

Complexity of first-person pronoun in lyrics: How the Swedish band Kent wrote and translated “the nation” and “the self”

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Abstract

Kent, a Swedish rock band, was one of the most popular bands in Sweden during the time when the country was hailed as a global popular music superpower. Seen as a symbol of “Swedish” music by both the audience and the critics, the band created songs almost exclusively in Swedish, with two albums being translated into English by the creators in a failed attempt to break into the international market. This paper examines the use of the first-person pronoun in Kent’s lyrics as a way to explore the relationship between personal storytelling and the establishment of a national image. The paper argues that the conscious choice to write in Swedish allows for greater agency of expression, which is revealed through the complexity of the first-person pronoun in the Swedish lyrics, as opposed to the English self-translation. The paper also demonstrates, via corpus linguistic means, how the frequency of the first-person pronoun changes over the course of the band’s career, reflecting the varying levels of subjectivity in their music. In Kent’s later works, the first-person pronoun is used to represent both the individual and the nation, creating a complex and nuanced lyric voice. The paper concludes that through the representation of “the nation” and “I” in their lyrics, Kent have acquired the status of a quintessentially Swedish band.

Biography

Ms. Wenjian LI is a PhD student at the Department of Translation, Interpreting, and Intercultural Studies, the Hong Kong Baptist University. She obtained her Master Degree in Translation and Interpreting from the Graduate Institute of Translation and Interpretation, the Shanghai International Studies University. She is currently working on her PhD project examining the cognitive process of chunking in sight translation. She is also interested in corpus linguistics and its application in popular music studies.