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Translation, creativity and cognition

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17.1 Introduction

17.1.1 Why does creativity matter in Translation Studies?

Creativity is the pivotal term in the title of this chapter, and it is explored from a cognitive perspective here. According to conventional wisdom, someone who writes creatively produces texts that did not exist before; translators, however, are bound to source texts and have to be in some sense faithful to them. In Translation Studies this widespread notion has traditionally been reflected in terms such as equivalence, adequacy and invariance (e.g. Koller, 1979/2011; Neubert, 2004).

Nevertheless, for quite some time it has been popular in Translation Studies, as in many areas of life, to use the term creativity as an attractive phrase suggesting prestige. But this does not mean that one has come to grips with what creativity really means. In the old tradition of faithful translation, it was not felt that there was such a need.

It was Christiane Nord (1989), who opened the door to more freedom when she suggested replacing “faithfulness” with “loyalty”. Loyalty, as seen within a functionalist paradigm, notably the skopos theory of Hans J. Vermeer (see Nord, 1997, pp. 123–128; Vermeer, 1989), takes account of the fact that the translator has a double responsibility: to the partners on the source-text side and also to the partners on the target-text side. The translator, when taking account of the partners on the target-text side, will quite often find it suitable to produce shifts, that is, use words that are not literal reproductions of the source text but new expressions, which, as will be seen, can be called creative solutions. Skopos theory can indeed be seen as the overall framework for creative translation.

Creative translation has become an important topic in Translation Studies in recent years. In times when translation memories and machine translation play an ever-increasing role in the translation business, and in times when the “digital revolution” is causing a disruption of traditional business models in many professions, it is important to point out those qualities of translation services that only human translators are able to deliver.

17.1.2 Translational creativity research in a nutshell

Whereas the psychological discipline of creativity research saw its birth in 1950, creativity in translation research was discussed predominantly within the literal-versus-free debate until the
1990s. According to Wilss, the reason was that translational creativity could “neither be clearly conceptualized, nor measured, nor weighted nor described precisely” (Wilss, 1988, p. 111, our translation). The first empirical study seems to be Wilde’s (1994) type/token analysis. It investigated the relation between Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) elements and creative elements in promotional/advertising texts and found that even LSP-specific syntactic structures can work as creative elements (Wilde, 1994, p. 25). Also in the 1990s, Kußmaul ventured to undertake a large-scale series of investigations into translational creativity. His work was based on observation and empirical data from the translation classroom and demonstrates the value of cognitive and psychological insights for translation research, translation practice and translator training (Kußmaul, 1991, 1993, 1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2000d, 2005, 2007).

Even today, much of the research appears to be limited to the perception that creativity in translation is what goes beyond any literal rendition and is studied in the context of literary translation (e.g. several articles in Cercel et al., 2017; Mariaule, 2017). Other research into translational creativity has been of limited scope. Studies were carried out frequently with regard to specific text types, e.g. promotional texts (Jettmarová, 1998; Quillard, 1998, 2001), technical texts (Byrne, 2006; Durieux, 1991; Schmitt, 2005), legal texts (Nida, 1998; Pommer, 2006; Šarčević, 2000), religious texts (Nida, 1998; Nord, 2005), audiovisual translation (Chaume Varela, 1998; Fontcuberta i Gel, 1997) and popular music (Kaindl, 2005). Other investigations have dealt with pedagogic aspects (Bastin, 2000, 2003; Forstner, 2005; Lee-Jahnke, 2005; Mackenzie, 1998). Dancette et al. (2007) developed criteria for translational creativity; Hubscher-Davidson (2005, 2006) and Hague (2009) place the focus of their research on the creative personality of translators. Thomä (2003) created a translation-specific creativity test and analysed the creativity of 30 students in their first or second semester of studies in English Language and Literature with that of 16 professional translators in her PhD thesis. Kenny (2001, 2006) and Laviosa (1998) compared the degree of creativity inherent in source texts and target texts and observed a trend towards less original and more conventional English target texts, which Stewart (2000) attributes to the use of corpora by translators. A conference in 2005 in Portsmouth (Kemble & O’Sullivan, 2006) brought practising translators, researchers and translation teachers together. In translation process research, Heiden (2005) carried out an investigation from a keylogging study. She found that most creative translations are first created in the main phase and that long revision phases are a strong indicator of creative translation processes. Fontanet (2005) conducted self-experiments with technical texts and found that the problem-solving processes use divergent thinking differently for comprehension problems and production problems. Audet (2008a, 2008b) reports on a framework for the analysis of translational creativity that was developed following the analysis of think-aloud data of translation processes. It resembles text-analytic approaches and allows qualitative creativity assessment. Other process-oriented studies were carried out by Kußmaul (2007); Hubscher-Davidson (2005, 2006); and Cho (2006).

The large number of studies on aspects of limited scope and conceptualization issues has paved the way for quantitative research. The focus of interest is now on large-scale empirical investigations that extend beyond sample text analyses and the discussion of conceptualization issues, e.g. research such as Adamczuk (2005) or the corpus linguistic studies by Kenny (2001, 2006); Laviosa (1998); and Stewart (2000). Studies using psycholinguistic methods such as key-logging or think-aloud were carried out by Kußmaul (2007); Fontanet (2005); Heiden (2005); Hubscher-Davidson (2005, 2006); Cho (2006); Audet and Dancette (2005); Dancette et al. (2007); and Audet (2008a, 2008b). On a cognitive level of analysis, Kußmaul (2000d, p. 31) introduced the concept of obligatory shifts (which also entails the existence of “optional shifts”) and developed his types of creative translation. The term shift has long been used in translation theory from the point of view of structural semantics (e.g. Catford, 1965), but Kußmaul’s typology of cognitive shifts was based on scenes-and-frames theory (Kußmaul, 2000b, 2000c; see
Bayer-Hohenwarter and Kußmaul

Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2009, p. 42, for a more detailed discussion). In contrast to shifts, literal translation is, according to Ballard (1997, p. 90), a sort of conscious or unconscious ideal of equivalence. Observations by Englund Dimitrova (2005) and empirical evidence by Zhong (2005) and Tirkkonen-Condit et al. (2008) also support this view. Here, all authors seem to adhere to the general consensus that “the literal translation reflex” is presumably a cognitive universal, but certainly not a universally valid, acceptable and accepted quality standard.

The study by Bastin and Betancourt (2005) was the first to measure creativity according to strict criteria and analyse the development of translational creativity. From 2008 onwards, a large-scale empirical study on translational creativity was carried out within the TransComp project (Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2012; Göpferich, 2009; Göpferich et al. 2008; Göpferich et al., 2011). In this context, a comprehensive framework and a sophisticated creativity assessment procedure (see e.g. Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2010, p. 98) were developed for the analysis of translational creativity. The creative performance of different translators, such as students in different semesters (first to sixth), was compared with that of professionals, and the development of their performance in time was traced. This study comprised an analysis of 652 source text (ST)–target text (TT) pairs from 163 experimental trials.

Regarding the results of substantial empirical studies on translational creativity, the following results seem to be based on sound evidence:

- **Divergent thinking**: It functions optimally with sufficiently developed evaluation competence (Bastin, 2003, p. 353; Kußmaul, 2000d, pp. 76–80).
- **Normalization**: Strong normalization trends in translations into English occur across various text types (Kenny, 2001, 2006; Laviosa, 1998; Stewart, 2000). The opposite trend was observed for translations of promotional texts into French (Quillard, 1998, 2001).
- **Metaphorization**: It is an important creative translation strategy (Adamczuk, 2005); ST metaphors in non-literary texts that are highly conventionalized are usually preserved by translators in the TT (Pisarska, 1989).
- **Learnability**: Translational creativity is competence dependent and thus potentially learnable and teachable (Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2012, p. 299).
- **Switch competence**: The more experienced translators are better able to switch more economically between a cognitively less demanding routine mode and a cognitively more demanding creativity mode (Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2012, p. 302); see also Section 17.2.4.
- **Routinized creativity**: The use of certain creative strategies has become routine for professional translators (Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2012, p. 235, Göpferich et al., 2011, p. 75).
- **Creativity in non-literary texts**: Creative cognitive processes are also useful in the translation of non-literary (instructive) texts (Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2011a, 2012, p. 314; Popescu & Cohen-Vida, 2015).

17.2 Core topics

17.2.1 The creative product

In creativity research, the creative product is defined as both new and appropriate to the task (see, for instance, the survey by Preiser, 1976, pp. 1–7). Accordingly, in Translation Studies, a creative translation is a translation that often involves changes (as a result of shifts) when compared with the source-text, thereby bringing in something that is new and also appropriate to the task that was set, i.e. to the translation assignment (or purpose). There seems to be agreement on this double quality of novelty and of appropriateness or adequacy. This is mentioned in
many studies, for instance in Kußmaul (2000d, *passim*), Siever (2010, p. 196), Bayer-Hohenwarter (2009, *passim*) (see also Section 17.2.4).

Changes are a matter of degree; there are small changes and big changes. Sometimes the translator can follow pre-existing linguistic patterns. For instance, Ballard quotes as an example of a creative translation *derrière Winston* for *behind Winston’s back* (1997, p. 93). The translation certainly involves a change, but it is a small one.

It is when there are no pre-existing patterns in the target language that a larger amount of creativity is involved. In the following example no shifts occur, but a new word is created. The quote is taken from August Wilhelm Schlegel’s German translation of the well-known lines from Hamlet’s monologue (act III, scene 1):

And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought

While preserving rhyme and metre (which was the task he set himself), Schlegel created a new word for *sicklied over* and wrote:

Der angebornen Farbe der Entschließung
Wird des Gedankens Blässe angekränkelt

*Shakespeare, Dramatische Werke, übersetzt von August Wilhelm Schlegel und Ludwig Tieck, Berlin: Lambert Schneider o. Jg.: 522*

"Angekränkelt" is a word that did not exist before. Grimm’s *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Erster Band, Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1854) quotes Schlegel as the source. He created it, and its meaning very precisely renders that of *sicklied over*. The fact that it is quoted by Grimm can be taken as a sign of its appropriateness (see Kußmaul, 2000d, pp. 30–31).

We quoted from literature, but creative translation is by no means restricted to literature. It can be observed in all kinds of texts; for instance, also in specific-purpose and in technical texts (Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2011a, 2012, pp. 53–54).

### 17.2.2 The creative process: The phase model

Many psychologists agree that the creative process can be divided into four phases: 1. preparation, 2. incubation, 3. illumination and 4. evaluation (for an overview see Preiser, 1976, pp. 42–49; Shorthouse & Maycroft, 2017, pp. 142–149). The four-phase model has, with some modifications, been taken over by translation researchers on creativity (e.g. Balacescu & Stefanink, 2006; Fontanet, 2005; Kußmaul, 1991, 2007).

The preparation phase focuses on the stage of comprehension of the source text, where text analysis and interpretation play a major part and where the function of the target text is being established. Moreover, in this phase problems are recognized, since problem solution is closely connected with creativity (see Kußmaul, 2000d, *passim*; Wilß, 1996, pp. 47–48). Comprehension itself can indeed be creative. Bayer-Hohenwarter presents an extensive list of researchers who share this opinion (Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2012, p. 115). She also noticed in her case studies that paraphrases, among other phenomena, can be a sign of “deeper” (and thus creative) understanding of a text passage (Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2012, pp. 115–117).

In the incubation phase, according to psychologists, thinking seems to be mainly associative and subconscious. According to Guilford (1975, p. 40), often set in motion by brainstorming, two kinds of thinking take place during this phase: “fluency of thinking”, i.e. producing a large
number of thoughts and ideas in a short space of time, and “divergent thinking”, i.e. not thinking along strict and logical lines but finding several possible solutions to a problem (cf. Shorthouse & Maycroft, 2017, pp. 157–159). Observing these thinking processes in translators has proved difficult. In think-aloud protocols and in programs used to record and study human reading and writing processes on a computer (such as Translog), mental activities are mostly reflected in pauses. If these pauses have been creative, then they are followed by suggestions for a translation. This means that, after all, we can only observe the final products but not the actual processes (Kußmaul, 1991, p. 94, 2000d, passim).

The illumination phase appears to be closely connected with evaluation (Kußmaul, 1991, 2000d, pp. 76–80). Therefore, these two phases are not treated separately here. Preiser (1976) in his survey draws attention to the fact that phases do not normally simply follow each other in a sequence, but there are moves backward and forward (see Shorthouse & Maycroft, 2017, p. 154); in other words, the phase model is a theoretical construct. For translation this can mean, for instance, that (normally) silent verbalizations of what is comprehended in the preparation phase may, in fact, represent a creative translation, and evaluating solutions during the incubation phase can prevent good ideas from getting lost (Kußmaul, 2000d, pp. 79–80). Nevertheless, the phase model can be regarded as a means to structure observation of the process.

17.2.3 Visualization

In his book The act of creation / Der göttliche Funke (1966), the author and journalist Arthur Koestler points out that creative thinking is predominantly visual thinking, which is a specific kind of imagination. He illustrates this by a number of reports about famous poets and scientists. For instance, he mentions a dream of the chemist August Kekulé about the Uroboros, in which he saw a snake that bit itself in its tail. This revealed to him the shape of the benzene ring (see Koestler, 1966, pp. 174–182).

In the field of translation, the interpretive theory developed by the “Paris School” has recommended visualization as a method to build sense (Seleskovitch, 1978, p. 55; Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1989, pp. 24–26).

In order to explain what goes on in the minds of translators when they are creative, Kußmaul (2000d) has made use of cognitive semantics, especially of scenes-and-frames semantics, as developed by Charles Fillmore (1977), and prototype semantics, with its notions of core and fuzzy edges as presented by Eleanor Rosch (1973). When comprehending a text, translators produce mental representations, and these representations lead to translations. It seems that especially by visualizing (imagining) a scene with core elements, translators have good chances of producing creative solutions (Kußmaul, 2005). For instance, students in one of Kußmaul’s classes were asked to translate the following text:

8 p.m. Off to dinner party. All the Smug Marrieds keep inviting me on Saturday nights now I am alone again, seating me opposite an increasingly horrifying selection of single men.  
Fielding, 1996, p. 212

The students were tape recorded while discussing the translation of “Smug Marrieds”. They explicitly visualized a scene, a cliché: “the people that are settled in their […] nice house with a garden, and then there is the dog, the cat”, which, obviously, they retrieved from their memory. The details of this scene, being part of a cliché, are thus core elements by definition; in other words, they are prototypical. The visualization of a scene with prototypical elements (in Fillmore’s sense) led to a translation. The students suggested: “der Club der ganz ekelhaft glücklich Verheirateten”
(the club of the disgustingly happily married ones), which for the final version was slightly modified into “der Club der ganz ekelhaft glücklichen Ehepaare” (the club of the disgustingly happy married couples). This translation can be called creative, since it contains words expressing a negative attitude not explicitly expressed in the source text but certainly implied. The phrase thus highlights the feelings of the narrator (see Kußmaul, 2005, pp. 388–389). Visualizations also play a central role in the case study we present towards the end of our chapter (see later).

Bayer-Hohenwarter (2012, p. 111) adopted the concept of visualization and extended it to include other forms of imagination such as acoustic, arithmetic, graphologic, kinaesthetic and process-related imagination. Agnetta and Cercel (2017) approach the issue of how comprehension takes place in a similar way by conceptualizing it as an “act of hearing”.

Martín de León (2017) took up Kußmaul’s concept of visualization and looked at the mental imaging patterns of five Spanish students when they translated English texts into Spanish. The participants were asked to report about the images that occurred to them while translating, and to a certain extent a correlation between their ability to imagine and the quality of their translations could be observed. Due to the small scale of the study, the findings cannot be generalized but may still be seen as indicative (Martín de León, 2017, p. 16).

### 17.2.4 Defining, measuring and evaluating creative translating

In psychology, creativity has been assumed to be an elusive concept that seems to defy precise definition and measurement because of its multicompositional nature. According to Wittgenstein’s idea of family resemblances (Wittgenstein, 1958; see Lakoff, 1987, p. 16), there are many concepts which cannot be defined by common properties with clear boundaries. Translational creativity is such a concept. Creative translation products and processes can be characterized by qualities such as rareness, outstanding quality, high cognitive effort, fluency or non-literalness, but none of these individual qualities are mandatory. Consequently, it is impossible to set up an exhaustive list of criteria that can reasonably be regarded as necessary and sufficient for a definition of translational creativity (cf. e.g. Amelang et al., 1981, p. 46). Two criteria, however, that any creative process or product must meet, as mentioned, are novelty and adequacy (e.g. Amabile, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Torrance, 1988). The factorial approach suggested by Guilford (1950) provides a very comprehensive framework. It comprises nine dimensions, or basic abilities, which are a prerequisite for creativity: novelty, fluency, flexibility, ability to synthesize, ability to analyse, ability to reorganize/redefine, complexity/span of ideational structure, and evaluation. Generally, it seems possible to attribute all manifestations of translational creativity, e.g. non-literality, generativity as measured by Krings’ variant factor (1988, 2001) or Kußmaul’s types of creative translation (2000a, 2000c), to one of these dimensions, whereby novelty, fluency and flexibility are commonly perceived as the prototypical creativity dimensions.

In Bayer-Hohenwarter (2012, p. 92), several criteria were devised to measure creativity quantitatively across different units of analysis (i.e. chunks of text) and across different experimental texts, regardless of their text type. This measurement was carried out on a product level and on a process level of analysis using think-aloud data and Translog data. In this study, translational novelty was defined as a manifestation of (1) exceptional performance that considerably exceeded translational routine, (2) uniqueness or rareness within the TransComp data corpus (= originality) and (3) a non-obligatory translational shift (cf. Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2012, pp. 108–109; Kußmaul, 2000d, pp. 23–24), not all of which aspects must be present. Flexibility was defined as the ability to transgress fixedness (e.g. literalness in translation) and fluency as the ability to produce a large number of translation variants and/or adequate translation solutions spontaneously or even automatically. Acceptability was defined as skopos adequacy.
profiles were described based on specific strengths and weaknesses in different areas of Guilford’s framework, e.g. high fluency but little evaluation competence or high flexibility but little fluency.

One particular aspect of flexibility was developed starting from Kußmaul’s types of creative translation (2000c) and the levels of categorization in the theory of basic-level primacy suggested by Brown (1958). With reference to this, it can be argued that target-text (TT) versions that belong to the same level of categorization as the corresponding source-text (ST) element can generally be considered “natural” and less creative than TT versions that belong to a different level of categorization. This explains why “literal” translations that are on the same level of categorization as the corresponding ST element are commonly (and reasonably) regarded as less creative than non-literal translations. Following this, the three basic creative procedures—abstraction, modification and concretization—were developed (Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2009, 2011b, 2012). This basic cognitive typology refers to “directions of thought” as in the tree structure used in terminology management, i.e. upward (searching for a more general way of expression), sideways (searching for a different way of expression) and downward (searching for a more specific way of expression) with reference to the ST element. These strategies are opposed to mere reproduction.

**Example:**

German ST: hund
TT abstraction: animal, mammal
TT concretization: poodle
TT modification: cur, puppy, lap dog, doggy
TT reproduction: dog

Abstraction refers to using TT solutions that are more vague, general or abstract TT as compared with the ST (“upward”). Concretization refers to the evoking of a more explicit, more detailed and more precise TT idea compared with the ST (“downward”). Modification includes strategies such as re-metaphorization or changes of perspective (“sideways”). Reproduction is a non-creative strategy involving the same cognitive level (not upward, downward or sideways). It is assumed that changes such as paraphrase, addition and deletion cannot be directly attributed to any one of these three procedures, because they refer to the linguistic form but are not necessarily cognitive concepts: An addition, for instance, means that a linguistic element has been added, but this can lead to a more abstract or a more precise idea in the TT according to Bayer-Hohenwarter’s cognitive strategies. The basic creative procedures suggested may therefore have very different manifestations at the form level. It is assumed that all translation products can reasonably be assigned to either abstraction, modification, concretization or reproduction and that all procedures except reproduction can be considered creative because they deviate from the initial level of categorization, i.e. the level represented in the ST.

In the large-scale empirical study on translational creativity carried out within the TransComp project (Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2012; Göpferich, 2009; Göpferich et al., 2011), creativity was conceptualized using a number of creativity indicators, including the above-mentioned procedures abstraction, modification and concretization. The creativity assessment relies on a scoring system in which acceptability and several indicators reflecting the dimensions of novelty, flexibility and fluency, as measured in the translation process and in the translation product, are rewarded by bonus points. The scores for process and product creativity are transformed to percentages and added up to form an overall creativity score (for details see Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2010, 2012). In the study of 652 ST-TT pairs from 163 experimental trials, no direct correlation was found between high creativity and high formal levels of competence. Instead, in line with the
notion of cognitive economy, the results were seen as an indication that the more experienced translators were able to switch more economically between a cognitively less demanding routine mode and a cognitively more demanding creativity mode (hence named “switch competence”). In line with this model of cognitive economy underlying translational creativity, the notion of “cognitive brake” was introduced (Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2012, pp. 306, 307). It was suggested that factors such as lack of concentration, lack of competence, fixation on irrelevant details, and laziness can prevent the activation of this cognitive brake.

On the basis of her experience with translations from English into German by non-native speakers of German, Hagemann suggested a principle for evaluating creativity in student translation tests that may also be applicable to translations into the mother tongue. She asked how far-reaching the positive effect of a creative translation was. She distinguished between two kinds of creative translation: 1) Translations that are just as adequate in the target context and culture and for a given translation assignment as the ST item and 2) translations that optimize the text (Hagemann, 2007, p. 108). Furthermore, she distinguished how far-reaching the optimizing creative translation was: a) It affected the text on a micro-level and two sentences succeeding each other, or b) it affected the text on a macro-level and thus more than two sentences (Hagemann, 2007, p. 108). A positive evaluation might be of considerable psychological value to students in a translation curriculum.

17.3 Some recent developments

As we have said, one of the main topics investigated within creative translating is creative shifts, i.e. what happens to the source text when it is translated. But some work has also been done on observing the comprehension process of the source text as a first stage of creative translating. Recently, Bayer-Hohenwarter (2017) has looked at comprehension problems in a real-life sample of translations from the point of view of complex analogical reasoning. She found that unsuccessful translations often result from a fixation on the surface structures of the source text instead of considering the source concept level and remaining open to various possibilities of interpretation. She advocates joint translations, in which both translator and reviewer should have the same language combinations, but one of them should have the language of the source text as his/her mother tongue. This would help minimize miscomprehension due to fixation.

Taking up the concept of switch competence and the notion of cognitive economy, Martínez-Martínez and Teich (2017) operationalize the notion of routine in terms of entropy and surprisal, both measured in terms of the probability of a target-text unit in a given context. The more routinized the translators’ behaviour, the lower the entropy and the lower the surprisal. They analysed 72 translations of 69 difficulty units in one source text. The professionals produced “translation spaces (i.e. target text solutions) with lower entropy than learners”, and the learners produced target-text solutions with more variation. Moreover, it turned out that professionals tend to produce preferred solutions with a lower surprisal than trainees and that professionals’ behaviour seems to be more consistent. The entropy of translation spaces appeared to be almost ten times higher for learners than for professionals. This seems to corroborate the assumption that the switch competence of professionals is more highly developed than that of learners, which allows them to work more economically.

Recently, a new term, “transcreation”, has been added to translation, first suggested by Nina Sattler-Hovdar (2016) and taken up by Michael Schreiber (2017). It seems to widen the concept of creative translation and is used to highlight processes that go beyond what is traditionally called translation. It takes account, for instance, of newly invented slogans in marketing texts.
(e.g. BMW: Freude am Fahren. English: The ultimate driving machine). In Translation Studies, this kind of activity has been covered by the terms “localization”, “rewriting” and “adaptation”. Moreover, it has long found its place within Vermeer’s (1989) *skopos* theory and Holz-Mänttäri’s (1984) theory of translatorial action. But it can be regarded as a useful marketing label, and if translation is seen from a business point of view, translators may well be able to increase their chances of receiving higher fees by using this label.

An even wider view is taken by Risku, Milošević, et al. (2017a) in an empirical study based on the concept of situated cognition. They show that creativity in the translation departments of organizations is not necessarily restricted to the actual translations but also takes place in the interactions between people, and they identify a number of factors that contribute to creativity in the translation workplace. In an exploratory empirical study, Risku, Pichler, et al. (2017b) investigate the expectations of regular clients of an Austrian translation agency regarding the translation of marketing materials, thus placing the focus of research on the client perspective.

### 17.3.1 Case study

The following case study is an example from a translator’s professional practice and may help to illustrate the relevance of a number of features of creative translating mentioned earlier and to understand current developments. The data is from a virtual social media platform for translators that was set up for professional exchange. An estimated number of several hundred members who rarely know each other in person, and frequently do not even register by their regular name but under an alias, use this platform for a variety of purposes. They discuss specific translation problems and general challenges of a translator’s everyday life, such as defaulting clients, inappropriate inquiries and prices. The inquiry discussed in the following was made on 19 August 2017 in German and is here translated into English:

I need to translate a somewhat delicate passage and simply don’t know what to do.

**Context:** A woman invited to an event would like a man to join her. The man usually wears jeans and T-shirts, but all of a sudden appears dressed in a suit. She is speechless and then explains to him that all women at the event will admire him because he is so handsome in this suit, because women like well-dressed men. And she says:

“...now you’re walking, talking suit porn.”

And later again: “... you’re suit porn in the flesh.”

Any ideas how to translate “suit porn” [into German]? I’ve been trying to figure out a good translation since yesterday, but no adequate solutions yet. Many thanks!

Within 30 hours, 20 persons had made 117 comments or interactions (some people only posted links) and made 55 target-text suggestions, some of which were the following:

Example 1: Purer Sex auf zwei Beinen.
Literal translation: Pure sex on two legs.

Example 2: Der Anzug ist der reine Schenkelöffner.
Literal translation: This suit is the perfect leg-opener.

Example 3: In dem Anzug schubst dich garantiert keine von der Bettkante.
Literal translation: In this suit no woman will push you away from the edge of the bed.

Example 4: Du bist ein wandelnder Porno in dem Anzug.
Literal translation: In this suit you are a walking porn film.
The challenge for the translator seems to have been to correctly judge which level of sexual connotation was appropriate for the translation of “suit porn” in the given context. The following observations are worth noticing:

1) The 23rd comment suggests that the target-text suggestions with strong sexual connotations could be far off the mark. It is argued that “suit porn” is a social media term corresponding to “food porn”, and that over the course of time a shift in meaning has taken place with the effect that the sexual connotation has lost importance or may even have disappeared altogether. According to Wikipedia, “food porn”:

   is a glamourized spectacular visual presentation of cooking or eating in advertisements, infomercials, blogs, cooking shows or other visual media, foods boasting a high fat and calorie content, exotic dishes that arouse a desire to eat or the glorification of food as a substitute for sex. Food porn often takes the form of food photography and styling that presents food provocatively, in a similar way to glamour photography or pornographic photography.

2) These comments were made by one male translator whose native tongue is probably (judging from his name and place of education) not German, and by a female translator whose mother tongue is clearly English. All translators who, judging by their names, are native speakers of German are mainly driven by primary associations and visualizations with a strong sexual connotation. The very few proponents of the theory that this sexual connotation might not necessarily be so prominent must vehemently defend their point of view. The female translator eventually does so by underlining that her mother tongue is English and that she is convinced of her judgement.

3) After 32 comments, the first source (Urban Dictionary) is cited. According to this, “talking suit porn” is an idiom with the following meaning:

   Graphs, charts, spreadsheets, and power-point presentations illustrating vague descriptions of corporate growth, fiscal decline, projected expenditures, etc. Typically, those involved in authoring such empty and meaningless propaganda claim six-figure salaries yet produce no tangible profits, capital, or services for their organization which offsets the aforementioned salary.

4) For a long time, no person leaving a comment or link to this thread sets out to discuss the wider context or type of publication where the text is going to be published. It is assumed that it is a widespread phenomenon that members of such groups tend to disclose as little context as possible to avoid possible competitors getting in touch with their clients. Only the 41st posting mentions for the first time that the translator has googled the corresponding passage to identify its source. Comment no. 70 finally includes a link to the source text.

5) A look at the publication from where the example is taken shows that it is a romantic novel and that “suit porn” appears three times in the same chapter on two subsequent pages. The sexual connotation seems to be intended, but starting out with a vague allusion, gradually building up to a clear statement.

6) The translations of “suit porn” suggested so far and the discussion on the social media platform clearly show that creative translating must find a balance between novelty and adequacy. The translation examples 1) to 4) were obviously inspired by visualizations triggered by the seemingly strong sexual connotations of the phrase “suit porn”. But were they adequate? What becomes clear in the discussion on the social media platform is that the phrase “suit porn” is lexicalized, and the meaning of “porn” has no sexual connotations any more. Nevertheless, in the context of the novel, the sexual connotations are, as it were, revived. The example thus very clearly shows two basic features of the comprehension process in general: Comprehension
is determined by (1) the role of the meaning as preserved in the lexicon, here in the *Urban Dictionary* and in the memory of the native speakers of English, and (2) by the role of the context, here the scene described earlier, where the man suddenly appears dressed in a suit.

The following target-text variants could be considered if, for the first vague allusion, a relatively unexcited, sober translation for “walking, talking suit porn” is needed corresponding to the model “food porn”:

- Das ist doch das reinste Kopfkino. (Literal: This makes women’s imaginations go wild.)
- Reißerischer Aufzug, reißerischer Anzug. (Literal: Lurid act, lurid suit.)
- Heiße Luft, heißes Outfit. (Literal: Hot air, hot outfit.)

### 17.3.2 Results

From the perspective of translational creativity, these examples from the collaborative working practice of translators are interesting for the following reasons:

1) **Visualization and other forms of imagination can be regarded as cognitive default patterns just like literalness and equivalence. In order to fulfil the criterion of acceptability/adequacy, which is commonly regarded as one of the necessary prerequisites for a truly creative translation, the translator must be able to use his or her “cognitive brake”. The examples given in this case study clearly show how dangerous it can be to make decisions solely on the grounds of the most flowery visualizations and linguistically and metaphorically most expressive primary associations. However tempting and creative primary associations may be, the focus must always consider the traditional parameters such as the translation task, context and medium, target group and text function.**

2) **Visualizations relying on frames and scenes may well take different forms depending on certain translators’ characteristics, such as their mother tongue. For source-text comprehension, the spontaneous imaginations of native speakers of the source text can generally be assumed to be more reliable than those of native speakers of the target language or other languages.**

3) **The interactions taking place on the virtual translator platform as described in this case study may serve as a model of collaboration as practised in a contemporary translator’s everyday life. It shows how translations can be the product of the cognitive resources of a large number of individuals with no commonalities except their profession and interest in a particular topic, which they voluntarily comment on. One might call this “Facebook brainstorming”.**

4) **Even if translations in collaborative settings are often the product of the cognitive resources of a large number of individuals, it is the translator who is the contractor paid for the specific project and bound to clients’ expectations. It is s/he who must take responsibility for selecting one of the many proposed target texts. The process of generating target-text suggestions may well be “outsourced”, but judging which is the most suitable solution and deciding on the final target text always remains the task of the person commissioned to undertake the translation, the person bound by economic, institutional and social factors.**

### 17.4 Concluding remarks

When we observe how the Internet, social media and the digital revolution influence the work of translators at present, we realize that they are bringing about vast changes. The Internet has long been used by translators to assist in finding translations with the lowest entropy and least
surprisal, and hence the “mainstream solutions” that are least likely to be disputed by colleagues, clients and technical tools alike: Just google different target-text solutions to find out which one has more hits. This can make translations acceptable, but sometimes it can make them rather flat. Social media translator platforms can be used as more refined tools for gathering different opinions on how well suited a particular target-text solution is in a given context and for a particular target group. The case study has shown how creativity can even be “outsourced” and how crowd intelligence can speed up the translation process. For research, social media platforms can possibly be used as sources of empirical data in future studies.

The digital revolution that is under way is likely to affect all trades and professions, from factory workers to doctors and lawyers. What production robots, autonomous vehicles, surgery robots, tele-medicine and legal technology are for these professions (e.g. Brünjes, 2016), Google translate, post-editing of machine translation, and translation vendor platforms are for the translation business.

In the context of these recent developments, creative translators seem to be those who understand (1) where high-quality human translation is needed, (2) how it can best be achieved, and (3) how it can best be sold to meet customers’ expectations, for instance by using new labels (e.g. “transcreation”) for old concepts.

Technological disruption has been affecting the translation business in a radical way and will most likely do so even more radically in the future. But the need for the highest possible translation quality is greater than ever in the case of the few types of translation projects for which computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools are of no avail. For these, translational creativity with a high degree of evaluation competence will still be needed.

Training translators to be creative will give them the chance to do a really good job. If they aim at the best, they will be good even when the best is not needed. And they will be able to recognize, evaluate and appreciate human peak performance in times when the creative cognitive abilities of translators are challenged by the digital revolution.

**Further reading**


An empirical study that measures and compares creativity and routine and their development on a product and process level in professionals and students on the basis of 652 source-text/target-text pairs from 163 experimental trials over three years.


A study that applies the results of cognitive linguistics and creativity research to translation.


Lakoff explores the effects of cognitive metaphors on mental categories. His central concept of chaining of categories seems to have a close affinity with the notion of divergent thinking in creativity research.


A book that explores the place and role of creativity in our modern world from various points of view and is firmly based on creativity research.

**References**


