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# CULTUS

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## TRANSCREATION AND THE PROFESSIONS

2014, Volume 7

*Editors*

*David Katan*  
*University of Salento*

*Cinzia Spinzi*  
*University of Palermo*

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BOLOGNA

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**Table of Contents**

Foreword - <i>Cinzia Spinzi</i>	7
Uncertainty in the Translation professions: time to transcreate? <i>Introduction by David Katan</i>	10
A conversation between <i>Yves Gambier</i> and <i>Jeremy Munday</i> about transcreation and the future of the professions	20
Crowd, cloud and automation in the translation education community <i>Christophe Declercq</i>	37
Exploring the concept of transcreation – transcreation as ‘more than translation’? <i>Daniel Pedersen</i>	57
Exploring the Chinese translation of Australian Health Product Labels: Are they selling the same thing? <i>Jing Fang</i> and <i>Zhongwei Song</i>	72
Strategies for the Audio Description of Brand Names <i>José Dávila-Montes</i> and <i>Pilar Orero</i>	96
Translation and transcreation in the dubbing process. A genetic approach. <i>Serenella Zanotti</i>	109
Journalators? An ethnographic study of British journalists who translate <i>Denise Filmer</i>	135
Transcreating a new kind of humour: the case of Daniele Luttazzi <i>M. Cristina Caimotto</i>	158
Notes on contributors	176
Guidelines for contributors	180

## Exploring the concept of transcreation - transcreation as ‘more than translation’?

Daniel Pedersen

### *Abstract*

*During the last couple of decades, it has become more and more frequent to see seemingly translation-like activities being carried out under a different name. One of these names is ‘transcreation’ – basically a merger of the two words translation and creation. The term transcreation has found its way into several different domains. One of the most predominant ones is the world of marketing and advertising, which is the focus of the present paper. Here, the term is often used to describe the adaptation of advertising material for different markets. Extensive adaptations are often called for in this context, and this seems to have led to the genesis of a concept that is often described both as a kind of translation and in opposition to translation, as ‘more than translation’: transcreation. Thus, the transcreation industry itself often defines transcreation based on how it differs from translation. This paper will take the discussion of transcreation vs. translation from the industry to the academic discipline of Translation Studies by analysing statements from transcreation providers, and bringing their conceptualization of transcreation into translation related contexts. The attention will be on how the industry’s perception of transcreation relates to already existing Translation Studies literature.*

### **1. Introduction**

This paper seeks to investigate the concept of transcreation in an advertising and marketing context. It will initially analyse the concept of transcreation as seen from the perspective of a selected number of transcreation providers. This analysis will, a posteriori, lead to a comparison between the conceptualizations of translation and transcreation to be found among these providers (in this paper also

referred to as *the transcreation industry*) and some of the most dominating conceptualizations of translation within the Translation Studies (TS) community. The aim of this endeavour is to discuss the perception of translation within this particular transcreation context.

### 1.1 The term “transcreation”

Despite its only recently obtained status as a field of particular academic interest, transcreation as a term has existed for a number of decades. It seems to have its roots in India and especially in the work of the Indian translator and academic P. Lal (Munday 2013: 280; Di Giovanni 2008: 34). Transcreative practices in India are often performed on sacred texts. Hence, in India, transcreations are not considered as replacements of the original (Tymoczko 2007: 68), which could at first lead to an idea of faithful reproduction, but the fact is that P. Lal defines transcreation as a “readable, not strictly faithful translation” (Di Giovanni 2008: 34). Acknowledgement of the sacredness of the source has not, it seems, taken away a willingness to make adaptations so creative that they are regarded more as transcreations than translations. Transcreation can be found in many different places and cultures. India is just one example. The term has also found its way into other literary contexts, primarily used by the writer Haroldo de Campos and the theorist Else Vieira (1999). De Campos sees transcreation as a “transformative recreation of inherited traditions” (1999: 97) – much in line with the original meaning of Indian transcreation.

But there is also another field, much more commercially oriented, where transcreation stands out as a phenomenon that becomes more and more visible, and that is the world of marketing and advertisement, where the denomination of transcreation is used to describe a specific kind of product and process. Generally, transcreation in this context seeks to perform all the adjustments necessary to make a campaign work in all target markets, while at the same time staying loyal to the original creative intent of the campaign.

## 2. Analysis

Transcreation is a term and a practice that, like localization (Mazur 2009), is currently being developed by the industry, and it is this industrial development of transcreation that will now be subject to scrutiny. The

meaning of transcreation, in a marketing and advertisement context, originates from the needs and ideas of practitioners who have their own agendas. So when observing this phenomenon from an academic angle, it is important to bear in mind that this kind of transcreation is primarily defined from a practical point of view. In the present section, the concepts of transcreation and translation, as seen from the point of view of the transcreation industry, will be briefly described. This will be done by looking at definitions taken from a number of different transcreation providers.

*(Example 1): Transcreation is the creative adaptation of marketing, sales and advertising copy in the target language. It involves changing both words and meaning of the original copy while keeping the attitude and desired persuasive effect. (Branded Translations)<sup>1</sup>*

This example starts by mentioning the areas where transcreation is applied. A common feature of the texts represented within these areas of application is their persuasive character and their ability to have a certain effect on the target audience. So in many ways, this transcreation provider defines the text types found in transcreation based on the (commercial) goals they share. Here, transcreation is seen as creative adaptation, and what is being adapted is both words and meaning. As we move on to the next example, we will find a further elaboration on which kinds of texts are most typically being transcreated.

*(Example 2): Text featuring creative wordplay and techniques such as assonance or alliteration requires more than a straightforward translation, they need to be transcreated to ensure this impact is retained. (TransPerfect)<sup>2</sup>*

In this case, the focus is not that much on the goals of the texts, but more on what they actually contain. Elements such as wordplays and alliterations that are normally deemed difficult to translate would, according to this transcreation provider, not just benefit from a process of transcreation but would actually require it, if hopes are set on reaching the same impact when speaking to a new target audience. And in this

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.brandedtranslations.com/transcreation/> (consulted 6/6-2014)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.transperfect.com/services/multicultural\\_marketing\\_transcreation.html](http://www.transperfect.com/services/multicultural_marketing_transcreation.html) (consulted 6/6-2014)

particular claim we also find an indication of the intended goal of transcreation – retention of a desired impact.

Another thing worth mentioning is that, in this quote, the term *translation* is actually used. There is an indication of translation somehow being involved, but as we go into the process of transcreation there is something more than translation going on. When moving on to other examples, it is possible to detect this same indication.

*(Example 3): If you want to realize your brand's potential, it has to be tailored for its audience. And when you're a global brand, translation isn't enough. You need to make sure you speak to your audience using the right cultural nuances too.*

*We call this dual focus 'transcreation'. (Tag)<sup>3</sup>*

Once again, translation is mentioned. And once again, there is a reference to the insufficiency of translation, when it comes to certain types of text. In this example, we are faced with the expression “dual focus”, which seems to be a reference to a sort of *added value* that transcreation has compared to translation. The adaptation of cultural nuances is an essential part of what constitutes transcreation. Besides describing the elements that constitute transcreation, there is also a statement of what the goal of transcreation is, and that is “to realize your brand’s potential”. So according to this transcreation provider, the brand is at the very core of transcreation. And there are other providers who share this focus on the brand.

*(Example 4): Transcreation goes far beyond transferring words from one language to another. Looking at advertising content from strategic and creative perspectives, we leverage both linguistic and cultural expertise to deliver the message and brand voice to the target audience in each local market. (Hogarth World Wide)<sup>4</sup>*

This is another example of the brand having a very central position in the transcreation process. Earlier, we saw the content of a transcreated text as consisting, among other things, of wordplays and other kinds of “tricky” elements. In this case, the description of the content is taken to a

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.tagworldwide.com/services/index.php> (consulted 6/6-2014)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.hogarthww.com/transcreation/transcreation-language-services/> (consulted 6/6-2014)

more general level, indicating that a transcreated text contains a message and a brand voice that have to be adapted for each local market.

The word *translation* is not present in this example, but it should be fair to assume that the idea of translation is present in “*transferring words from one language to another*”. If we assume that this refers to translation, then there is, in some way, a commonly shared perception of translation among a number of different transcreation providers. The following example adds little new information on transcreation and translation, but seems to place both concepts more or less within the same perimeters as the majority of the transcreation industry:

*(Example 5): Alpha CRC features a dedicated marketing transcreation team which can recreate your marketing and advertising texts in a new language, rather than just translating the source version. (Alpha CRC)*<sup>5</sup>

As we have seen before, the area of application is marketing and advertising. This example also indicates the language transfer and the fact that transcreation is performed in teams, although it is impossible to deduct anything with absolute certainty from this limited piece of information. As in many of the other examples, the concept of transcreation is placed in opposition to translation.

The final example is from a transcreation provider, which states the following under the headline ‘Transcreation’:

*(Example 6): A real growth market for the localisation industry where the focus is on transferring the essential message of a text into the target language and culture – as opposed to a more traditional translation between two languages. (TextMinded)*<sup>6</sup>

What makes this definition differ slightly from the rest is the fact that it has a very explicit focus on transcreation as an industry. What is more, this particular provider places transcreation within the localization industry and thereby places it as a subcategory within a localization paradigm. A comparison between localization and transcreation will follow in section 3.2. When moving on to the remaining part of the definition, it is once again possible to find transcreation being opposed to translation.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.alphacrc.com/linguistic.php> (consulted 6/6-2014)

<sup>6</sup> <http://textminded.dk/EN-GB/Text-Services/Transcreation.aspx> (consulted 6/6-2014)

These six examples represent some of the most general statements about transcreation in a marketing and advertising context. They reveal very little of the actual process of transcreating, but help form a general picture of how transcreation is conceptualized by the entities that provide this particular kind of service. So what is there to extract from these definitions?

Within marketing and advertising, texts usually have a persuasive character, and elements such as wordplay, assonance and alliteration are frequently applied. The focus is on ensuring cultural/local relevance, and commercial intent involved. These assumptions seem to be supported in almost all the definitions, but there are other general observations to be made. What seems to be a common factor in transcreation when it comes to comparing it to translation is the assumption that when transcreation takes place, it involves something more than translation. Phrases like “*more than translation*” and “*just translation*” seem to be repeated over and over again and contribute to the impression that transcreation gives an added value to a job that would otherwise be subject to translation. So, the client is offered a transcreation product, which is considered to be more effective or valuable than a translation. Based on this observation, it could be said that rather than transcreation having no relation to translation (transcreation  $\neq$  translation), transcreation is more than translation (transcreation  $>$  translation). If we take this added value as being a defining feature of transcreation for the advertising and marketing industry, what is it then that transcreation can do that translation cannot?

An element that appears paramount when treating transcreation is *culture*. There seems to be a focus on all the cultural nuances needed to convey the right message (*Example 3*). The amount of adaptation required to obtain success in this quest is, apparently, not easily reached using “straightforward translation” (*Example 2*). Another aspect worthy of attention is the fact that at the centre of the marketing and advertising transcreation we seem to find the brand. Behind the message of each single text we find the voice, which is speaking: the brand voice. Ensuring that the brand is presented in the desired way in each target market appears to be a main focus of transcreation.

To sum up this short analysis and formulate some general observations, we could probably say the following about translation and transcreation based on the words of the transcreation industry: Translation is transferring words from one language to another. Transcreation is transferring brands and messages from one culture to another.

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This view on translation is rather simplistic and is certainly not coherent with dominating ideas within TS. To say that using the right cultural nuances (*Example 3*) and going beyond transferring words from one language to another (*Example 4*) constitute characterising features of transcreation as opposed to translation is something that would undoubtedly encounter great opposition in a TS context. Surely, when Nida (1964) talks about dynamic equivalence in translation, it certainly involves going beyond just transferring words from one language to another. A point that is also emphasized by Katan (2009), who talks about “translation as intercultural communication”, and as something that “requires treating the text itself as only one of the cues of meaning” (2009: 91). And when Toury (1995) characterises translations as facts of target cultures there is clearly a suggestion of using cultural nuances. “Translating cultures” is a common collocation, and these are but a couple of examples of how transcreation, as presented by the industry, fits perfectly well into a translation paradigm. A further elaboration on this issue is to be found in the following section 3.

### 3. Scholarly literature

#### 3.1. Transcreation

The literature on transcreation is taking a number of directions. In section 1, attention was brought to some of the more literary uses of the term, and it was mentioned that in some contexts there has been talk about transcreation for a number of decades. In other contexts, the term *transcreation* has only recently gained considered attention. Consequently, literature in contexts such as marketing and advertising transcreation is relatively scarce. Its existence, however, must be acknowledged, and Bernal Merino (2006) notes that transcreation “is being increasingly used by a new wave of companies seeking to distance themselves from traditional translation firms. These new firms offer translation-like services that include not only translation but also creativity” (2006: 32). Rike (2013) also acknowledges the element of creativity as being central to transcreation. She then goes on by placing transcreation within the same context as the present paper by calling it “an approach used in particular for websites, marketing and advertising texts” (2013: 73).

When concluding her description of the concept of transcreation, Rike sees a link to localization but distinguishes between the two concepts by placing localization in a context of “software, manuals, user instructions” and emphasizing the more creative intent of transcreation (ibid: 73). Linking transcreation and localization has also been done by others.

Mangiron and O’Hagan (2006) state that “In game localisation, transcreation, rather than just translation, takes place” (2006: 20), and according to Munday (2013: 280), a lot of the vocabulary and the ideas behind transcreation come from the discourse of localization and translation.

While Rike sees transcreation and localization as two separate concepts belonging to different domains, Mangiron and O’Hagan place transcreation as a specific approach to localization. The following section will take a closer look at the possible relation between localization and transcreation.

### 3.2. Localization vs. transcreation

The previous section did to some extent open the question “Is transcreation a sort of localization?” The present section will treat this question by looking at a description of a transcreation workflow and comparing it to one of localization, albeit, in a simplified form.

On their website, the transcreation provider Hogarth World Wide describes one of its overall workflows in the following way:

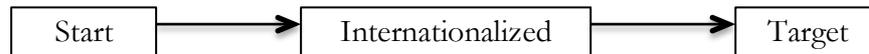
*Hogarth uses its in-house team of native insight planners who will analyse the creative brief, identify any differences in consumer behaviour, consider cultural nuances, validate creative ideas, copy and visuals. The creative agency will refine the campaign based on feedback from Hogarth’s native insight team. Once the revised master creative<sup>7</sup> has been approved, Hogarth can begin transcreation.*

According to the description of this particular workflow, the process of marketing and advertisement transcreation goes on hand in hand with the creation of the original campaign. If transcreation is involved in the development of the master copy (the source text), then we are probably looking at a process that involves creation of both source and target texts. This process is in many ways similar to what Pym (2014) describes as

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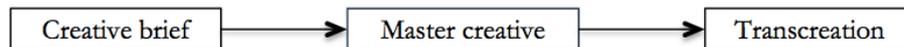
<sup>7</sup> creative (n.): “(Advertising) creative material produced for an advertising campaign, such as the copy, design, or artwork.” (OED)

*internationalization*, which is usually associated with localization. Internationalization is a sort of intermediary stage between source and target, which Pym illustrates using this simplified model:



Pym (2014: 121)

Although the starting point may differ whether you are dealing with localization or transcreation, the intermediary phase of internationalization that follows in localization does look like the creation of the master creative in transcreation. Pym (2014) says that internationalization prepares a product prior to its translation (2014: 121). Hogarth World Wide say that they help the creative agency “analyse the creative brief, identify any differences in consumer behaviour, consider cultural nuances, validate creative ideas, copy and visuals”. This is a preparatory phase that ultimately leads to the transcreation of the master creative. A tentative model of this process inspired by Pym could look like this:



Even though these processes are not entirely identical, the similarities seem to be apparent. There is, of course, a difference in the fact that the preparation of the master creative is a phase of counselling and collaboration between a creative agency and the transcreation experts. Internationalization, on the other hand, as defined by the former Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA) in 1998, is “the process of generalizing a product so that it can handle multiple languages and cultural conventions without the need for re-design. Internationalization takes place at the level of program design and document development” (In Pym 2014: 119-120).

However, when it comes to localization and transcreation, there are some commonly shared features that could be emphasized. First of all, they both seem partly to be a result of a need for fast, global distribution. The nature of the involved types of texts makes it clearer to see why this could be the case. Localization is primarily concerned with software programs (Pym 2004, 2014; Mazur 2009; Rike 2013), while marketing and

advertisement transcreation mainly deals with creative campaigns. Both these text types have a relatively short life expectancy, and therefore, fast and efficient distribution is in many ways essential. Secondly, the fact that both localizations and transcreations usually have the ultimate goal of provoking a sale makes the focus on local relevance and cultural (consumer) behaviour appear as an important factor. Thirdly, they both share a structure of one-to-many-languages/markets that is normally applied.

It is most likely possible to highlight even more similarities between localization and transcreation. According to LISA (In Pym 2014: 119) localization involves taking a product and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used and sold. More or less the same thing could be, and has been, said about transcreation. The task of framing transcreation and localization is probably all but done, and we may continue to find examples of transcreations deemed to be localizations and vice versa. But so far, there seems to be a tendency detectable in the abovementioned examples and in the writings of Rike (2013), which would be that as a process and in its general structure, transcreation is close or similar to localization. The difference between the two seems to lie mainly in the fields of application.

### 3.3. Advertising translation vs. transcreation

If we assume that there is a general difference between localization and transcreation in the field of application, then the next step in the description of transcreation could be to shift focus from software to marketing and advertising. So, whereas the ‘transcreation’ of advertising is a field that has enjoyed only little academic interest, the ‘translation’ of advertising is frequently discussed in the TS literature. And much of what is deemed essential to transcreation is also valued within advertising translation. Guidère (2000), for example, assigns great importance to reaching the same effect when translating advertising material and admits that this effect can be something as straightforward as simply purchasing the product (2000: 62). De Mooij (2004) states that “if advertising is translated at all, the translator should closely co-operate with the copywriter/art director team and not only translate but also advise about culture-specific aspects of both languages” (2004: 196). Cooperation between the translator and the copywriter or art director, which includes

giving advice on culture-specific elements, is to a large extent similar to the workflow described in section 2 of this paper.

Another element that has been highlighted earlier in this paper is the value of the brand, which George Ho (2004) discusses in his article on translation of advertisements across heterogeneous<sup>8</sup> cultures. As consumer behaviour becomes more sophisticated (Gobé 2001), showing one particular product's superiority is not enough to "win the heart of the consumer" (Adab & Valdés 2004: 162). According to Gobé (2001), this development in consumer behaviour has led to a change in marketing strategy with a greater focus on emotional value – *emotional branding*. Ho (2004) elaborates on what this new trend of emotional branding means to advertising translation. For him, there is no doubt that the changes in consumer behaviour and marketing strategies must have implications on translation as well. Ho says that "the translation strategy for commercial translation should be changed accordingly, from focusing on the product itself to highlighting the personal needs of the consumer" (2004: 226). In many ways, this perspective fits very well with the earlier mentioned transcreation goals of *keeping the attitude and desired persuasive effect (Example 1)*, *speaking to your audience using the right cultural nuances (Example 3)*, and *delivering the message and brand voice to the target audience in each local market (Example 4)*.

In general, transcreation and advertising translation share common grounds above all in the field of application, as both concepts evolve around persuading the client. Consequently, there is a shared need to emphasize cultural adaptation, local market specificities, etc. The importance of the brand and how it is presented in each target market is also recognized both in advertising translation and transcreation.

### 3.4. Translation vs. transcreation

Earlier in this paper, it was indicated that the transcreation industry seeks to distance itself from traditional translation activity. A matter that still needs attention is the more general theoretical aspect of translation and how this relates to transcreation. Jakobson (1959) divides translation into three groups that embrace both interlingual, intralingual, and intersemiotic translation, which includes transfers that are not necessarily

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<sup>8</sup> "heterogeneous" is a term used by George Ho himself. It is used to distinguish between what he calls homogeneous Eurocentric cultures and more heterogeneous cultures, i.e. Chinese vs. Western cultures.

between two different languages. According to Toury (1995), translation, or *assumed translation*, includes “all utterances which are presented or regarded as such within the target culture, on no matter what grounds” (1995: 32). The same ‘open’ approach to the definition of translation can be found in Tymoczko (2007). Tymoczko does not seem to have any intention of delimiting translation, which she sees as an open cluster concept. She states that “there are no necessary and sufficient conditions that can identify all translations and that at the same time exclude all non-translations across time and space” (2007: 78). Based on these views it is difficult to say what translation is or to exclude transcreation from potentially belonging to translation. However, Toury’s own concept of assumed translation makes it possible to argue that transcreation is *not* translation, simply because it is assumed to be something else. Nevertheless, when bringing forth this idea, Pym’s questioning of who is supposed to be doing all the assuming (2006: 4) becomes relevant, because it would imply that the conceptualization of one particular group of people, in this case the transcreation providers, determines what transcreation is (and is *not*).

If we move on from these general views on to what can be deemed as belonging to the field of translation and take a closer look on how translation is categorized, we find that many theories tend to create translation dichotomies. From a number of these dichotomies it is possible to identify a series of different approaches. In 1813, Friedrich Schleiermacher distinguished between two general approaches to translation, one being a naturalizing and the other being an alienating strategy. Much in the same line, we find Lawrence Venuti, who talks about translations being either foreignizing or domesticating. One thing they seem to have in common is the idea that one is faced with the choice of either hiding or showing that a text is a translation. This idea can be recognized in many other translation dichotomies, e.g. Levý’s illusory vs. anti-illusory translation, House’s covert vs. overt translation, and Gutt’s indirect vs. direct translation. When comparing these different strategies, they all seem to leave the translator with a choice between two general options: either you move towards the source or towards the target.

This overall theoretical framing of translation might also be applicable when describing transcreation strategies. Target-orientation, which seems to hold a strong position within translation theory, is also an important factor in transcreation. Nida’s dynamic equivalence is one such term that could be placed in the category of target-oriented strategies. Regarding

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dynamic equivalence, Nida himself says that it means “that the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message” (Nida 1964: 159). This brings in another factor much valued in transcreation – the idea of same or equivalent effect. This idea is later put forth by others focussing on translation, e.g. Eco (2001) who says that “a good translation must generate the same effect aimed at by the original” (2001: 44-5). The ideas of both Nida and Eco seem to be more or less similar to the Branded Translations’ idea (*Example 1*) of transcreation being something that “*involves changing both words and meaning of the original copy while keeping the attitude and desired persuasive effect*”. Target-oriented translation is also at the heart of the functionalist approach as formulated principally by Reiss & Vermeer (1984/2013) and Nord (1991), who see translation as being determined by its function or purpose. It thus seems plausible that some approaches to translation could also be considered as approaches to transcreation.

#### 4. Conclusion

Although marketing and advertising transcreation as a concept *per se* has only been subject to a modest amount of theoretical description, there are other concepts with a much richer description that seem to be able to embrace transcreation – at least to some extent. Within the transcreation industry itself the tendency is towards classifying transcreation as being something more than translation. According to Schäffner (2012), phenomena such as transcreation “contribute to raising awareness of the complexity of processes and encourage rethinking the more traditional views” (2012: 881). And it is perhaps in this aspect that the concept of transcreation gains its value.

Be that as it may, the fact that the industry and the TS community generally operate within two very different discourses when it comes to translation is hardly surprising. What would seem more revealing is to investigate why the transcreation industry seeks another word rather than “translation” to describe its activities, and what implications this might have. In this perspective, the present paper has sought to establish a basis for addressing these questions in future research.

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