



Words and meanings – decolonising dance-music terminology

Egil Bakka

Abstract

This article aims to identify and situate problems of dance and music terminology arising when we, as scholars in this field, write about a practice in another language than that spoken by the practitioners. This happens ever more often because English is rising to become a world language. In the first section of the article, a brief discussion of political argumentation regarding language hegemony outlines the context in which the problem arises, and the minimal room there is for any general language decolonisation. The second part of the article attempts to illustrate the problems arising from a linguistic perspective. Translation is about conveying the meaning of a word as it appears in each specific context. Then the one actual meaning suffices even if five more English words might be needed to give all the meanings. An academician investigating a phenomenon labelled by the word needs the whole range of meanings to understand how the word is situated in its language. The third, applied part discusses possible measures for achieving decolonisation, such as how one can navigate between a mother tongue and a hegemonic language. It asks if the many non-native users should have a say on the norms of academic English, discusses principles for borrowing terms between languages, and points to the need to analyse the different ranges of meanings carried by dance and music terms in any language. The article concludes with the argument that even modest measures such as these can bring more respect to languages. Language are tools for people to make sense of their surroundings and culture, just as is the research of traditional music and dance. By strengthening their esteem, we increase the stringency of our research and support them in a world mostly politically barren to language diversity.

Introduction

A world language has been established, which is a blessing for international communication on the one hand. On the other hand, the dominance of the English language tends to make large parts of the world rely more and more on only one language for academic work (Rosenhouse & Kowner, 2008a). This has a globalising effect by reducing the status and importance of other languages. I must stress here that this article does not discuss the suitability of English as a world language, but the influences of hegemonic languages in general, and of English in particular, being the leading one. In languages not used in tertiary education, the need for academic language tends to be ignored; in other languages it is given less priority. I aim to look at how this situation affects research on traditional dance, even if the questions addressed in this article are more general. In the first section, I ask if the rise of a world language and its consequences are altogether unavoidable or if it also depends on and can be influenced by politics. The article does not discuss political measures but looks for what researchers of dance and music can do themselves, and among the measures suggested is the raising of awareness. I argue that as researchers, we should take the trouble to question or discuss the problems of labelling phenomena we encounter in other cultures using terms from our own language, or from English. I suggest that a solution may be to pay more attention to and discuss the native terms more carefully, which is the core argument of the article.

Political perspectives

Small academic disciplines with modest status may find it too demanding, and perhaps less interesting to engage with global issues and political discourses, but the issues raised in this article need contextualisation. This section therefore serves as an introduction and necessary backdrop to subsequent sections that address linguistic and applied issues, and presents a few voices from political debates regarding language hegemony.

Some researchers claim that the spread of the English language functions as a neo-colonial strategy and can be viewed as part of a more extensive

neo-colonial play about power (Cummins & Davison, 2007, p. 17). In this view, English language dominance has a significant globalising effect by reducing the status and importance of other languages, stopping them from developing into full-fledged languages of the future, and even replacing them. Conversely, other linguists, as shown below, consider the development of and relations between languages as a given that humans cannot influence. Similar issues can also be raised from a dance heritage perspective: for example, one could ask if the dominance of Western theatre dance in the world is also beyond humans' control, or if it is part of the international power play. In *Dance Education around the World*, the American dance educationalist Susan R. Koff notes: "dance in formal settings, regardless of the culture, has followed not only a Western paradigm but has also followed the other arts and the Western-dominated established structure of formal education" (Nielsen & BurrIDGE, Stephanie, 2015, p. 32).

English language dominance – a neo-colonial trend?

Many writers on *English language* teaching, among them J. W. Tollefson, strongly criticise the dominance of English as a neo-colonial trend.¹ My article does not address that broad issue but offers it as a modest contextualisation for an idea that might positively affect the status of other languages.

Tollefson (2000) introduces some of the concerns about English as a neo-colonial language by pointing to a paradox: "At a time when English is widely seen as a key to the economic success of nations and the economic well-being of individuals, the spread of English also contributes to significant social, political, and economic inequalities (Tollefson, quoted in Cummins & Davison, 2007, p. X)". Thus, on the one hand, some see English as fulfilling "the perceived need for one language of international communication . Through English, people worldwide gain access to science, technology, education, employment, and mass culture, while the chance of political conflict is also reduced"; on the other hand, amongst other things, "the spread of English presents a formidable obstacle to education, employment, and other activities requiring English proficiency [...]" (Cummins & Davison, 2007, p. 17).

1. I would like to reiterate that English is not the only language that, through processes of colonisation, has come to replace or reduce the use of local languages. I suggest that French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian are other examples.

Linguist Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu distinguishes between “vernacular language as the everyday spoken language or languages of a community” in contrast to a transplanted, foreign, or colonial language. He argues that African masses might embrace their own Indigenous languages as the mediums of instruction in schools if that education were as profitable as education through the medium of a former colonial language (Kamwangamalu, 2016, p. 4).

The English lexical invasion as an unavoidable development

Compared to Tollefson, linguist Judith Rosenhouse and historian Rotem Kowner come from a nearly opposite attitude. They contribute to linguists’ usual discourse about the general (unavoidable) development of language and borrowing words from English to other languages. This is not the same as arguing over education in “Indigenous” languages but still seemingly uncritical to what they consider a “natural” and inevitable English lexical “invasion process”:

Critically, this book suggests that the English lexical ‘invasion’ depicted in each chapter is a natural and inevitable process driven by psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and sociohistorical factors. Moreover, it demonstrates that borrowed loan words constitute part of the normal way languages develop and survive. Although speakers’ attitudes concerning loan words (either pro or con such words) may be emotional, we conclude that when borrowed lexical items are used in communication, the main driving force behind them is apparently the need for efficient and expressive communication (Rosenhouse & Kowner, 2008b, p. 4-19).

It is, of course, not possible to stop languages from changing, and all change may not spring from political decisions or lack thereof. Still, the balance and relationships between languages are also changing, and such processes are undoubtedly influenced by politics, which is why I tend to question the image of linguistics only as a neutrally observing discipline (Allan, 2020, p. 44).

English language dominance as part of an ancient power relationship

The quote above is a close parallel to some general persuasions from colonising processes, They are said to represent efficiency and rationality and can, therefore, not be stopped or influenced. A group of linguists presenting an anthology on multilingualism in Africa ask:

Or is it “language that reminds me every day of past injustice”? “Language that reinforces my powerlessness”? How easy is it for the speaker to come to believe that the relationship is not intimate/public/international, but inferior/neutral/superior? Is it possible for individuals and communities to embrace the local mother-tongue language as an asset and means of empowerment rather than as a liability and means of disenfranchisement (Zsiga, Boyer & Kramer, 2014, p. 15)?

I think it would take substantial political measures and enormous educational developments for Indigenous languages to fully become mediums of instruction in schools on a large scale in many African countries. Therefore, it is far beyond what modest research fields such as dance and music can pass supported judgements on. The informal borrowing of words between languages is indeed a process that can hardly be stopped. However, it is striking how linguists mostly describe influences between languages as neutral processes. They just happened, and patterns of dominance or inferiority are rarely brought to the forefront. A comment from the specialist in etymology, Philip Durkin, stands out in bringing up such a point:

The examination of borrowing from Celtic languages in chapter 5 highlighted some important negative observations. Close geographical proximity of speech communities, even on the same landmass, will not always lead to large-scale reciprocal lexical borrowing. Whatever conclusions we draw from the difficult issue of the tiny number of loanwords from Celtic languages in our surviving Old English records, we also cannot avoid the fact that the general vocabulary of modern English shows very little borrowing at any date from any of the Celtic languages, particularly not if we compare the impact from other neighboring languages such as French or Dutch. Sadly, we cannot escape the sobering conclusion that this is largely a result of the relatively low esteem in which

speakers of Celtic languages have generally been held by speakers of English over many centuries. (Durkin, 2014, p. 416)

Hegemonic languages and political agendas

Durkin's observations remind us that linguistic hegemony has probably been a power tool between language groups going back into time immemorial. The example links to the understanding of even current imbalances and thereby opens to setting agendas for work and reflection on linguistic justice or improvements of languages' status. Iceland is an example of a country with a linguistic agenda that aims to resist "unavoidable" language. The aim is to create new words from Icelandic roots in order to keep out mainly English loanwords. The efficiency of the Icelandic strategy can be debated, but at least it shows that the receipt of loanwords can also be considered an ideological and political issue (Hilpert, et al., 2015, p. 59).

I hope this introduction has called attention to researchers who argue for the intrinsic values of languages and the dangers that face many of them. The parallel with dance heritage is striking but is not the main topic here. In the following, I test some ideas related to linguistic mechanisms and discuss how they may influence academic terminology.

Linguistic perspectives

I will now discuss issues of traditional dance and music terminology from a linguistic perspective, addressing what I find to be a shared practice in our field and in most research on culture wherein it is not customary to discuss or even quote local terms for well-established English words such as "dance" or "ritual". Our convention seems to be that the established English words are sufficient. Consequently, one hegemonic language might be viewed as containing all the terminology needed in an academic discipline, requiring users of other languages to rely on translating local terminology into the hegemonic language. The Spanish linguist María Sánchez point[s] "towards the practical impossibility of conveying in one language exactly what was originally said in another" (Sánchez, 2009, p. 276). Trans-

lations, of course, are needed, and translators find ways to transfer meanings between languages that are satisfactory on a general level. This, however, does not mean that translation is sufficient in research where terminology and the relationship between phenomena and their labels are in focus. I suggest we abandon the illusion that a well-defined English word can serve as a neat translation of terminology for all the phenomena of similar kind in the world.

The problems with universal definitions of dance

The belief in the sufficiency of translation can be traced to early attempts to create universal definitions of cultural practices. You take the name of a European phenomenon with a relatively straightforward meaning in English or another hegemonic language. Then you search for what seem like global parallels to that phenomenon and finally use that word, for instance “dance”, to denote all of these phenomena worldwide. To justify this, you try to demonstrate, in various ways, how the phenomena you want to group belong together. This can, for instance, be done through complex and well-informed definitions (Hannah, 1987, p. 19) or by pointing to what one considers to be common traits among all kinds of dance, as when Sondra Horton Fraleigh posits that “aesthetic value is basic to everything we call dance” (1987, p. xvi). In this way, one indirectly argues for the persuasion that a word from a world language, such as “dance”, is a valid and sufficient category for the dance research in all of the world and that a scrutiny of terms and categories from other languages is redundant.²

Adrienne Kaeppler, seeing the many problems with this kind of categorisation, proposed to call the field she studied *culturally structured movement systems* (Clark-Decès, 2011 p. 138). In this way, she freed us from the term dance with its heavy burden of European connotations and assumptions. Her term, however, has the burden of anthropological heritage, still Western but with more distance to a culturally specific point of departure. If we take Kaeppler’s term as a delimitation of our field of study, it broadens our scope significantly. To come to an understanding of a specific phe-

2. I started the discussion of insufficiency of translation and the problem of defining one English word to refer to similar phenomena in all languages on the ICTM listserv in response to Don Niles on 13 January 2022.

nomenon throughout the world, I propose to work with a broad and colloquial description of phenomena that has a few common characteristics: If we were to study a specific phenomenon in meteorology, we could, for instance, ask for words denoting “water that is falling from the sky”, rather than asking about translations for precipitation, rain, or snow. In the same vein, we can ask for words that denote human movement structured to music instead of dance.³

Coming from ethnochoreology at home, primarily working in my mother tongue, I see the phenomenon at hand and its name and conceptualisation in my language as indivisible. A translation cannot replace this name, and if the cluster of meanings of the Norwegian word is clearly different from that of the word used in the English translation, an extensive discussion of these meanings would be needed. I consider the phenomenon and its name in the language where it belongs to be inseparable.

Words can combine meanings or distinguish them

I will continue with some more examples of how one language can use more words to distinguish different meanings or combine more meanings under one word. As a Norwegian man I can wear two main kinds of headdress, the *lue* and the *hatt*. The first is soft, often knitted, and is used to label most kinds of male headdress that is not considered to be a hat. A hat has a brim and a crown and is made from firmer material. Top hats, cowboy hats and bowlers are typical examples. I was confused and slightly uncomfortable the first time a British colleague referred to the *lue* I was wearing as “your hat”. I soon realised that there is not any direct and precise parallel to *lue* in English. This is not a problem of translation; a good translator will surely find a suitable word in each case. Researchers referring to male headdress in Norway as a phenomenon of some importance might chose to write: “Young people in Norway often wear a knitted hat or bonnet (*lue*) as alternative to a cap.” Following my suggestion they should at least mention the clear difference between Norwegian and English in classifying male

3. Since submitting the first version of this article, I have initiated a project called *The World in dance words* in collaboration with Georgiana Gore and alumni and staff of the Choreomundus International Master’s programme. I try not to use results from that project in this article.

headdress, enabling the reader to understand for instance the symbolic use of a red *lue* as token of resistance during WWII.

Such differences can, of course, be found between any two languages, and I describe them, not to say that a particular language is better than another one. The point is that comparison gives us a deeper understanding of words and the phenomena to which they refer. It also demonstrates why the meaning of a word needs to be understood in the context of its language.

Words for knowledge – vernacular speech and terminology

Following up on this by looking at experts' or researchers' procedures, I ask if underlying structures from our vernacular language influence how we construct the academic terminology we make and use. Perhaps we make more precise distinctions where our vernacular language divides and less where the vernacular language keeps phenomena together. Will this influence the construction of terminology—do two languages approach the building of terminology differently due to the dissimilarity of structures on the vernacular level?

I will use the words “know” and “knowledge” to examine the question. Comparing that word and its concept to a selection of parallels in other languages, I hope to demonstrate basic differences in the structures of meaning in vernacular languages. Different languages will give us different ways of grouping or dividing up clusters of meaning on the words they offer. Clusters of meanings are attached to words that carry our knowledge and understanding. Due to its dominance, the words that the English language has available to carry clusters of meaning become particularly important for how the growing number of English speakers worldwide can express themselves. When I have words to keep apart two phenomena that in my own language are clearly distinguished, but not in English, it can be rather annoying even in purely vernacular language.

For this reason, I continue by checking how words for knowledge and cognition are organised to take on different clusters of meaning in different languages. One term that has offspring in many Indo-European languages is Old English *wit*, Norwegian *vit/vet*, and German *Wissen*, which refer to mental capacity. A second one is German *können*, the basis for *Kunst* (art),

Norwegian *kunne*, but also, to some degree, the English *can*. This is partly about know-how, knowledge or skill. The third one is the German *kennen*, Norwegian *kjenne*, which means, among other things, to recognise by sight.

German	Kennst Du dieser Mann, weisst Du wo er wohnt und ob er tanzen kann ?
Norwegian	Kjenner du denne mannen, vet du hvor han bor og om han kan danse?
Italian	Conosci quest'uomo, sai dove vive e se sa ballare?
French	Connaissez -vous cet homme, savez -vous où il habite et s'il sait danser?
Spanish	¿Conoce a este hombre, sabe dónde vive y si sabe bailar?
English	Do you know this man, do you know where he lives and if he can (know how to) dance?
Polsk	Poznáte tohto muža, viete , kde býva a či vie tancovať?
Czech	Znáte tohoto muže, víte , kde žije a zda umí tančit?
Icelandic	Pekkir þú þennan mann, veistu hvar hann býr og hvort hann geti dansað?

As we can see above, three of the Germanic and one of the Slavic languages, Czech, divide the capacity of cognition and skill into three terms; Latin languages tend to combine mental capacity and the skill, whereas English is close to using the verb *know* about all the three meanings.

An example is a small piece from a newspaper article in Norwegian that illustrates translation problems with the word “to know” and its derivatives. The subtitle is *Kunnande* (skill) *og vitande* (mental capacity), which translates as *Knowing* and *knowing* since both the different Norwegian words, through simple translation, end up as *knowing*. The author writes:

Vi treng presisere ordparet *kunnande* (kunnskap) og *vitande* (vitskap). We need to clarify the word pair *know-how* (knowledge) and *knowing* (science). I litterær samheng blir orda ofte brukte artslike. (...) In a literary context, the words are used without distinction. I daglegtala fungerer orda onnorleis. In everyday speech, the words work differently. Der er ikkje *kunnande* artslikt med *vitande*, dei er to ulike dugleikar. There *know-how* is not of same kind as *knowing* (science), they are two different skills. Eit døme er å spinne på rokk. One example is to spin on the spinning wheel. Det finst folk som veit svært mykje om rokken, historisk utvikling og nemningar, og som i prinsippet veit korleis rokken fungerer. There are people who know very much about the spin-

ning wheel, its historical development and terminology, and who know how it works in principle. Dei veit så og seia «alt» om rokken, utan at den vitande av den grunn kan spinne. They know nearly “everything” about the spinning wheel, without knowing for that reason how to spin. Vi oppfattar å kunna som noko anna enn å vita. We perceive “å kunna” (what I can do) as something different from “vita” (knowing as cognitive capacity). Kunnskapen er knytt til handling. The know-how is linked to action. Vitande er passivt i høve til å utføre ei handling. Knowing about is passive compared to performing an action. Dei fleste av oss kan gå. Most of us can walk. Dei færreste av oss kan likevel gjera greie for kva som skjer når vi går. Few of us can still explain what is happening when we walk (Godal, 2004).

How Norwegian, German, Icelandic, and Czech distribute meaning on words makes Godal’s elementary distinction very easy to formulate and connects excellently to vernacular language. In English, it is cumbersome for the same reason. I would say that in discourses about knowledge, particularly in the context of heritage, an awareness about the finer distinctions that other languages offer for the verb know is vital. Precise ways of expressing them are beneficial in any context.

In order to work with English as an international language covering phenomena that are primarily conceptualised in other languages, I find an obvious need to depart from the word in the primary language. It is even more important to grasp and report on how that word is conceptualised compared to the word used for conventional translation into English. That is, which clusters of meaning are connected to that word? Does it, for instance, give finer or broader distinctions, as demonstrated above by comparing the Norwegian terms *hatt* and *lue* with the English “hat”? The awareness of how words in different languages carry often widely different clusters of meaning, and how those influence the understanding of phenomena primarily conceptualised in other languages is, in my mind, vital to cross-cultural research.

In our fields of human movement structured to music, the distinction and relationship between *knowledge-that* and *knowledge-how* is essential to many issues. I refer to an example by Christopher Winch, philosopher of

education. He speaks from a totally different discipline but has similar concerns.

[...] concepts of competence, knowledge and know-how are central to VET [Vocational Educational Training] research. However, there is a considerable amount of variation in what seem to be corresponding concepts even in cultures that are closely related, such as those in northern Europe. Ignoring this variation can lead to serious problems in understanding what is going on in the VET practices and institutions in these societies. [...] This is not because these societies have no concept akin to skill - they definitely do. It is rather that their term equivalent to 'skill' is not exhaustive of what they understand by 'know-how' nor does it cover the range of related concepts that skill does in the English context. This is not a marginal issue concerning translation, but a substantive one that concerns how work is conceived of and organised (Winch, 2022, chapter 10:7).

Another issue is how ancient value judgements can be reproduced by terminology that does not problematise underlying attitudes or even prejudices. It might be worthwhile to compare discourses on vernacular and academic levels in different languages, not only for questions of concrete meanings. I also wonder if underlying differences in attitudes and values could be traced, and I test this idea with a small reflection on Bloom's taxonomy.

Bloom's taxonomy and the Cartesian split

Bloom's taxonomy is a set of three hierarchical models used to classify educational learning objectives into levels of complexity and specificity (Dawson, 1998). The three lists cover the cognitive, affective, and sensory learning objectives. The models were named after the American educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom, who chaired the committee of educators that devised the taxonomy. Taking as a point of departure that learning objectives include acquiring knowledge may bring us an understanding of how the taxonomy understands knowledge.

The first edition says that the model does not include the motor-skill area (Bloom, 1956, p. 7). The taxonomy has been developed and revised,

but the originating group never published a taxonomy for the psychomotor domain (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 218). There have, however, been attempts from others. One is from the Australian researcher Dawson, who has the following taxonomy of the “Psychomotor Domain: 1. Observation 2. Trial 3. Repetition 4. Refinement 5. Consolidation 6 Mastery” [...] . Here we see a concrete model for learning movement patterns.

Some authors writing about dance art in education also engage with the taxonomy. The American dance educator Pugh McCutchen “offers a breakdown of Bloom’s taxonomy for dance” in six levels. The first one is knowledge. She proposes these “Verbs to use at Level I: List, name, observe, memorise, remember, recall.” She is, in other words, offering a system for dance knowledge, but she does not include the skill of dancing in dance knowledge (McCutchen, 2006, p. 81). Another take is from Kassing and Jay:

The psychomotor domain focuses on physical learning. Two taxonomies in the psychomotor domain have been selected as applicable to dance forms. The first taxonomy focuses on skill acquisition and is parallel to the stages of motor learning. This taxonomy is appropriate for dance forms that require students to learn a vocabulary of increasingly difficult steps or figures (for example, in ballet and square dance). A second psychomotor taxonomy presents a hierarchy for gaining movement skills and concepts that lead to divergent thinking. This hierarchy is pertinent for creative and modern dance improvisation, creative studies, and choreography’ (Kassing & Jay, 2003, p. 134).

The latter is a striking demonstration of the ideology of proponents of contemporary dance, presenting the learning of movement skills in modern and contemporary dance as principally different from that in other dance forms. All classificatory systems referring to Bloom’s taxonomy that I have reviewed follow the principle of going from simple to complex in learning. Learning to dance seems unavoidably to start with an essential component of imitation, however much, some pedagogues intend to make their pupils invent their own movements.

Etymology shows that the English words cognition and motor *skill* stem from as different roots as “know” and “distinguish.” One sees the main cate-

gories of motor skills as something not taught, such as crawling, walking, running, and jumping. It is believed to “come by itself” through the development of the body’s physical capacity and socialisation. However, I would question whether it makes sense to say that complex music-making or dancing are just motor skills or to divide such activity into a cognitive and a motor skill part. Maybe bodily skills also need to be counted as part of the cognition bringing us to the discussions about the Cartesian split, and the old understanding that the mind and its abilities are valued more than the bodily abilities. The Irish ethnochoreologist Catherine Foley responded to some questions I asked her and reminded me that she “referred to this divide in an article I wrote in 2012 (Foley, 2012). I state in it how in Ireland in the recent past, cognitive knowledge was seen as superior to knowledge associated with vocational training, including dancing.” (Foley 2021) It is difficult to interpret Kassing and Jay’s ideas above about the two taxonomies for the psychomotor domain as connecting to this idea of superiority, classifying one dance genre, the one developed in the West, as superior to those in the rest of the world. I suggest that the previous discussion about Bloom’s taxonomy and its application demonstrates that attitudes and values underly words as knowledge and skill.

Applied perspective

One field that bridges applied research and translation questions with issues of cross-cultural understanding is that of UNESCO’s conventions, not least the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). An analysis, particularly of the terms used for safeguarding and heritage, would be important and interesting. The interpretation of those terms no doubt influences their implementation in different countries due to differences in meanings. They also no doubt carry signals about values and attitudes, as mentioned above.

The UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage

The distinction between knowledge and skill is vital in the work with the UNESCO ICH Convention. The crux of the work is to support practi-

tioners in keeping up their know-how and to realise it through continuing practising. This is a revolutionary change from institutional practices, which analysed and documented know-how by fixing it onto material media. Then it became knowledge stored at least temporarily as illusorily unchangeable material. Even if such material is vital for safeguarding, it is not the core but rather supplements to know-how and practice. The researchers still did not learn to practice the know-how. That part remained, for good reasons, outside the scope of museums and heritage institutions. That is also why such institutions may have problems relating to the Convention's most central ideas. The agenda of safeguarding and the most crucial activity needed was taken away from the research experts and put into the hands of the practitioners as ever-changeable realisations (Bakka, 2015).

The bottom-line question is: how does this influence our thinking and how we understand the world and formulate our understanding into terminologies? Would it benefit research if we raise awareness about this organisation of words and pick distinguishing words to increase precision?

The missing term

The applied perspective also arose from discussing one concrete problem: the missing concept in at least most European languages for dance and music as a unity. Dancers and musicians stress that dance and music are two sides of an indivisible unit. Disciplines such as dance anthropology, ethnochoreology and ethnomusicology still lack a suitable one-word term for that. I will discuss the claim to give background.

I suggest considering two perspectives on the lack of concepts. One is that the lack of a word for a phenomenon does not cancel its existence; we mostly find ways to refer to it, even if it makes writing and translating cumbersome and unsatisfactory. The other is how words, or lack of them, shape our epistemological awareness and understanding of a phenomenon. Researchers and practitioners from many African countries claim they do not have words to talk about the movement and the sound dimension of the dance/music separately (Gore, 2001, p. 33; Gwervevende, 2020). I will test arguments about how it influences our knowledge construction, why we should keep dance and music apart, and why we should unite them under

one term. I then ask why we do not look upon concepts from other languages as a resource to improve academic terminology in hegemonic languages. I hope all this comes together in a reasonably consistent and supported call for improved strategies for the use of language in the study of traditional dance and even in related disciplines.

Western dance researchers have also stressed the unity of dance and music and argued against the split in a way that can remind about the discussions on the Cartesian split. At the same time, the relationship between dance and music has become a trendy topic, and a new set of words has been coined: choreomusical or choreomusicology. In some ways, these terms confirm the split. The Danish dance researcher Inger Damsholt surveys and discusses the terms and attributes them to the American musician and educationalist Paul Hodgins (Damsholt 2018a; Damsholt 2018b; Hodgins 1992). They allow us to talk about the relationship between dance and music and see it as a sub-discipline of choreology and musicology, combined to become choreomusicology. A more recent article takes the issue to the fields of ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology and on to more principle and theoretical levels (Hood & Hutchinson, 2020).

Movement and sound are different expressions

I often heard criticism against educationalists and researchers of dance and music for not keeping the two together. It is mostly in conference discussions or informal exchange, but an example of written argumentation can be found in Akombo (2016). At this point, it is necessary to remind that dancers produce movement as their primary expression, whereas musicians primarily produce sound. More precisely, musicians produce movement that they intend the receivers to experience mainly as sound. I say this because it takes very different knowledge, training and methods to analyse movement patterns compared to sound patterns. Despite the conviction that dance and music cannot and should not be severed, it is necessary to analyse each of them with different tools for practical and methodological reasons. The argument about unity can foster a belief that what is worthwhile to know about dance can be retrieved through the study of music so that specialised tools for movement are unnecessary for understanding the

totality. Therefore, methodologically, researchers and teachers will necessarily have to separate them. They can deal with the two simultaneously, and some methods can integrate the work to a certain degree. Still, learning to produce movements and learning to produce sounds are necessarily different. Few experts will be equally skilled and experienced in analysing and teaching both expressions. It seems unrealistic and unnecessary to discard all experts specialising in mainly one of them. Even many of the practitioners specialise in only one of the expressions. That is very different from experts who do not understand or are interested in more than one of the expressions. Of course, in most cases, it is a significant advantage to study and teach dance and music in parallel. Their unity is apparent when we approach them as a social phenomenon.

A culturally constructed relationship

How are they still a unity despite these differences that split dance as movement and music as sound? Is it laid down in our genes to react to certain kinds of organised sound with certain kinds of movement? Do we wish to add specific sounds to certain kinds of movement patterns as an all-human reflex? These are questions far beyond my competence. However, my empirical studies have repeatedly shown me that the relationship between dance and music is culturally constructed (Bakka, 2023). That means the laws of nature do not keep that dance and music together. Dancers and musicians, from my social dance experience, share the primary motivation to experience movement and sound melt together. They get an ultimate satisfaction from their interaction. Still, there are hardly any limits to how this interaction can function or be created.

In our time of fusion, media often present a dancer and a musician from totally different genres performing together (Yuxia, 2012, pp. 4–26). It is often seen as a sensation, but it is not that challenging. Since the relationship between dance and music is culturally constructed, most dancers can adapt their dance skills and patterns to any music. I have witnessed such work, tried it myself, and it is easy to find examples, for instance, on YouTube. Most musicians can adapt their playing to any kind of movement. More precisely, most dancers can use their basic patterns and movement

skills to move in whatever way comes to their minds, but they cannot go far beyond their knowledge and skills. Let us say that a tango dancer and a ballet dancer, with high skills in each their genre and not in the other's genre, are set free to do whatever they like. I claim they could not take over each other's dancing or develop an improvisation; they do the same way. We cannot do in a skilled way what we do not know and have not learned. Even contemporary dancers, claiming they have the freedom to move as they wish, will be stuck inside their movement competence. The difference is that some practitioners find it more exciting and satisfactory to remain inside their dance's defined frames and conventional patterns. In contrast, others are convinced that it is more advanced to break frames and patterns.

If any dancer is asked to dance a dance far away from their practical dance skills, they will, of course, fall short. Contemporary dancers want to avoid defined patterns and often claim that there are no borders for their practice. There seems to be a credo that the instant, immediate expression has particular artistic value. This tends to devalue "premade" dance forms that rely on frames. I think these ideas need to be confronted with the understanding that dancing is a skill that needs to be learned and rehearsed. There is no way to learn dancing in general, more than there is a way of learning to speak in general; you depend on choosing between French or Turkish or between Kathak, Tango or some contemporary technique. Music and dance have an enormous heritage of works made by famous artists. Traditional music and dance are also developed, selected and used with striking stability over centuries, setting millions of bodies moving. Promoting the immediate artistic expression as having a higher value than pieces of dance or music, such as Bharatanatyam or the music of Mozart developed and selected through long-term and advanced processes, is a problematic ideological attitude.

Returning to dance and music as a unit, the relationship between its two parts can also result from long-term development, selection and adaptation, parallel with the previous discussion. The resulting choreo-musical pattern becomes at the same time stable and flexible. I will claim that the meeting of dancers and musicians in the realising of a particular dance is every time the recreation of the choreo-musical relationship on which the

unity is built. In most cases, the allowed degree of adjustment is so narrow that it creates strong attention and effort for perfection and total harmony. I often feel that this dance cannot be done to any other music; they have combined into a perfection that only experts with highly specialised but acquired tastes can appreciate, but they are not given by nature. My conclusion to this discussion is that there is an equal need for analytic terms uniting dance and music, and terms keeping them apart. This does not mean that experts should use analytic terms to overturn the understanding and conceptualisation of dance practitioners, both understandings are needed, and in this article, I argue for giving priority to the Indigenous ones.

Navigating between native language and English

As a developer of terminology for Norwegian folk dance, I encountered the question of how to transfer these terms to English, and I will give my reflections as examples of different principal attitudes to terminology building. Some terms are easily translatable, such as *eintaktssnuing* (one-measure-turning). As a developer, I have defined it as a turning that takes one measure of music. Turning I defined as the turning of a couple around its own axis. It is part of terminology for the Round dances, the nineteenth-century couple dances such as waltz and polka. Terminologically I wanted to have the term *snuing* in the meaning of an ongoing process, of which I do not focus on beginning or end. Then I also want to identify a unit of turning in detail from beginning to end. Having coined what I intend to be a translation into English of a Norwegian term, I often get into discussions with the proofreaders for my articles. “Why do you not use rotation or turn instead of turning?” they would ask, and I would answer that turning is much closer to the Norwegian point of departure. The Norwegian parallel, *rotasjon*, gives other connotations. I meet the question whether I should consider the situatedness of the word in English or Norwegian as most important. I meet proofreaders with a task assigned, from publishing houses to streamlining academic language into a British one that wears no marks of the linguistic point of departure of the phenomenon represented. I met another similar issue when I wrote about Norwegian community

houses. Norway is full of stand-alone houses that the local population, as individual members, as members of organisations, or simply through the municipality built for people to meet. One usual name for them is *samfunnsbus* – community house. Since Britain does not have them or does not conceptualise them like that, the proofreader was quite concerned: could she permit me to use a word next to unknown in English? I finally was allowed to use the term with an explanatory footnote. My point here is to ask if the development of academic English is and should be fully in the hands of the international publishing houses and their policies. We find well-established surveys of spoken English dialects established in many countries worldwide. However, it is unclear to me if more than two written versions, British and US, are used in academic publications. Would even the academic world benefit from English writing norms open to the use of words expressions usual in English dialects of the countries from which authors write? ⁴ Can English be a language used by the whole world's population of academic writers and still remain under a kind of jurisdiction and management of the British and Americans only?

When I in my terminological work came to a name for the vertical movements in locomotion, I could not find any adequate translation in English and decided to stay with the Norwegian term *svikt* (Bakka & Mæland, 2020). Labanotators proposed bounce, but have defined it as a mass word, understood as a quality of movement and not as one or more bounces.⁵ At that time, it was not a purely pragmatic choice to take *svikt*. The concept was already used for vertical movements in dance and is already very close to my terminological need and is well established in Norwegian dance terminology. The interrelations between the words used in vernacular language and terminology give additional exciting connotations. In afterthought, I see it as a part of an agenda I would like to promote: why do researchers not pick up words from any language when it fits a terminological need that English does not cover well?

4. I am, of course, aware that many countries have local variants of English. The Microsoft proofreader offers English (Australia), English (Belize), English (Canada), English (Caribbean) and more.
5. A mass noun names things that, when used in English, are usually not counted, dancing, bouncing, pliancy,

The Ngoma principle of teaching music

Thirty years ago, the Norwegian musicologist Jon-Roar Bjørkvold had written works on learning and interaction among children in preschool. He came up with very enthusiastic agendas about revising the work with music in Norwegian schools. Some field visits to Africa gave him the idea to adopt a Swahili term for dance and music into Norwegian and English as part of his agendas. A reviewer characterises Bjørkvold's work as follows:

In his book *The Muse Within*, which discusses the universal ideas of music and culture from birth to ageing, the Norwegian Jon-Roar Bjørkvold emphasises the point of the Kiswahili word *Ngoma*. He describes it as the musical idea that best fits the way all children naturally learn music. Whether right or not, the Kiswahili word should at least apply to Swahili culture. The word itself means drum but describes a musical practice, which always includes several musical expressions simultaneously, such as drumming, singing and dancing. In addition, it also reflects a social dimension of making music together or music as a social happening (Mans, 2006, p. 66; Bjørkvold, 1992).

Many educationalists received Bjørkvold and his radical vision of music education for children to include dance enthusiastically. He was not the first to borrow the term *Ngoma* into European languages, but earlier, it seems to have been used for African music, including dance (*Ngoma* [Journal] 1980; Tracey, 1948). Bjørkvold proposes it as an educational concept that integrates music and dance, in general, and not only for Africans. As far as I know, other researchers in our field have not taken it up as a general term for dance and music. The Kenyan-Norwegian journalist Sadique Nadamwe explains that *Ngoma* means drum in Swahili but also describes the usual kind of social event that integrates music and dance. The Kenyan journalist Makoye Shigela also supports the idea's feasibility: "Your thoughts about the use of *Ngoma* in the wider context are correct because, as you pointed out, this term denotes the experience of singing, shaking body, drumming, etc. *Ngoma* in [...] Swahili [...] means drum, but in the wider context, it entails the entire experience" (Shigela 2021). In my experience, words do not have to mean exclusively one thing to be applicable as terms,

and many words may come from just one aspect of a larger concept, such as the drum here. Nadamwe also mentioned that the act of dancing—that is, moving with music—in Swahili could be referred to as *katika*, coming from ideas of breaking loose and erupting into movement. I do not have a supported opinion about how this word is generally situated in Swahili. Is it considered to belong to a too informal register to function terminologically, or could it work as a translation of the English word dance? (Nadamwe 2021)

There are undoubtedly linguistic issues with the ideas, and *Ngoma* and *katika* may not be the most appropriate terms for the purpose, but I find it a principally exciting possibility.

Words and epistemology

I repeat the questions I want to raise: 1) Are there benefits of enriching or broadening terminologies by borrowing words from any language, and which may those be? I have suggested it can raise the esteem of even low-status languages and enrich high-status languages with new perspectives on the crucial role of conceptualisation. 2) Is an increased awareness of how different languages keep phenomena together or split them up with their words and concepts helpful, and in which ways? Finally, does the etymology of concepts matter epistemologically? The German term *Wissenschaft* (standard translation science) is rooted in the word *wit* (mental capacity, wise is a trace in English). The English term science has roots in words about splitting or distinguishing. Is this one of the reasons for the uneasy relationship between the two terms?⁶

Conclusion

This article has examined how the rise of a world language and parallel hegemonic languages influences researchers' use of words as tools. How do researchers in ethnochoreology, anthropology of dance and broader disci-

6. Many of us have had translation trouble because the term science tends to exclude humanistic disciplines, and the German term *Wissenschaft*, as well as derived Nordic versions, tend to include them.

plines relate to and deal with words, labels and terminology when crossing language borders? I have compared two contrasting views on language change. One is that changes are unavoidable and cannot be influenced by humans, mainly referring to the changes in language structure. The other is more about the changing relationships between languages and sees them largely as resulting from a power play and as a legacy of colonialism. Still, hegemonic languages, particularly English, are marginalising and even replacing smaller ones. I claim that all languages are valuable. They are original tools for describing our world, each of them offering different perspectives. For researchers a follow-up question is whether we, from our position, can contribute, even if modestly, to strengthen their position and status. I propose that we can contribute by paying attention to words from other languages and scrutinising the way they stand for a specific structure of meanings. In this way, we attribute value to them, but we also improve the research consistency and stringency when we investigate how similar phenomena are labelled in different cultures. Finally, with a flair of applied research, I suggest we search for words and terms that we can borrow or learn from when making essential distinctions or showing connections between phenomena. This tool for epistemology can lift linguistic competence and diversity and give more critical attitudes to the strong linguistic neo-colonialism we witness.

References

- Akombo, D. (2016). *The unity of music and dance in world cultures*. McFarland.
- Allan, K. (2020). *Dynamics of Language Changes*. Springer.
- Bakka, E. (2015). Safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage – the spirit and the letter of the law. *Musikk Og Tradisjon*, 29, 135–169.
- Bakka, E. (2023). Dance and Music in Interplay: Types of Choreo-Musical Relationships in Norwegian Heritage. In A. Ahmedaja (Ed.), *Diverging Ontologies in Music for Dancing European Voices V* (pp. 29–50). Böhlau Verlag. <https://doi.org/10.7767/9783205217657>
- Bakka, Egil, Mæland, Siri. (2020). The Manipulation of Body Weight for

- Locomotion – Labanotation and the Svikt Analysis. In D. Pál-Kovács, & V. Szőnyi (Eds.), *THE MYSTERY OF MOVEMENT Studies in Honor of János Fügedi* (). L'Harmattan.
- Bjørkqvold, J. (1992). *The muse within: creativity and communication, song and play from childhood through maturity*. HarperCollins.
- Bloom, B.S. (1956). Taxonomy of. *Educational Objectives*,
- Clark-Decès, I. (2011). *A Companion to the Anthropology of India*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Cummins, J., & Davison, C. (2007). *International handbook of English language teaching*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Damsholt, I. (2018a). Identifying Choreomusical Research. *Music-Dance: Sound and Motion in Contemporary Discourse*, 19–34.
- Damsholt, I. (2018b). *Viden om dans : en grundbog*. Multivers.
- Dawson, W.R. (1998). *Extensions to Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. Putney Pub.
- Durkin, P. (2014). *Borrowed words: A history of loanwords in English*. Oxford University Press.
- Foley, C.E. (2012). Ethnochoreology as a mediating perspective in Irish dance studies. *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua*, 16(2), 143–154.
- Foley, C.E. (2021) E-mail to Egil Bakka
- Fraleigh, S.H. (1987). *Dance and the lived body: A descriptive aesthetics*. University of Pittsburgh Pre.
- Godal, J. (2004). Kunnskapen utanfor bøkene. *Dag Og Tid*
- Gore, G. (2001). Present texts, past voices: The formation of contemporary representations of West African dances. *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 33
- Gwerevende, S. (2020). *Venda Cultural Expressions: Towards an Inclusive Analysis of Tshigombela as the Performative Enactment of Ubuntu* (Master thesis NTNU)
- Hannah, J.L. (1987). *To dance is human: A theory of nonverbal communication*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hilpert, M., Östman, J., Mertzlufft, C., Riessler, M., & Duke, J. (2015). *New trends in Nordic and general linguistics*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG.

- Hodgins, P. (1992). *Relationships between score and choreography in twentieth-century dance: Music, movement, and metaphor*. Edwin Mellen Press.
- Hood, M.M., & Hutchinson, S. (2020). Beyond the Binary of Choreo-musicology. *The World of Music*, 9(2), 69–88.
- Kassing, G., & Jay, D.M. (2003). *Dance teaching methods and curriculum design*. Human Kinetics.
- Kamwangamalu, N.M. (2016). *Language policy and economics: The language question in Africa*. Springer.
- Krathwohl, D.R. (2002). A revision of Bloom's taxonomy: An overview. *Theory into Practice*, 41(4), 212–218.
- Nadamwe, S, (2021) Zoom-talk with Egil Bakka 13. November.
- Man, M. (2006). *Centering on African practice in musical arts education*. African Minds.
- McCutchen, B.P. (2006). *Teaching dance as art in education*. Human Kinetics.
- Ngoma. [Journal]. (1980). *Ngoma*.
- Nielsen, Charlotte Svendler.,Burridge, Stephanie. (2015). *Dance education around the world : perspectives on dance, young, people and change*. Routledge.
- Rosenhouse, J., & Kowner, R. (2008a). *Globally speaking: motives for adopting English vocabulary in other languages*. Multilingual Matters.
- Rosenhouse, J., & Kowner, R. (2008b). The Hegemony of English and Determinants of Borrowing from Its Vocabulary. In J. Rosenhouse, & R. Kowner (Eds.), *Globally speaking: motives for adopting English vocabulary in other languages* (pp. 4–19). Multilingual Matters.
- Sánchez, M. T. (2009). *The problems of literary translation: A study of the theory and practice of translation from English into Spanish*. Peter Lang.
- Shigela, M. (2021) E-mail to Egil Bakka on 14 November
- Tollefson, quoted in Cummins & Davidson, 2007, p. X
- Tracey, H. (1948). *Ngoma. An introduction to Music for Southern Africans*. Longmans, Green.
- Winch, C. (2022). *Educational Explanations: Philosophy in Empirical Educational Research*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Yuxia, J. (2012). *Hip-hop dancers meet their match in the form of classical music*. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/706870.shtml>

Zsiga, E.C., Boyer, O.T., & Kramer, R. (2014). Introduction: Layers of Language-Some Bad News and Some Good News on Multilingualism, Language Policy, and Education in Africa. *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics*, 1–11.