

Creativity in Translation

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Received: 23 February 2021

Revised: 28 March 2021

Accepted: 17 April 2021

Abstract

This study is an attempt to address the rationale for creativity in translation practice. Although little has been done for creativity in translation, creativity is regarded as an inevitable element of the translation process. The potential ambiguity existing about the concept of creativity in translation studies is partly because of the uncertainty of the term and partly because of the frequent impression that approximate translations are articulated by creativity. It has, in fact, been a neglected research topic in translation studies. There are times that translators face untranslatability due to cultural and linguistic divergences between the source and receptor languages. This is where the notion of creativity can effectively remove the insurmountable obstacles. The study stressed that translation should not be regarded as a mere act of transferring textual material from the source language into the target language. In its essence, the translator is engaged in recreating task, and translation is a creative process, no less than creating of an original literary work.

Keywords: creativity, translation practice, creative procedures.

How to cite the article:

M. Bahraman, L. Erfaniyan Qonsuli, Creativity in Translation, J. Practical Soc. Psych., 2021; 2(2): 05-08,

1. Creativity

Creativity is an important task, which at an individual level involves problem solving and on a societal level leads to innovation. Creativity, based on Sternberg and Lubart (2004, p. 3), "is the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e. original, unexpected) and appropriate (i.e. useful, adaptive concerning task constraints)." Young (1985, p. 85) defines creativity as "the skill of bringing about something new and valuable" into existence. He argues that when creative people innovate toward newness, they often find a series of alternative solutions and can quickly make decisions about what to include and what to eliminate. Siegler and Richards (1982) also indicated that people's expertise in a given domain influences the efficacy of problem solving. These propositions suggest that creativity results not only from domain-specific knowledge, but also creative undertaking or application of existing knowledge within a domain.

2. Creativity in translation practice

Translation has been thought of a process of decoding the meaning of the source text (ST). Therefore, every translation is an expansion of the ST in the TL. However, the process of translation

should be defined, not as a sort of mechanical transferring from one language to another; instead as an understanding of two languages and cultures (Babae, Wan Yahya & Babae, 2014). As Levý (1963) in *Art of Translation* observes: A translation is not a monistic composition, but an interpenetration and conglomerate of two structures. On the one hand, there are the semantic content and the formal contour of the original, on the other hand the entire system of aesthetic features bound up with the language of the translation. (Levý, cited in Bassnett-McGuire, 1980, pp. 5-6). According to Loffredo and Perteghella (2006, p. 9), 'creativity is still regarded as a spontaneous process readily associated with a special individual and a sort of freedom, which is sustained by an individualistic conception of authorship ...According to this conception, the author freely expresses his thought and feelings in writing.' Therefore, translation is an act of evaluating and analyzing the source text and then creating a new text in another language.

Given that translation retraces the creative impulse of the original, both writer and translator are equally constrained by "the handling and crafting of the raw material of language" (Perteghella and Loffredo, 2007, p. 10). A

commitment to the mere equivalence of this “raw material,” too often the cornerstone of translation excellence, has the ability of erasing the most outstanding features of the source text and reducing the translation to an inferior copy, making it therefore unable to live up to the original. This mechanical function contrasts sharply with translation projects such as those of the Romans or the Romantics whose translators were viewed as possessing “creative genius” (Bassnett, 2004, p. 69), capable of enriching both literature and language. A translator’s creativity is an essential element in the translation process as it incorporates “the original’s mode of signification” (Benjamin, 1992, p. 79) and reconciles what might seem conflicting notions: fidelity and freedom. Translations undo the original (de Man, 1986) and in their rewriting require freedom to deal with the linguistic uniqueness of the source and target languages. It is only after translations are accepted for what they are – translations – that there can be greater freedom (Damrosch, 2003, p. 295).

One of the inevitable losses incurred by translation that calls for some form of compensation is that for unusual or precise words in the source text, there will often not be a word with a similar meaning available in the target language. This is unavoidable, for example, when the source language has a larger vocabulary in one particular semantic field than the target language. The translator is then left with little choice but to translate many different words with the same target language word. Without creative efforts to compensate for this, the richness of the source text vocabulary would be reduced and the target text may become repetitive. When one word in the target language covers the same lexical ground of many words in the source language, there may also take place a kind of lexical levelling; meaning may become more generic and specifics are lost. To a large degree, the limitations of translation are of a linguistic nature. But creativity is a construct that can overhaul the notion of untranslatability and give “voice to the intentio of the original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself” (Benjamin, 1992, p. 79).

3. Creativity and literary texts

The history of translation is also the history of literary innovation. Translations introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and mirror the shaping power of one culture on another. To approach translation from a “cognitive problem-solving orientation” (Lubart, 2004, p.341), forms must be adapted and linguistic boundaries even disregarded. This is especially so in poetry, given the linguistic uniqueness and even literary divergences the genre conjures across languages.

Thus, translating forms which do not coincide, such as sonnets in English and Spanish or haikus in Japanese or Portuguese, are tasks which require creativity.

It is no overstatement to say that creativity is in fact a necessary part of the translation process, if the translated text is to emerge as a successful work of literature. Since loss is unavoidable, it follows that the only way to deal with this is to ensure that the translator puts something back. The term ‘compensation’ has been used to describe a strategy the translator might use when faced with ‘untranslatability’. Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet described it as a “procedure whereby the tenor of the whole piece is maintained by playing, in a stylistic detour, the note that could not be played in the same way and in the same place as in the source”. A commonly given example of a situation in which compensation strategy might be employed is that of translation from a language that has a T-V distinction (separate informal and formal, or honorific, second-person pronouns) into one that does not. Whether the formal or informal terms of address are used by characters in the source text gives the reader implicit information about these characters and the relationship between them; respect, intimacy, rudeness, seniority and so forth can all be indicated by this grammatical distinction. It is then impossible to reproduce that information in the same way in the target text. A translator might ‘compensate’ for this by adding something to the target text that gives a similar impression, perhaps suggesting formality by the addition of a title, for example Mr, or by using a character’s surname rather than first name. By these means, so the idea goes, essential information can be preserved, albeit transmitted in a different way.

This strategy is unambiguously creative; the translator is adding something original which did not directly come from the source text. However, it is also argued that the definition of compensation could usefully be significantly broadened to include original content that makes up, in a more indirect fashion, for the phenomenon of translational loss.

4. Creative procedures in translation practice

The creative procedures presented in this study is based on the twelve microstrategies posed by Schjoldager (2008) which can be divided into more and less creative procedures. Based on Holst (2010), Characteristic for some of them is that they do not alter, add or remove any linguistic or semantic meaning when applied to the TT including direct transfer, calque, direct translation and oblique translation which all translates close or very close to the ST (PP. 93-99). Therefore, as Holst (2010) argues, these are not considered

creative microstrategies, and texts translated using solely these cannot be regarded creative translations. On the contrary, the remaining eight strategies do all in some way add to the level of creativity when applied in a translation. Though

the semantic meaning is by some means rendered, there are linguistic changes when employing these strategies. Within these eight creative strategies, the degree of creativity varies as well.

Table 1: A taxonomy of microstrategies (Schjoldager 2008, p. 92)

Direct transfer	Transfers something unchanged.
Calque	Transfers the structure or makes a very close translation.
Direct translation	Translates in a word-for-word procedure.
Oblique translation	Translates in a sense-for-sense procedure.
Explication	Makes implicit information explicit.
Paraphrase	Translates rather freely.
Condensation	Translates in a shorter way, which may involve implication (making explicit information implicit).
Adaptation	Recreates the effect, entirely or partially
Addition	Adds a unit of meaning.
Substitution	Changes the meaning.
Deletion	Leaves out a unit of meaning.
Permutation	Translates in a different place.

The model of creativity classifies the strategies explication, condensation and deletion as slightly creative since they merely involve elaborating on existing meaning, shortening text and taking out meaning. The top five strategies, however, are rewriting semantics of the ST or adding meaning which cannot be directly inferred from the ST. Therefore, these are regarded as slightly more creative. These creative procedures are explained in the following paragraphs.

4.1 Explication

Explication makes implicit information explicit, to put it briefly. In literary translation, the strategy is often used to make texts more cohesive, but it is also seen in other kinds of translation. It is used when there is a need to expand on something, e.g. cultural bound references or presuppositions not shared by the TT audience. What makes this strategy creative is the fact that a unit of meaning is added to the text; although it can be directly inferred from the ST (Schjoldager 2008, pp. 99-100).

4.2 Condensation

Condensation translates a ST unit in a shorter way which may involve making explicit information implicit; implicitation. Condensation renders the already existing contextual meaning in a shorter way and is therefore only considered slightly creative. (Schjoldager 2008, p. 102).

4.3 Deletion

Deletion is leaving out a ST unit of meaning from the TT. The unit is completely taken out and is not implicitly present, as is the case in condensation (Schjoldager 2008, p. 108). In that way, this microstrategy is somewhat creative although not considered one of the most creative.

4.4 Addition

When a unit of meaning is added to the TT, Schjoldager (2008, pp. 104-105) refers to it as addition. The added unit cannot be directly deduced from the ST, thus, addition is different from explication and is also slightly more creative.

4.5 Paraphrase

By paraphrasing, ST meaning is rendered, though quite freely. The TT elements can seem somewhat different to those of the ST but the contextual meaning of the elements corresponds. It can be hard to define just how the two units of meaning correspond; however, there is no doubt that they do (Schjoldager 2008, pp. 100-101). Therefore, this strategy can be considered creative.

4.6 Adaptation

Adaptation is one of the most creative strategies as it does not necessarily render any contextual meaning, but rather recreates the effect of a ST item in the TT. It is applied, for example, where cultural references in the ST cannot be translated or explicated. It is somewhat similar to oblique translation and paraphrase, but is more creative and is often applied, where the translator wants to 'imitate the source-text author's thinking process' (Schjoldager 2008, p.103). That is, the translator 'adapts' the text to the TT audience and culture. When applying this strategy to larger units in a translation, it can be discussed whether it is actual translation or copywriting.

5.2.7. Permutation

Permutation is mostly used in literary translations. It translates ST effects in a different place in the TT. It is applied when a given ST effect cannot be rendered in the TT for linguistic or stylistic reasons. Hence, the effect is recreated somewhere else in the TT (Schjoldager 2008, p. 109).

5.2.8. Substitution

Again we are dealing with a rather creative strategy as substitution involves changing the meaning of a ST unit. The TT unit is clearly a translation of the ST, but the semantic meaning has changed (Schjoldager 2008, p. 106).

Conclusion

In practice, not any translation can be performed by merely replacing textual materials from the source language into the target language. In fact, the translator is involved in an act of creation and reproduction. Creativity, which is considered a positive notion in most cases, in translation realizes the shifts which stem from the need to reformulate linguistic, stylistic and cultural particularities. In order to tackle the obstacles occurring in translation practice, translators can resort to creative procedures including explicitation, paraphrase, condensation, adaptation, addition, substitution, deletion, and permutation to recreate originals. Then, translation is a creative process, no less than creating of an original literary work.

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