languages. Engaging in linguaging when given a task to translate language rich in figurative, contextual and local references may trigger such gaps. The present study is inspired by the findings of the studies mentioned above in the sense that it continues exploring how collaboration and argumentation in LRE’s promote instances of linguaging that are conducive to language learning.

2.2 Understanding Metaphors, Figurative Expressions and Contextual/Local References

Park (2015) analysed how translation of poetry, and discussions about the issues involved in such translation, can foster language learning, language awareness and literacy. The study was carried out during the implementation of a programme referred to as Poetry Inside Out (POI), aimed at improving literacy skills through translation of poetry (from the native language of students to English). The findings suggest that the students became aware that translation is not about substituting one word for another one. Rather, it is about figuring out the sense of words in a poem, and how the context of poem is taken into account when deciding what expressions to use when translating. More specifically, as the students “questioned word choice, worked to define words, questioned whether and how a word’s meaning differs from its definition, they came to understand the concept of synonyms”, which helped them “build semantic awareness” (p. 140) through these activities.

Beauvais and Ryland (2021) investigated what skills students employ when collaboratively translating literary texts rich in figurative expressions. In terms of design, their study has similarities to the present one and the study by Park (2015). Beauvais and Ryland (2021) argue that during literary translation activities, students practice three different types of skills that are relevant to language learning and literary education: metalinguistic, linguistic and literary. Metalinguistic skills were present through the whole process and worked as a bridge between linguistic and literary skills categories. Linguistic skills implied grappling with semantic questions, and literary skills emerged especially when moving from word-to-word translation to dynamic, focusing on the sense of the expressions encountered. They conclude that the dynamic translation activities help pupils negotiate across languages and therefore enhance metalinguistic reasoning. The study of Beauvais and Ryland (2021) as well as the current study are of an exploratory and experiential character “and privileges collaborative work at all stages” (p. 289). This approach resonates with the ideas of translanguaging and similar studies have been carried out in the area of translanguaging (e.g., García & Lin, 2017; Mazzaferro, 2018; Somerville & Faltis, 2019), but translanguaging will not be a primary focus of the present analysis.

How students understand metaphors in the target language when collaboratively discussing them was analysed by Littlemore (2004). She suggests that understanding metaphor is usually not difficult for native speakers, as contextually shared knowledge provides sufficient clues. Littlemore argues that when students try to understand metaphors in a foreign language, the situation is different, and difficulties may arise for a number of reasons. Therefore “it is useful to know what kinds of strategies language learners use to work out the meanings of metaphorical language in the target language” (p. 58). Littlemore concludes that the approaches the students used to bridge “the gaps” created by metaphors and contextual or local references, depended on their knowledge of the context in which they were used.

In our study, we will attend to the nature of gaps and the learning potential of encountering gaps. We identify gaps as instances in the interaction when students themselves topicalize cross-linguistic challenges during ongoing translation work. The language-related episodes (LRE’s), which are initiated to work on such challenges have been used as our main unit of analysis (Säljö, 2009) and rationale for selection of data for analysis. A central concern in our research approach is to attend to the participants’ perspectives on the activities they engage in.

3. Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the study is to explore how students make sense of the challenges they work on together when interpreting song lyrics, and how they notice and argue about the meaning potentials of particular figurative or contextual expressions.

3.1 Research Questions

- (1) How do students identify and respond to gaps between languages when interpreting song lyrics, and what kind of collaboration is established to resolve cross-linguistic challenges?
- (2) What challenges in terms of metaphorical, contextual and local references do the students identify when cross-linguistically interpreting?

4. Methods

4.1 Context and Participants

The study was conducted in 2019 in a school in a medium sized city in Sweden. The school has an international profile, where one part of the school follows the Swedish curriculum and the other part the IB curriculum in English. The students participating in this study were from a class that follows the Swedish curriculum. The project was introduced in three grades (6, 7 and 8) to three teachers. The teachers were introduced to the ideas behind the project and implemented the exercises during English lessons. We chose to study Grade 7 where the highest number of signed written consents was received. The teacher implemented the teaching during five English lessons with a thematic block she referred to as Speech and Lyrics. These activities consisted of cross-linguistic exercises of translating song lyrics of a popular musical genre; a song in English called “Dancing on my own”, performed by the pop artist Robyn, and a song in Swedish called “Valborg” (Walpurgis night) performed by the singer and songwriter Håkan Hellström. The teacher chose the songs that she believed were both popular and rich in figurative language.

The class had 24 students, 12 to 13 years of age, and they all participated in the activities. Eighteen students signed the written consent and were included in the data collection. They worked in groups of three or in pairs. The students’ first languages varied between Swedish, French, English, Lebanese, Bosnian, Czech, Urdu, Chinese, Spanish and Thai. However, all the students were fluent in Swedish as they had been exposed to Swedish from a very early age in preschool. The students’ level of English proficiency was characterised by the teacher as B1-intermediate. As the school was of an international profile, the students had a slightly higher level of English language proficiency than in a regular school with a non-international profile. The students were exposed to English as they continuously met students from the classes that followed the international IB curriculum in English.

4.2 Generating Data

The study was conducted for four weeks. Five lessons with six student groups (in all 30 recordings) were recorded. A total of 945 minutes of audio data were transcribed verbatim. Of the whole set of recorded and transcribed audio data, we selected a 45-minute lesson suitable for this particular study, where the students were engaged in translating song lyrics. The research respected the already existing curriculum and the teacher’s plans for that specific term and the task was led by the teacher during regular English lessons. Audio-recorders were placed on the desk of each group. The interactions in Swedish have been translated into English, and they are

marked as the researcher's translation in the transcriptions (see the appendices). The project followed the data regulation requirements of GDPR. Following concerns of confidentiality and privacy, the names of the school and the students have been anonymized.

4.2.1 The Classroom Activity

When the teacher introduced the activity to the students, she stressed the importance of how it connects to the curriculum and what the expected outcomes were. Although the students were used to collaborative group-work, this type of cross-linguistic activity was new to them. The teacher introduced the lyrics to the students. They listened first to the song in English and then to the song in Swedish. The task was to translate (bearing in mind what message is the singer trying to communicate) the lyrics of the Swedish song into English, and vice versa. When starting, the students spent a short time reflecting on the lyrics and writing down their individual translations. Following this, they used those translations and notes as starting points in the collaborative group work. These interactions in the group work made up the empirical data used in this article. During the activity, the teacher walked around in the class, ready to answer questions and provide clarifications. The researcher was present at the back of the classroom observing and taking fieldnotes. The activity ended with a whole class discussion and reflection on the cross-linguistic interpretations. The teacher pointed out the figurative expressions that differed most in students' translations and encouraged the students to reflect on the expressions in relation to Swedish (if the original song was in English), or in relation to English (if the original song was in Swedish). She concluded the discussion by the message that languages have different layers of meaning and that especially figurative language is more open to interpretation.

4.3 Data Analysis

To highlight how interlocutors collaborate to manage communicative challenges as part of ongoing activities, Linell (1998, 2009) introduces the notion of communicative project. A communicative project is defined as an episode in speech that focuses on solving a problem (1998, p. 213). LRE in this study represents a type of a communicative project, and as such it serves as the criterion for selecting data in the recordings. The concept of LRE is defined by Swain and her colleagues as "any part of dialogue where the students talk about language they are producing" (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). In this study, LRE's emerge when the students try to bridge a gap between languages that they have identified, that is, they begin to orient to and elaborate on problems they encounter with an attempt to resolve them. These sequences come to an end when the students resume the activity that they were involved in before the problem emerged.

The lesson from which the excerpts were chosen for this article was 45 minutes, and 15 minutes were devoted to the peer discussion. The peer discussions were carried out in five groups of students, working either in pairs or groups of three. In the entire data set, we identified 115 LRE's, in which we documented different challenges the students faced when coming across metaphorical, contextual and local translation issues. Gaps emerged during LRE's. In some cases, students resolved the gap, and in some cases, they encountered other gaps during negotiation of the translations that needed to be resolved first (see the table below). The excerpts chosen for this article have been selected to show variation of such instances.

Table 1. Overview of LRE's in each lesson, instances of gaps and the number of resolved gaps

Grade 7 lessons n.:	LRE's	Instances of gaps	Resolved gaps
7.1	49	26	21
7.2	31	16	14
7.3	Classroom discussion	_____	_____
7.4	16	13	11
7.5	19	21	21

Note: Gaps that were only partially resolved during peer discussions were brought up by students during classroom discussion in the end of the lesson.

The cross-linguistic activities have been studied through Interaction Analysis (IA). IA, as described by Jordan and Henderson (1995) and by Derry et al. (2010), is an interdisciplinary method for analyzing empirical data, focusing on interaction, verbal language as well as on other modes of interaction. This study is based on audio-recordings. The reason for choosing audio rather than video recordings is that it was presumed to be easier to get the young pupils' and their caregivers' written consent for participation in the study, as the pupils may find the audio-recordings less intimidating than video-recordings (Denscombe, 2017).

5. Results: Students' Collaboration and Problem Solving when Translating

In the data, there are many cases where students handled gaps quickly and without much effort. They first listed their individual translations, noticed discrepancies between them, evaluated candidate translations and, as a final step, confirmed what they considered the best alternative. The coordination of such sequences of interaction generally ran smoothly. This, we believe, testifies to their communicative competence in both languages and their experiences of collaboration in groups. However, in this research we focused on occasions in which students needed to go more deeply into collaborative problem solving and interpretative work. We selected four excerpts of such sequences that show how students handle such challenges.

5.1 Cross-linguistic Interpreting as a Challenge: Languaging and Problem-solving

As pointed out, the LRE's we analyse are responses to gaps marked by disruption, hesitation or silence in the flow of the interaction. Thus, the LRE's emerge as students' own concerns when attempting to get on with their work. In the excerpts presented below, the text in bold/italic are instances when students read their own interpretations aloud. The utterances in the excerpts that are underlined were uttered in English, and the utterances that are not underlined were translated by the first author from Swedish to English. For details of transcriptions, see Appendix 1. We will start by presenting a part of the song lyrics by Robyn (Note 1).

Robyn: Dancing on My Own, Excerpt 1 and Excerpt 2:

Somebody said you got a new friend

Does she love you better than I can?

It's a big black sky over my town

I know where you at, I bet she's around.

When working on this part of the song and translating it into Swedish, the participants encountered difficulties of the kind illustrated in the first two excerpts.

Excerpt 1 (Note 2): “a buddy or a friend?”, “to love someone more or better”

Tabel 2. Students: Zephyr (♂), Marlo (♂) and Kyrлие (♀)

Students		
1.	Marlo:	okay(.) someone said you have a new buddy =
2.	Zephyr:	=new friend
3.	Kyrлие:	I wrote someone said that you have a new friend =
4.	Marlo:	=okay then
5.	Kyrлие:	ehmm and then does she love you more than I do
6.	Marlo:	I wrote does she love you better
7.	Zephyr:	that could be it
8.	Kyrлие:	eeehm and then there's a big black sky over my town
9.	Marlo:	uhm I wrote that too
10.	Zephyr:	Uhm
11.	Kyrлие:	I know where you are I suppose she's with you
12.	Zephyr:	I know where you are I bet that she's not far =
13.	Kyrлие:	=yeah (.) that's good

Marlo starts delivering his translation in Swedish, which Zephyr interrupts by suggesting: “**new friend**” (Turn 2). Zephyr thereby displays a gap in what he expected and suggests an alternative to Marlo's “**new buddy**” (Turn 1). The issue here is whether to use the more standard expression “*vän*” (friend) or “*kompis*” (buddy) in Swedish. Kyrлие delivers her contribution, which is in line with Zephyr's suggestion, and Marlo agrees and closes the gap (Turn 4). Kyrлие then continues reading her translation of the second line of the lyrics (Turn 5). Her contribution is directly followed up by Marlo, who initiates his turn with “I wrote”, which prepares the others for an alternative translation. He starts to deliver his translation up to the very point where a discrepancy is displayed through the alternative expression: “**better**” (*bättre*). Zephyr continues by acknowledging the suggestion (Turn 7), rather than “**more**” (*mer*) (Turn 5), which closes the gap, and the participants continue without further elaboration. In Turn 11, Kyrлие delivers the last line of her translation of the verse, and, as a response, Zephyr provides a different version which Kyrлие immediately confirms (in Turn 13). There are several features of this translation which we will unpack a bit further. Zephyr suggests the English verb “**bet**” as a preferred translation

of the Swedish verb “*slå vad*” (an alternative to “*suppose*”), but his suggestion also stands out in other interesting ways that aligns with the particular genre.

One example of this is the attempt to make the translation rhyme, (*you gre ... she's not far*) (i.e., *are, far* translated into Swedish as (*du är ... hon är där*), and thereby adjusting the translation to a general feature of popular song lyrics. Zephyr, however, also adheres to the 16 beats of the pop song, and he adjusts the translation to the rhythm of the lyrics as they are performed by Robyn including syncopation and accentuation (*I know where you at, I bet she's around* (Note 3)). In this way, Zephyr provides both general and specific cues that capture performative features of the pop genre and of this particular pop song as resources for recognizing the genre in a new language – a form of sense-making. In Excerpt 2, lines from the same song are translated by another group of students:

Excerpt 2: “*I bet she's around*”

Table 3. Shilah (♀), Valentine (♀), Indigo (♀)

Students	
1. Shilah:	okay (.) <i>somebody said you've got a new friend</i> (.) <i>does she love you better than I can</i> (.) <i>there's a big black sky over my town</i> (.) <i>I know where you are</i> then I can't come up with this “ <i>I bet she's around</i> ”
2. Valentine:	okay (.) I wrote <i>somebody said you have a new friend</i> (.) <i>does she love you better than I can</i> (.) <i>there's is a big black sky over my town</i> (.) <i>I know where you are I suppose she's with you</i> (.) something like that <u>because I don't know</u> “ <i>I bet she's around</i> ” (.) it's like different mean- different meanings
3. Indigo:	let me see (.) <i>there's someone who said that you have a new friend</i> (.) <i>does she love you more than what I do?</i> eehm_(.) I tried to kind of re-do it a bit more kind of (.) <u>poetic style a big black sky over the town of mine I</u> (.) <i>know where you are</i> (.) <u>probably she's there</u>
4. Valentine:	(.) I think that (.) you know “ <i>I know where you are I bet she's around</i> ” (.) I think yours is the better (.) best
5. Shilah:	probably she's there=
6. Indigo:	=uhm

After marking her upcoming contribution with “okay”, Shilah begins delivering her Swedish translation to the others (Turn 1). While doing this, she begins commenting on it, pointing to the last part of these lines where she has not been able to come up with a translation. She ends by reading the last part of the line in English. This turn signals a gap, and her account clearly displays the problem in a way which functions as an invitation for the others to contribute. Valentine picks up the initiative (“okay” in Turn 2). She then offers her Swedish translation, which is very close to Shilah's, up to the very point where she adds a suggestion to the missing part “*I suppose she is with you.*” However, this is immediately followed by a hedging which displays uncertainty. As signaled by Valentine, her translation of “*I bet she's around*” is close, but it is not entirely on the spot (“something like that because I don't know “*I bet she's around*” (.) it's like different mean- different meanings.”). The participants still display uncertainty about how to render this expression in Swedish. Indigo continues by picking up the challenge (“let me see”, Turn 3), indicating that her contribution to this communicative project should be understood in light of the remarks already made. To prepare the others, she comments that her choice of words may be somewhat exceptional as she tried to adopt a “poetic style” (said in English), which marks an attempt to bridge the cross-linguistic translation gap by explicitly adhering to a genre that includes figurative language. As they move on to evaluate the contributions (Turns 4 and 5), Indigo's suggestion is agreed upon as the best alternative, and as the issue is treated as settled, the LRE is resolved (Turn 6).

As can be noted from Excerpt 2, these students are all challenged by the task, but by successively offering their cross-linguistic translations as candidates to be considered, they engage in an activity that gradually bridges the gap. Their translations are not presented as straightforward solutions to be accepted as they are. Rather, they are offered as problematic, tentative, optional and open for elaboration, and they involve languaging. By making explicit a different, but relevant, approach to song lyrics, mimicking a “poetic style”, Indigo also opens up a space for an entirely different form of translation work; one that does not need to focus on finding parallel translations of single words. Rather, the important point is to find a translation that will serve as an approximation of the sense of the expression as part of a song.

We continue by presenting a part of the song lyrics by Håkan Hellström. In the case of the lyrics of “Valborg” (Walpurgis night), which is to be translated into English, the participants encounter a different problem. The lyrics of this song, like many other epic songs by this singer/songwriter, situate the story in the city of

Gothenburg in Sweden, the hometown of the artist. This rhetorical strategy of referring to local conditions is known to his fans, but at the same time it introduces problems of interpretation of the lyrics, since the local conditions that are alluded to may not be known to the participants.

Håkan Hellström: Valborg, Excerpt 3 and Excerpt 4:

Änglarna har åkt på pisk

Gårdarna är grönsvarta

Och i Azalea kan man inte undgå att bli kär

Där går en som svär att allt du gör är gott.

Translation into English:

The Angels got their butts whipped

Gårdarna (Note 4) are green-black

And in Azalea you cannot avoid but falling in love

There goes one who swears that all you do is good.

Excerpt 3: "Do we have any angels in the city?"

Table 4. Students: Zephyr (♂), Marlo (♂) and Kyrлие (♀) Teacher: Tannah (♀)

Students		
1.	Kyrлие:	the other one [song] then
2.	Marlo:	okay the angels =
3.	Zephyr:	= have gone on whip ((giggling))
4.	Marlo:	on (.) do the (.) whipping ((giggling))
5.	Zephyr:	what is meant by the word "på pisk"?=
6.	Kyrлие:	=ahm that means that they got beaten
7.	Zephyr:	ahha (.) the angels have been beaten
8.	Marlo:	((giggling))
9.	Zephyr:	the angels have been whipped
10.	Marlo:	Tannah! ((calling for the teacher)) " <i>The Angels have been whipped</i> " what does it mean=
11.	Tannah:	<u>=do you know anything about this song?</u>
12.	Marlo:	[no]
13.	Zephyr:	[no]
14.	Tannah:	<u>do you know who the angels are?</u>
15.	Marlo:	[no]
16.	Zephyr:	[no]
17.	Tannah:	<u>do we have any angels in this city?</u>
18.	Marlo:	(.) no
19.	Zephyr:	IFK?= =IFK! that they lost their match
20.	Kyrлие:	
21.	Tannah:	<u>aaaah, so it's the soccer team, right</u>
22.	(.)	
23.	Zephyr:	IFK have lost=
24.	Kyrлие:	=have lost their match
25.	Marlo:	IFK have lost ☺ IFK were defeated (.) hm ☺ (.) or what do you think? or just the angels have been beaten kind of
26.	Kyrлие:	No
27.	Zephyr:	the angels have been defeated
28.	Kyrлие:	Ohm
29.	Marlo:	okay (.) the angels have been defeated

Kyrlie initiates the transition to this song from the previous one by saying “the other one then” (Turn 1). Marlo has just started to translate, when Zephyr continues with a literal translation that does not make much sense and he starts giggling (Turn 16). This giggle seems to result from his recognition that the literal translation of the expression “*åkt på pisk*” makes no sense in English. Marlo restarts in Turn 17, but due to the grammatical inconsistencies he notices, he also starts giggling and comes up with a new word, “whippening” (Turn 17), obviously derived from the verb whipping. In analytical terms, this is also a situation where a gap emerges in the interaction, and the participants initiate an LRE. Zephyr formulates the problem in Swedish by asking what “*på pisk*” means (Turn 18). Kyrlie responds in Swedish, which provides them with an alternative expression (*fått stryk*) to use as a platform for continuing, and in Turn 20 they agree on “*been beaten*.” Although the students have translated and read the first line of the lyrics in English, they do not grasp the sense of this particular expression (“*på pisk*”) in this context, and they cannot come to grips with it. Marlo now calls on the teacher for assistance (Turn 23). The teacher does not provide a direct answer to bridge the gap, but she scaffolds the students by prompting them to think beyond the text. She also provides contextual cues by posing questions about the song. The first cue “do you know who the angels are?” (Turn 27) signals that the expression refers to something familiar. The second cue (Turn 30) locates the expression “angels” in the context of their own city, and one of the students suddenly realizes that the expression refers to the local football team.

The contextual cues from the teacher, accordingly, establish a new frame of reference, where the expression “*på pisk*” makes sense as a metaphor for losing a match (Turns 35-37). That this new frame of reference is accepted as relevant is further evident in the way the group quickly resolves the problem by jointly suggesting “defeated” as the preferred translation (Turns 37, 39 and 41). This type of challenge shows that although the students succeed in translating the song lyrics into English, they are aware that the translation they offer is not on the spot, and that is why they continue probing into the matter until they, after further discussion, agree on “defeated.” This conclusion closes the LRE.

Our final excerpt provides an illustration of the meaning potential of words, and that further contextualization can provide more in-depth knowledge of local history and culture alluded to in the song.

Excerpt 4: “*the gardens are green and black*”

Table 5. Zephyr (♂), Marlo (♂) and Kyrlie (♀)

Students		
1.	Kyrlie:	“ <i>Gårdarna</i> ”
2.	Marlo:	the gardens right (.) or?
3.	Zephyr:	the gardens are green and black =
4.	Marlo:	=I don’t think he means gardens though=
5.	Kyrlie:	=but he means GAIS then (.) <u>obviously</u> =
6.	Zephyr:	=you know all the football teams (.) ☹ “ <i>Gårdarna</i> ” (.) what’s “ <i>Gårdarna</i> ”?
7.	Marlo:	perhaps he plays for GAIS (.) why does he call them “ <i>Gårdarna</i> ” then?
8.	Kyrlie:	like green-black

As the group continues with the song lyrics by Håkan Hellström, Kyrlie begins with “*Gårdarna*” (Turn 46), and the first suggested translation is given by Marlo “the gardens right (.) or?”. This initial translation “garden” is an attempt of a direct translation of the Swedish word “gård”, which literally means “yard”, but where the Swedish term “gård” has a clear phonetic resemblance to the English term “garden.” Marlo’s hesitation (Turn 47) about his own suggestion reveals a gap in the interaction flow, and through rising intonation Marlo invites the others to contribute to resolving the problem. As soon as Zephyr retakes his translation and continues in English, “the gardens are green and black” (Turn 48), Marlo expresses his doubts and retracts his earlier suggestion about what the expression “the gardens” refers to. Kyrlie, however, takes a different route to bridge the gap. By relying on the framing given that the first line of the lyrics is about football teams, she continues within this framing and reads the “green and black” as not about colours in general, but as about the colours of a competing, local football team – GAIS (Turn 50) (a rival of “the angels” mentioned in the previous line). Zephyr acknowledges the connection to football teams despite the fact that Kyrlie does not provide an account of why she makes this suggestion. After several questions from the others, he provides a cue to the meaning of the colours, but the initial question what “*Gårdarna*” refers to, is still unresolved when the teacher interrupts their work. The sociopragmatic complexity of this expression cannot be handled without adding information about the history of

the city. The expression in the song goes back to a local sports club in a part of the city by the name of Gårda, which had its own football team. The term “Gårdarna” refers to this club located in this part of the city. The club merged with another club, GAIS, in the beginning of the 20th century. For someone familiar with the local history of the city, “Gårdarna” is accordingly a membership category (Sacks, 1992) used by supporters and attributed to the club. For Kyrllie, the colours represent the team she knows as GAIS, but whether the rich cultural meaning of the expression “Gårdarna” is known to her is not possible to ascertain on the basis of this interaction. However, as the name is still in use, its historical meaning and potential as an identity marker is still available for use.

6. Discussion

The aim of this study has been to explore some elements of language learning; how students respond to the challenges they run into when making cross-linguistic interpretations of song lyrics. As is obvious from previous research, collaboration around such translations triggers languaging about vocabulary and grammar, metaphorical expressions, and contextual layers of meaning. What earlier research has shown is that such interactions may be conducive for students’ language learning (e.g., Littlemore, 2010; Carrol et al, 2018; Bell et al., 2020; Beauvais & Ryland, 2021; Gultekin, 2021). We will elaborate on our contribution to this line of research.

By choosing song lyrics, and by framing the activity in ways that highlight their performative features (Note 5), the intention of the exercises was to provide challenges that contribute to promoting students’ communicative competence, cross-linguistic competence, and language skills. A sign of their cross-linguistic competence is that they comfortably and continuously switch between English and Swedish. Students notice, test hypotheses and reflect (Swain, 1993, 2005; de Jesus Sales 2020). The gaps that emerge in their interaction serve as triggers for establishing LRE’s targeting cross-linguistic interpretations (Ballinger, 2013; Ballinger et al. 2020) that may enhance their cross-linguistic awareness (Bell et al., 2020; Woll & Paquet, 2021). In such situations, appropriation of knowledge about languages emerges in an incidental but productive manner through joint problem solving; individuals contribute with their knowledge of figurative language (sometimes at the edge of their capacity), contextual and local knowledge to their joint collaborative efforts (e.g., Sato & Angulo, 2020). By individually providing, and jointly evaluating cross-linguistic interpretations, the students identify how words and sequences of words may be rendered in a different language by oscillating between meaning and sense. Similarly, it is impossible to continue with the work they are engaged in, unless some agreement is reached about how a gap is to be resolved. Interruptions of this kind are triggers for problem-solving and learning.

Our results also show how the students are challenged and how they develop strategies of collaboration when bridging gaps they identify. We argue that these triggers for learning and problem-solving are grounded in the fact that the cross-linguistic interpretations emerge through reflections supported by the printed version of the lyrics and their own written suggestions of translations. In their interaction and learning, students continuously appeal to re-read their written, translated suggestions when attempting to bridge the gaps they have noticed. When re-reading, they use their language skills to “taste” the alternative suggestions of how to evaluate the various cross-linguistic interpretations. The written format of their individual suggestions of translations in this sense serves as a vehicle of linguistic and cognitive work and for sharing and considering the suitability of the various candidate translations that are suggested. It should be mentioned that when we translated the lyrics of the Swedish song into English, we experienced the same problems as the students of capturing the sense of the figurative language used.

Words and expressions can function as straightforward vehicles for communication but may simultaneously open up possibilities for further exploration and investigation of the world around the students. The students learn that figurative expressions cannot be translated literally if the sense of the lyrics is to be communicated (Park, 2015; Beauvais & Ryland, 2021). Standard translations will often fail to capture what is alluded to, and this is an important insight when learning languages at an advanced level. In this particular language exercise, there is need for suggestions that bring together different elements of the songs in new ways by alluding to both contextual and interpretative frames of reference (Littlemore, 2004; Park, 2015; Beauvais & Ryland, 2021). Even in instances where there are alternatives for translation that in a lexical sense are correct, the students demonstrate a sensitivity which implies that they acknowledge that some translations may be contextually inappropriate, and they actively look for alternatives that better capture the figurative nature of the expressions. The presence of metaphorical and idiomatic expressions is a challenge, as Littlemore (2004), Park (2015) and Beauvais and Ryland (2021) argue, but it may also serve as a resource triggering learning.

At some instances in our study, the cultural context and meaning of a figurative expression were already familiar to the students, as in the case of the song by Robyn. When searching for a suitable cross-linguistic translation, the students re-framed their activity, drawing on performative and poetic modes of expression. At other times, words in the lyrics were recognized, as in the case of song by Håkan Hellström, but did not initially make sense to the students. To fill this kind of gap, the students turned to other resources such as the teacher who provided cues to a cultural context that helped the students re-contextualise their reading of the song lyrics in ways that made sense to them. By preserving their features as cultural expressions, their learning of language is inherently multimodal (i.e., aesthetic or competitive game frames). Such frames become a space for creativity, where the search for direct translations is replaced by attempts to step beyond conventional forms of language production. In terms of cross-linguistic competence, performative features of specific language genres such as figurative language are relevant next steps to advance students' language learning and further their understanding of how everyday conventions of linguistic expressions can be creatively and comprehensibly reshaped (cf. Ballinger et al., 2020).

7. Conclusion and Future Direction

This article contributed to the field of languaging when cross-linguistically interpreting two songs between English and Swedish. The study suggests that when making cross-linguistic interpretations to translate popular songs, students either list their candidate translations and decide which one is the most suitable, or they come across a linguistic problem/gap that they try to solve through collaboration. This study showed that although highly proficient, the students faced challenges of interpreting figurative expressions cross-linguistically. Such challenges trigger the students to learn and become cross-linguistically aware of the fact that figurative language has several layers of meaning and cannot be translated directly as this reduces the qualities or meaning potentials of the expressions. As a pedagogical strategy, the use of song lyrics from contemporary music seems to serve as a productive context in which students feel at home, and they discover and struggle with fairly sophisticated issues of what is in a metaphor and how it is to be rendered in a different language in order to preserve its sense. The song context provides a framing for the translation activities where issues of genres, registers and aesthetic qualities of linguistic expressions are spontaneously attended to. The activity enhances students' cross-linguistic awareness by encouraging them to look for comparisons and differences across the languages and to focus on structural, sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects of the languages.

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Notes

Note 1. Please note that the syllables that are accentuated by Robyn in the studio recorded version of the song are marked by dots. There is no formal notation system for how the rhythm of song lyrics are to align to the beat of pop music. This degree of freedom is typically used by singers as one (of several) modes of artistic expression.

Note 2. Transcription legend in Appendix 1.

Note 3. The 16 beats and rhythm of the lyrics performed by Robyn in the studio version (0:33-0:37).

Note 4. Gårdarna' is, as referred to in the literature, a "membership category" (Sacks, 1992, pp. 40-41) which is rich in cultural meaning. It refers both to the historical location of a football club in Gothenburg city (Gårda), and to the "supporters" of the football-club.

Note 5. As the lyrics were introduced by the teacher the students listened to the songs, and when closing the translation activity, they performed the songs translated into the target language.

Appendix 1

Transcript Legend

Transcript legend	
(.)	micropause
xxxx	reads one's own translation aloud
“xxxx”	cites the original text
<u>xxxx</u>	English in original
-	interruption, cut-off sound
=	latches on to previous/coming turn
☺	giggling tone
((xxxx))	the analysts' clarifying comments
ᵗxxxx	rhythmic accent

Appendix 2

Excerpts in Original Transcription

Excerpt 1: “A friend or a buddy?”, “to love someone more or better”

Students: Zephyr (♂), Marlo (♂) and Kyrлие (♀)

Students		
1.	Marlo:	okej(.)någon sa att du har en ny kompis=
2.	Zephyr:	=ny vän
3.	Kyrлие:	jag skrev någon sa att du har en ny vän=
4.	Marlo:	=okej då
5.	Kyrлие:	så älskar hon dig mer än jag gör
6.	Marlo:	jag skrev älskar hon dig bättre
7.	Zephyr:	så kan det vara
8.	Kyrлие:	eeehm och sen det är en stor svart himmel över min stad
9.	Marlo:	uhm jag skrev också det
10.	Zephyr:	uhm
11.	Kyrлие:	jag vet vart du är jag antar att hon är med
12.	Zephyr:	jag vet var du är slår vad att hon är där=
13.	Kyrлие:	=ja(.) det är bra

Appendix 3

Excerpt 2: “I bet she's around”

Shilah (♀), Valentine (♀), Indigo (♀)

Students		
1.	Shilah:	okej (.) <i>någon sa att du har fått en ny vän (.) älskar hon dig bättre än jag kan (.) det är en stor svart himmel över min stad (.) jag vet var du är</i> sen kommer inte jag på den ”I bet she's around”
2.	Valentine:	okej (.) jag skrev <i>någon sa att du har en ny vän (.) älskar hon dig bättre än jag kan (.) det är en stor svart himmel över min stad (.) jag vet var du är jag antar att hon är med (.)</i> typ nånting sånt <i>because I don't know "I bet she's around" (.)</i> de är liksom olika men- olika betydelse.
3.	Indigo:	jag ska se (.) <i>det var någon som sa att du har en ny vän (.) älskar hon dig mer än vad jag gör?</i> eehm (.) jag försökte liksom göra om det lite (.) lite mer liksom, (.) <i>poetic style (.) en stor svart himmel över staden min (.) jag vet var du är (.) troligen är hon med</i>
4.	Valentine:	(.) jag tycker att (.) asså ”I know where you at I bet she's around” (.) jag tror att din är bättre (.) bäst där
5.	Shilah:	troligen är hon med=
6.	Indigo:	=uhm

Appendix 4

Excerpt 3: “Do we have any angels in the city?”

Students: Zephyr (♂), Marlo (♂) and Kyrлие (♀) Teacher: Tannah (♀)

Students

- | | | |
|-----|---------|---|
| 1. | Kyrлие: | den andra ((sången)) då |
| 2. | Marlo: | okej the angels= |
| 3. | Zephyr: | =have gone on whip ((fnittrar)) |
| 4. | Marlo: | on (.) do the (.) whipping ((fnittrar)) |
| 5. | Zephyr: | vad menas med ord ”på pisk?”= |
| 6. | Kyrлие: | =ja men det menas att de har fått stryk |
| 7. | Zephyr: | ahha, the angels have been beaten |
| 8. | Marlo: | ((fnittrar)) |
| 9. | Zephyr: | the angels have been whipped |
| 10. | Marlo: | Tannah! ((calling for the teacher)) ”Änglarna har åkt på pisk” vad menar= |
| 11. | Tannah: | = <u>do you know anything about this song?</u> |
| 12. | Marlo: | [no] |
| 13. | Zephyr: | [no] |
| 14. | Tannah: | <u>do you know who angels are?</u> |
| 15. | Marlo: | [no] |
| 16. | Zephyr: | [no] |
| 17. | Tannah: | <u>do we have any angels in this city?</u> |
| 18. | Marlo: | (.) no |
| 19. | Zephyr: | IFK?=
IFK har förlorat= |
| 20. | Kyrлие: | =IFK! att de har förlorat en match |
| 21. | Tannah: | <u>aaaah so it's the soccer team (.) right (..)</u> |
| 22. | Zephyr: | IFK har förlorat= |
| 23. | Kyrлие: | = <u>have lost their match</u> |
| 24. | Marlo: | IFK har förlorat IFK <u>were defeated</u> (.) hm (.)
eller vad tycker ni? eller bara änglarna har blivit
slagna typ |
| 25. | Kyrлие: | nej |
| 26. | Zephyr: | the angels have been defeated |
| 27. | Kyrлие: | ohm |
| 28. | Marlo: | okej (.) the angels have been defeated |
-

Appendix 5

Excerpt 4: “the gardens are green and black”

Zephyr (♂), Marlo (♂) and Kyrлие (♀)

Students		
1.	Kyrлие:	“Gårdarna”
2.	Marlo:	the gardens va (.) eller?
3.	Zephyr:	the gardens are green and black=
4.	Marlo:	=jag tror inte han menar gardens då=
5.	Kyrлие:	=asså han menar GAIS då (.) <u>obviously</u> =
6.	Zephyr:	=du kan alla fotbolslag (.) ☹ gårdarna (.) vad är gårdana?
7.	Marlo:	han kanske spelar för GAIS (.) varför kallar han de för gårdarna då?
8.	Kyrлие:	asså grön-svarta ((the teacher speaks to the whole class and discusses the students' ideas))

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