“Jeg elsker dig”

- No. 3 from Op. 5, *Hjertets melodier* [Melodies of the Heart], composed 1864 by Edvard Grieg (published Copenhagen, 1865)
- Text in Danish by H. C. Andersen (1805-1875), “Min Tankes Tanke,” 1833, from *Samlede Digte - Epigrammatiske Digte*
- “Singable translation” to German

Original Grieg Manuscript (1864 - Bergen Public Library)

First edition (1865), published in Copenhagen by Hornemann

**Diction of the Scandinavian Languages**

Anna C. Hersey
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Why are “singable translations” problematic?

- Distorts the meaning
Why are “singable translations” problematic?

- Pre-existing rhythmic and melodic pattern

Definite nouns in Scandinavian language:

- flicka: girl
- en flicka: a girl
- flickan: the girl

1. Set “the” on the downbeat

2. Add a pickup note
Why are “singable translations” problematic?

- Results in a loss of the sounds of the original text: onomatopoeia, rhyme, alliteration, etc.

Og det er Rull-i-Ring, og det er Sull-i-Sving, og det er Lett-på-Tå, og det er Sprett-på-Tå,

And it’s roll-in-the-ring, and it’s hum-in-the-swing, and it’s light-on-the-toes, and it’s run-on-the-toes,
Why are “singable translations” problematic?

- Research in the area of text/music relationship:
  - Explores the music-language connection in terms of cognitive and neural processing using a variety of methods, including brain imaging, behavioral experiments, and acoustic research
  - Using these methods, vocal music (and even instrumental music) can be linked to prevailing pitch patterns of a composer’s native language

Why are “singable translations” problematic?

- Research in the area of text/music relationship:
  - Melodic range of French songs versus German songs was seen to parallel average frequency variation in the spoken language

Why are “singable translations” problematic?

- Research in the area of text/music relationship:
    - Compared stylistic and structural differences in the song output of polyglot Finnish composers (such as Sibelius)
    - Revealed some correlation between acoustic properties of the language used (Swedish, Finnish, or German) and compositional technique

The musical intentions of a composer are best served when vocal music is performed in the original language.
“Jeg elsker dig!”

Merete Hjortsø, soprano
Tom Ernst, piano

Scandinavian Repertoire

But the languages can still be intimidating!

Scandinavian Repertoire

• Performance in the original language is preferable

This is now made possible by:

• Recent initiatives on publication of scores in the US, digitization of scores
• Recent increase in sources on Scandinavian diction

The Scandinavian Languages
Swedish Speakers

- Swedish is the official language of Sweden (population 10 million)
- Swedish is one of two official languages in Finland

Swedish and Norwegian

Swedish-Speaking Counties in Finland
Norwegian Speakers

- Norwegian is the official language of Norway (population 5 million)
- Norway has two official written languages: Bokmål (“book tongue”) and Nynorsk (“New Norwegian”)
- There is no official pronunciation norm

Norwegian and Swedish Alphabets

- The Swedish Alphabet has 29 letters: å ä ö
- The Norwegian Alphabet has 29 letters: å æ ø

Linguistic Traits

- Quantity
  - Vowel Quantity
    - For Example: English, Danish
  - Consonant Quantity
    - For Example: Italian
  - Vowel-Consonant Quantity
    - Finnish
    - Icelandic
    - Faroese
    - Norwegian
    - Swedish

Background - Linguistic Traits

- Vowel-Consonant Quantity
  - Non-Complementary
    - Finnish
  - Complementary
    - Icelandic
    - Faroese
    - Norwegian
    - Swedish
The Principle of Complementary Quantity

A stressed syllable always includes *either* a long consonant or a long vowel (but never both)

Where V=Vowel and C=Consonant, a stressed syllable in Swedish or Norwegian can have two possible structures:

(C) V: C
(C) V: C

**talar**
(Swedish: “speaks”)

[t dː l a r]

**tallar**
(Swedish: “pines”)

[t a lː a r]

**beten**
(German: “to pray”)

[b eː t ə n]

**Betten**
(German: “beds”)

[ˈb eː t ə n]
The Principle of Complementary Quantity

- Makes the mapping of orthographic spelling to phonetic spelling in Swedish and Norwegian quite straightforward
- Transcription can be accurately accomplished in a few easy steps

3 Steps to IPA Transcription

- Step 1: Determine stressed syllables
- Step 2: Apply the “Complementary Quantity” principle

In general, in a stressed syllable a vowel followed by a single consonant is long. A vowel followed by multiple consonants is short. In the case of multiple consonants, linguistic convention transcribes the first consonant in the cluster as long.

Outside the stressed syllable, all other phonemic elements are short.

- Step 3: Apply vowel/consonant occurrence rules

3 Steps to IPA Transcription

**dagen**

Step 1: Determine stress

3 Steps to IPA Transcription

**dagen**

Step 1: Determine stress
Step 2: Apply Quality of Complementary Quantity
3 Steps to IPA Transcription

**dagen**

Step 1: Determine stress
Step 2: Apply Quality of Complementary Quantity
Step 3: Apply occurrence rules

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occurrence in a stressed syllable/word</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Occurrence in an unstressed syllable/word</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[tə] a final or followed by a single consonant</td>
<td>dagen [dɑːgən] (the day)</td>
<td>a: occurs as an exception in some one-syllable words, short [ə] occurs rarely as an exception</td>
<td>[ŋ] (ŋrăl) (l) sarar (ˈvʊsər) (of which)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ə] a followed by more than one consonant</td>
<td>stranden [ˈstrændən] (the shore)</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>speglaude (ˈspeɡləudə) (as reflected)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[c] c final or followed by a single consonant</td>
<td>eviga [ˈɛvɪɡə] (eternal)</td>
<td>e: occurs as an exception in one-syllable words, short [ɛ] occurs rarely as an exception</td>
<td>mœf (mœf) (wih) onnefan (ˈoŋnəfən) (among)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ɛ] N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>e in some unstressed prefixes</td>
<td>bæŋga (ˈbæŋɡə) (adaptiv)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Steps to IPA Transcription

**dagen**

Step 1: Determine stress
Step 2: Apply Quality of Complementary Quantity
Step 3: Apply other occurrence rules
3 Steps to IPA Transcription

**stranden**

Step 1: Determine stress

Step 2: Apply Quality of Complementary Quantity

Step 3: Apply occurrence rules
3 Steps to IPA Transcription

stranden

['strändən]

Step 1: Determine stress
Step 2: Apply Quality of Complementary Quantity
Step 3: Apply other occurrence rules

Vowels

- Both Swedish and Norwegian have large vowel inventories
- Swedish: approximately ten short-long vowel pairs, in addition to several unpaired vowels
- Norwegian: approximately eight short-long vowel pairs, in addition to an unpaired vowel and several diphthongs
- Although the members of each pair may differ (sometimes marginally) in quality, the quantity (or length) is the most relevant difference in Swedish and Norwegian

Swedish Vowels

![Swedish Vowel Chart]
[u:] in Swedish

- The close front vowels demonstrate an interesting three-way contrast.
  - [yː] (and short counterpart [y])
  - [iː] (and short counterpart [i])
  - [uː]
- Lip position:
  - [yː] (protruded)
  - [iː] (neutral)
  - [uː] (compressed)
- Examples:
  - *ryta* [ˈryːta] (roar)
  - *rita* [ˈriːta] (draw)
  - *ruta* [ˈrʉːta] (box)

(Ladefoged, *World’s Languages*)

Norwegian Vowels

挪威語元音

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Swedish</th>
<th>Norwegian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sju-ljudet</td>
<td>tjugo-ljudet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[f] (voiceless dorso-palatal/velar fricative)</td>
<td>[c] (voiceless alveolo-palatal fricative)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Swedish - *sju-ljudet* and *tjugo-ljudet*

- **Sju-ljudet**
  - Definition with regard to pronunciation is a source of contention even among linguists
  - *The Handbook of the International Phonetic Association* describes it as simultaneous [ʃ] and [x]
  - Ladefoged and Maddieson, however, dispute that it is a doubly-articulated fricative.
  - Ladefoged and Maddieson call it a variant of [ʃ], and I recommend this substitution in singing
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shaMHjlw0sw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shaMHjlw0sw)

- **Tjugo-ljudet**
  - Sound is similar to ich-laut in German but is pronounced with the tongue slightly more forward and a greater force of expelled air
  - Again, I recommend substituting [ʃ]

Swedish - formality

**Differences between högsvenska**

&

**talad svenska**

- **mig** [miːɡ] vs. [meːjː]
- **dig** [diːɡ] vs. [deːjː]
- **säger** [sɛːɡɛr] vs. [seːjɛr]

Swedish - formality

Gunnar de Frumerie:

“Som en våg” (Like a wave)

Som en våg sköljd upp mot stranden/ vilar du hos mig
(As a wave washed up on the shore/ you rest in me)

När jag smeker dig med handen/ skälver havet ini dig
(When I caress you with my hand/ the sea trembles within you)
Swedish - formality

Differences between
högsvenska
&
talad svenska

– Composer’s wishes
– Year of composition of the song/poem
– Style of the song/poem

Norwegian – two written forms

• Bokmål (book tongue)
• Nynorsk (new Norwegian)

• How did this unique linguistic situation evolve?
• In 1814, as part of a post-war treaty, Norway was transferred to Sweden. Norway resisted, declaring its independence on May 17, 1814.
• In the summer of 1814, however, Sweden invaded, and a few weeks later Norway surrendered.

Norwegian – two written forms

• Bokmål (book tongue)
• Nynorsk (new Norwegian)

• The written language of the upper classes at this time was Danish, which is most accurately called Dano-Norwegian.
• Populations in rural areas and those in lower socioeconomic classes spoke a wide variety of dialects.
• Although nationalist sentiment supported a written language that was distinctly Norwegian, two opposing camps emerged.
  – On the one side, spoken dialects were considered most purely Norwegian
  – On the other side were those who supported a version of Danish with orthographic variation to reflect the spoken language of the upper classes

Norwegian – two written forms

• Bokmål (book tongue)
• Nynorsk (new Norwegian)

• In the end, both of these options came to fruition:
  – nynorsk, developed in the mid-nineteenth century, was based on Norwegian dialects (primarily southwest and south-central).
  – Bokmål was based on Danish but underwent “Norwegianization” via spelling reforms.
Norwegian – two written forms

• Bokmål (book tongue)
• Nynorsk (new Norwegian)

– For a short time in the middle of the twentieth century, a movement developed to try to merge bokmål and nynorsk into samnorsk (common Norwegian).
– Today a moderate form of bokmål is most commonly seen in Norway.
– About 15 percent of Norwegians choose to conduct written business in nynorsk.

Norwegian – two written forms

• Bokmål (book tongue)
• Nynorsk (new Norwegian)

• What does this mean for us as singers?
  – You will encounter much variation in song texts, both with regard to spelling and to vocabulary
  – Even examining a single text you may find differing spellings depending on the publisher

Norwegian – two written forms

• Bokmål (book tongue)
• Nynorsk (new Norwegian)

• In general, standard pronunciation in singing for both written forms is Standard East Norwegian (spoken in the greater Oslo region)
• Differences in pronunciation exist for some vocabulary words, and for pronouns

Norwegian – two written forms

• Bokmål (book tongue)
• Nynorsk (new Norwegian)

• How do I know which one I’m looking at?
  – Check your pronouns
  – First person pronoun “I”
    • Nynorsk eg
    • Bokmål jeg
“Norwegianization” Controversy

- Many nineteenth century texts by Danish and Norwegian writers are technically “Dano-Norwegian” (neither Danish nor Norwegian)

- Some Norwegian singers assert that all these texts should be “Norwegianized,” modifying vocabulary and pronunciation

“Norwegianization” Controversy

- “When the poet is Danish, [the text] should of course be sung in Danish, even if the composer is Norwegian.”
  – Opera Singer Bo Skovhus

- “The poetry of German, Danish and Norwegian poets is for the attentive observer so thoroughly different, that the music demands an equally different expression for the nationality in question, without however finding it possible to express this difference in words.”
  – Edvard Grieg, in correspondence with Henry Finck (music critic at the New York Post), original in Bergen Public Library.

Idiosyncracies of Swedish and Norwegian

- Absence of voiced alveolar fricative [z]
Idiosyncracies of Swedish and Norwegian

• Retroflex consonants (combinations with “r”)

Norwegian:
- rd
- rt
- rl
- rm

spoken: [ɾd̥] [ɾt̥] [ɾl̥] [ɾm̥]
sung: [ɾd̥] [ɾt̥] [ɾl̥] [ɾm̥]

Swedish:
- rd
- rt
- rl
- rm
- rs

spoken: [ɾd̥] [ɾt̥] [ɾl̥] [ɾm̥] [ɾs̥]
sung: [ɾd̥] [ɾt̥] [ɾl̥] [ɾm̥] [ɾs̥]

Grammar

• bleka “whiten”
  – ['ble:ka]

• bleknat “whitened”
  – ['bleknat']
Grammar

- *bleka* “whiten”
  - [ˈbleːka]

- *bleknat* “whitened”
  - [ˈblekːnat]
  - [ˈbleːknat]

Danish Speakers

- Danish is the official language of Denmark (population 5.6 million)
- Danish is also a recognized minority language in Greenland (~20% of the population speaks Danish at home) and an official language of the Faroe Islands.

Danish

- Good news! There are no sounds in sung Danish that are completely foreign or unfamiliar to a student who is versed in diction of the “singing languages.”

- Bad news! Orthographic to phonetic correlation is inconsistent in Danish, making transcription for non-natives quite difficult.
Danish Alphabet

- The Danish Alphabet has 29 letters:
  æ  ø  å (aa)

Rødgrød med fløde

- “Red porridge with cream”
- Tongue-twisting litmus test
  [ˈʁøeːd̪t̪,ɡʁøeːd̪t̪ me ˈfløːd̪t̪]
- Native speakers: 🧔

Stød

- Stød (literally “blow” or “hit”), the most distinctive characteristic of spoken Danish, is the truncation of a syllable or word with irregular vibration of the vocal folds (“creaky voice”).
- Sometimes defined as a glottal stop, stød is actually a succession of glottal stops.
Linguists believe that *stød* in Danish is a remnant of the tonal accent still present in Swedish and Norwegian, because both traits are distributed similarly in their respective languages.

Fortis/Lenis

- distinction of “articulatory strength” are not familiar to American singers, but it’s important in Danish
- in English, fortis-lenis corresponds to unvoiced-voiced (and also to aspirated-unaspirated)

Stød

- *Stød* is not used in singing
- [ˈkæːd, ˈkæːd ˈmɛ ˈfɔːd] (spoken Danish)
- [ˈkæːd, ˈkæːd ˈmɛd ˈfɔːdə] (sung Danish)

Fortis/Lenis

- in Danish, fortis-lenis *does not* correspond to unvoiced-voiced
- it’s actually possible to have [b]
- why not just use [p]
- an American singer would pronounced that as [pʰ] (with aspiration)
- difficult choices with regard to transcription
Danish IPA transcriptions for singers

• Active Vowel Modification
  The schwa may be modified by vowel harmony conventions to assimilate to nearby (even non-adjacent) stressed vowels, especially in singing.

  [t̪æŋkəs] tankes

Danish IPA transcriptions for singers

Transcription of final r
  – [.addElement] (used by Grønnum)
  – [AnotherElement] (used in standard German transcriptions)

Let’s Try It!

“Jeg elsker dig!”

(text, translation, and IPA on your handout)
“Var det en dröm?”

(text, translation, and IPA on your handout)

“Mor synger”

(text, translation, and IPA on your handout)

Questions?

Tack!
Takk!
Tak!

hersey.anna@gmail.com