



## Think India (Quarterly Journal)

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### International Conference on Indigenous Languages and Translation Studies

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Venue- Seminar Hall, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Jain Deemed-to-be-University, Palace Road, Bengaluru, India



## Translation To Transcreation: Significance Of Subtitles.

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### Abstract

'If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.' (Nelson Mandela)

Translation involves rendering one language to another. Nevertheless, without proper attention to context and culture, intended meaning can be lost in the translated text. Phrases in one language cannot be directly translated word for word into another language. Transcreation is the merger of two words: translation and creation. It's an intricate form of translating that preserves the original intent, context, emotion, and tone. The paper attempts to show that the goal of transcreation is to duplicate the message thoughtfully and flawlessly, without audiences realizing a translation ever occurred. The paper endeavours to show that Transcreation serves as the translation strategy in especially difficult subtitling cases, Subtitles in AV Texts as a strategy of transcreation to a greater extent is successful in reaching a wider audience.

Key words: subtitles, translation, transcreation, text.

### **Introduction**

The English word "translation" derives from the Latin word *translatio*, (Velez 3-21)) which comes from *trans*, "across" + *ferre*, "to carry" or "to bring" (*-latio* in turn coming from *latus*, the past participle of *ferre*). Thus *translatio* is "a carrying across" or "a bringing across": in this case, of a text from one language to another. (Kasperek 83) The ancient Greeks distinguished between *metaphrase* (literal translation) and *paraphrase*. This distinction was adopted by English poet and translator John Dryden (1631–1700), who described translation as the judicious blending of these two modes of phrasing when selecting, in the target language, "counterparts," or equivalents, for the expressions used in the source language: Dryden cautioned, however, against the license of "imitation", i.e., of adapted translation: "When a painter copies from the life... he has no privilege to alter features and lineaments..."(Kasperek 84) Thus Translation involves rendering one language to another. Although it sounds simple enough, however, without proper attention to context and culture, intended meaning can be lost in the translated text. Phrases in one language should not be expected to directly translate word for word into another language. Poetry, for example, doesn't directly translate because it's filled with feeling and personal interpretation. For brands, slogans and taglines often include regional slang and colloquial words that require an approach beyond translating methods alone. That's where transcreation comes in.

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### Transcreation vs Translation

#### **Translation and Transcreation are related processes, but they are not identical.**

Translation in the Western world has a centuries-long history and has been marked in practice by two “ideal” approaches – metaphrase (word-for-word translation) – and paraphrase (i.e. “say in other words”). Due to idiom and the wide variety of local usages, word-for-word translation has long been considered inadequate and the best translations take into account the vocabulary, grammar, syntax, idiom and local usage of the target audience while remaining faithful to the text, and context, of the original document.

Transcreation expands upon translation by focusing not so much on the literal text, but on discerning the emotional response by viewers in the source language and working to elicit the same response from viewers in the target market. It is about “taking a concept in one language, and completely recreating it in another.”(4) Absolute fidelity to the text is secondary to eliciting the desired emotional response by the target audience. Because differences between cultures are so numerous, eliciting the same emotional reaction may also necessitate changes in the context of the message. According to transcreation agency Words in Translation, this contextual change can range from modern emoji to deep-seated colour symbolism. (5)

#### **What is Transcreation?**

Etymologically, Transcreation is the merger of two words: translation and creation. It’s an intricate form of translating that preserves the original intent, context, emotion, and tone. Originally conceived by marketing and advertising professionals, the goal of transcreation is to duplicate the message thoughtfully and seamlessly, without audiences realizing a translation ever occurred. The finished product should give the audience an identical emotional experience as the source message. Though English is a global language, people’s levels of English aren’t the same around the globe. Even when a title is not translated, it may still need to be transcreated. It has no formal definition and has not yet been accepted by Oxford Dictionaries. Sissel Rike talks about transcreation as “an approach used in particular for websites, marketing and advertising texts.” (P73) When talking about the possible repercussions of transcreation, Rike mentions that “the concept of transcreation can contribute to broadening the scope of the translator’s part in the communicative process.”(P 82) Another insight into transcreation is found in Di Giovanni (2008) who analyses the transformation of ancient Indian scripts into films for an Italian audience. According to Di Giovanni the term of transcreation is deeply connected to the translation of Indian sacred texts that would sometimes need radical changes (p 33). Di Giovanni tries to reach a definition of transcreation when she refers to the Indian translator P. Lal who “assumed transcreation as being “readable, not strictly faithful translation” (p34).

Transcreation is the process of re-developing or adapting content from one culture to another. The purpose of transcreation is to carry the intent, style, and tone of a message across cultural barriers, while maintaining the emotional reaction it creates. For this purpose, it goes beyond just translating linguistic messages – visual ones must often be translated too. Essentially a content creation process, transcreation requires skills that go beyond language and culture, such as the capacity to relate to the target audience and to create content that establishes trust

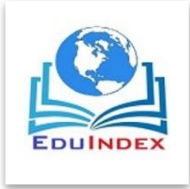
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and motivates the audience to take action. Transcreation often depends less on the source text than traditional translation because each regional version might require the creation of new images, storylines, and copy.

Successful transcreation must be an integral part of the content creation process, not an afterthought. It is crucial that the transcreation teams truly understand the concept and emotional intent of the message so that they can successfully transfer the intent globally. Transcreation is not something to be rushed through; all the right elements must be created to support the full intent of the message (Väisänen 2017).

‘If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart.’ (Nelson Mandela)

In addition to creativity, a transcreator should also have excellent knowledge of both the source language and the target language, thorough knowledge of cultural backgrounds and ought to be familiar with the product being advertised. In short, the finished text should read as if it were originally written in the reader’s own mother tongue, and give them the exact same experience as the source text gave to readers in the original language. Translation is about the ability to understand someone else’s language. Transcreation is about the ability to write in your own. Transcreation takes into account the difference in contexts between the source and target versions. This often means making cultural adjustments. People may share a language, but be divided by cultural factors that stop communications from working.

One of the most widely known examples of transcreation is the Spiderman comic in India. As producers realized that the American Spiderman was in no way a fit for the Indian market, they recreated it into an Indian boy named Pavitr Prabhakar. All elements of the original narration were recreated and replaced to offer it an Indian context. Even Spiderman’s suit was altered: wearing a dhoti, he fights the demon Rakshasa against backdrops such as the Taj Mahal. This is how transcreation brought Spiderman to life for the Indian market. (9)

The fundamental purpose of transcreation is to transfer the intent, style and emotional salience of a message from the original language to the targeted one. The goal of transcreation is to keep the meaning and emotion of text while adapting a new audience’s culture. Therefore, it is vital that not only the words but also the culture, dialects, and context must be considered equally. This may at times result in significant changes to the original message, but the soul of the message remains same because transcreation attempts to bring about the same feeling by saying something different. Any lack of knowledge about the local values and beliefs can have a very adverse effect on the marketing strategies of companies. So, a transcreator must have expertise in marketing, as well as linguistic skills and a firm grasp of targeted cultures. Text featuring creative wordplay and techniques such as assonance or alliteration requires more than a straightforward translation, they need to be transcreated to ensure this impact is retained. For example, *Seven Samurai* (1954), the thrilling film about seven samurai warriors in feudal Japan who defend a poor village from roving bandits, was remade as *The Magnificent Seven* in 1960, a thrilling film about seven gunfighters in Mexico who defend a poor village from roving bandits. In this case, the film was re-written from page one for an American audience. (10)

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Transcreation is a distinct translation process that is mainly used to describe the cross-cultural adaptation of advertising and marketing copy. The process is more than a straight translation; rather it is a creative writing and localisation process that is carried out by specialised mother-tongue translators who are also copywriters. Often advertising campaigns will be recreated from scratch in order to get the same impact within a different culture, so effectively, transcreation is not translation per se. (11)

Haribo is to Germans what Cadbury is to the British: an institution. So when they decided to launch their products in the UK, it was important that the tagline was spot-on. The English literal translation of the German slogan „*Haribo macht Kinder froh, und Erwachsene ebenso*“ [“*Haribo makes kids happy, and adults too*”] was pretty flat as it lacks the punchy rhythm and rhyme of the original. And so the following line was born: “***Kids and grown-ups love it so, the happy world of Haribo***”. (10) To take the phrase and to translate the tone of the message along with the rhyme, metre, and cadence is a rare skill. It is the translation jackpot. Yet with transcreation, fidelity is not the priority. Accordingly, the best case scenario is not just perfect preservation – it is to actually improve upon the original. A transcreation brief provides the freedom to do this. McDonald’s is another good example of a company that uses transcreation with outstanding results. Not only does McDonald’s transcreate their slogans, they also adapt and localize their menus to suit the tastes of their target audiences. Each country has its own exclusive menus with products adapted to the local culture. For ex: Mc Paneer in India. In a funny transcreation blunders Pepsi got it badly wrong when their slogan ‘Come alive with the Pepsi generation’ was rendered in Chinese as ‘Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave’.”(11)

Contrary to what people may think, transcreation is not just relevant to creative copy. For example, documents relating to recruitment policies and training manuals may not work well when translated literally, as people’s motivations and attitudes are so different across cultures. A little local knowledge goes a long way. It can mean completely different things in different cultures. In the Western world, for example, white is associated with peace and weddings, while in Asia, white is for funerals.

Last but not least, **transcreation** is the process of re-creating in another language, which is generally the case of campaign advertisement, etc. In fact, these generally consist of word games and if translated literally would simply not work for the target audience. The best way to get a message through to people is normally to give them it in their own language. This principle of recreating the reader experience is where the magic of transcreation resides.

### Significance of Subtitles

Baker (1998) states that subtitling was first used in Europe since 1929 when the first talkies reached Europe. Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997, p.161) define subtitling as ‘the process of providing synchronized captions for film and television dialogue’. O’Connell (2007, p.169) defines subtitling as ‘supplementing the original voice sound track by adding written text on the screen’. So, the main role for subtitling is to facilitate an access for the foreign viewers on audio-visual product in a foreign language.

Jorge Diaz Cintas and Aline Remael define subtitling as

“a translation practice that consists of presenting a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen, that endeavors to recount the original dialogue of the



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speakers, as well as the discursive elements that appear in the image (letters, inserts, graffiti, inscriptions, placards, and the like), and the information that is contained on the soundtrack (songs, voices off) (Diaz Cintas, Remael, 2007, p15).

Jan Pedersen points out three constraints of subtitling: spatial constraints, temporal constraints, and constraints stipulated by a semiotic switch from spoken to written language (p 18) some of the challenges, appearing due to the constrained nature of subtitling, can be addressed effectively by implementing the strategy of transcreation. Subtitling seems like a pure kind of translation – after all, they retain all of the original video content, and merely superimpose translations onto it. But remember that subtitles content is re-written for locale quite often – for example, to “sell” jokes that wouldn’t translate to a specific locale.

**Subtitles** are text derived from either a transcript or screenplay of the dialog or commentary in films, television programs, video games, and the like, usually displayed at the bottom of the screen, but can also be at the top of the screen if there is already text at the bottom of the screen. They can either be a form of written translation of a dialog in a foreign language, or a written rendering of the dialog in the same language, with or without added information to help viewers who are deaf or hard of hearing to follow the dialog, or people who cannot understand the spoken dialogue or who have accent recognition problems.

The finished subtitle file is used to add the subtitles to the picture. The different types of subtitles are: Automatic captioning, Same-language subtitling(SLS), Same-language captions, i.e., without translation, were primarily intended as an aid for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, Closed captions ,Real time, Pre-prepared, Live and Subtitles for the deaf or hard-of-hearing (SDH) (20)

#### **Problems of subtitling**

The differences between cultural norms of different countries rise up through using language and translating from one language to another, especially during subtitling because it deals with audio-visual materials (Toury, p.38).

Humor presents the most popular form of cultural challenges for subtitlers because sometimes laughter is more important than the meaning in certain TV series like American sitcom ‘Friends’. Humor can be classified into international jokes which can be translated literally and it is easy to understand. The local or national jokes and their sub community jokes represent the main cultural challenge for the translators. Another example is the representation of people from particular field or who hold a certain position like ‘MP’ in Britain, the person who represent people in House of Commons, but in other countries they use ‘Deputy’ instead of ‘MP’ to refer to that person (Cintas and Remael, p.37).

**Linguistic Challenges.** Cintas and Remael ( p.190-96) shed the light on the linguistic challenges which face the subtitlers and state that the linguistic choice in subtitling is not random, in other words, characters in audio-visual programs or films convey certain effects through their grammar, syntax, lexicon, annotation, etc. which carries connotative meaning in addition to the denotative one. Even Idioms should be handled with caution. If translated literally, they often make little sense! Take the English phrase “to kill two birds with one stone”. In other languages, the equivalent idioms are rather different. Germans “hit two flies with one blow”. Chinese “shoot two hawks with one arrow”. Burmese “get two pieces with

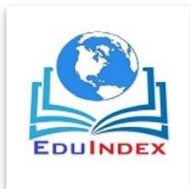
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one cut”. Koreans “catch a pheasant and its eggs as well” and Italians “snare two pigeons with one bean”.

### Conclusion

There's a reason why people say “Lost in translation” ..... but not “Lost in transcreation”. Transcreation is the process of re-developing or adapting content from one culture to another, while transferring its meaning and maintaining its intent, style, and voice. Hence transcreation as a strategy can be effectively implemented while subtitling to cover the gaps in communication. Translators must not forget that different places have different cultures and a single formula cannot be applied to all of them. Depending upon the targeted audience, the message to be delivered must be transcreated so as to have an active and positive impact on the new audience. The text, as well as the images used, must go with the people and culture of the land to avoid any kind of embarrassment. Transcreation must be adopted while subtitling any AV text to cross borders because undoubtedly, transcreation is the real Evolution in the world of Translation. Trans creation serves as the translation strategy in especially difficult subtitling cases, Subtitles in AV Texts as a strategy of transcreation to a greater extent is successful in reaching a wider audience. This verse of Percy Bysshe Shelley's (1792-1822) sums up the concept.

“The vanity of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language to another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flower.” (*A Defence of Poetry*. 1821) Ideas and feelings get lost in translation, and people have known that forever. To overcome this problem, when you create something new in its stead, an old idea is spread for generations.

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