modelling creativity in translation

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• the ‘creative’ translation vs. literal translation: why is one more creative than the other?

• a text has different levels of description

• creative translation deals with multi-level system of constraints

• this multi-level system of constraints makes meaning processual and prone to change
creative translation

“not only the signified but also the sign itself is translated, (...) its very materiality (sonorous properties, graphical-visual properties all of that which forms, for Charles Morris, the iconicity of the aesthetic sign...)

Haroldo de Campos
creative translation

…the signified, the semantic parameter, becomes just a kind of boundary marker for the 're-creative' enterprise”

Haroldo de Campos
translation centered on the materiality of the sign

vs.

translation centered on the signified, the referential message

...how can we model this difference?
text: levels of description

- pragmatic
- semantic
- syntactic
- morphological
- phonological / typographic
‘literal’ translation

- you **can** isolate the semantic levels

- pragmatic
- semantic
- syntactic
- morphological
- phonological / typographic
‘literal’ translation

• you can isolate the semantic level

why?
‘literal’ translation

- you can isolate the semantic level

- levels are either decoupled, loosely coupled, or their coupling is irrelevant

- semantic meaning is autonomous across different material circumstances and situations


‘literal’ translation

- you can isolate the semantic level

- a text has a fixed identity, its message: an unchangeable, immutable core of meaning, that can be communicated in different ways

- action of a translator doesn’t change this core
‘literal’ translation

**source-sign**
- pragmatic
- semantic
- syntactic
- morphological
- phonological / typographic

**target-sign**
- pragmatic
- semantic
- syntactic
- morphological
- phonological / typographic
You cannot isolate the levels.
creative translation

- you cannot isolate the levels

why?
creative translation

- you cannot isolate the levels

- levels are relevantly coupled
- organization of the elements of a level narrows down the possibilities of organization of the elements of another level: *multi-level constraints*
creative translation

- you cannot isolate the levels
- a sign has no fixed identity, it is always in process
- action of a translator participates in this process and can radically transform meaning
a multi-level system of constraints

- pragmatic
- semantic
- syntactic
- morphological
- phonological / typographic
translation of multi-level constraints

**source-sign**
- pragmatic
- semantic
- syntactic
- morphological
- phonological / typographic

**target-sign**
- pragmatic
- semantic
- syntactic
- morphological
- phonological / typographic
If we are correct...

- Haroldo’s ‘creative translation’ really accounts for creativity in translation
- texts can be modelled as multi-level systems of constraints
- creativity in translation is related to operation on multi-level constraints
If we are correct...

...then how do we interpret our results?
2 possible keys for interpretation: 1

- **situated cognition**: creativity is somehow dependent on the manipulation of available semiotic resources in a situation…
a multi-level system of constraints with uncountable opportunities of creative influence…
a huge bias and no resources left for creativity
2 possible keys for interpretation: 1

- **situated cognition**: creativity is somehow dependent on the manipulation of available semiotic resources in a situation…

  …and is negatively influenced when situational resources are considered irrelevant.
translation

structure of the problem

linguistic material

actions of the translator
translation

structure of the problem

linguistic material

actions of the translator
structure of the problem

linguistic material

actions of the translator

translation
'literal' translation

structure of the problem

linguistic material

actions of the translator
2 possible keys for interpretation: 2

• **problem solving**: translation involves the action of a translator on the linguistic material as structured by the problem...

....if the meaning of the source-sign is seen as immutable, one can only arrive at very efficient *solutions* for reconstructing it.
‘literal’ translation

- structure of the problem
- linguistic material
- actions of the translator
creative translation

structure of the problem

linguistic material

actions of the translator
2 possible keys for interpretation: 2

• problem solving: translation involves the action of a translator on the linguistic material as structured by the problem...

... if the meaning of the source-sign is seen as a process prone to change, the activity of translation itself can modify the meaning the translator is trying to translate. trying to solve the problem feedbacks on the problem itself: one can arrive not only at new solutions, but at new problems.
thank you!

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