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Translation in the creative industries: An introduction

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this introduction is to highlight the presence of translation in the world of creative industries. I discuss various models of creative industries that are operative in different parts of the globe and I propose a basic typology that can help to clarify the role of translation according to these models. The discussion then moves to the theoretical implications that this extraordinary range of translational phenomena has for the way we understand translation in the present era. This part concludes with an attempt to identify some 'family resemblances' between these phenomena, to wit, the creative, the aesthetic and the promotional elements. The second part of the introduction presents the contributions to this issue and highlights the diversity of approaches and the potential of research in this newly conceptualised area of enquiry.

KEY WORDS

Creative industries, cultural institutions, intercultural transfer, creativity, promotional texts.

The concept of 'creative industries' first appeared in public discourse in the 1990s and has since gained traction as a policy theme in almost every corner of the world. John Hartley (2005: 5) clarifies that it is a "historical rather than categorical" idea, in the sense that "it has evolved from previous conceptualizations of the 'creative arts' and the 'cultural' industries" in various ways, "depending on local heritage and circumstance" (Ibid.). While 'creative industries' generally refers to ideas of innovation and creativity within the framework of national development strategies, it remains overall an unclear and, for many, a contentious term. It is unclear because there is no consensus as to what exactly counts as a creative industry; and it is contentious in that it carries strong neoliberal connotations related to the idea of the exploitation of individual creativity at a mass scale as part of the transition to a postindustrial society.¹ At the heart of the creative industries is the "potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property" (BOP Consulting 2010: 16), while the term itself applies to such broad areas as audiovisual media, performing and visual arts, design and fashion, and cultural sites and establishments (BOP Consulting 2010: 40-41; UNCTAD 2010: 8). The difficulty of pinning down the meaning of 'creative industries' has not in any way impeded the proliferation of its usage as a term, which has gone hand in hand with the global expansion of the creative sector as a whole. According to a survey by the International Confederation of Societies of Authors and Composers, in 2013 the "cultural and creative industries" generated a revenue of 2,250 billion USD or 3% of the world's GDP, and 29.5 million jobs or 1% of the world's active population (World creative 2015). Despite important inequalities, according to the same source, each and every continent

contributed significantly to this result. The global reach of the creative industries and the fact that as a sector it deals in cultural artefacts and services make it particularly interesting from the vantage point of translation. By way of introduction to this special issue of *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, I would like to trace some of the ways in which translation participates in the workings of the creative sector, and also to find out how the concept of translation is expanded and problematised as a result of this participation.

In different parts of the world, different creative industries models exemplify local perceptions of the culture-economy relationship. Flew and Cunningham's (2010: 5) description of several such models that apply to different geographical regions is illuminating. Thus, the US model of the creative industries is based on "a substantive divide" between "arts and culture, on the one hand, and the entertainment/copyright industries on the other" (ibid.), while the European variant emphasises "the cultural mission of these industries and strategies for social inclusion for common cultural benefit" (ibid.) and favours the term 'cultural industries' over that of 'creative industries.' To a certain extent, then, these models reiterate traditional binary oppositions in political and aesthetic thought. On the one hand, there is the binary between the individual and the community, opposing ideas of self-reliance, originality and free-thinking to ideas of fraternity, social cohesion and collaboration. This opposition can be understood in terms of the debate about subsidising arts and culture rather than treating them as income-generating activities. On the other hand, there is the modernist divide between highbrow and lowbrow forms of art, establishing evaluative hierarchies between and within genres (for instance, placing opera above film, and arthouse film above Hollywood). Overall, however, these binaries collapse into functional unity as soon as it is recognised that the point of the creative industries is not the content per se (the quality or acceptability of the cultural artefact, the truth or tastefulness of the aesthetic representation) but the purpose to be served, whether economic (i.e. wealth generation and job creation) or symbolic (e.g. social or ideological cohesion). Thus other creative models mentioned by Flew and Cunningham (ibid.), including those operative in Asia, South America, South Africa, the Caribbean and elsewhere, inflect various national, sociocultural and political interests with local aspirations for growth and development. The global polyphony of models, understandings and criticisms of the concept of creative industries suggests that this concept itself has been 'translated' so as to mean different things to different people, according to their social and historical background and their economic or ideological priorities.

Translation as practice contributes to cultural and creative activities in ways that serve the functional purposes of the creative industries models adopted. In the absence of empirical typologies, it is possible to speculate based on the crisscrossing categories mentioned above, namely

individual/community and highbrow/lowbrow forms of art. Thus, where an individualistic lowbrow model is predominant, focus would be on the adaptation of the message to the receiving culture, as in the transcreation of advertisements, the translation of videogames, and film dubbing. The bulk of translation work in the creative industries belongs to this type, in so far as its aim is to maximise consumption and to promote dominant forms of popular culture. Where an individualistic highbrow model is used, the purpose of the translation may be to enhance a sense of exclusivity and to consolidate the cultural capital of the user, as in the translation of artbooks and catalogues, or of exhibition audio guides. Conversely, where a communitarian lowbrow model is in place, focus would be on inclusion, equal opportunity and accessibility, as in the translation of public information campaigns, in the subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing, and in audio description. Finally, if the prevailing model is communitarian and highbrow, priority would be given to the arts education of the public, as in the translation of museums and art galleries material.

This is a tentative typology, but it may offer an initial frame for thinking about translation in the creative industries as a special form of engaging with language, audiovisual representation and intercultural transfer. For one thing, this typology helps us realise that more than one creative industries model may be operative in any single geographical area and cultural context. For example, while in the UK the creative industries model primarily concerns the mobilisation of individual creativity in the service of consumption (witness the quantity of transcreation work that is managed by UK-based agencies), the country also has a strong record in accessibility to the media for the hearing or sight disabled people, something which is more consistent with a communitarian model. When it comes to translation strategies, this typology also suggests that similar source materials may be translated in very different ways according to the creative industries variant that is locally adopted. To explain this with an example, in their study of differences in cultural expectations between Chinese and British users of museum websites, Hogg, Liao and O'Gorman (2014) have noticed that "English museum websites are interpersonal, serving the purpose of attracting visitors, and presenting the museum as a place for entertainment." English museum websites, then, seem to adopt a communitarian lowbrow approach. Chinese museum websites, on the other hand, seem to follow what I call here a communitarian highbrow approach: they "adopt an authoritative tone, serving the purpose of providing clear guidelines and regulations, and presenting the museum as a cultural education centre" (2014: 162). Hogg, Liao and O'Gorman are thus able to warn against simple functionalist approaches in the translation of these websites that do not take into account the different expectations of the Chinese and the British (see also Liao's article in this issue).

Beyond this typology, it is worth noting the sheer variety of forms of translation that can be associated with the creative industries. The examples mentioned above include transcreation and other forms of translation of promotional material, audiovisual translation (both interlingual and intralingual), localisation, and other forms of re-writing and adaptation, such as from image to text and vice-versa. The potential for identifying and mapping a large area of translation activity that can be usefully viewed through the lens of creative industries is huge. At the same time, the risk of grouping together various loosely related translation and adaptation practices, and consequently the probability of theoretical vagueness with reference to 'translation in the creative industries' is high. In addition to the uncertainty as to (a) what constitutes a creative industry, and (b) what translational transactions take place within the creative industries sector, there is an ambiguity about what may legitimately be considered as a form of translation and what may not. This last question is key to the present discussion, but rather than delving into it in depth here, it is useful to evoke Maria Tymoczko's 'cluster concept' of translation. This is based on Wittgenstein's idea of 'cluster categories' and his insight that (in Tymoczko's words) "membership in a cluster category is not a matter of logic but rather a function of practice and usage" (Tymoczko 2005: 1091). By using this term, Tymoczko aims to avoid exclusive definitions of translation, and to transpose the question of definition to that of finding appropriate interpretive frames through which to research translational phenomena as they can actually be observed. Building on that idea, Karen Korning Zethsen (2007: 299) provides a "broad though still meaningful description or translation" which, I propose, can be used to encompass the variety of translation practices in the creative industries. Zethsen's description is as follows:

- A source text exists or has existed at some point in time
- A transfer has taken place and the target text has been derived from the source text (resulting in a new product in another language, genre or medium), i.e. some kind of relevant similarity exists between the source and the target texts.
- This relationship can take many forms and by no means rests on the concept of equivalence, but rather on the *skopos* of the target text.

Tymoczko's cluster concept and Zethsen's description free the way to explore creative translation phenomena between different lingua-cultural contexts based on "family resemblances," to use Wittgenstein's term (as cited in Tymoczko 2005: 1085). But what are some of these family resemblances when it comes to translation in the creative industries?

Yet again, the answer can only be tentative, especially given the dearth of research into the topic. While there exists a significant amount of research on particular forms of translation in the creative industries, including AVT, advertisement, museum translation, the translation of tourism etc., very little translation scholarship conceptualises creative industries as a distinct field (exceptions include Vesela and Klimova 2015; and Chen 2016). A

conference entitled *Translation and the Creative Industries* at the University of Westminster in 2016 charted the growing academic interest in this area and underlined its potential. In fact, three of the articles of the present issue are based on papers presented in that conference (Benetello, Perdikaki, and Sidiropoulou). Taking this evidence into account, it is possible to propose some shared themes or elements.

- *The creative element.* Creativity is the main concept, albeit, arguably, an ill-defined one. The question of creativity is of course central to translation theory and harks back to the debate about whether translation is to be understood in terms of imitation/reproduction/resemblance or of creation/originality/difference. Interestingly, creativity as a (Western) cultural imperative, a value to be cherished and rewarded, is both what reduces translation to the status of “second-order representation” (Venuti 1995: 7) and what adds currency to the idea of creative industries. Hence the interest of practicing and studying translation in creative environments, that is, environments in which translation must *by definition* resist one of its default modes of operation, i.e. simple imitation.

- *The aesthetic element.* Most source texts originating from the creative industries sector consist of (moving) images, and often sounds, in addition to speech and written text. The theoretical interest from this point of view relates to Michael Cronin’s (2003: 15) analysis of the “changing nature of the documentation that translators are called upon to translate” in the age of globalisation. Cronin draws on sociologists’ Lash and Urry’s idea that the new economy is characterised by a proliferation of informational and aesthetic (rather than material) goods, and notes that the aestheticisation of the economic activity brings with it new translation imperatives. This novel understanding of the source text as hybrid, aestheticised and often multi-modal comes with a new conceptualisation of translation as a simultaneous engagement with the visual, the acoustic *and* the purely linguistic, with a view to partially or totally transforming these elements in functionally effective ways.

- *The promotional element.* The promotional aspect is mostly evident in the translation of advertising and marketing material, but it is equally present in the translation of messages aiming to raise public awareness, in persuasive texts in museums and heritage sites, and in other similar texts. It may be more difficult to discern promotional elements in audiovisual translation, for instance, but these elements are important there too. This is because (a) most of the activities involved, including in audiovisual texts, are consumer-led (or citizen-led) and aim to convince or entertain the user; and (b) most of the time, source texts originating from the creative industries (including film dialogues) have to be understood as part of larger and diverse bodies of texts (such as websites, press releases, interviews, etc.) whose function is to promote a cultural artefact or service.

No doubt this is an incomplete list in need of further entries and refinement. It is possible that there are other shared themes lending coherence to the field of translation in the creative industries. They may include, for instance, the relative tenuousness and instability of the notion of the 'source text' in creative environments, where multisemiotic texts are constantly updated and intertextually dependent on each other, often while they are being translated. From a different perspective, centralised translation workflows, separating various stages of internationalisation, multilingual localisation, simulation (and in some cases post-editing, sub-editing, native insight etc.) may provide a different way to perceive translation in the creative industries as a distinct field of study.

The contributions to this issue

The authors contributing to this issue have touched upon various facets and possible norms of translation in the creative industries. True to the diversity of this 'cluster' of translation forms, the collection of articles in this issue is characterised by a remarkable thematic variety. The authors responded to an initial call for papers that aspired to "establish and investigate the role that translation plays in the growth of the creative industries." They did much more than that, showcasing the potential of research in that area to inspire very different types of questions and methodological approaches.

The issue opens with two contributions in the 'Translators' corner' discussing two different types of experience of translating in creative ways and environments. In the first one, Zoe Moores discusses with Dan McIntyre about the application of stylistics in film subtitling, the effect of technical constraints on characterisation (two very under-researched topics) and the benefits of creative subtitling both for pedagogical purposes and for the general audience. McIntyre goes as far as to propose that subtitlers should be part of the filmmaking team alongside other members with recognised creative roles. Benetello, on the other hand, sets herself the task to prove that transcreation adheres to different rules of function and acceptability from those that apply in conventional translation forms and in traditional perceptions of translation quality. In the process of making her case, Benetello offers and analyses an outstanding array of examples of transcreation, including from her own professional practice.

Research-based articles in this issue begin with Min-Hsiu Liao's essay on "Museums and the creative industries: The contribution of Translation Studies." Liao provides an extremely useful framework for exploring the role of translation in contemporary museums. She then shifts her attention to the economic and social-inclusive implications of adopting different approaches and strategies in the translation of museum texts.

The next article, by Marianna Deganutti, Nina Parish and Eleanor Rowley, examines in closer detail some of the museological implications of translation and multilingualism. Deganutti, Parish and Rowley study how translation and multilingualism are used in two museums related to the First World War, one in Slovenia and one in France, and find that, rather than conveying a message of peaceful co-existence of nations, linguistic difference is sometimes used in order to tell mutually exclusive stories to different visitors, depending on their linguistic allegiance and historical memory.

Close to specialised translation, but still very relevant to the reference themes of aesthetics and creativity, the article by Tamara M. Cabrera looks at architectural reviews and their translation in the English-Spanish language pair. Noting that very little research has been conducted in architectural translation, Cabrera analyses the logic according to which ideas are organised and articulated in architectural reviews and the idiosyncratic way in which these ideas are verbally expressed. Cabrera stresses the pedagogical implications of her findings and the need for future research in this area.

The next two articles focus on the translation of advertisements and marketing texts, a core topic when discussing translation in the creative industries. In her contribution, Maria Sidiropoulou explores how tensions between global and local variabilities in cultural values affect translational choices in automobile industry advertising. Sidiropoulou considers a range of promotional texts from various car brands in the English-Greek pair, and follows a methodological paradigm that uses binary oppositions such as universalism/particularism, individualism/communitarianism and others. Her research underlines the importance of understanding culture-specific norms in economic transactions across cultural borders. In the following article, Marián Morón and Elisa Calvo examine marketing material translation from a different angle. They report the findings of a pedagogical experiment consisting of integrating transcreation skills in an undergraduate translator training programme. Morón and Calvo's article is worth reading for more than its contribution to translation pedagogy: it reviews the existing literature in transcreation, it disambiguates transcreation as a term and clarifies its difference from similar practices and, in describing the transcreation simulation experiment, it sheds light on real-world transcreation processes.

Luo Dong and Carme Mangiron's article "Journey to the East: Cultural adaptation of video games for the Chinese market" examines cultural adjustments to video games in order to meet the needs and expectations of Chinese gamers. Dong and Mangiron make a strong case for cultural adaptation in game localisation into Chinese, subtly observing a number of sensitive areas in cultural transfer into Chinese, including "number format, food-related terminology, myths and legends, songs, the use of colours,

character design, and game mechanics, as well as sociocultural, economic and political issues such as gaming habits and censorship.”

A different type of adaptation is explored in Katerina Perdikaki’s article. Perdikaki examines Baz Luhrmann’s film adaptation of Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, paying particular attention to the director’s creative input at many levels. She argues that, much like translation in the literary polysystem, adaptation can also be seen as “a system monitored by economic, creative and social agendas.” Perdikaki’s article shows how adaptation as creative practice can be studied using translation research concepts, thus extending the remit of translation theory to account for intralinguistic transactions that would arguably not be considered as translations in the past.

While Perdikaki examines text-to-screen transfer, the next two articles concentrate on screen-to-text (or stage-to-text) transfer and specifically on audio description. Both Elena Di Giovanni’s and Monika Zabrocka’s contributions refer to creative engagements with audiovisual source texts. In her article “Audio description for live performances and audience participation,” Di Giovanni reports the results of a reception experiment in accessibility to the opera for the sight disabled which involved various techniques for data collection including observation and questionnaires. Zabrocka also reports the results of an experiment on creative audio description of films, which included blind and visually impaired children and adults. Creativity here consisted in that audio description was rhymed to match the artistic effect of the film viewed (*Boundin’*, a computer-animated short film). While both authors report positive results (almost unconditional in the case of Di Giovanni, rather more qualified in the case of Zabrocka), a particularly interesting aspect of these articles is the creative way they re-imagine immersive or participatory techniques to audiovisual spectacles, for the benefit of the end users.

The last article in this collection, Francis Mus’s study on Leonard Cohen’s introduction and reception in France, approaches translation in the creative industries from a very different angle. Mus looks at the institutional reception of the literature and songs of Leonard Cohen, focusing not so much on these cultural or literary outputs themselves as on the ways they have been translated and commented upon, and on the primary agents of this reception, namely translators and commentators. Mus’s fascinating essay shows how Cohen’s persona has been perceived in France not in terms of his artistic features but in terms of the categories and preferences of the French cultural and literary system of his time. The idea of the ‘translation’ of an artistic oeuvre and a persona may test the limits of what falls within the scope of translation research, but it shows the breadth of research opportunities the ‘creative industries’ theme offers.

This collection of articles testifies to the complexity of creative translation practices and shows how translation can be problematised and reconceptualised as a result. Taken together, these articles point to the need to delineate "Translation in the Creative Industries" as a sub-discipline with its own distinctive characteristics and research imperatives. While this collection offers only a glimpse of the diversity of translational engagements in the creative industries, the breadth and sophistication of the contributions suggest that there is true potential for knowledge and research in this field.

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Biography



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¹ Tony Blair's New Labour government of 1997 was one of the first to make it a priority of their economic planning.