The translation process and its creative facets in a hermeneutic perspective

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Abstract

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Reference


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The translation process and its creative facets in a hermeneutic perspective

Abstract: After discussing several models of the translation process, the author looks retrospectively at her own translations and explores the various mechanisms at work in her mind while translating a segment of text. She then proposes a tentative simplified model, which accounts for more overlapping between the understanding and production phases than is generally found in other models, and links it with the hermeneutic perspective, before discussing the part creativity plays in the process.

Keywords: Hermeneutic circle, translation process, self-observation in translation, creativity, hermeneutics.

1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to encourage further reflexion on the translation process in a hermeneutic perspective. On the basis of self-observation, I will propose an exploratory non-linear model, suggesting that there is permeability between the translator’s attempts to understand the original and to produce the translation, and, more generally, that the various phases are partly concomitant. The first part will focus on the translation process in general, and the second on the role of creativity. In both parts, I will refer to concrete examples of texts I have translated and will discuss how my own experience contrasts with some of the seminal models proposed so far.

2 The Translation Process

In this part, I look at some of the major models that describe the translation process. Then, by using retrospection and self-observation, I describe how I

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1 I would like to thank Lance Hewson for his helpful suggestions and comments.
approach a working unit of translation. On the basis of this description, I will suggest my own model.

2.1 Some major translation models

Since the 1980s, many researchers have given serious thought to the translation process, focussing on the cognitive processes at work in the translator’s mind that they could infer from their observations.

The first translation models contain two phases: 1) the decoding of the source text segment in order to establish its meaning and 2) the encoding of this meaning in the target language. More recently, the translation process has generally been described as a three-stage model, including a transfer phase as well.

Figure 1: Eugene Nida’s model of the translation process (cf. Nida 1975: 80)

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2 I distinguish between the unit of translation (the portion of text which needs considering while translating a text) and the working unit (the portion of text which is actually processed while translating).

3 An excellent and detailed presentation of the various models is given in Göpferich (2008: 127–142).

4 Wolfram Wilss states: “it is advisable to define translation as a two-phase operation, with a ST-analytic and a TT-synthetic phase […] (with the additional dimension of feedback between the two phases)” (1996: 155). Jiří Levý (1963/2011: 23) noted that “translators decode the message contained in the text of the original author and reformulate (encode) it in their own language”.

Nida’s model presents translation as a linear process in which the source text is analysed before the translator transfers it into the target language, where it is restructured:

The translator first analyzes the message of the SOURCE language into its simplest and structurally clearest forms, transfers it at this level, and then restructures it to the level of the RECEPTOR language which is most appropriate for the audience which he intends to reach. (Nida 1975: 79f.)

This model, which is compatible with Lederer and Seleskovich’s Interpretative Theory of Translation, implies that the translator analyses the text in the source language before the transfer, without calling on the target language, which seems surprising in view of the fact that translators do not necessarily have a particularly good command of the source language. Besides, the model gives no clue as to the nature of the transfer. The process seems purely sequential (with no way back), logical, well focused, and devoid of noise.

Other models focus on problems and strategies to solve them, implying that the translation is purely automatic whenever there is no problem. Wolfgang Lörscher makes the following distinction:

the translation process contains both strategic phases, which are directed towards solving translational problems, and non-strategic phases, which aim at accomplishing tasks. The former phases range from the realization of a translational problem to its solution or to the realization of its insolubility at a given point in time. The latter phases start with the extraction of a unit of translation and terminate when it has been (preliminarily) rendered into [target language] or when a translational problem arises. (2005: 601)

Lörscher seems to imply that when there is no translational problem, nothing worth mentioning is going on in the translator’s mind. An interesting aspect is that he does not consider the process as purely one-way nor the translation as necessarily final (he mentions a preliminary rendering). According to him, “the subjects often produce several translation versions” (ibid.). However, he thinks that a second version is only produced if the first one is not satisfactory.

Hans Krings (1986) has put forward interesting models that describe strategies applied to deal with problems, while proposing that working units that do
not pose any problems are translated directly, in an automatic way. What is clearly missing here is a model explaining non-complex translation.\(^5\)

Hans Hönig has designed a model, the “idealtypische Modellierung” (1995: 51) including intuition, association and both a controlled and a not controlled processing area [Gezielte Intuition, Assoziationskompetenz, kontrollierter Arbeitsraum and Nicht kontrollierter Arbeitsraum] which is convincing, but whose nature is necessarily prescriptive.

In her *Text Analysis in Translation: Theory, Methodology, and Didactic Application of a Model for Translation-Oriented Text Analysis*, Christiane Nord briefly describes and comments on a few models (2005: 34–38) before presenting her own “looping” model. Reacting against “the assumption that translating is a code-switching operation” (2005: 35), she underlines that the two-phase model “wrongly suggests that a receptive proficiency in the source language and a productive command of the target language are all a translator needs” (ibid.). According to her,

 translation is not a linear, progressive process leading from a starting point S (ST) to a target point T (TT), but a circular, basically recursive process comprising an indefinite number of feedback loops, in which it is possible and even advisable to return to earlier stages of the analysis. (Nord 2005: 34)

Nord’s model is perfectly symmetrical:

\(^5\) About these two authors, Brigitta Dimitrova states that “[a] limitation of these models is that they are based on an analysis of problem-solving and strategic processing only” (Dimitrova 2005: 19).
According to Nord, a translation model must take account of the translation brief6 formulated by the initiator (possibly in cooperation with the translator). The brief is the only means of checking the results of the translator’s ST reception and subordinating them to a higher criterion. (Nord 2005: 36)

Her looping model (2005: 36–39) allocates a great importance to the skopos of the text: the target text’s function is the decisive factor in the process. However, the more complex and precise a model is, the more difficult it is to decipher. Even though the idea of looping is an interesting one, the model presupposes that translators always act in rational and predictable ways – which experience shows is not the case. It corresponds more to a didactic model of the translation operation rather than an account of what actually happens when translators work. Moreover, the heavy weighting given to the function of the target text reduces the importance of other factors, such as the target reader, the type of text, the medium and the context in which the translation will be received.

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6 Nord explains that depending on context, one could use here the terms translation assignment or translation instructions (Nord 2005: 10 footnote 4).
Don Kiraly has published a very detailed and convincing model.

Kiraly accounts for the subjective perception of the source text, a circular movement and a partly unconscious processing of the working unit. Moreover, he explains that even though the working unit does not change, in some sense it is dynamic because the mental representation of the text in the translator’s mind can be altered by rereading, and new triggers for invoking knowledge frames in long-term memory may be encountered. (Kiraly 1995: 103)
His model provides an excellent description of the extreme complexity of the way in which a translator processes a text. Kiraly underlines that the source text is processed simultaneously “as a social interaction structure, as a propositional structure, and as a complex index to socially shared knowledge” (1995: 104), so that it carries with it “all of the elements of the source context of situation” (ibid.), as “textual references, or as part of an inferred pragmatic bundle” (ibid.). He notes that these references activate “the translation-relevant segments of the long-term memory” (ibid.).

Kiraly acknowledges that there is an indistinct phase during which the translator gropes around among mental products emerging from his cognitive and emotional resources:

Two kinds of products emerge from the workspace: tentative translation elements and translation problems. Tentative translation elements are (at least initially) untested, unmonitored products of spontaneous associations made in the workspace level. Spontaneous associations may occur purely at a formal level as the result of learning or acquisition, or they may be functional equivalents established through an intuitive assessment of textual and situational information in the workspace. (Kirali 1995:105)

He describes a “relatively controlled processing center” in which the tentative translation elements are evaluated (to check their form and content). All the moves are bidirectional, which accounts for the many changes a translator may make to each sentence. The only reservation one could have about this model is its complexity.

It is clear that prescriptive models (e. g. Nida 1975 or Höning 1995) cannot be considered as reflecting what happens in the translator’s mind. However, leaving aside the models put forward by Kiraly and, to a lesser extent, Nord, most of the descriptive ones fail to show how circular, rich and partly uncontrolled the process is.

2.2 The importance of the hermeneutic circle

Commenting on her own model, Christiane Nord writes that “the interpretation of translation as a circular process can […] be regarded as an analogy to a
How far can hermeneutics be used to describe the translation process? As Pol Vandevelde explains,

Friedrich Ast is usually recognized as the first to introduce the notion of a hermeneutic circle in terms of whole and parts. We can only know the whole by knowing the parts, which are its sum, but we can only recognize the parts as parts of a specific whole if we already know the whole. (Vandevelde 2012: 67)

Ast set out both fundamental principles of the hermeneutic circle. First he expressed the idea that the interpretation of a text relies on a dialectical move between the reader’s personal experience and knowledge, and the text itself.


He also put forward the idea that the reader must navigate between the micro and the macro perspectives in order both to understand each part and the whole work:

Nicht nur das Ganze eines Werkes, sondern auch die besonderen Teile, ja einzelne Stellen können folglich nur so verstanden und erklärt werden, dass man mit der ersten Besonderheit auch den Geist und die Idee des Ganzen ahndend erfasst, dann die einzelnen Glieder und Elemente darlegt, um eine Einsicht in das individuelle Wesen des Ganzen zu erlangen, und nach der Erkenntnis aller Einzelheiten das Ganze zur Einheit zusammenfasst, die, nach der Erkenntnis der Elemente, eine klare, bewusste und in allen ihren Besonderheiten lebendig ist. (Ibid: 188)

Following the same line of enquiry, Schleiermacher (1826: 169–170) explained that understanding a text requires a dynamic conjunction of an intuitive approach (Divination) and a more analytical one (Komparation). He saw the

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7 She refers here to Georg Gadamer (1972: 250ff.).

8 I have changed the spelling so that it corresponds more to the present usage.
interpretation of a text as resulting from the mutually correcting effects of these two perspectives. Vandevelde clearly exposes the subtle perspective of Schleiermacher who, like Friedrich Schlegel, was aware that full understanding is merely a theoretical concept:

Schleiermacher famously says that the starting point of understanding is precisely the non-understanding and Schlegel provocatively wrote an essay “on Incomprehensibility” (Schlegel 2003). In accordance with their thought pattern of avoiding dichotomy and instead thinking the terms in opposition from within the relation, like subject and object or spirit and matter, non-understanding and understanding are not two stages that are well delineated and can be occupied, but two poles of a tension that is dynamic. This dynamism has sometimes been called the hermeneutic circle. (Vandevelde 2012: 67)

Radegundis Stolze (2009: 30) mentions however that although no distinction is made in English, the term hermeneutic circle refers in German only to the interaction between the preliminary cognition of the reader and his or her progressive apprehension of the text, the relationship between the part and the whole being called “Zirkel des Verstehens” (the understanding circle).

Concerning comprehension, Gadamer stresses that

Die Vorurteile und Vormeinungen, die das Bewußtsein des Interpreten besetzen halten, sind ihm als solche nicht zu freier Verfügung. Er ist nicht imstande, von sich aus vorgängig die produktiven Vorurteile, die das Verstehen ermöglichen, von denjenigen Vorurteilen zu scheiden, die das Verstehen verhindern und zu Mißverständnissen führen.

Diese Scheidung muß vielmehr im Verstehen selbst geschehen und daher muß die Hermeneutik fragen, wie das geschieht (Gadamer 1990: 301)

In order to integrate the hermeneutic circle and the understanding circle in a translation model, it is important to account for an oscillatory movement both between an objective and a subjective element and between partial and integral comprehension.

2.3 Personal experience

It may seem presumptuous to develop a model of the translation process starting from one’s own experience. It is, however, so difficult to observe what is going on in a translator’s mind that a researcher feels lucky to have direct access to a translator’s mind. Lörscher has expressed the view that models should not be built on theories. He states:

[…] none of the models of the translation process can account for the psychological reality of translating. […] The components of the translation process and their assumed interplay, as outlined in the models, have been construed rationalistically, by logical deduction, not by empirical induction. Thus, the translation process appears to be completely rational, which, however, it is only in ideality, but not in reality. (1989: 64)

Several researchers have based their models on empirical observation, generally using Think-Aloud Protocols (TAP), sometimes associated with eye-tracking or retrospection. Lörscher, for instance, considers that it can be assumed that thinking-aloud in combination with retrospective probing represents a useful instrument to formulate hypotheses on mental processes in general and about translation processes in particular. (2005: 599)

The necessary subjectivity of my approach may thus be compensated by the fact that it relies on direct observation and more than twenty years of experience. Moreover, in view of the subtlety and simultaneity of the mental operations involved in the translating process, TAPs may interfere with their object of observation: they constitute yet another task for the translators, who are obliged to verbalize what they observe in themselves while pretending to work “as usual”. There is a high risk that TAPs will influence the way they work.

General comments

First of all – and contrary to what I recommend to my students – I generally start translating a text before I have completely read it. The translating process sometimes even starts before I have finished reading the first sentence. However, I never start a translation without a preliminary notion of what the text will be, based on whatever I know or presuppose about the client, the author, the target reader and any intermediary who might read the text I will produce.
My approach to the text may vary depending on my mood (I may be more
daring if I feel optimistic and more cautious if unsecure), my physical state (if
I am tired, hungry or unwell) or my sympathy for the subject-matter or for the
author (I will probably exert myself more for an author or a cause close to my
heart).

If the text which I am assigned is of a specific genre, my preconceptions
about it will induce a spontaneous parametrization in my mind before I read
the first word: depending on the situation, I anticipate the most probable level
of specialisation, register and stylistic form. This parametrization will condi-
tion my reading, but as soon as I start translating, I tend to modify the param-
ters if they do not apply for the text. At the same time, as my interest in the
subject matter grows, I am able to attain a high level of concentration and
plunge so deeply into the text that I grow less influenced by my mood or phy-
sical state.

When I start reading a sentence, the first word triggers pictures, memories,
sometimes emotions and spontaneously associated words in the source or the
target language. For example, if I read “apple”, I simultaneously see a proto-
type apple and access the French word I associate with it (pomme). The French
word “is there” even though I may not use it in the end. Each source language
segment gives rise to a burst of interacting elements, which are potential frag-
mentary solutions. I may encounter no difficulty while translating the text, but
I hardly ever produce the target version in an automatic way: I never choose a
wording (even if there is a set term or a standard translation) without consid-
ering, be it during a microsecond, a few other possibilities. When there are prob-
lems, I generally produce a series of different solutions at the same time.

Some words, which I call my “trauma words”, paralyse me: even though I
always end up finding a way of translating them, my first reaction is to panic.
Words such as record, challenge, control, liabilities or expressions like ‘be
satisfied with’ slow the translation process, because they are associated with a
difficulty.

My impression is that during the translation process there is always a phase
— sometimes a very brief one — when there is no clear difference between the
source segment and its emerging projection in the target language. The whole
of the source-text segment is present in my mind, but the image I have of it is
fuzzy and uncertain. This is the result of the fusion of words and associations
belonging to both languages, and it is from this state of fusion that possible
translations, and in particular syntactic structures, begin to emerge. As a trans-
lation starts to take shape, the fuzziness and uncertainty gradually disappear. Put another way, it is in fact thanks to the act of translating that I can fully enter into the original. I explore, rewrite and explore again until a solution that is fully compatible with my intuitive apprehension of the original comes into my mind – and that is the moment when I feel I have understood. I will now describe how I translated two passages, one from a technical text and one from a literary one.

Example No 1

The following sentence is an extract from the *Guide to Meteorological Instruments and Methods of Observation*, published by the World Meteorological Organisation.

| In earlier years, upper winds were generally processed manually or with a small calculator, and it was impractical to produce detailed reports of the vertical wind structure. | Par le passé, les données relatives aux vents en altitude étaient en général traitées manuellement ou à l'aide d'une petite calculatrice et il n'était guère possible de fournir des rapports détaillés sur la structure verticale du vent. |

I start producing the translation while reading the sentence. Thus, I write “par le passé” before reading “upper winds”. While translating “In earlier years”, I wonder how many years are meant (one or two, five, ten?) and different options come to my mind, such as précédemment, auparavant, dans les années précédentes (or au cours des années précédentes) and par le passé before deciding on one – but without conviction. I detect that “upper wind” is a term in this document. I remember that its standard translation is “vent en altitude”. If I were in a doubting mood, I would either look it up in a glossary or a previous text to see how it needs be translated or I would leave a blank not to waste time at this stage. When seeing a passive form, I consider using the active voice, then give up the idea because this would have require finding a grammatical subject.

At this stage, I stop translating and read the sentence until the end. I am uneasy at the idea that winds might be “processed” and decide to be more explicit in French. I write *les données relatives aux vents en altitude (upper wind data*.

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instead of *upper winds*). The word “generally” triggers immediately a standard translation (*en règle générale*) which I find a little too formal in this context. The word *calculator* puzzles me, but I see in the Multitrans translation memory that it is translated by *calculatrice* in this context. I know the term “vertical wind structure”, but check its translation. On the whole the word *impractical* is the one which I find the most difficult to translate, because it doesn’t seem logical to me. While translating, I have the picture of a balloon in my mind, because the measures are taken using a balloon, and I wonder who sends these reports. In the end, after having re-read the original sentence, concentrating on its general meaning but focusing on “impractical”, I decide, among different options (*impossible, peu commode, peu pratique, difficile*), to use “guère possible”, because I do not want to exclude the possibility that detailed reports are actually sent. Coming across “with”, the French word “*avec*” comes to my mind, together with the notion that it is often a bad translation for *with*; I choose “*à l’aide de*”. I read the original again, then my translation, and move to the next sentence.

Reading the original sentence and producing the target-language sentence are not sequential operations. To a certain point, target-language words come to my mind while reading the original before I really understand the sentence. Similarly, while producing the target-language words, source-language words or expressions still cling to them. It is only when I feel optimistic enough about the appropriateness of a segment in the target language that I endeavour to consider it in isolation. If my feeling is confirmed, I can adopt the tentative segment. The process can be very quick, but I cannot consider my translation final before a last check.

I tend to change my translations a lot while revising them. The revision process is different: to compare my production to the original (sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph or as a whole), I memorize the original working unit and keep it in the background while reading the text I have produced. Because the original is “cognitively and emotionally loaded” in my mind, I can easily measure what is missing, different or superfluous in my own production while checking its linguistic consistency.

During the whole process, the source and the emerging target text interact in my mind and I have a double role: on one hand, I set parameters to guide my search and filter the solutions I come up with, and on the other hand I tend to expand the field of possibilities, trying to come with as many solutions as possible within the framework that has been defined. Two simultaneous pro-
cesses are at work, involving two antagonistic moves: a part of my mind opens the floodgates to new ideas while another one filters and selects them, and, for that purpose, I stay strictly focussed on everything I perceive in the source-language segment, while remaining as open and flexible as possible on the target-language front so as not to hinder inspiration.

Example No 2

Okparanta’s short story *Runs Girl* portrays a Nigerian girl whose mother is very ill, and who ends up accepting to work as an escort girl one evening to pay for an operation. Her so-called friend Njideka does not tell her that the man with whom she plans to go to a restaurant is expecting her to sleep with him.


I start translating the sentence literally, though using the present tense – a choice I have made for the whole short story, because the past tense options in French would either be very clumsy or too polished compared with the rather oral and dynamic tone of the original.

I stumble against the pun (*BMW* – *Be My Wife*) and doubt very much that a similar pun will be possible in French. I imagine the scene, leave the pun open and go on. The word *tease* triggers another hesitation: I first choose the verb *taquiner*, expressing harmless playfulness, and move on. When I come back to the sentence, having finished reading the whole text, I know that Njideka has betrayed her friend and taken advantage of her credulity. The verb *taquiner* seems too inoffensive and I choose “charrier” instead, even though it is familiar, because it fits better in the syntax. I decide to look for a solution for the pun. I concentrate and start defining what I need to find. I could actually reduce the problem to a set of equations with two unknown factors:

- X = the name of a luxury car, whose pronunciation must be very similar to Y.
- Y = a standard courtship sentence.¹¹

I set about trying to remember names of cars (a field in which I am particularly ignorant) and associating them with stereotyped wooing messages. I try with

¹¹ This is important because the man will actually rape her.
BMW, Porsche and Rolls Royce – in vain. The names of the car reverberate in my head while I try to find appropriate associations connected with them. Whilst I am thinking “freely”, what seems to be another part of my brain is examining the product of my imagination, rejecting one solution after another. After a while, I think of Mercedes and think of Merci déesse (which could be translated by Thank you goddess). Such an idea can pop into one’s mind after a few seconds, a few minutes, a few days or can never come at all – in which case another solution must be found.

2.4 A tentative simplified non-linear model of the translation process

The model I would like to propose is simplified: it contains few parts, each including several undifferentiated elements.

![Figure 4: The translating process from a hermeneutic perspective](image)

The Resource Pool (RP)

While reading a working unit of the source text, the translator processes whatever he or she finds there through his or her “resource pool” (RP), which corresponds to all of his or her cognitive and emotional resources (words of the source or target languages, emotions, notions, encyclopaedic knowledge…). These resources are normally latent, but reading the text activates some of them (words of various languages, emotions, associations and related memories) and transfers them towards the Activated Resources area.
If the RP is not sufficient, the translator will look for extra elements – mainly through terminological and documentary research. It is important to note that the RP is not stable, but can be enriched by every new experience, by every new piece of information gleaned and, of course, by engaging in translation.

The Hermeneutic Filter (HF)

All the different elements that are triggered by reading the source text pass through the Hermeneutic Filter (HF) into the Activated Resources area (ARA). Those which cannot be exploited in the particular context are filtered out.

![Figure 5: The role of the HF in the translation process](image)

The HF functions as a regulatory mechanism enabling the translator to increase or decrease the number of elements processed in the ARA, depending on their relevance for the translation, and with a view to finding the best solution. When the original is non-problematic for the translator, the HF works in a spontaneous, mechanical way, but if, for example, there is a difficulty, then the translator can consciously exploit the filter and use a translation technique or apply a strategy. The filter thus has a double role. It controls what flows into the ARA, but also contains a certain number of well-tested paths that the translator is able, if necessary, to go down.

It would be wrong to think that the ARA is empty before the actual translation process begins. For example, if a translator accepts to translate a short story written by a young feminist author who has lived in Norway, he or she will spontaneously feed in preliminary elements concerning the genre “short story”, the author (if known), feminism and Norway, all of which will help to parametrize the filter.
The HF determines what is worth injecting in the ARA and what should be filtered out because it is not relevant (for example the personal associations that rush into the translator’s mind), leaving only the best input which is then used to produce the working unit in the target language. Potential ideas can remain in the filter for later use, without interfering with the process taking place in the ARA.

The HF remains active throughout the process. First, it rejects all the elements from the resource pool that could interfere and produce unwanted associations. Later on, it is used again to select the definitive target version of the working unit. As soon as solutions emerge, it removes less promising elements, until there only remain a few solutions. The best of these is then checked on the basis of various criteria, and retained by the translator, while the rejected solutions are either eliminated or stored in the HF, depending on their (perceived) potential value for the following working unit.

The HF is either consciously driven when selecting the best possible translation, or, when the translator is well trained and has interiorized the criteria to be applied, the filter operates by itself. The HF can continually switch between these two modes of operation. Since the source-language segment is retained in the memory, its meaning, effects and associations can be used as a yardstick to measure the meaning, effects and associations of the potential translation candidates, until there only remains the translation which resonates the best with the original.

The workings of the HF, whether to filter in new matter (if there are not enough elements to find a solution) or to filter out content in order to isolate the translated fragment, can last anything between a few seconds, a number of minutes, some hours or even weeks.

The Activated Resources area (ARA)

Understanding and production take place in the Activated Resources area. At first, the ARA contains a rich mixture of more or less disorganised elements: all the preconceptions about the text and its author and all the elements that are triggered and filtered through as a result of reading.

When the filtering is completed, the ARA contains both conscious and unconscious elements: words of different languages, their primary meanings, associations, diffuse emotions, elements of cognition, reminiscences, feelings, questions, doubts, echoes of sounds and tastes, and fragments of sentences in
the source and target languages. All these elements rub together, collide and produce derivatives, new associations and new chains of words. After a while, fragments of comprehension and translation appear. Throughout the process, the ARA stores all the source-text elements and all the data about the context and the target readers that could be relevant.

For one and the same working unit, all translators may filter common elements into the ARA: dictionary meaning, evocation of common cultural elements, and general human emotions naturally aroused by the text. However, many elements will differ from one translator to the next, such as associations based on personal life and experience (linked with personality, friends and activities).

A distracted translator who hasn’t read the sentence properly may miss something and fail to allow important elements to filter into the ARA. On the contrary, if the translator projects himself or herself too much into the text, some elements in the core will be superfluous or not really compatible with the text and may interfere with the translation process. What happens in the ARA corresponds to what Albrecht Neubert describes:

Even during the production of the target text, fragmentary recollections of the source text, which translators or interpreters cannot escape the influence of, continue to influence target text production. (1997: 7)

At the end of the process, when the various fragments have produced a segment in the target language which seems sufficiently compatible with the original one, the working unit is considered translated.

The model does not differentiate between the phases of understanding and production, as they are partially concomitant. As noted above, the rendering in the target language often starts before the entire working unit has been understood.

In the same way that some of the rejected solutions are stored in the HF for later use, the original working unit (according to how it has been understood and interpreted) is stored in the ARA, along with the solution retained as a translation, the preliminary data about the whole text (which have been partly corrected on the basis of what the translator has understood so far) and the echoes of the intense activity that has taken place.
Segmentation

Contrary to many models, this one only reflects the translating process associated with one working unit. Indeed, the translator does not translate the text in one go but by segments (generally sentence after sentence). It is useful to consider what happens when the translator moves onto the next working unit.

Figure 6: Traces of previous working units in the processing of a new one.

Figure 6 shows that when translating a working unit, the intense activity in the ARA includes the previous working units (in both languages) which have been stored and which contribute to the general activity. Thus, all the translated segments stay as “activated resources” in the core. Every new batch of working units and associated elements can interact with them.
Revision

Figure 7: The self-revising process

As shown in Figure 7, the self-revision process looks very much like the translation process. However, the source text is no longer the input element here. The translator has assimilated it so fully, with all its complexity, that it has become a cognitive and emotional load stored in the ARA, and can be used as a yardstick to test translated segments. If the revision is based on a comparison with the original, the translator concentrates on the text unit he or she has produced while comparing it with the memorized unit. The HF filters in corrections if necessary. Whereas the segment produced during the translation process is mostly considered in its relation to the source text segment, during the revision phase it is mostly assessed in relation to the whole target-language text.

3 Creativity

After referring to some of the literature on creativity, I will analyse a concrete example drawn from my own experience, and then discuss where creativity fits into my model.
3.1 Current research on creativity

There has been a long debate about the presence or absence of creativity on the part of the translator, and this debate is certainly not yet over. Hewson explains that

[w]e can, broadly speaking, identify two contrasting ways of looking at the process of translating. The first is a global approach that sees the translating process as creative *per se*; the second considers creativity as being potentially part of the translating process (2006: 54).

Most theorists consider that the translator is an author with a special status, and thus acknowledge that there is indeed creativity in translation. According to Susan Bassnett,

[b]oth original and translation are now viewed as equal products of the creativity of writer and translator, though as Paz pointed out, the task of these two is different. It is up to the writer to fix words in an ideal, unchangeable form and it is the task of the translator to liberate those words from the confines of their source language and allow them to live again in the language into which they are translated. (1980: 5)

However, one should define which perspective to adopt. As Hewson underlines, creativity is generally considered in terms of product. 

[w]hen examining instances of creativity, we are necessarily looking at the product rather than the process. In a sense this obscures our judgement, as we look at published translations using a whole series of criteria. This can easily lead to one researcher seeing evidence of a creative process, where others see a banal target text. (2006: 56)

In 1995, Kussmaul, referring to Wilss (1988: 127) and Alexieva (1990: 5), noted that “[a] creative product must be novel and must contain an element of surprise, it must be singular or at least unusual, but at the same time it must, of

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12 Lance Hewson (forthcoming, 2017) offers an interesting discussion on this question in the literary field in *Les paradoxes de la créativité en traduction littéraire.*

13 In his forthcoming article, he points out that it seems absurd to describe the process leading to the creative product since the latter is so hard to define.
course, fulfil certain needs and fit in with reality” (1995: 39). However, he thinks that instead of focussing on the creative product, it would be interesting to establish how creative solutions are achieved.

I consider that there is creativity, in its broadest sense, in every human translation, but only a few translation products are creative, because the creativity of the product depends on its relationship both to the original and the current textual production of the target culture. In my opinion, the creativity of the translator can in complex situations be of the same amplitude and the same importance as that of the author when it comes to finding the proper form, but it is of another nature: it is functional. Whereas authors have an urge to create and write to transcend their feelings or to express what they can no longer come to grips with when not writing, the translator is (normally) not driven by a creative impulse. This makes the task of the translators more difficult: they must produce something that is predetermined – just as meaningful, emotional, beautiful and efficient, but do not have the personal motivation nor freedom the author has.

Alberto Gil underlines that when translators’ motivation is creativity, it interferes with whatever they are supposed to convey: “Je bemerkbarer sich der Translator in seiner Kreativität machen will, desto undurchsichtiger wird die Mitteilung, da er sich dann als Blende zwischen Leser und Translat aufstellt” (Gil 2009: 326). Normally, creativity is purely a means and not a goal in translation.

Gerrit Bayer-Hohenwarter considers that true translational creativity must “refer to a quality that can only be found when comparing texts (source text and target text) or to qualities of the transfer process” (Bayer-Hohenwarter, 2009: 85). According to her, non-literalness and cognitive shifts often signal creative translation, provided they are not random, and translators must possess the following qualities.

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14 Kussmaul refers here to Preiser (1976: 48).
Acceptability is a fundamental criterion correcting the three others, which, if they do not serve a rigorous purpose, might lead to everything but a translation.

Much of the discussion about creativity in translation has revolved around problem solving.\textsuperscript{15} Most researchers agree that the creative process (conceived as problem solving) comprises the four stages first described by Graham Wallas: “if we examine a single achievement of thought we can distinguish four stages – Preparation, Incubation, Illumination (and its accompaniments), and Verification” (1906: 10; details: 79–81). However, many claim that these phases overlap. Kussmaul, in particular, stresses that these stages are just a model, are not well delimited, and do not follow each other chronologically. Sometimes the translator goes through the same stage many times.


Besides, Kussmaul (1995: 41) suggests that creativity is part and parcel of creative comprehension and that one “might try to apply Guilford’s notion of divergent thinking […] to the comprehension process” (ibid.): “understanding is not merely a receptive but also a productive process” (ibid.). He considers fluency to be the main quality a translator must possess to be creative because it enables divergent production to provide many ideas, associations and new

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} This was actually my own perspective in a paper published in 2005 (cf. Fontanet 2005).
\end{itemize}
thoughts in a little time. He underlines that the creative process “as most mental activities, is not only governed by intellect but also by emotion” (1995: 48).

In a paper on Fritz Paepcke, Larisa Cercel underlines that because translators are looking for the words or expression, they are creative:


These various points of view show that theorists have linked creativity with four competencies: acceptability, flexibility, novelty and fluency. Many consider that the four stages of Wallas’ model are present in the process but overlap. And, from a general point of view, creativity is linked with the fact that translation is an irrepresible, transcendental attempt to grasp and express something which stays elusive.

3.2 Personal experience

Before showing the part creativity plays in my model, I will give an example of a rather straightforward situation.

Example No 3

Okparanta’s short story America describes the difficult path followed by a Nigerian woman in love with another woman. Her father is sympathetic, but her mother, though loving, cannot accept lesbian love. The inability to accept it comes to light through the inability to find words to describe it.

We became something—an item, Papa says—in February, months after Gloria’s visit to the school. (Okparanta 2013: 88)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We became something—an item, Papa says—in February, months after Gloria’s visit to the school. (Okparanta 2013: 88)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>En février, plusieurs mois après la visite de Gloria à l’école, nous sommes devenues quelque chose – un tandem, dit papa. (Okparanta 2014: 107)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I started translating the text literally and became stuck with item, which I understood to mean “a couple” and to refer to a lesbian relationship in this con-

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text. I wondered if it was a particular use of the term or a meaning I did not know. I looked it up and found the following definition in *The Oxford English Dictionary*: “colloq. (orig. U.S.). A pair of lovers, a couple; to be an item: (of a couple) to be involved in an established romantic or sexual relationship, esp. a socially acknowledged one”. I was not able to find spontaneously a convincing translation, but thought of *paire, couple or duo*. At a low ebb of inspiration, I used *paire*: “Nous sommes devenues quelque chose – une paire, comme dit papa – en février, des mois après la visite de Gloria à l’école.” Reading the sentence again, I was dissatisfied, because the I-narrator would never express herself in such a manner. It would be much more natural to start with the time indication. Besides, the expression “des mois après” sounds hyperbolic in French. I changed the sentence to: “En février, plusieurs mois après la visite de Gloria à l’école, nous sommes devenues quelque chose – une paire, comme dit papa.” A few pages later, I saw that the mother uses the word *thing* to refer to the same relationship: “that sort of things” (2013: 92), “that silly thing” (ibid) and “that thing between you two” (ibid: 93). This under-determined word is derogatory and reflects her inability to rely on her language to fully acknowledge lesbian love. I feel that the choice of words is not random: the father, who is more open-minded, uses the word *item*, the mother uses *thing* and the I-narrator, who has no name for the relationship, uses *something*, revealing a degree of helplessness.

I was uneasy, feeling that it would be important to understand not only the meaning, but the register and the connotation of the word, because the nature of the expression indicates the status of female homosexuality in the eyes of the father. After having read the whole story, I decided to let myself be guided by my general perception of the father (a benevolent man, slightly singular, tolerant and enjoying figurative speech, who is not oversensitive to people’s opinion and can respect love between two women), because I thought I knew what he would say in such a situation. Therefore, without remembering precisely all the details, I relied on my feelings to choose the words he will use. The word *tandem*17 came to mind, because it is more interesting and has a more positive connotation than *paire*. Finally, I dropped *comme* and left only “dit papa” because I felt that this gave the matter more emphasis.

17 The solution I retained does not perfectly reflect the original one, because the word “tandem”, in French, refers more immediately to the notion of a group of two people working together in a complementary way, unlike the word *item* in English.
I can summarize what was going on in my mind as follows: I was looking for a word, which I will call the unknown factor (X), which had to meet the following criteria:

- X contrasts with the word I use to translate thing.
- X is not derogatory.
- X belongs to the standard language.
- X can refer to a couple, but should have other meanings.
- X is used by a non-conformist benevolent Nigerian father living in Nigeria, who is never crude and uses figurative language.

I see two creative dimensions of my translation: first, the fact that I could produce a consistent vision of the father implies a re-creation of the character; then, my ability to rely on this vision to “let the character speak his own language”, basing myself no longer on the words of the original but on my interiorized notion of the character.

### 3.3 The place of creativity in the model

Translators, like readers or listeners, are creative in their attempts to understand. People never express themselves perfectly and it takes creativity to compensate for their imprecision. Any sincere attempt to understand a person or a text requires both making the most of one’s personal resources and a move to stand back from one’s own subjectivity in order to access what is really meant. This corresponds to Schleiermacher’s oscillatory movement between an intuitive (Divination) and a more analytical (Komparation) approach. Similarly, translators are creative in their attempts to choose the proper expression: they hover between the words, phrases or sentences from the original and those from their first, tentative versions until they find one which triggers something close to or compatible with the former.

Three hermeneutic oscillatory processes, which operate partly simultaneously, can be identified:
Figure 9: Three oscillatory processes in translation

Figure 9 shows the oscillations of the process, symbolised by sinusoidal lines, which can be considered as another representation of the hermeneutic circle. Part A represents the oscillation between the source text elements and the Resource Pool: the text resonates with the translator’s cognitive and emotional resources, but the HF filters out part of the attracted elements to prevent them from entering the ARA. Whatever seems of potential relevance or use is filtered into the core. The rest is left in the pool. The creativity criteria of fluency and acceptability can already be measured here: the more fluent the translators and the more resources available, the better they can activate them by filtering them into the core; the more watchful they are, the better they select productive resources and reject the useless ones. The so-called “preparation phase” of the creativity models corresponds to the initial flow of information into the ARA, based on whatever the translator associates with the text before reading it, and to the filtering of resources into it for further reflexion (or incubation).

Part B represents the oscillation of the activated fragments in the core, which collide, split, interact and recompose. This oscillation enables an interaction or mixing between antagonistic elements of the subjective/objective, emotional/rational and visual/abstract poles. Translators who are well focused can slow down or accelerate the process by acting on the HF. If there is no hurry, they can step back and let diverging or associate reflection take over. Their creativity may be assessed by the number of flashes of inspiration (corresponding to the illumination phase of the creative models) they get out of a working unit. The more segments there are and the smaller these segments are,
the more chances there are that they might collide and recombine to produce something interesting. Thus, the translation is all the more creative if the original text triggers more associations and if the more elements remain from previous working units. This explains the loss of creativity linked with the use of translation memory software: translators get predefined segments the size of a sentence and do not play around with them. To enrich the text, they must be creative revisers.

Part C represents the oscillations between fragments of potential solutions and the HF. The candidates (potential translations) are compared with the memorized original segment or analysed by defined criteria. Whether the translator is fully concentrated or focussing on something else, the HF detects any interesting productions (symbolized by little sparks). As long as the whole text has not been translated, the selected candidates remain memorized in the core, where they may interact with segments of the following working units.

4 Conclusion

The simplified model presented here has been designed to stimulate reflection on the translation process and its creativity. To introduce the problematic of the hermeneutic circle, a model of the translation process should provide for some permeability and an oscillatory move between germs of solutions and a regulatory agent. Moreover, in order to show that the production of solutions runs in parallel with the understanding process and that the various phases are partly concomitant, it is helpful to avoid a linear representation. Besides, the model should show that the product emerges from an interaction between different factors, which are indiscriminately distributed and can be linguistic, emotional, rational or associative.

The model should show that there is creativity both in understanding and in a restitution that relies on the exteriorization of the original, transcending its words. Besides, in order to account for creativity, a model of the translation process should show two things: that the more resources are used to find the solution, the more chances there are of finding a good solution, and the more selective the evaluation function is, the more appropriate the solution will be.
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