# Translation and creativity in the 21st century

## SUSAN BASSNETT – LAWRENCE VENUTI – JAN PEDERSEN – IVANA HOSTOVÁ

The discussion below, which took place during a roundtable at the conference Translation, Interpreting and Culture 2: Rehumanising Translation Studies held in September 2021 in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, addresses topical issues pertaining to translation and creativity in contemporary translation practice and research, both in general and focused on literary and audiovisual translation.

**INTRODUCTION**
IVANA HOSTOVÁ: With the incessantly expanding number of texts to be translated for the globalized market and international institutions, instrumental thinking has to a great extent become ingrained both in translator training programs and in research on translation. Recent years have also seen heated debates concerning the unethical employment of poorly post-edited machine translation, misguidedly used with the intention of preserving small or minority languages (Baumgarten and Cornellà-Dettrel 2018). Theory is making visible the consequences of accepting the instrumental view of translation by addressing such issues as the depletion of language commons as expressive linguistic resources (Cronin 2016a), the commodification of education, and the occlusion of human agency in these circumstances (cf. Cronin 2016b; Dizdar 2014; Venuti 2019). Creativity as manifested in the complex handling of languages in cultural contexts has been advocated as one way in which translators can fight the impact of this crude commodification of linguistic transfer. To translate poetry, to tackle wordplay when translating subtitles, to deal with complex intertextualities in a novel – all these endeavors require enormous time expenditure and bring little immediate profit. However, to engage in these is to perform activities that in the long term help to alleviate the detrimental effect that the superficial handling of interlingual transfer can have on languages, cultures and the translation process.

"Creativity" is a term that – similar to "translation" – escapes a single definition. Some scholars have argued that it is intimately connected with language, since "creativity stands at the core of both the emergence and evolution of different forms

of language practices, well beyond art [...]. In the absence of language there would be little, if any, creative action" (Demuth and Glaveanu 2016, 54). It is therefore not surprising that "creativity" is a concept which is often used when we write or speak about translation. For the purposes of the following discussion, we can outline three topical areas concerning translation and creativity.

**(1)   The secondary status of translation springing from the binary of source and target texts by definition renders the translator as the less creative actor (if indeed creative at all) – compared to the author/authors – in the process of text production.**

It is creativity – thinking outside the box, transgressing common norms, making individualized translation choices, introducing elements unprovoked by the text undergoing translation – that enables a literary translator to carry a challenging text (especially texts like poetry, philosophical treatises or innovative/experimental/conceptual writing) across the boundaries of its cultural and cognitive domain.

Innovative writing often employs translation as one of its procedures or handles the foreign text as a source of creative material, especially in the writing of poets who are also translators, both explicitly as in US-based poet and translator Brandon Brown's *The Persians by Aeschylus* (2011) or the Scottish poet and translator Peter Manson's *English in Mallarmé* (2014) and less conspicuously as in the Czech poet Viky Shock's *V předsíni dýchal idiot* (An idiot breathed in the hallway, 2020) or *Batéria* (Battery, 2014) by the Slovak poet and translator Karol Chmel (cf. Piorecký and Škrabal 2020, 571; Hostová 2015, 2). But when investigated very closely, even exemplars of what we would call prototypical "literary translation" or "original writing" contain procedures that dilute the illusion that writing a text and translating one are two radically different activities. Moreover, as Lawrence Venuti argues, "a translation can only communicate an interpretation of the source text, never that text itself or some form or meaning believed to be inherent in it" (2011, 426).

The status of the source and target text is especially unclear when it comes to such areas in translation as localization (Pym 2004, 35) or audiovisual translation (Pedersen 2019, 51). These issues pose a number of questions, such as: (a) Has the basic binary model of source and target (text and culture) become obsolete or can it still serve as an explanatory model, as a certain backdrop from which further thinking can spring (in teaching for example)? (b) Where – in the practices that combine translational and non-translational procedures – are the boundaries between a translation and a new text? Is it even necessary or productive to insist on these boundaries? (c) Would a more radical abolishing of the boundaries (between translated and non-translated texts and between source and target texts) in any way threaten translation studies as a field?

**(2)   With the quickly improving natural language processing technologies and the growing number of texts that need translation, human creativity in the translation process might become restricted as the quantity of translations that require post-editing limits the extent to which humans and human creativity are involved in the process.**

Intellectuals from various domains have argued that instead of rejecting these technologies, translation studies and translation practice and products included, should look for ways to cooperate with phenomena like artificial intelligence, to insert human sensitivity into the machine and to create *with* it, since ignoring technological advances could ultimately enclose the arts, literature and the human sciences within their individual domains and prevent them from engaging with broader public debates and having real impact on the shape of the world. This prompts the question of whether (and how) we can (or should) fuel a transdisciplinary and intermedial dialogue (e.g. by building creative teams) between the natural sciences and technologies on the one hand and human-centered fields and areas of practice.

A recurrent fear voiced by translators and translation scholars is the diminishing role of the human translator (and, by extension, of creativity) in the process of interlingual exchange. However, in *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty*, Benjamin Bratton argues that "[t]hinking with tools, and [...] working with the fixed capital of advanced technologies, is a good thing. It is part of the genesis of our species. It is how we mediate the world and are mediated by it; we become what we are by making that which in turn makes us" (2015, under "Preface"). Even the invention of writing and, later, of the printing press which enable us to create and move texts in translation at all are technologies. Or, as Karin Littau puts it, "[t]here is [...] something wrong with an overly anthropocentric emphasis on mind, consciousness, language, meaning, discourse, critique, etc, if it makes us blind to the very things that arguably are the conditions of possibility for humanization: the material technologies and techniques that underpin cultural practices such as reading, writing, translating, painting, counting, etc." (2016, 84). This raises at least two questions: (a) why are pre-machine translation technological advances generally deemed acceptable in translation and translation studies while services using neural machine translation have become such an enemy and (b) how can translators use the machine translation that is perceived as a threat so as to take the current state of natural language processing technologies into account and turn them into an advantage.

**(3)   Translation studies often lacks sufficient creativity that would help it escape the confines of its own domain and enter new transdisciplinary dialogues, including the new models of thought as outlined by such thinkers in critical posthumanism as Rosi Braidotti (2013, 163).**

Susan Bassnett and David Johnston (2019, 184) have recently pointed out the perceived "lack of original thinking [...] in many conferences dedicated to translation" which prevents the discipline from being able to enter wider transdisciplinary discussions that have the ability to address the pressing crises faced by the planet. The key points here then would be (a) how this impasse can be overcome and (b) what tools can be used to reinsert creativity into translation research and teaching.

## OPENING STATEMENTS

SUSAN BASSNETT: I believe that all translation has a creative dimension. Translation involves finding solutions to problems that arise as one moves between languages, hence translating all kinds of text, whether they are epic poems, plays, tourist brochures, legal texts or instruction manuals always has its creative dimension. When I first came across functionalist theory years ago, particularly as promoted by Katharina Reiss and Hans Vermeer, I found it very useful and applicable also to literary texts, because the whole basis of skopos theory is simply to just be mindful of the purpose for which the translation is being undertaken, and then to make those linguistic selections that appear most appropriate. The translator has to take responsibility and taking responsibility for a text – whether it is a translation of a business letter or newspaper report on a football game or a recipe or whatever – involves freedom on the part of the translator to reshape it accordingly.

My interest is in literary translation. I have done a lot of judging of international literary prizes in the last twenty years, and I find that a fascinating process in terms of thinking about translators' creativity. For many years, I was one of the judges on the Spender Poetry in Translation Prize, and I noticed that the texts to which we awarded the prizes tended to be the ones that took the greatest risks. Risks included taking a 19th-century Italian dialect poet and translating him into Scots or translating short Greek epigrams into text messages or transforming the Latin poet Catullus into a contemporary rap artist. In other words, exercising a freedom, as Anne Carson (King 2012) called it, to "crazy" things up a bit. Another thing that one has to bear in mind is the instability of the original with earlier texts, and my argument here is that in a sense, the older the text, the more textual manipulation it has gone through with multiple hands and therefore the more creative a translator needs to be.

As to some of the questions Ivana has outlined: one of them asked whether the binary model of source and target has become obsolete. I think it was always inadequate, except perhaps as a pedagogical tool for the teaching of a foreign language. Also, can we talk about boundaries, that is, when is a translation not a translation, when does it become an adaptation? I do not find this distinction helpful at all. The basic criterion in theatre translation when people talk about the difference between an adaptation and a translation seems to be the distance perceivable in the freedom of the translator that a text has travelled from its source. And I do not find that helpful. As to the problem of translating small languages, I would again like to refer to one of the translation prizes which I have judged – the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation. This is the fifth year and we can see something quite interesting here, which is not only a number of small publishers willing to take risks, but an interesting number of prize winning entries from small languages. In the first year of the prize, we awarded it to Yoko Tawada, a Japanese-German writer. The second year it went to a Croatian writer, and last year it went to a Georgian writer. The only major language was French – we awarded the prize to Annie Ernaux in 2019. But looking at which languages are represented in our shortlists, one can see that there are very interesting artworks written in small languages – we had a Georgian writer, two Finnish ones, three Hungarian, three Korean, five Polish, a Russian, Sudanese.

I think that when we are thinking about creativity, we also have to take into account the unpredictability. Also, what I call the randomness of translation success because, well, the Elena Ferrante phenomenon, for example, I think is a classic example of this. I read those four books in Italian and I thought they will never work in English, they are just culturally too tied to the Italian context. But I was wrong. And there are endless examples of writers who one assumes will be hugely successful but who have not been successful at all in the target culture. In other cases, and it is not just Elena Ferrante, I would cite the famous J.K. Rowling and *Harry Potter* or the Brazilian Paulo Coelho, who has become an international bestseller, a global phenomenon, it is the other way around. Both of those are writers that were pretty well ignored when they first came out. So I think the unpredictability factor which has everything to do with how readers read and thankfully cuts across the marketing process has to be taken into consideration.

LAWRENCE VENUTI: Anything said about translation always assumes a concept of what translation is. And the fact is that not every concept can disclose in a comprehensive and incisive way the nature of the translator's creativity. Consider a concept of translation that has long dominated the history of translation theory and commentary throughout the world right down to the present: I call it instrumentalism. It understands translation as the reproduction or transfer of an invariant contained in or caused by the source text, an invariant form, meaning or effect. Here it would seem that the translator's creativity lies, not in perceiving the source-text invariant – that cognitive ability would constitute basic competence – but rather in choosing or developing a form, meaning, or effect in the translating language that exactly matches that invariant. I say "choosing or developing" because the corresponding form, meaning, or effect may not preexist the translation process in the translating language; it may have to be constructed somehow. Hence instrumentalism imagines the translator's creativity as a certain resourcefulness, the results of which are evaluated as to correctness or accuracy against the source-text invariant. To be creative in translation, then, is to get the source text right in these terms.

Yet just how creative is getting it right? Doesn't an instrumental model of translation essentially reduce the translator's labor to mechanical substitution? Translation here is largely a matter of replacing one word by one word, whereby a formal, semantic, or effective invariant in the source text is believed to be preserved intact during the translation process, that is to say reproduced or transferred so that it is communicated or signified in the translated text. We can call this process one that requires resourcefulness, but finally that seems to be a misnomer, since by "mechanical" I mean that a machine can do it, properly programmed.

To discover a way out of this quagmire we must acknowledge that instrumentalism carries an egregious corollary. This is the empiricist assumption that the invariant is simply available to perception without the translator's construction or interpretation. The invariant, however, doesn't exist: it is in fact a variable interpretation.

You may of course object by insisting that source-text words have stable, inherent grammatical features and meanings so the translator need only perceive them to locate formal, semantic, and effective invariants. But this objection doesn't stand up. Why not?

Merely by choosing the word as the unit of translation, you have already initiated the process of constructing the so-called invariant since *many* different units of translation are possible – not only the word, but the phrase, sentence, paragraph, section or chapter, right up to the entire text – and the choice of a specific unit will inevitably affect how the translator construes grammar and meaning at a lower or smaller level in the scale of units. Moving between languages, furthermore, releases the possibility of synonymy, where similarity in meaning cannot be treated as identity, pointing to the fact that meaning in language is ultimately determined by context. Translation builds a context for the source text in a different language and culture, so that differences in form, meaning, and effect are inevitable – even when the translator struggles to establish a semantic correspondence and stylistic approximation, not so much to the source text itself as to the translator's understanding of the source text. The invariant, then, does not exist as a readily perceptible essence residing in any text, since any text is never available in some direct, unmediated way but always already processed or interpreted.

To reveal the translator's creativity, we need a concept of translation that is fundamentally hermeneutic. Translation can be understood as an interpretive act that inevitably varies source-text form, meaning, and effect according to intelligibilities and interests in the receiving culture. The translator applies interpretive factors drawn from receiving cultural forms and practices that are arranged in a hierarchy of authority or prestige. An interpretation is inscribed in the source text through linguistic patterns, cultural traditions, and translation conventions, through the styles, genres, and discourses of specific media, which enable the translation to support meanings, values, and functions in the receiving situation. This interpretive act reveals translation at its most creative because any source text can support the construction of multiple and conflicting interpretations. The institutions in and through which translations are produced and circulated delimit a range of acceptable interpretations even as those institutions try to control how the translations themselves are received or interpreted. Translation of any kind of text, whether humanistic, pragmatic, or technical, regardless of the medium, should be seen as creative precisely because it has the potential to be a powerful act of interpretation – depending, of course, on the translator's inventiveness in construing verbal choices at interpretive moves.

An example is offered by Darcy Paquet's English subtitles for Bong Joon-ho's 2019 film, *Parasite*. An instrumentalist model might fault Paquet's translation at two points where it deviates from specific words on the Korean soundtrack. Thus he changes a reference to "Seoul National University" to "Oxford" in a scene where the Kim family fabricates a resume to secure a lucrative job. With the Korean word, "chapa-guri", a neologism that splices together two brand names for instant noodles, "chapa-ghetti" and "neoguri", Paquet used "ram-don", which is also a neologism, although formed from two Japanese words, "ramen" and "udon". The Japanese borrowing thus deviates from Korean usage: Korean viewers would immediately recognize as Korean the neologism, "chapa-guri", along with the two brand names from which it is formed. In interviews Paquet himself has acknowledged these deviations, explaining his choices as an effort to increase accessibility. They would be easier to understand for Anglophone viewers.

Yet Paquet's choices need not be regarded as deviations, since they actually adhere to the film, if not the soundtrack. From a hermeneutic point of view, they are interpretive moves that develop key themes. They glance at the foreign domination that Korea has suffered since the beginning of the 20th century – first by Japanese colonial rule, then by the United States military presence – insofar as they indicate the characters' fascination with Anglophone and Japanese cultures as repositories of cultural resources that are perceived as valuable and therefore worthy of imitation. This fascination is represented in the film by the wealthy Park family whom the impoverished Kim family exploit to improve their own financial situation. It is Mrs. Park who requests the beef noodle dish called "ram-don" in the subtitles. Even if Paquet did not intend the thematic resonances that I have located in his verbal choices, they can be seen as constituting inventive interpretations that point up the postcolonial discourse in the film.

JAN PEDERSEN: I do not find these translation solutions to be errors either. I think they are indeed interpretations that could validly be made in the subtitles of *Parasite*. I also agree with Susan that all translation is creative – that is, all *human* translation is creative. My notion of creativity involves intent and intentionality, and machines and algorithms cannot have intentions. So machines cannot, to my mind, be creative.

I work mainly in subtitling and in this field, the binary opposition between instrumentalism and hermeneutics needs to be nuanced. To me, it is a question of perspective. As subtitles themselves are not the target text – reading subtitles without the original film makes little or no sense – we need to separate process and product here. Because of the well-known constraints of the medium (time and space constraints, shift from spoken to written language, semiotic cohesion etc.), the process of subtitling inevitably means choices, priorities and interpretation. In other words, the process of making subtitles is a highly hermeneutic and creative act. However, viewed as products, subtitles are instrumental. How could they not be? No one ever went to the cinema with the sole intention of reading subtitles. In subtitling, the target text is best defined as the source text plus the subtitles. The subtitles are thus instrumental for accessing and enjoying the film. This form of instrumentalism is nothing new in audiovisual translations. We find old axioms like "the best subtitles are those that you never notice" (Søndergaard 2000), "willing suspension of linguistic disbelief" (Romero-Fresco 2009) and "a contract of illusion" (Pedersen 2011). And there are similar metaphors in other forms of translation as well, e.g. the "translation pact" (Alvstad 2014) for literary translation. To me it is clear that viewers (and readers) are aware that they read a different text from the original; it is obvious as the original dialogue and the subtitles are co-present in the subtitled target text. However, they disregard this knowledge in order to immerse themselves in what they consciously deceive themselves to be the source text.

When it comes to the issue of creativity, there is a big discussion about creative subtitles these days, because with improved technology, a lot of text on screen is included in the source text films. In the translation process, some subtitles now also appear in various places and interact with the source text in fascinating ways. And the common name for that, both in business and academia, is *creative sub-*

*titles*. So, for example in the TV series *Sherlock* (Gatiss and Moffat 2010–2017), text messages appear on screen, a business letter gets constructed in that form in the subtitles or, in dream sequences, the subtitles appear in a mist. There are various other forms of creative use of subtitles interacting with other semiotic channels on the screen.

However, I do not think the label *creative subtitles* should be reserved for such ways of handling the subtitles only. To my mind, creativity in subtitles also lies elsewhere. For instance, in the creative interpretative solutions from *Parasite* just mentioned. And there are more overtly creative solutions in traditional subtitles as well. Consider for example the Danish subtitles of the TV series *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (Chapman et al 1969–1973). In the "Trouble at the mill" sketch, there is a caption on screen that simply says "Jarrow-1912", and the Danish subtitle of that says just "se ovenfor" – "see above". The subtitle interacts with the source text, and communicates a direct instruction to the viewer. These are still traditional subtitles, but they are handled in a very creative way. And further on in the same sketch, the character says "there is trouble at the mill". Then he specifies the trouble, but the words are undecipherable. The Danish subtitler translated that into "mumlenog-såovenikøbetpådialekt" (mumblingandthenalsoevenindialect). So instead of reproducing the nonsensical message – it becomes apparent in the dialogue that neither the speaker nor the hearer understands what the message means – the subtitler focused on the style and interpreted the utterance functionally, rather than semantically. My other example comes from the Swedish subtitles of the TV series *Little Britain* (Walliams and Lucas 2003–2007). In the series, the character of Vicky Pollard speaks very quickly and very nonsensically. In one of the episodes, she is asked if she bit a fellow pupil. In her fast and confused reply, she does not address the question. Her utterance instead reproduces the stereotype of the original Essex girl. The Swedish public service broadcaster created a translation with a new meaning, which is more related to the way she speaks rather than to what she says. These are all examples of creative subtitles, too. I think that it is misleading to talk about creative subtitles only when they look different, e.g. when they have unusual colours, fonts or placement. I think that creativity is a continuum and requires intent. Therefore, Stavroula Sokoli, Rita Menezes and I have suggested the term "free form subtitles" (as noted by Romero-Fresco 2021) for the first examples I quoted, because they mainly stand out by where they are placed and what fonts they use and how they look on screen and so on. This term is more adequate in my opinion, since all forms of subtitling are in fact creative.

### DISCUSSION

IVANA HOSTOVÁ: Let us now move to some of the points I wanted us to discuss. Susan, you opened the question of the viability of the old binary of source and target text and you said that in your view, it is not something really stable or existent…

SUSAN BASSNETT: Yes, I do not think the opposition is particularly helpful. It can be useful, I think, as a pedagogical tool. It can assist you with the teaching of a foreign language and also with the teaching of translation. This is one of the rea-

sons why in my translation workshops I like to give my students a range of different possibilities. Because when you show the possibilities inherent in translating a text, you immediately see how that kind of binary distinctions start to dissolve.

JAN PEDERSEN: I agree that the binary is useful for teaching purposes, both in languages and in translation. But I also think that the binary opposition is not a very good way of seeing it. I think we need to have a more nuanced and pluralistic view of source texts and target texts. But I also like to strongly state that they are different texts – the source and the target text. A translation can never change the source text because the source text is still there, and the target text is then created as a different text. The source text remains untouched by the translation. The only way in which a translation – a target text – can change the source text is when a reader comes to a source text after having read the target text. In this way, in his or her mind that reading of the source text may be affected by the translation that she or he has read. But that is not a change in the source text itself, it is a change in the way that the reader sees the source text. And then, of course, there are many different levels of source and target texts. Also, there are often, especially in subtitling, many different source text versions, therefore source texts are not really stable over time anyway, and target text can be worked upon in many ways. Some target texts do not even have source texts – take the example of pseudotranslations. So while it is a complicated issue, I think we do need some sort of common ground for that purpose. I think the terminology is useful to be kept.

LAWRENCE VENUTI: Among the problems with thinking of translation as simply a process of moving from a source to a translated text is certainly that it conceals the translator's creative development and application of interpretive factors. No translation can be produced without this third category insofar as it involves factors that are formal (e.g. a concept of equivalence, a style, a discourse) and thematic (e.g. an ideology, a function). To reduce translation to a source and a translated text invites the sort of naïve comparison that has long rested on the instrumentalist notion of a source-text invariant, typically a semantic essence that the translator can and should reproduce to translate effectively.

It is also important to recognize – in my view – that a sharp distinction exists between instrumentalism and a hermeneutic model of translation. They are mutually exclusive. Instrumentalism stresses invariance, reproduction or transfer, and in some formulations untranslatability, whereas a hermeneutic model stresses variation, interpretation, and translatability. Not only would I argue that instrumentalism is a hoax – the invariant doesn't exist – but it is not possible to think of translation in both instrumentalist and hermeneutic terms at the same time (even if a commentary on translation may assume contradictory models in different statements).

Most film viewers who depend on subtitles tend to bring to their viewing experience the instrumentalist assumption that the subtitles reproduce essential meanings contained in the soundtrack. This assumption underpins the imaginative engrossment they experience, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's notion (he applied it to theatrical performance) of the "willing suspension of disbelief", and it is this very assumption that enables them to succumb to the realist illusion, effectively

erasing the distinction between art and reality. If, however, viewers treat the subtitles as an interpretation, they would be more detached in their viewing, certainly perceiving the meanings they need to make sense of the entire audiovisual image, but also grasping subtleties like tone, dialect, style, and intertextuality while regarding them as provisional, admitting of other possible interpretations, especially as gauged against the audiovisual image. Or at least this would be the first hermeneutic step. It is a step, however, that is not routinely taken by viewers, by film scholars, even by translation scholars – unless some linguistic peculiarity appears in the subtitle that dislodges the viewer from the illusionism. At which point, of course, the viewer need not process the peculiarity as an interpretive move. It can be folded back into a semantic essentialism, a meaning contained in the soundtrack, or just denigrated as bad translation.

IVANA HOSTOVÁ: The question of whether the source text does or does not get changed by the fact that it has been translated probably depends on the definition of the source text – on whether its reception, not just on the individual level, but on the level of the source culture, is a part of it or not. Because when a text is translated from a small language into a dominant language, the source text changes its status – it becomes more important, sometimes even canonical.

JAN PEDERSEN: I agree that the status of the source text will change, but the source text itself would remain the same.

LAWRENCE VENUTI: The idea of distinguishing between the source text and its status – I don't really see how that can be helpful, because the source text is only available to us through mediations, interpretations. We can say that the words on the page of the source text stay the same – if the text is still under copyright, copyright law will ensure that it gets copied in that way. But translation does materially change the status of the text. Pascale Casanova (1999) speaks about translation as a consecration of source languages, source texts, source literatures. That is a key example of the power of translation. But we are not going to see that power if we understand the source text as purely a succession of words on the page. The source text is not just that. What ultimately matters is the way the text is understood, the way it is interpreted, the way it is processed in translation or other forms of interpretation – even the way it is typeset can affect the meaning of the text.

IVANA HOSTOVÁ: Let us now move from the opposition between the source and target text to the opposition of the human and the machine in translation. Some translators and translation scholars perceive current developments in natural language processing as a threat to human languages and to translation. Others call for translation studies and translation practices to look for ways to cooperate with these phenomena and to try to insert human sensitivity into the machine, to interact with the artificial intelligence in a creative way. And the idea behind these practices is not to replace human agency, but to humanize the machine. Do you see such trans-disciplinary and intermedial dialogue between natural sciences and technologies, on the one hand, and human-centered fields – humanities, social sciences, arts – on the other, as something that can alleviate the possible detrimental effects of technologies in translation practice?

JAN PEDERSEN: I definitely think so, because there is too little dialogue between the tech industry which makes the machines and the humanists who have to use the machines. That is why, in my opinion, humans currently get to be used by the machines and not vice versa. There needs to be a more intense dialogue with the developers of software also about what it means to translate. This is because the notions that many technology people or natural science people have of translation are very different from the many and various forms of definitions and understandings of translation that translators and humanists have. I think that there is a lot to be gained from a dialogue all the way through from the very beginning, to understand the concepts and also to understand the needs of the translators and also the needs of the viewers and readers.

SUSAN BASSNETT: I think this is an important point also because there are enormous generational differences in technological awareness. I admit to being what I call technologically semi-literate. During the eighteen months of the pandemic, I have given a lot of consideration to this because clearly we are all finding ourselves using technology in ways that many of us could not have imagined two years ago. We have been forced to rethink our relationship with technology as a means of communication. But this is very difficult to generalise exactly because of these generational differences. We are witnessing a massive generational transformation – the scale of which, of course, differs across cultures – and that has to be taken into account. I always used to with my students in, let us call it, the age of the book draw attention to the way in which written texts, whether they are novels, newspapers or any other kind of text, manipulate the readers. I think that the question of manipulation or, if I am going to go extreme, one could almost say brainwashing, is more significant now than it has ever been, particularly for a generation that may not read books and may get their news entirely from the (new) media. And also we are witnessing a number of ongoing debates now over the nefarious impact of social media which is something that has been heightened during the pandemic. All these issues are kind of floating around in a sort of vast soup at the moment. And there is most definitely the need for a lot more dialogue about the role of machines and the human.

LAWRENCE VENUTI: Let me begin with an admission. I use Google Translate. I happen to be translating a novel at the moment – Dino Buzzati's *Il deserto dei Tartari* – and Google Translate as well as online dictionaries have been very helpful. Buzzati wrote his novel in the 1930s, and the syntax of some of his sentences is so strange from the vantage point of contemporary Italian that it sometimes helps to feed a sentence into Google Translate to get some sense of how the syntax is working (even if the machine doesn't always make it intelligible). Yet what machine translation is currently unable to do is to perform the interpretive act that translation is. A translator can and should interpret a source text by drawing interpretive factors from the hierarchy of cultural forms and practices that characterize the receiving situation, always a complex conjuncture of residual, dominant, and emergent values where verbal choices and interpretive moves mean taking a stand, often an ideological standpoint. This task is fundamentally human. Machine translation

remains helpful – and remarkably efficient – in generating versions on the basis of an electronic database of texts, versions that might multiply possibilities while illuminating the source text.

JAN PEDERSEN: I would just like to point out that even though I said that machine translation cannot be creative, it does not mean that machine translation cannot be used creatively – there were probably technophobic people who were very much opposed to using quills and ink. I just want to say again that I think it is important that the users are involved in the process of producing the software. It is very similar to what we see in media accessibility these days, where groups of people with various disabilities insist on being involved in the processes that lead to the accessibility for them under the slogan of "nothing about us without us". I think that translators should also make their voices heard and insist on being involved in the processes that create the tools they use.

IVANA HOSTOVÁ: And how about creativity in translation studies as a discipline? Creativity is a crucial element in furthering research…

SUSAN BASSNETT: That is a huge question. Part of the thinking behind the special issue of *The Translator* devoted to the outward turn that David Johnston and I co-edited (2019) sprang from the feeling that although translation studies has spread enormously around the world in the past few decades, there seems to be a tendency on the part of some people working in translation studies to talk only to one another, to use a code that is only comprehensible to one another. And I think if you believe, as I do very firmly, that translation is crucially important not only in today's world, but always has been in terms of enabling communication across cultures – the whole history of literature, I would argue, is a history of translation – then I think it is problematic that much of the value of thinking in translation studies is not finding its way out into other disciplines. The point we were trying to make was that most of the thinking done in translation studies has not been speaking to other related disciplines. The two of us are now co-editing another volume for Routledge, which is simply entitled *Debates on Translation* which will address current debates on translation and a number of the issues that we are talking about here.

LAWRENCE VENUTI: One way to address the issue of creativity is to begin rethinking curricula in translation studies and translator training where the relationships between theory, history, and practice are not explored in productive ways. Translator training programs are producing large numbers of professional translators who lack the sort of theoretical sophistication and historical knowledge that can not only advance translation practices but present translation to the people who commission it and use it.

IVANA HOSTOVÁ: That – I mean the degree of interconnectedness between theory and practice – probably also depends on the specific country, region and so on.

JAN PEDERSEN: And I think the degree of creativity in research may also be field-specific because in audiovisual translation I think we are highly creative. It may be due to the fact that the field is younger. We borrow methodologies and work together with cognitivists and sociologists and anthropologists and film and media studies and disability studies and computer scientists and so on. So there is a lot going on between disciplines and also with user groups. I do not feel that there is such a great lack of creativity and isolation from practice in audiovisual translation.

LAWRENCE VENUTI: A question worth asking is: where is audiovisual translation in the study of film and television? What are film scholars doing with translation studies? How many film scholars are studying dubbing and subtitling, drawing on translation research or research they themselves do into translation? Markus Nornes – a film scholar who is also a subtitler – is one of the very few. In his groundbreaking essay "For an Abusive Subtitling" (1999) he immersed himself in translation studies. Then he wrote a book called *Cinema Babel* (2007) which examines translation in film. How many anthropologists are studying translation? How many historians? Those are the kinds of interdisciplinary connections I want to make. Needless to say, the question can be redirected at translation scholars. How many scholars of audiovisual translation are actually in dialogue with film theorists and historians?

SUSAN BASSNETT: I was just going to say that Jan has the advantage of working in and from a small language, and we have the disadvantage of being handicapped by English and by the problems of the Anglophone world in not being willing to talk openly about translation and also not translating – not nearly as much as you are translating in Sweden, in Denmark, in Slovakia. We are deeply handicapped by this and I think some of our defensiveness comes from the awareness that this is the problem, where you have a language that is considered a global means of communication, you have a lack of interest in translation. Unfortunately, I will end on that gloomy note.

IVANA HOSTOVÁ: This is not a very optimistic way to round up our discussion.

JAN PEDERSEN: But it is – for thinking of translation in Slovakia.

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## Translation and creativity in the 21st century

Creativity. Randomness. Instrumentalism. Hermeneutics. Creative subtitles. Transdisciplinarity.

The discussion addresses a host of issues pertaining to various intersections between creativity and translation. Embracing the inevitable vagueness of the concepts, the speakers outline several clusters of topics, including the unpredictability of translation success (Susan Bassnett), critique of instrumentalism in translation (Lawrence Venuti) and the definition of the notion of creative subtitles (Jan Pedersen). The speakers also take positions on such complex and sometimes inherently contradictory issues as functional approaches to translation, source

and target text, translation process, the pros and cons of new technologies in current translation practice and the lack of a true transdisciplinary dialogue felt in today's translation studies. The last point hints at a problem the discipline has been facing for a while: although the field has (for the most part) been incorporating inspiration from other research areas, disciplines for which translation is crucial (as a means of acquiring research corpora, disseminating results, etc.) still tend to overlook the translational character of their work. "Translation and creativity in the 21st century" springs from a roundtable that took place at Translation, Interpreting and Culture 2: Rehumanising Translation Studies (TIC 2) conference held on 22–24 September 2021 in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. TIC 2 was the second in the series of translation and interpreting studies conferences organized by scholars and professionals affiliated with several Slovak and European institutions. The 2021 organizational team was managed by Associate Professor Martin Djovčoš (Matej Bel University).

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