Taking stock of a discourse: An integrative content analysis of musical structures and cultural stereotypes in top-10 German *Schlager* songs from 2009 to 2019

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Abstract

German Schlager's simple and static musical form is considered by many authors as an immutable key factor in the genre's overall success. However, the introduction of break routines and pop drops to the genre seem to refute this point of view. Cultural references and musical clichés are also integral parts of Schlager's staging. This paper presents an integrative content analysis of 548 songs from 2009 to 2019 with the aim of observing trends in musical form and the use of both cultural references and musical clichés in contemporary Schlager. Overall, the corpus shows more variability than expected, featuring a growing number of structural parts. Contrary to strong claims, the genre is undergoing a change in musical structure. However, whether this also applies to the reproduction of certain stereotypes in song lyrics remains to be seen: about a quarter of the songs contain cultural references, outnumbering musical clichés by a factor of three.

Introduction

German *Schlager* music represents a large proportion of one of the biggest music markets in the world, yet the genre has received little (and mostly negative) attention in musicology and other disciplines (e.g. Behne 1982; Brednich 1974; Reisloh 2011; von Schoenebeck 1994). This academic ostracism can be traced back to Theodor W. Adorno, who introduced the term 'culture industry' with reference to Schlager and its international counterparts, defining it as a simple, standardised and thus highly marketable type of music (Adorno 1968, p. 48). Accordingly, later authors such as Gotho von Irmer (1977, p. 7) referred to the genre in mainly negative terms: 'Schlager – in contrast to other types of music – makes no intellectual

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demands on the listener. Good and functional songs contain a short-phased, catchy (banal) melody, a brisk and enervating (but not predominant) rhythm, an unobtrusive (romanticising) sound background, and illusionary or amusing lyrics (with a dash of frivolity). [...] Schlager songs are a short-lived musical snack intended for quick consumption, which one can indulge in as a pastime without harm – but not all the time!' A less dismissive and more scientific definition can be found in the *Handbook of Popular Music* by Wicke *et al.* (2007, p. 647). Here, the genre is described on the one hand as being based on a modular principle of constants ('strict verse–refrain scheme, simple cadence harmony, formulaic melodies and topics that can be found mainly in everyday life') and on the other hand as variable elements, i.e. elements of popular music genres ('jazz, Latin American music, rock and, of course, pop'). Several authors have pointed out that German Schlager has failed to develop a sound of its own. Nathaus (2017), for example, states that the genre has instead adapted to current media usage habits and contemporary musical tastes.

Authors from various disciplines point to a severely limited range of topics and a distinctly conservative view in the content of the songs. For instance, the literary scholar Jens Reisloh (2011, p. 86) distinguishes Schlager from other genres of German-language popular music (*Neues Deutsches Lied* [New German Song], NDL) using primarily negative criteria. Referring to Schlager lyrics, he describes the treatment of predominantly 'middle-class/bourgeois' themes, a restriction to exclusively heterosexual relationships and an escapist entertainment function. The sociologist Christoph Marek describes the central contents of the genre as love, home, utopian worlds, holiday destinations and leisure activities, e.g. partying on the weekend (Marek 2006, p. 53).

However, since the turn of the millennium, a number of critical voices have spoken against a general rejection of the genre in musicology. For instance, the German linguist Dessislava Stoeva-Holm opposes the 'judgmental and elitist attitude' towards Schlager, and argues that 'a factual argumentation is needed in the analysis of lyrics, which is not guided by considerations about Schlager as a qualitatively inferior product' (Stoeva-Holm 2005, p. 33). This wish for more in-depth studies of genres previously branded as inferior is echoed by music psychologists and popular music researchers alike (e.g. Lehmann and Kopiez 2013; von Appen 2012).

The current study aims to investigate the validity of some of the criticisms of the genre via an integrative content and corpus analysis. A team of three coders analysed the structural parts within a corpus of Schlager songs released between 2009 and 2019, aiming to account for the structural variability of the genre and to quantify the extent to which the genre is open to or oriented towards current developments in international popular music.

Structural characteristics of the genre

Several authors have pointed out that one of the main criteria for the success of Schlager music lies in the 'catchiness' of the songs (e.g. Mendívil 2008, p. 138), which is mainly attributable to simple melodies and repetitive structures. Schlager has adapted musical trends, mostly in terms of the arrangement, from many genres of international popular music, including, for example, elements of rock 'n' roll in the 1950s and elements of beat and disco music later on. These German

adaptations pursued a more 'moderate' and 'romantic' style than was usual in the international versions (Mezger 1975). Hornberger (2014) agrees that German-language popular music is closely connected with the stylistic developments of British and US music, which is 'imported and imitated, but also integrated and appropriated' (p. 172), and adds that this appropriation, in turn, is often perceived as 'bastardisation, flattening, and expropriation, especially when it is successful'.

Mezger (1975) emphasises that in Schlager, the lyrics and music are particularly strongly coordinated, so that each musical note coincides with a text syllable – melismas are rarely found. According to Mezger, author of one of the first large-scale analyses of the genre and its market, this correspondence implies that the stanzaic structure of the lyrics coincides with the main musical parts, leading to strong (and repetitive) formal conventions. Mezger identifies two basic schemes composed of the chorus (R) and verse (V): the main scheme V_1; R; V_2; R (. . .), which he calls the more original form, and a newer form in which the same sequence is preceded by another chorus. The author expresses that these patterns are unlikely to change, apart from 'a tendency toward a more refined internal division' (p. 262). Thirty years later, Wicke *et al*. (2007) again refer to the persistence of this basic verse–refrain scheme as a foundation of the genre's overall success. However, opposing voices describe a greater potential for development. In his extensive ethnomusicological work on Schlager, Mendívil (2008, p. 124) agrees that the genre has little innovative potential of its own. However, more recent compositions differ fundamentally from the Schlager of the 1950s, and this diversification seems to have accompanied the differentiation of popular music into countless subgenres. Accordingly, the author contradicts those voices that emphasise the immutability of musical forms in Schlager and argues for understanding it less as a genre and more as a discourse. Hornberger (2014) agrees that in a global market, cultural goods may be circulated globally, and this circulation cannot be without consequences. New listening modes have emerged owing to the ubiquitous accessibility of musical streaming services that allow every listener to design their own playlists according to their motives. Owing to the success of music streaming in recent years, huge amounts of user data can be analysed and linked to intramusical data for the first time (i.e. Al-Beitawi *et al*. 2020). For instance, recent research has shown that skipping behaviour (i.e. 'the act of interrupting a song in order to listen to the next song in the music queue') often coincides with changes in musical structure (Montecchio *et al*. 2020). Others have observed that altered usage patterns have led to structural changes in pop songs. In this context, Hogan (2017) states that 'catchy bits come early and at a quick clip'. It seems obvious that such developments will lead to further changes in the composition and production of musical works.

The current study aims to discover whether structural changes in international pop music are also spreading within Schlager music, which has long been known for its formal simplicity and immutability. In the following, therefore, two forms of structural parts are presented that have become established in international pop music in recent years.

The so-called *break routine* is a common import from electronic dance music (EDM) that evolved from the shorter *break*. Wicke *et al*. (2007) define the latter as a 'soloistic overplaying or fill-in of deliberately omitted bars (often also omitted by the rhythm section) at the end of a chorus or at the transition to the chorus; i.e. interruptions of a musical sequence' (Wicke *et al*. 2007, p. 114). Break routines imply a more complex play with listener expectations through dynamic changes in the

intensity of the instrumentation. In most cases, the intention is to increase the dynamics of the piece through three successive phases: *breakdown*, *build-up* and *drop* (Solberg and Jensenius 2019, p. 114). Solberg and Jensenius characterise the breakdown as a phase of reduction in which dynamics, texture and structure are reduced to a minimum of musical elements while rhythmic parts are often completely withdrawn. During the build-up phase, these previously removed tracks are added back so that the arrangement is gradually rebuilt. With the drop as a last step, the intensity of the arrangement reaches its climax: here, the rhythm section is abruptly reintroduced, often supplemented by additional instruments. This sequence of thinning and condensing the track seems to be particularly attractive and adds to the 'danceability' of a song. Psychophysiological measurements in an experimental study by Solberg and Dibben suggest that the abrupt increase in energy during the drop can raise the level of activation in listeners, which can be measured by stronger physical activity during dancing (Solberg and Dibben 2019).

Inspired by these strongly dynamic design elements of EDM, a new form of structural part developed around the mid-2010s and quickly spread in airplay charts. Within a few months, the pop drop could be heard in many successful pop songs of the time and was proclaimed 'Sound of the Year 2016' by *Billboard* magazine (Harding 2016). Major German-language media also picked up on the phenomenon (Iten 2017; Plodroch 2016). The pop drop is a particularly energetic passage that marks a second emotional climax within a piece besides the chorus. Formally a kind of second chorus or pre-chorus, it is usually based on the harmonics of another structural part of the piece, often containing strongly processed elements, such as instrumental solos and vocal fragments. The musical material is thus repeated and varied in a highly dynamic way, while the drop itself is usually repeated throughout the musical piece. The music journalist Dominique Marcel Iten (2017) describes the pop drop as '[that] moment before which there is still a brief pause, only to trigger a "hands up in the air" feeling with an ecstatic electronic highlight melody and fragmented word phrases from the chorus. It's also the most danceable part of the song with the most driving beat'. An early track featuring the phenomenon is the song 'Lean On' by Major Lazer and DJ Snake feat. MØ (Grigahcine *et al.* 2015). Many prominent artists such as David Guetta and Kygo quickly followed suit by incorporating similar structural parts in the following months.

It is clear that the picture of German Schlager drawn by different authors is quite ambivalent. On the one hand, it is described as conservative in terms of musical form; on the other hand, there are signs of great responsiveness to musical trends. In the present study, therefore, changes in musical structure are quantified. Accordingly, the first exploratory research question is: to what extent are current structural changes in international pop music also adopted in German Schlager?

Depictions of 'the Other' in Schlager lyrics

The second research question deals with another topic that has been passionately discussed. Schlager has been criticised for the inclusion of frequent cultural references that are supposed to give songs a 'foreign feel' (e.g. Schmitz-Gropengießer 2012, p. 242). These references apply to both the content level and the use of musical clichés, such as traditional musical instruments, rhythms and other intra-musical parameters. Accordingly, the present analysis accounts for these borrowings from

various musical traditions as well as for references to foreign languages, countries and cultures. These frequent stylistic elements are rooted in the genre's historical genesis. The term 'Schlager' first appeared in the last third of the 19th century as a label for particularly successful songs, literally translating to 'hit song'. Only later did this attribution develop into a distinct designation of a musical genre (Becker 2013). Before World War I, records of particularly successful pieces from operettas were distributed by the mass media for the first time in Germany; this is considered to be the genre's seedbed, both musically and content-wise. Many of these musical stage plays were set in foreign countries that were out of reach for the audience and thus set a thematic focus on *Sehnsucht* (yearning) and *Wanderlust*. In an early qualitative analysis of Schlager lyrics, Malamud (1964) describes an accumulation of lyrics dealing with the motif of a generalised 'South': 'Even if Schlager lyrics do not always specify a particular place, however, the south is by far the preferred direction. Following the lyrics, it implies ideas of radiant days, mild, starry nights, balmy winds, heavy fragrances, lush vegetation and eternal spring, of gentle "brown girls" on heavenly South Sea islands in a deep blue ocean' (p. 69).

Dessislava Stoeva-Holm's (2005) qualitative linguistic analysis, spanning nearly 600 Schlager lyrics from the 1970s to the turn of the millennium, points to the temporal persistence of this thematic clustering of lyrics referring to 'distant lands'. On a more general level, the author notes that Schlager songs work with strong symbol packages that can be composed of references to emotions, key or stimulus words, metaphors and phrasemes. Stoeva-Holm concludes that the associations created in this way should generate relevance for as many recipients as possible, as they can also be read as emotionally effective clichés, creating exotic theme worlds associated with vacations. However, the songs did not refer only to distant or even illusionary places like Hawaii or Adano. As certain destinations became increasingly available to the masses, they were also increasingly thematised in Schlager (Mezger 1975, p. 187). After World War II, with the growing attainability of concrete holiday destinations such as neighbouring Italy, local references in Schlager lyrics also became more concrete.

Frauke Schmitz-Gropengießer (2012) makes a similar point in an analysis of Schlager songs referencing an idealised version of France and the French ('Schlager à la Française'). The author distinguishes French chanson from German Schlager by emphasising the difference in the extent to which the two genres address the recipients' dreams. According to the author, the main topic of Schlager, love, is staged in much longed-for vacation destinations such as Italy and Greece. Maude Williams (2020) describes another function of such references. She explains that the success of French artists during the 1960s had (re-)created an image of France, and especially its capital Paris, as a 'place of popular culture par excellence' (p. 88) in Germany, and that these connotations could easily be evoked by integrating French vocabulary. Specific gender stereotypes attributed to both sexes proved to be another implicit success factor for artists in this context: while French women were depicted as seductive, sexy and fashion-savvy, French men were portrayed as charming seducers. By connecting these strong images with the protagonists, and by adopting certain characteristics of the supposedly more sophisticated chanson, Schlager music was in a sense up-valued from within. Similar developments have been observed for other genres, although to a lesser extent. Kaspar (2020), for example, refers to the Germans' longing for Italy in an analysis of *Italo disco* and confirms the staging of an idealised image of the country that Janz and Sala (2011) had described as a

'cathartic means of liberation from the dreariness of everyday life'. Accordingly, the construction of what Kaspar calls 'Italianity' [Italianität] is about creating an 'image of Italy in the mind', which is fed both by the assumption of a specifically hedonistic and sensualised conception of music and a 'sympathetic hedonism allegedly anchored in the DNA of "the Italian", the *dolce far niente*' (p. 68, as stated by Sala and Wöhrle 2011).

As Mendívil (2008) notes, such foreign references are not only cliché-laden representations of 'the Other' – they also convey a lot about the genre's recipients' views of themselves as Germans. With regard to the song 'Ein Indiojunge aus Peru' ['An Indio Boy from Peru'] by artist Katja Ebstein, Mendívil writes, 'what seemed to be a stereotype-laden, superficial, even racist song about a caricatured Peruvian Indio at first glance, turned out to me as a subtle ode to the German bourgeois way of life and showed an exact correspondence between lyrics and music: a mournful, supposedly Andean minor melody for as long as the verses recount the protagonist's miserable life, and a glamorous major melody depicting the superiority of the gentle and cosy, yet convincing German way of life' (p. 19). The author reports similarly contrasting narrative patterns in relation to other nationalities, including Mexicans, Russians, Spaniards, Greeks and Italians. Interestingly, he learned from performer Katja Ebstein that the 'charango' supposedly heard in the piece is actually a mandolin. Regarding this kind of use of musical cliché (or, as Mendívil puts it, *musical poetics*), composer Enjott Schneider (2005) writes, albeit with reference to film music, 'The same applies to ethnic instruments as to historic instruments: It is not a matter of reconstructing an exact geographical sound image, but of integrating archaic timbres into one's own color palette' (p. 205). This appropriation of global music practices has been subject to criticism in popular music research and ethnomusicology alike (Hemming 2016), and a corresponding criticism of Schlager resonates in many publications on the genre. However, this discourse should be conducted in a differentiated manner and at the level of individual compositions. Therefore, it will not be discussed further at this point.

Aims and research questions

As noted above, research literature on Schlager is not only scarce but also contains contradictory statements about the (allegedly missing) development of the genre's musical structure. Quantitative empirical studies that address individual characteristics of this much-listened-to music are even less common.

The current study combined lyrical content and intra-musical coding categories, uniting aspects of musical corpus and quantitative content analysis. Based on a total of 548 top-10 Schlager song lyrics, and with respect to the literature summarised in the background section, the analysis aimed to provide insights into the distribution of structural parts in contemporary Schlager songs. It also quantified the prevalence of national and international cover versions to provide information about compositional influences from other genres, especially international pop.

RQ_1 To what extent have structural changes been introduced within German Schlager music?
H_1 There has been little development in the number of different structural parts in Schlager songs over the observed time period.
H_2 The prevalence of individual structural parts has changed with corresponding musical trends in international pop music.
H_3 The number of cover versions of national and international songs remains unchanged.

The second main aim of the current study was to examine the persistence of different kinds of cultural stereotypes within the corpus. Therefore, the second research question (RQ$_2$), operationalised by four hypotheses, builds on the widely agreed-upon findings from various disciplines. The use of cultural clichés to create a somewhat exotic impression is well documented in the literature and can be illustrated with plenty of examples.

Both simple mentions and stereotypical descriptions of foreign countries and cultures were quantified within the study corpus to account for their overall distribution. Musical clichés, as conveyed by certain instruments, rhythms, etc. were also coded. In addition, instances of individual foreign language vocabulary were counted. Although, of course, single words do not necessarily imply cultural stereotypes, they are, as Stoeva-Holm (2005) states, capable of arousing strong associations in listeners.

H$_4$ does not necessarily include English vocabulary, as colloquial German includes many loanwords from English that have become part of everyday and professional vocabulary alike.

RQ$_2$ In which ways and to what extent are foreign cultures, languages, and places referenced in German Schlager?

H$_4$ Foreign language vocabulary mostly reflects Germans' favourite holiday destinations.

H$_5$ There is a high prevalence of cultural clichés in Schlager songs.

H$_6$ Musical clichés (*musical poetics* imitating non-German musical traditions) are highly prevalent in the corpus.

H$_7$ Geographic references mostly reflect Germans' favourite holiday destinations.

Materials and methods

The current study is not a computer-based content analysis; three trained coders coded the data and counted the categories. It is based on the principle of media content analysis, which Berelson (1952, p. 18) defined as a means for the 'objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication'. Here, complexity in a body of texts is reduced by identifying underlying patterns and by showing existing tendencies in the ways topics are treated (Rössler 2017). Quantifying content characteristics inevitably requires interpretation by the researchers during every stage of the analysis and is, therefore, always somewhat subjective. In defining *integrative content analysis*, Früh (2017, p. 40) writes: 'Every observation or identification of a textual feature in terms of content is initially a "qualitative" act of analysis. Subsequent acts of quantification do not cancel out this character'. Following this line of reasoning, the present study is understood as an integrative content analysis in Früh's sense. In this method, not all content of the texts is analysed, but only those references relevant to the research topic. Accordingly, the category system is defined by the research questions of the investigator: in a first step, the members of the coding team identify specific text passages that represent the meaning of content categories in a predefined part of the corpus (in our case, $n = 20$ songs). Through mutual feedback between the coders, the categories are differentiated and consolidated during a training phase. This serves to increase inter-rater reliability during the subsequent main coding which is carried out by all coders separately. In this phase, all text passages that correspond to the content categories are coded and quantified – guided by the inventory of reference examples created in the training phase. The aggregated data of all coders are then analysed and interpreted by the investigator.

Data

The analysis was based on $N = 548$ Schlager songs, taken from the *DJ Top 100 National* (Berufsverband Diskjockey e.V. 2020). This German language music-only hit list is neither a sales nor an airplay chart list. Rather, it is compiled by the approximately 1000 members of the *Berufsverband Diskjockey* (BVD), a professional association of disc jockeys in Germany. On a weekly basis, the members of the BVD carry out a subjective ranking of a preselected list of contemporary compositions, mostly Schlager songs. A song is included in the hit list when it is proposed by at least three members independently. It is then offered to the remaining members for assessment. Hence, the ratings are compiled partly by the BVD and partly by the members. According to the initiators of the DJ Top 100, this creates a hit list that is independent of the previous week's ratings (M. Winkler, personal communication, 20 August 2020). The underlying data have been collected and published since 2009. They can be viewed and downloaded from https://www.djtop100.de/charts/current/national.

For the corpus of the present study, the 10 highest-ranked songs per week were selected for each week of the 2009–2019 period. The combined list was then adjusted for multiple entries. In a further step, cover versions (i.e. songs with identical lyrics) were excluded. This also applied to so-called 'hit mixes', medleys of different pieces of music from one or more artists. Many of the lyrics analysed in this study were transcribed by the coding team.

Content categories

Four content categories were then created for different types of cultural references: (1) *Romantic*, (2) *Sexual/erotic*, (3) *Holiday-related* and (4) *Solitary words*.

As described in the literature review, cultural references in Schlager often appear in the context of romantic relationships. An example of such a composition is the song 'Champs-Elysées' by the band Wolkenfrei (Bossi *et al*. 2014): 'Champs-Élysées/Und die Zeit, sie blieb stehen/So verliebt in die Liebe/An den Ufern der Seine/Je ne regrette rien.' [Champs-Elysées/And time stood still/So in love with love itself/On the banks of the Seine/Je ne regrette rien.]

As corresponding connections with erotic or sexual content also occur frequently, there were many overlaps between the first two categories, which were taken into account by multiple coding. A sexual reference was coded when a physical interaction was implied, e.g. in the song 'Baila mi amor' by artist Norman Langen (Wittgruber and Scholz 2018) 'Ein Kuss und die Erde vibriert/Zum Rhythmus, der in uns pulsiert/Und du sagst "Baila mi amor"/Und ich tanze wie niemals zuvor.' [One kiss and the ground vibrates/To the rhythm pulsating within us/And you say 'Baila mi amor'/And I am dancing like never before.]

Holiday-related references were coded if a vacation in another country was implied; for instance, in the song 'Ticket nach Hawaii', performed by artist G.G. Anderson (Schreiber *et al*. 2019) 'Ich hab ein Ticket nach Hawaii, ein gold'nes Ticket für uns zwei/für den schneeweißen Strand und ein Blumenband in deinem Haar.' [I've got a ticket to Hawaii, a golden ticket for the two of us/For the snow white beach and a wreath of flowers in your hair.]

The last category was introduced because in many cases, single expressions are seemingly used without context, presumably to add a certain 'exotic touch' to the lyrics; for example, in the song 'Amore mio', performed by Grazia and Jay (Pertl *et al*.

2017): 'Oh, amore mio, ich will stark sein/Amore mio, stark für dich/Uns wird nichts mehr trennen/Amore mio, ich will Dein sein/Für ein Leben lang, für immer, sempre tu.' ['Oh, amore mio, I want to be strong/Amore mio, strong for you/Nothing is going to separate us/Amore mio, I want to be yours/For a lifetime, forever, sempre tu.']

Musical structures

To capture changes in the frequencies of the basic structural parts, (5) *verses* and (6) *choruses* were first counted for each song. In accordance with the hypotheses, (7) *break routines* and (8) *pop drops* or similar structures were also coded. To familiarise the coders with these forms, they were presented with detailed descriptions as well as several audio samples.

Examples of break routines can be found in the pieces 'Hier und sofort' ['Here and Now'] (Schöler et al. 2010), performed by Marcus Luca and 'Die geheimen Träumer' ['Secret Dreamers'] (Baumann et al. 2019) by Andrea Berg. The coders were informed that break routines could either consist of individual sections or occur over the time course of one or more structural parts.

As Mendívil (2008, p. 124) points out, Schlager has always incorporated developments in international pop music, while retaining its distinct 'light music' core. Thus, new sonic and structural developments have been processed in a distinct way in the genre. When forms like the pop drop are adopted from EDM, for example, they are most likely to be heard in Schlager in a toned-down form. Both Nico Gemba's 'Goldene Zeiten' (Weßling and Rötgens 2017) and Axel Fischer's 'Norderney' (Marquardt 2019) are good examples of this phenomenon. 'Norderney', a cover version of the eponymous song by the duo Pures Glück (Marquardt 2015), is particularly well suited as an illustration, as it demonstrates how production-specific trends are processed within the genre. While no pop drop can be heard in the original production, the arrangement underwent an 'acoustic facelift' in Fischer's version.

As was the case with all of the categories, the coders in this study received in-depth training on detecting and analysing such structural features. However, the experimenter finally checked all coding data sets for the application of the corresponding definitions to the related variables.

The same procedure was applied to the coding of musical clichés or *musical poetics*, respectively. Schmitz-Gropengießer (2012, p. 241) explains that in many 'Schlager à la française', metre changes from four–four to three–four time introduce a middle section performed by an accordion, reminiscent of the traditional *musette*. The author describes how the use of such elements, for example in the song 'Hinter den Kulissen von Paris' ['Behind the Scenes of Paris'] (Bruhn and Buschor 1969), sung by Mireille Mathieu, created a 'French packaging for German Schlager'. The use of such metre changes is an integral part of the genre, and 'French style' echoes only one variant. In the current corpus, an example of a recent concoction of this kind is 'Sommer in Paris' ['Summer in Paris'] (Brümmer and Gronau 2015), performed by Anna Maria Zimmermann. KLUBB3's 'Das Leben tanzt Sirtaki' ['Life is Dancing the Sirtaki'], written by Busse and Reitz (2017), appropriates Greek folkloristic dances, including a Bouzouki-like stringed instrument.

As Mendívil (2008) observes, the creative use of *musical poetics* in these productions does not necessarily require the original musical instruments of the 'cited' regions. Rather, the aim is the elicitation of a diffuse impression of *the Other* for the genre's listeners, hence the term 'musical cliché'. In addition to a limited number of

fixed, folkloristic colourings such as Italian, Spanish and Greek, there are also geographically and musically distant sources of inspiration specific to the arrangement and the melody. Often, the latter variants coincide with global (sports) events, such as the song 'Traum von Afrika' ['Dream of Africa'] by Axel Fischer (von dem Bottlenberg and von dem Bottlenberg 2010) during the soccer world cup in South Africa in 2010.

The soccer-themed cover version of a 'Schlager classic', 'Amsterdam' (von dem Bottlenberg and Minkow 1984), composed and performed by female duo Cora, opens with an 'African-inspired' women's choir and thunderous percussion. For all songs, the presence of musical clichés (9) was coded as a dichotomous variable.

Formal categories

Formal categories quantify manifest facts that do not require the coders' inference. As opposed to content categories, these categories can be measured, counted or transcribed directly (Rössler 2017). In the current analysis, formal categories included the compositions' character as (10) an original or cover version, for which the platform *hitparade.ch* served as a helpful source of information. References to specific places were entered by the coders as two free text variables representing both sites (11) and countries (12). The use of foreign vocabulary was coded by language (13) and additionally quantified by word count (14).

Coding procedure and reliability

Analogous to 'traditional' quantitative content analysis, integrative content analysis (ICA) begins with a deductive step from the research questions to the texts, in our case a set of 20 lyrics randomly selected from the overall corpus. Although the literature on Schlager presented above served as a basic direction for the research questions, the main categories were derived from the characteristics of the corpus materials, forming the hypotheses. Coding categories were then structured into subcategories and supplemented by data, such as coding variables 5, 6, 10 and 14.

To ensure a high degree of inter-coder reliability in the subsequent main coding phase, three coders were extensively trained during a pre-coding phase. Based on another 25 songs from the original corpus, the coding team was iteratively trained to consistently apply the definitions provided. Inter-coder reliability was then calculated following Holsti's (1969) method for all categories. Content-based and formal coding variables both yielded high degrees of reliability, with Holsti's intercoder reliability coefficients ranging between $r_H = 0.91$ and 0.97. For three of the categories, with $r_H = 0.91$ and 0.94, more specific information about the categorisation was provided to the coders for additional training.

During the subsequent main coding phase, no instructions were given to the coders to ensure independent categorisation. However, all of the coders received (1) a comprehensive code book featuring information on all categories, and (2) a set of lyrics, including all of the texts and artists, individually randomised for each coder to avoid implicit priming either by order or release date.

Data analysis strategy

Descriptive statistics for all formal and content categories were calculated in the first step. Subsequently, the data were analysed using single linear regression in the

statistical computing environment R (R Core Team 2021), as suggested by Früh (2017), enabling the identification of trends over time. Therefore, frequencies of occurrence were summed by year to form the predictors, and the year of chart entry served as the criterion in the statistical analyses. Owing to the sample's size (the overall corpus was limited to a 10 year period of chart entry), and to avoid a suggestive interpretation of the results, more sensitive change point analyses were not conducted.

Results

Musical structures in the corpus

For every song, the number of choruses and verses was quantified. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations over the time course.

The mean number of verses per song (mean, $M = 2.15$; standard deviation, $SD = 0.52$) did not vary substantially over the time course. As expected, the overall mean number of choruses per song was higher ($M = 3.4$; $SD = 0.9$) as a result of one or more repetitions towards the end of the songs. Over the observed period, there was a significant decrease in the number of choruses per song, beginning in 2016 ($\beta = -0.186$, $p < 0.001$). It seems likely that these 'missing choruses' were substituted by other formal structures in the corpus.

Overall, 61.5 per cent of the songs analysed contained rhythmic structures that were interpreted as break routines, while the number of these structures increased linearly from 19.3 per cent in 2009 to 71 per cent in 2019. Figure 1 shows a clear trend in the inclusion of break routines in Schlager compositions ($\beta = 0.866$, $p < 0.001$).

In addition, there was an increasing trend in the prevalence of pop-drop type structures. When they appeared for the first time in 2016, they were present in 8.33 per cent of the analysed pieces. The proportion remained steady at 14–15 per cent over the next three years, and then rose to 32.26 per cent of the pieces in 2019. Considering the late starting point of this development, and the abrupt increase in the last year of the analysed data, it was not appropriate to perform a regression, which would in any case have violated the premises of the procedure.

Table 1. Verses and choruses per song over the study period.

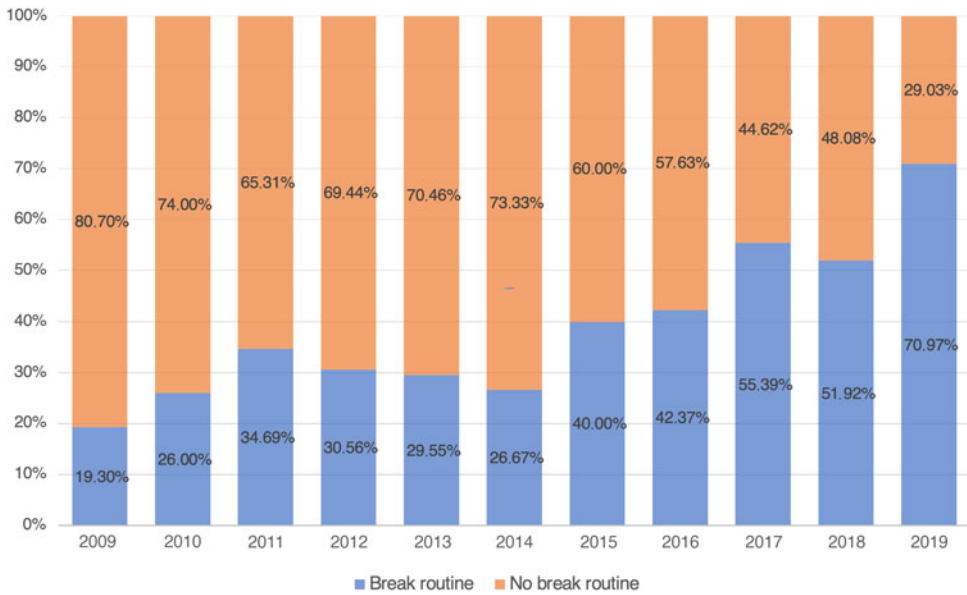| Year of entry	Number of songs	Verses per song		Choruses per song	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
2009	57	2.11	0.49	3.54	1.02
2010	50	2.24	0.56	3.71	1
2011	49	2.29	0.8	3.55	1.06
2012	36	2.11	0.32	3.42	0.69
2013	44	2.18	0.58	3.47	0.67
2014	45	2.09	0.63	3.51	0.94
2015	60	2.1	0.35	3.5	1.03
2016	59	2.14	0.35	3.22	0.77
2017	65	2.14	0.43	3.23	0.86
2018	52	2.17	0.65	3.2	0.89
2019	31	2.1	0.3	2.97	0.41
Total	548	2.15	0.52	3.4	0.9

Figure 1. Distribution of break routines.

According to these results, the first hypothesis was rejected (H_1 ✗), while the second hypothesis was verified (H_2 ✓). In the corpus, there were several developments in the number and composition of different structural parts. Both break routines and pop-drop structures were increasingly incorporated into the materials over time (Figure 2).

Of the 548 pieces included in this analysis, 427 (77.92 per cent) were original compositions, while 79 (14.42 per cent) were cover versions of German language songs and 42 were cover versions (7.66 per cent) of international hits. In 2009, a third of the songs were cover versions, but their share had halved by 2019. Figure 3 depicts what can be interpreted as a clear trend towards original compositions. Regression analyses for both categories (German/'national', $\beta = -0.150$, $p < 0.001$; international, $\beta = 0.125$, $p = 0.002$) confirmed this trend. Therefore, the third hypothesis was rejected (H_3 ✗).

Cultural references and clichés in the corpus

As stated above, there is a long tradition of including cultural references in German Schlager lyrics (Schmitz-Gropengießer 2012). In many songs, these references may just be single words. In some cases, however, entire structural parts are written and performed in foreign languages. The analysis in this section examines the proportions of different languages and the ways in which they are used in the lyrics.

The traditional use of foreign language vocabulary was reflected in our corpus, in which 42.34 per cent of the texts included such references. As English loanwords have greatly influenced German spoken (and sung) language in recent decades, it is not surprising that English vocabulary accounted for the largest proportion (32.48 per cent) of foreign language use in the corpus, followed by French (3.47 per cent), Italian (2.56 per cent), Spanish (2.19 per cent) and Portuguese (0.37 per cent).
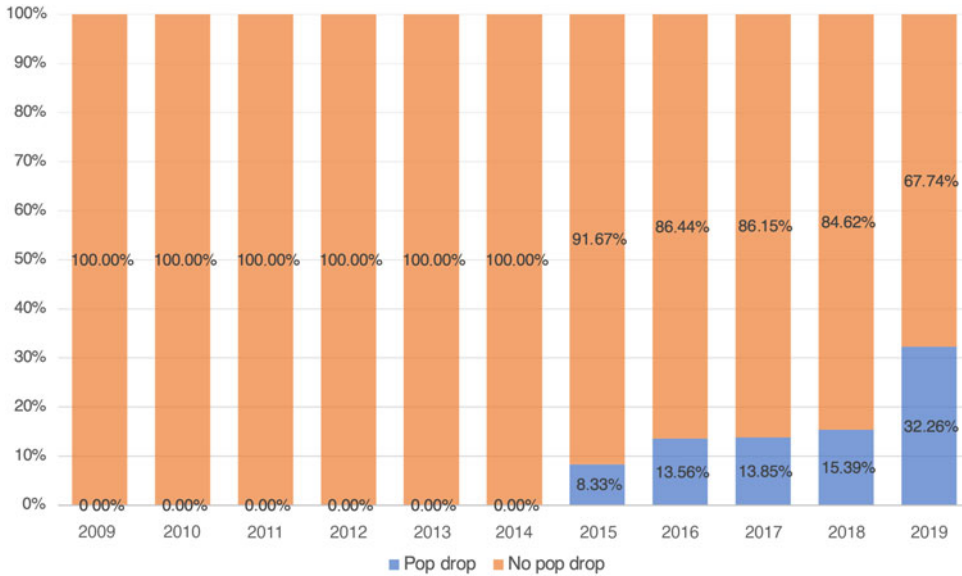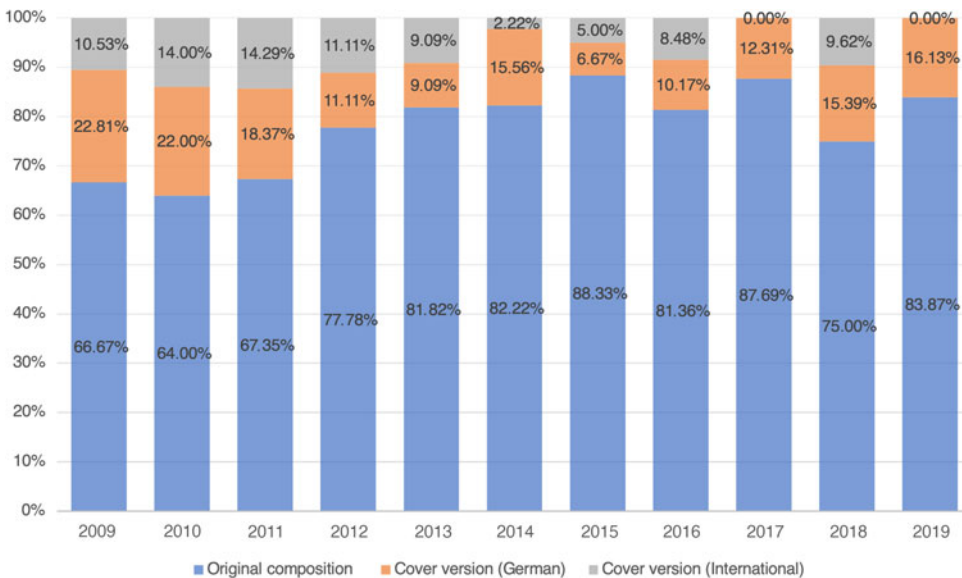
Figure 2. Distribution of pop drops.

Figure 3. Distributions of national and international cover versions.

Other languages, summed under an additional category (*Other*), made up 1.28 per cent of foreign language references. According to these results, the fourth hypothesis was accepted (H$_4$ ✓). The occurrence of foreign language references over time is depicted in Figure 4. Although the figure appears to show a trend towards the inclusion of more loanwords and greater foreign language vocabulary, regression models for both the overall and individual language categories failed to reach significance.
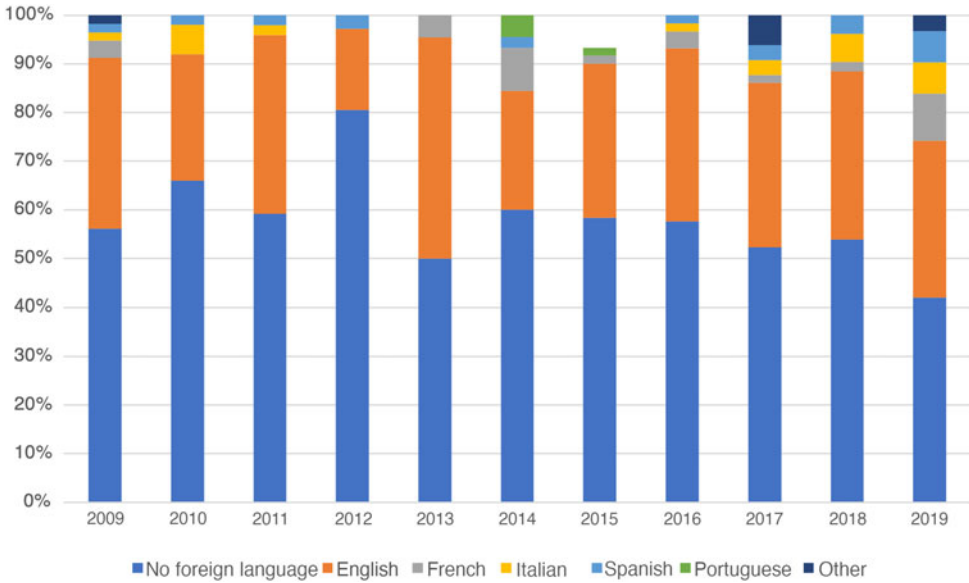
Figure 4. Foreign language use in the sample.

As stated, cultural references were coded using four categories, namely *sexual*, *romantic* and *holiday-related* references, and the use of *solitary words* that were not related to the content of the lyrics. One hundred and fifty-two of the songs in the corpus (27.74 per cent) contained at least one of these cultural references (see Figure 5). Accordingly, and in line with the literature in the field, the fifth hypothesis was accepted (H$_5$ ✓).
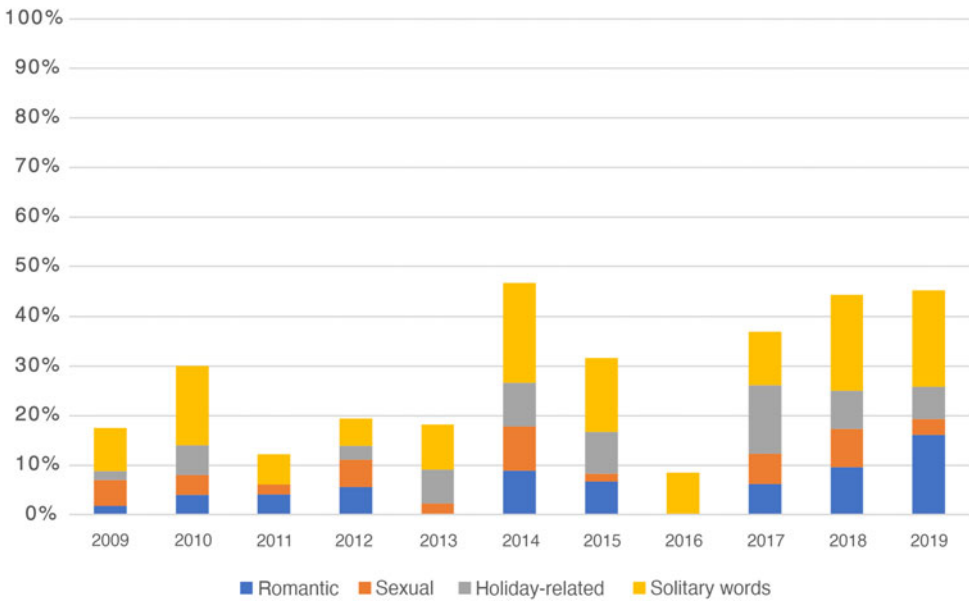

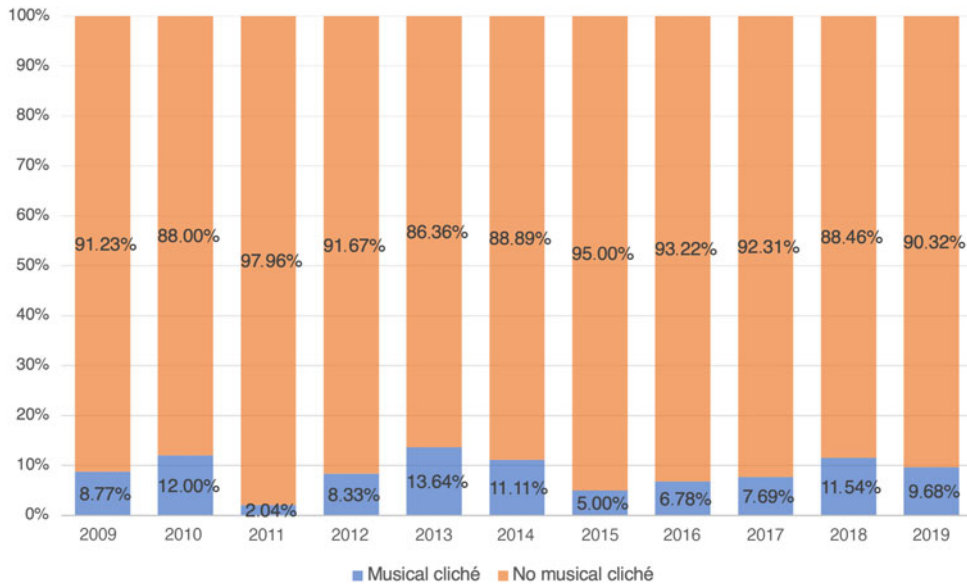*Figure 5. Distribution of cultural clichés over time.*

Figure 6. Shares of songs including musical clichés per year.

The majority of cultural references were *solitary words* (12.41 per cent) and *holiday-related* terms (5.48 per cent), closely followed by *romantic* (5.29 per cent) and *sexual stereotypes* (4.2 per cent). Figure 5 shows the distribution of these cultural stereotypes over time. Although the shares of sexual/erotic references and solitary words remained stable throughout the observed time period, there were strong positive trends for romantic references ($\beta = 1.41$, $p = 0.018$) and holiday-related references ($\beta = 1.21$, $p = 0.032$).

Musical clichés were found in 8.78 per cent of the corpus, with little variation throughout the years observed. A regression analysis did not yield a significant trend (Figure 6).

Table 2. Places and countries mentioned in the corpus.

Austria	Stubaital, Vienna (2×)
Brazil	Copacabana, Rio (4×)
France	Côte d'Azur, Paris (11×)
Germany	Bergheim, Berlin (7×), Cologne (3×), Flensburg, Garmisch, Hamburg (3×), Leipzig, Mechernich, Meißen, Munich (2×), Norderney, Sylt
Italy	Milan, Pisa, Venice (2×), Rome (2×), Palermo
Spain	Ibiza (2×), Mallorca (8×)
Tanzania	Kilimanjaro, Zanzibar
USA	Alaska (2×), Hawaii (3×), Houston, Miami (2×), New York (3×), San Francisco
	Africa (3×), Argentina, Australia, Bahamas, Dubai, China (Shanghai), Costa Rica, Greece (Athens), Japan (Tokio), Marocco (Casablanca), Mexico (3×), Monaco, Netherlands (Amsterdam), Portugal (Lisbon), Russia (Moscow), Scotland (Aberdeen), Singapore, South Africa (Cape of Good Hope), South America,
Other	Thailand, Turkey (Istanbul)

Note. The category *other* sums up references to countries with no specific places referred to, as well as individual references to spots, regions and continents.

Figure 7. Map of geographic references in the corpus.

As geographical references were coded as a free text variable, only descriptive results are reported for this part of the analysis. Table 2 lists the places and countries referenced in the songs, which broadly reflect the geographic distribution of foreign language vocabulary use.

Geographic references included 29 individual countries, states, and continents, with 43 specific cities and sites. Multiple references to Paris (11), Mallorca (8) and Berlin (7) again pointed to preferred holiday destinations. To visualise the distribution of these locations, an interactive map was created using uMap (FOSSGIS e.V. 2021), based on the open source map database OpenStreetMap (OpenStreetMap contributors 2017). The map can be accessed at https://umap. osm.ch/de/map/schlager-orte_3885#2/21.6/-70.7, and a screenshot is provided in Figure 7.

The locations mentioned seem to be widely scattered across the globe. However, there is a high concentration of destinations in Germany and surrounding countries. It seems likely that these locations were mentioned because they are holiday destinations within reach for many listeners, thus conveying a *realistic* escapist scenario. Therefore, the seventh hypothesis was accepted (H$_7$ ✓).

Discussion

On the one hand, stereotypes and clichés regarding foreign cultures and musical traditions are widely reproduced in German Schlager. On the other hand, beliefs about the genre have been cultivated by researchers over decades, often reflecting a dismissive attitude towards popular music that has been deemed unworthy of scholarly study in general.

Along with others, Mezger (1975) and Wicke *et al.* (2007) emphasise that Schlager is a particularly conservative genre in terms of musical form and lyrical content. In this context, the alleged immutability of the sequence of structural parts

has also been repeatedly referred to. Accordingly, the first research question of the current study asked to what extent these structures have been subject to change from 2009 to 2019. In line with the majority of the literature in the field, it was hypothesised that there had been little development in the number of different structural parts in the corpus. However, over the observed period, there was a significant decrease in the number of choruses, starting in 2016. This initial change coincided with the introduction of pop-drop structures and intensified as this new form spread throughout the genre. There was also a strong trend towards embedding break routines into the songs. While break routines are generally independent of the underlying structural parts, the growth of pop-drop structures seems to contradict the idea that the form of Schlager songs is set in stone. However, both elements have been implemented in a way that is distinctive for the genre. In contrast to international pop songs, melodic fragments in Schlager pop drops consisted neither of complex structures nor overly abstract vocal fragments. Rather, single words were repeated and varied melodically. However, there was a trend towards a more dynamic development of the sonic materials over the time course, in line with Nathaus's (2017) observation that the genre has adapted to current media usage habits and contemporary musical tastes. This surely cannot be at the expense of the small overall number of verses carrying most of the narrative in a song. Future analyses could examine the use of low-level psychoacoustic features to further quantify the observed dynamic changes.

Although Schlager's persistence in terms of content and form has long been considered a key factor in its success, the adaptation observed in this analysis may have been long overdue in terms of attracting a younger target audience, and considering today's digital channels for distribution. Mendívil's argument in favour of viewing Schlager as a discourse rather than a clearly defined musical genre provides an excellent frame for and explanation of these observations. At this point, it should be mentioned again that the main aim of quantitative content analysis is to reduce the complexity of a corpus by categorising sections of the raw material. This inevitably entails generalisations and simplifications. Future qualitative studies could help differentiate and update the stagnant discourse on what is Schlager and what it is not.

An unexpected finding concerned the prevalence of cover versions. Over the period investigated, the number of both international and national cover versions decreased by half. A closer look at the remaining share of German cover versions revealed that in many instances, the original artists had re-recorded and modernised older hits. Cover versions by artists other than the original interpreters were rare. As stated before, new artists have stepped onto the scene in the past decade, broadening and rejuvenating the genre's target group. Future content analyses could examine whether and how new musical and thematic impulses in the discourse have led to changes in the repertoire.

The second research question aimed at quantifying the extent to which foreign cultures, languages, and places were referenced in the corpus, in the sense of the lyrical subject looking outward, at *the Other*. More than a quarter of the songs in the corpus referred to actual *places and journeys*. Accordingly, the proportion of foreign language vocabulary was also high.

This use of foreign references does not necessarily reflect the audience's degree of openness towards foreign cultures. Rather, the Other serves as a projection screen for listeners' desires and fantasies, as pointed out by Malamud (1964). The high proportion of songs containing foreign vocabulary with no reference to the content of the lyrics confirmed this impression. Specific spots in Spain, France and Italy were

among the most common places of action in Schlager lyrics. References to non-European countries were rare.

However, there are two findings of interest concerning the 'geography of *Schlager* lyrics' and the seventh hypothesis. While the majority of references to *places and journeys* concerned 'prototypical' holiday destinations such as Mallorca or Ibiza, other places were primarily mentioned when they were in the public eye. In these songs in particular, cultural clichés were often used for the staging of an otherwise well-known topic. References to specific stereotypes concerning other countries and cultures were frequently used, accounting for more than a quarter of the songs in the corpus. Contrary to the fifth hypothesis, and in line with the results concerning foreign language use, cultural clichés did not decrease over time. Rather, these references reproduced a stable number of symbol packages emphasising romantic, erotic, and holiday-related content (see also Schmitz-Gropengießer 2012; Williams 2020). This is also reflected upon by Mendívil (2008, p. 121), who argues that engagement with the 'repertoire of culturally acquired images' is a prerequisite for the study of Schlager. The author refers to the use of linguistic clichés as a secondary semiological system that focuses on the figurative sense of the word rather than the literal meaning. When a *rose* is mentioned in a song, the meaning is not related to the actual flower, but to what it represents in the discourse: love, passion and so on. From this perspective, the use of cultural clichés can be interpreted both as a powerful means of eliciting internationality and as a form of emotional framing for repetitive content patterns.

Musical clichés were not represented in the corpus to the expected extent. However, they were found in about 8 per cent of all song lyrics. In accordance with the geographical references, folkloristic elements with a 'Spanish or French feel', such as acoustic guitar and accordion, were among the most common musical clichés. As observed for local references in the context of major (sports) events, there were also musical references to non-European musical traditions, although these were mostly unrelated to the musical traditions they cited. However, musical clichés do not necessarily have to be connected to the content; in this corpus, many songs that contained them did not make concrete references to other countries and cultures. Rather, musical poetics function as independent symbol packages. The music makers clearly do not intend to convey an authentic image of another musical tradition. They seem to aim at the much-cited listeners' needs for escapism and mood regulation. In order to answer these questions about the content's reception, further studies could go beyond the scope of this content analysis, e.g. following the *uses-and-gratifications* approach.

Of interest in this context is Mendívil's observation that the Schlager discourse 'does not stubbornly and radically reject the new' (Mendívil 2008, p. 261). Rather, he argues, it implies a process of legitimation in which innovations are presented in such a way that they pass as ordinary and familiar, following a law of compensation whereby disruptive factors are made compatible to the discourse. It is not surprising, therefore, that the pop drop and break routine were quickly adapted by the genre: they do not influence how the content is dealt with, but they do add a new element that does not interfere with common patterns. Although these structural elements will possibly disappear from Schlager songs in the long run, it is likely that cultural and musical clichés will persist, as they have served as successful vehicles for the staging of relevant topics for decades. However, this, too, is a hypothesis that could be tested by extending the present study.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the author upon reasonable request.

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