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of Human Creativity
in an AI Environment

**Human-Centred AI
in the Translation Industry.
Questions on Ethics,
Creativity and Sustainability**

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Skopos as a Source of Human Creativity in an AI Environment

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Abstract: The term ‘creativity’ has been defined and/or used to designate a variety of different concepts in Translation Studies. In recent times, the rise of artificial intelligence has further complicated the term’s semantics. Both neural machine-translation systems and large language models are able to produce translations that can be considered creative in terms of definitions such as Kußmaul’s (2000: 31), according to which “a creative translation springs from an obligatory modification to the source text and constitutes something that is more or less new and is accepted as more or less appropriate in a (sub-)culture of experts [...] at a specific time and with regard to a specific intended purpose.” Where, then, is the scope for human creativity? I shall suggest that functionalist approaches such as Vermeer’s skopos theory may provide one answer to this question. My starting point will be a version of Kußmaul’s creativity concept modified to meet the requirements of a skopos-theoretical approach. On this basis, I shall show that some skopoi, in a variety of translation situations, are still quite hard for AI systems to achieve. The examples I shall discuss will be taken from two post-editing courses I held in summer 2023 at FTSK Germersheim.

Keywords: Human creativity, Skopos, Functionalism, Translation situation, Post-editing, Output quality.

1 Introduction

Where is the scope for human creativity in the age of neural machine translation and large language models? In the following, I shall argue that functionalist approaches such as Vermeer's skopos theory (cf., e.g., Vermeer 1978, 1996) can help us to exploit the potential of human creativity because some skopoi are still quite hard for artificial intelligence (AI) to achieve. I shall begin by outlining Kußmaul's (2000) concept of creativity, which he implements using scenes-and-frames semantics, and proceed to propose a version of this concept modified to meet the requirements of a skopos-theoretical approach. On this basis, I shall then discuss a number of examples to illustrate the varied translation situations in which human creativity at present still appears to be indispensable. In terms of Rojo's (2017: 352) typology of creativity research areas, my approach will be product-based, though in contrast to the majority of studies classified as target-text-oriented by Rojo (*ibid.*: 353), the main objective of my product analysis will be to explore the potential and limitations of AI translation rather than "to make inferences about the translation process."

My examples will be taken from two post-editing courses I taught in spring/summer 2023 at Mainz University's Faculty of Translation Studies, Linguistics, and Cultural Studies (FTSK). They will include an online description of a tourist attraction that contains obvious factual errors and other defects, a museum flyer where both the layout and the target audience's prior knowledge constitute translation problems, and a business text where the translation is to be used as an aid to semantic and syntactic understanding by language learners. Solutions to the problems raised by translation situations such as these can be creative in Kußmaul's sense but go beyond the field of scenes-and-frames semantics. I shall argue that focussing on

the concept of skopos can promote a type of human creativity that is closely linked to the translator's self-image and sense of responsibility.

The source language in my post-editing courses was Turkish; the target language, German. Generally speaking, machine translation output for this language pair requires more post-editing than does the output for, say, English into German. At present, DeepL tends to produce results that are linguistically somewhat better than those of Google Translate and ChatGPT, but as will be seen, ChatGPT can prove useful as well. Machine-generated translations and ChatGPT responses obtained in spring/summer 2023 were checked for significant changes on 28 November 2023 and once more on 15 May 2024. In November 2023, ChatGPT 3.5 was used; in May 2024, GPT-4o. Unless otherwise stated, the three versions were either identical or very similar with regard to the issue under discussion.

While the texts I shall use were originally translated from Turkish into German, most of the problems on which I shall focus are not language-pair-specific but relate to the various translation briefs and skopoi. Their origin is translatorial rather than mainly linguistic. This will enable me to use machine-generated translations into (British) English as well as German in my discussion of examples. English translations were obtained on 15 May 2024.

One of my two post-editing courses was part of FTSK's bachelor's programme in translation; the other, of our master's programme. However, owing to the flexible structure of both of these degree programmes, students' backgrounds in translation can vary widely. The bachelor's group may include students in their first, second, and third years. Members of the master's group range from first-year students with no previous translation experience to second-year students with a first de-

gree in translation. In other words, it is impossible to specify the extent of exposure to translation issues for either of the two groups. Moreover, the extent of exposure does not necessarily correlate with those aspects of translation competence that are most relevant to my present purpose. When, in the following, I speak of how students handle certain translation issues, this refers to a sizeable number of bachelor's and/or master's students both in the two post-editing groups and in other skopos-based translation courses that I have taught over the years.

2 Creativity and Skopos Theory

In her overview of creativity research in Translation Studies, O'Sullivan notes that

creativity has proven a rather slippery concept for translation scholars. Much work which invokes the concept does so without an explicit definition, or invokes the complexity of the concept as a way of avoiding the necessity for definitions. References to creativity tend to presuppose the existence of a *tertium comparationis*, a literal translation against which non-literal translation strategies can be labeled as creative. [...] The result of such a state of affairs is that creativity becomes linked with the general concept of translation shifts. (O'Sullivan 2013: 42–43)

In line with O'Sullivan's observation, my *tertium comparationis* will be a literal translation. However, I shall not focus on shifts in the linguistic sense.¹

My starting point will be Kußmaul's definition of creativity. According to the author,

1 For a survey of approaches to translation shifts, see Cyrus (2009).

a creative translation springs from an obligatory modification² to the source text and constitutes something that is more or less new and is accepted as more or less appropriate in a (sub-)culture of experts (= representatives of a paradigm) at a specific time and with regard to a specific intended purpose.³ (Kußmaul 2000: 31)

Kußmaul's main interest is in linguistic and cultural patterns. His typology of creative translations (2000: 150–188), based on Fillmore's (1977) scenes-and-frames semantics, involves modifications to scenes and frames such as reframing, scene changes, or a new selection of scene elements within a scene or frame. One of the examples Kußmaul (2000: 174–177) discusses is a scene change: two students translated the verb “dot” in the sentence “Enormous supermarkets, furniture stores and shopping emporiums dot the east German landscape” as “schießen wie Pilze aus dem Boden” (literally, “shoot up from the ground like mushrooms”). However, modifications such as these are no longer the preserve of humans. Thus, in May 2024, Google Translate suggested “prägen” (literally, “mint”; here, metaphorically, “characterize”) for “dot,” and DeepL as well as GPT-4o produced an entire range of more or less appropriate metaphors. In Kußmaul's terms, these AI systems are creative.

In exploring the scope for human creativity, my theoretical framework will be skopos theory rather than the ‘Germersheim functionalist school’ to which Kußmaul belongs. While

2 I have translated Kußmaul's German term “Veränderung” as ‘modification’ because it seems less technical and less specific to me than ‘shift.’ In his translation of the same quotation, Kautz (2002: 380) uses “change.” Kußmaul himself, however, occasionally refers to ‘shifts’ in English (cf., e.g., Bayer-Hohenwarter/Kußmaul 2021: 311). Unless otherwise indicated, translations from languages other than English are mine.

3 For discussions of Kußmaul's creativity concept in English, see e.g. Kußmaul (1995: 39–53) and Bayer-Hohenwarter/Kußmaul (2021).

both approaches regard translation as an act of communication intended to fulfil a specific purpose, skopos theory has a stronger focus on translation situations and therefore makes it somewhat easier to discuss translatorial decisions that are not primarily linguistic. Such decisions are implicitly included in the wording of Kußmaul's definition, and as will be seen, this is an area in which humans at present continue to have a considerable advantage over AI systems.

However, in the context of skopos theory, it seems to me that Kußmaul's emphasis on obligatory modifications needs to be adjusted. According to Vermeer (e.g. Reiß/Vermeer 1984: 106–109; 2013/2015: 95–98), a successful translation is one that occasions no protests by any of the interaction partners against the transmission as such, the manner of transmission, and/or the recipients' reaction. Obligatory modifications can therefore only occur in situations in which a more literal translation would lead to protests. It is doubtful whether this would be the case even in Kußmaul's own example.⁴ If “dot” were to be translated by the non-existent verb ‘*überpunkten’ (literally, “dot over”), German readers might well be surprised, but this purely local lexical issue would not prevent them from understanding the sentence, let alone the text as a whole. The translation brief specified by Kußmaul (2000: 151) reads: “Translate the text from *Newsweek* under the aspect of ‘How foreign countries see us’ for the Press and Information Office of the German Federal Government.” The Office might of course protest if made-up words were to be used repeatedly, but a single occurrence would be much less noteworthy. As Vermeer (1978: 101) puts it, “[t]here are plenty of ‘erroneous’ yet entirely successful translations!”

4 For a different objection to the concept of obligatory modifications, see Schreiber (2017: 351–352).

A distinction should therefore be made between two quality levels: translation solutions that are functional and translation solutions that are (largely) free of defects. The former include all obligatory modifications; the latter, all obligatory and desirable ones. By ‘desirable,’ I mean optional modifications that constitute a demonstrable improvement on a more literal translation in the context of the translation situation. For my present purposes, creative solutions can be desirable as well as obligatory. I refer to ‘translation solutions’ rather than ‘translations’ to make it clear that creativity may involve individual aspects of a text as well as the text as a whole. On the level of the text as a whole, functional solutions will result in a translation that has a fair chance of being successful in Vermeer’s terms. Solutions that are (largely) free of defects will result in a translation that has a fair chance not only of being successful but also of being accepted as more, rather than less, appropriate by Kußmaul’s “(sub-)culture of experts.” I shall make use of the distinction between obligatory and desirable modifications in the following discussion of examples.

My functionalist approach to creativity, based on Kußmaul and Vermeer, has some affinities with Katan’s (2023) concept of narrativity. The author claims that,

while machines may successfully translate texts in the sense of copying or transcribing text from one language to another, the creation of texts meaningful for a particular readership in a particular moment is a uniquely *homo sapiens* or rather [...] a *homo fictus* or *narrans* ability. (Katan 2023: 74)

According to Katan (2023: 77, 75), the importance of narrativity “in making sense of the world” is most evident in “those contexts where the translation is targeted towards an unforeseen, secondary, communication situation [...], in particular where the new communicative situation includes epistemic

and cultural outsiders.” Contexts such as these will play a role in my subsequent discussion of examples.

3 Source-Text Defects

My first example is a tourist text describing Roman remains in the ancient town of Soli, in southern Turkey (“Soli” n.d.). The fictitious translation brief reads:

As part of the twinning arrangement between the municipality of Mezitli, Mersin Province, and the borough of Tempelhof-Schöneberg, city-state of Berlin, the text is to be translated into German and published on a new German-language website belonging to Mersin Province’s Tourist Board. The target audience are speakers of German who are interested in history. More specifically, the translation will be promoted in Mezitli’s twin borough. The purpose of the translation is to convey a positive impression of Mezitli’s tourist attractions, chief of which is Soli.

The source text includes a number of defects, the most obvious being a factual error that is clearly recognizable as such. Example 1 shows a short extract from the verbal text, which I will subsequently contrast with the nonverbal text.

Example 1: Verbal and nonverbal text

Sütunlu Cadde: Bugün caddede toplam 33 sütun ayaktadır. Bunlardan 4’ü batı 29’u doğu sütun dizisine aittir.

Säulenstraße: Insgesamt 33 Säulen stehen heute noch an der Straße. Davon gehören 4 zu der westlichen und 29 zu der östlichen Kolonnade. (DeepL, 19 June 2023)

Colonnaded Street: A total of 33 columns are standing on the street today. Of these, 4 belong to the western and 29 to the eastern colonnade. (DeepL, 15 May 2024)

The German translation that DeepL generated at the time of my post-editing course is quite similar to the English version it produced in May 2024. Both are fairly close to the Turkish ver-

bal text. However, the nonverbal text, in the shape of photographs of the colonnaded street, makes it clear that the information provided in the verbal text is inaccurate. Figure 1 shows a picture similar to those in the source text.



Figure 1: Soli, colonnaded street (Raddato 2017, CC BY-SA 2.0)

It is obvious from the photograph that the western colonnade must have more than four columns. In fact, as an archaeologist (Yıldırım 2017: 76) confirms, there are seven. It is not surprising that DeepL, Google Translate, and ChatGPT 3.5 did not correct the error. When I later gave the same task to GPT-4o, this more recent version was likewise unable to provide a factually correct translation. At first, I simply pointed out in the prompt that there was a mismatch between the text and the picture I had uploaded. When this proved to no avail, I asked GPT-4o to describe the picture and count the columns on the two sides, which it did. Subsequently I prompted it with the text and asked for a translation that fitted the picture. It again failed to make the connection, insisting that “4” was correct. What is interesting is that the students in my post-editing course did not notice the error either. None changed the information, and our subsequent discussion showed that the dis-

crepancy between the verbal and nonverbal parts of the text had escaped their attention.

In the context of the translation brief as it stands, correcting the error is not vital. As Rozmysłowicz (2020: 291–297) points out, recipients of the target text play a significant role in making texts, including defective texts, viable. Some readers will not perceive the discrepancy at all, and among those who do, some may well regard it as inconsequential. Others may feel confused, but whether or not this will affect the impression they receive of Meztli's tourist attractions is a matter of speculation. Thus, we cannot assert with any degree of certainty that the error will lead to protests, or that it will make it more difficult for the translation to achieve its purpose. Rectification is therefore not obligatory, but ensuring factual correctness does constitute a clear improvement. In terms of my above modification of Kußmaul's definition, the translation solution "seven" is creative because it is new, appropriate, and desirable.

A similar argument can be made for comprehensibility. The source text includes a passage the structure of which is somewhat difficult to follow (Example 2).⁵

Example 2: Structure

Antik Liman: Kalıntılarının bir bölümü bugün de görülebilen liman, birbirinden 200 metre aralıklarla düzenlenmiş iki dalgakırandan oluşmaktadır. Bunlardan batıdaki daha iyi korunmuştur. Büyük kalker blokların, demir perçinlerle tutturulduklarını gösteren izler halen görülebilmektedir. Batıdaki dalgakırının batısı kum yığıntısı ile dolmuştur. Yapılan ölçümlere göre korunmuş olan uzunluğu 160 metre, eni ise 23 metredir. Yapı malzemesi olarak kullanılan kalker taşların yaklaşık olarak uzunluğu 160 santim, eni 60 santim ve derinliği 60 santimdir.

5 As with Example 1, the German translation of Example 2 that DeepL generated at the time of my post-editing course is quite similar to the German and English versions it produced in May 2024. The same applies to Example 3 and Example 4.

Doğudaki dalgakıranın çok azı kaldığı için ancak 40 metre kadarı ölçülebilmektedir.

Antiker Hafen Der Hafen, von dem heute noch einige Reste zu sehen sind, besteht aus zwei Wellenbrechern, die im Abstand von 200 Metern zueinander angeordnet sind. Der westliche ist besser erhalten. Es sind noch Spuren der Befestigung von großen Kalksteinblöcken mit Eisennieten zu sehen. Der Westen des westlichen Wellenbrechers ist mit Sand gefüllt.⁶ Nach den Messungen beträgt die erhaltene Länge 160 m und die Breite 23 m. Die als Baumaterial verwendeten Kalksteine sind etwa 160 Zentimeter lang, 60 Zentimeter breit und 60 Zentimeter tief. Da von dem Wellenbrecher im Osten nur sehr wenig übrig geblieben ist, konnten nur 40 Meter davon vermessen werden. (DeepL, 4 June 2023)

[G] Ancient harbour The harbour, some of the remains of which can still be seen today, consists of two breakwaters arranged 200 metres apart from each other. [W] The western one is better preserved. [G] Traces of the fastening of large limestone blocks with iron rivets are still visible. [W] The west of the western breakwater is filled with sand.⁶ According to the measurements, its preserved length is 160 metres and its width is 23 metres. [G] The limestone stones used as building material are approximately 160 centimetres long, 60 centimetres wide and 60 centimetres deep. [E] Only 40 metres of the eastern breakwater could be measured since very little of it remains. (DeepL, 15 May 2024)

I have added abbreviations in square brackets to the English translation in order to highlight the structure of this paragraph. [G] precedes general information on the harbour and its two breakwater arms; [W] indicates information on the western arm, and [E], on the eastern one. As can be seen, the structure is not entirely coherent. GPT-4o likewise retained the sequence of sentences, despite being prompted with a request to

6 This is misleading. Since the breakwater consists of limestone blocks, it is presumably not filled with sand but buried under sand. Cf. Yıldırım (2017: 75), who explains that only half of the original western breakwater is visible, the rest, like the eastern breakwater, being covered with sand and silt.

improve the structure. A clearer thematic progression might facilitate comprehension (cf. Göpferich 2002/²2006: 103, 175). For instance, the section could begin with the general information and proceed to describe the western and eastern breakwater arms one by one, rather than interspersing general points with specific ones relating to individual arms. As with Example 1, the structural incoherence will not necessarily prevent the translation from being successful, but the target text as it stands is less good than it might be and leaves scope for human creativity.

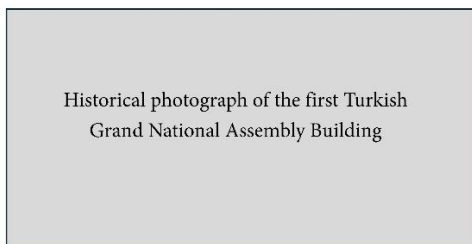
In my experience, students often find it difficult to handle source-text defects both in translating and in post-editing.⁷ If they recognize the defects, they are often unsure about whether to correct them in their target versions. Encouraging them to think about what the translation brief implies and, if appropriate, to produce a target text that is creative, rather than merely viable, will not only enable them to discharge their responsibility as translators in a wide range of translation situations. It will also give them an advantage over machine-translation systems, which do not (yet?) display this type of creativity when confronted with factual and structural defects.

4 Layout and Prior Knowledge

A different set of issues arises in translating or post-editing a Turkish museum flyer (KSM n.d.). The flyer shows and describes the first building of the Turkish Grand National As-

⁷ As mentioned in my introduction, the extent of students' exposure to translation issues does not necessarily correlate with specific aspects of their translation competence. The way students handle source-text defects is a case in point. Some act confidently and responsibly at an early stage, while others require a long learning process.

sembly, which houses the War of Liberation⁸ Museum. Figure 2 illustrates what the flyer layout looks like. The relationship between image size and character count is the same as in the original flyer.



History of the Grand National Assembly Building

The War of Independence Museum (First Turkish Grand National Assembly Building) was designed in 1915 by Salim Bey, the architect of Evkaf (Foundations Administration), by order of Enver Pasha, to be used as a clubhouse by the Committee of Union and Progress, and the task of executing the project was assigned to Mahmut Şevket (İscandal) Bey, the Ankara representative of the Committee of Union and Progress of the period, and the project construction work was assigned to Hasip Bey, a military architect working in the Corps. Hasip Bey successfully completed the masonry part of the building, but the roof and other parts were left unfinished due to the ongoing war and the shortage of materials; Architect Hasip Bey was martyred during the War of Independence.

When Ankara was occupied by British and French troops for a short time after the First World War, a small French detachment settled in this building, which had not yet covered part of the roof, but upon the arrival of Mustafa Kemal Pasha in Ankara on 27 December 1919, they evacuated the building and left the city.

When it was decided to open the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on 23 April 1920, it was observed that there was no building in Ankara with the necessary size and equipment for the Assembly to convene. Under these circumstances, it is decided to use the unfinished Union and Progress Party Club Building as the Parliament Building, and the task of repairing and completing the building is given to Necati Bey (later Bursa MP for the 1st term).

Constructed with pink-purple coloured local andesite stone known as Ankara stone and one of the first examples of the 'First National Architecture Period Style' in Ankara, the building was completed with the tiles brought from the houses of Ankara residents and the Numune School (now Cumhuriyet Primary School) in Ulucanlar, with the dedication of the people. Used between 23 April 1920 and 15 October 1924 as the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, the building was later used as the headquarters of the Republican People's Party and hosted the Law School for a short time during the same period. In 1952, the building was transferred to the Ministry of National Education (Ministry of Education), and in 1957, with the decision taken by the Ministry Commission, works were started to transform it into a museum and it was opened to the public on 23 April 1961 under the name of 'Grand National Assembly Museum'. As a result of the renovation works carried out by the Ministry of Culture within the framework of the 'Programme to Celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Atatürk's Birth', the museum was opened to visitors on 23 April 1981.

Figure 2: Layout of museum flyer (English text by DeepL)

8 The official English designation is *National War of Liberation*.

The translation brief reads: “Please produce a flyer with the same layout for a German-speaking target audience. The flyer is to be published both online and in print. The printed version will be made available for instance to museum visitors.”

Irrespective of whether a German-language flyer should be crammed with as much text as this, translators will face two related problems in trying to meet the requirements of the brief. First, the source text presupposes some prior knowledge that target readers cannot be expected to have. For instance, the title of the flyer is “War of Liberation Museum,” but no general background information on the war is provided. A Turkish audience will not require this information, but many target readers will be less knowledgeable about Turkish history. It would therefore make sense to contextualize the description of the museum by adding some basic historical facts.

Another presupposition can be seen in Example 3. All educated Turkish readers will know that “Mustafa Kemal Pasha” was the founder of the Republic of Turkey, who was dubbed Atatürk in 1934. Educated target readers might well be familiar with the surname Atatürk, but they might not associate this with the “Mustafa Kemal” mentioned in the text. The reason why the French left Ankara will in this case be less clear to them.

Example 3: Prior knowledge

Birinci Dünya Savaşı sonrasında Ankara, kısa bir süre için İngiliz ve Fransız askerleri tarafından işgal edildiğinde küçük bir Fransız müfrezesi, henüz çatısının bir bölümü örtülmemiş olan bu binaya yerleşmiş, ancak 27 Aralık 1919’da Mustafa Kemal Paşa’nın Ankara’ya gelmesi üzerine binayı boşaltarak kenti terk etmiştir.

Als Ankara nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg für kurze Zeit von britischen und französischen Truppen besetzt war, richtete sich ein kleines französisches Detachement in diesem Gebäude ein, das einen Teil des Daches noch nicht gedeckt hatte, aber bei der Ankunft von Mustafa Ke-

mal Pascha in Ankara am 27. Dezember 1919 räumten sie das Gebäude und verließen die Stadt. (DeepL, 18 April 2023)

When Ankara was occupied by British and French troops for a short time after the First World War, a small French detachment settled in this building, which had not yet covered part of its roof, but upon the arrival of Mustafa Kemal Pasha in Ankara on 27 December 1919, they vacated the building and left the city. (DeepL, 15 May 2024)

However, providing background information is made difficult not only by the layout, which does not leave much space for additions, but also by a second problem, namely the fact that it is not unusual for translations from Turkish into German to become longer in terms of character count. Even without additions, the German text may well require more space than the Turkish one. The translator will therefore have to consider leaving out some of the details included in the source text. For instance, in Example 3, the reference to the unfinished roof, while not irrelevant to the history of the building, is not essential for understanding its use and could be omitted if necessary (cf. also Example 4).

Additions aimed at providing background information for a target audience from a different culture constitute a desirable modification, but they are not indispensable. For one thing, readers of this flyer can be assumed to have a stronger interest in Turkish history than average, and therefore to be somewhat more knowledgeable about it. For another, the translation could be read despite a lack of prior knowledge, though not necessarily with ease, even if it contained no more than the facts included in the source text. By contrast, preserving the layout is explicitly required by the brief. Omissions are therefore obligatory if the number of characters cannot be kept within the necessary limit by means of a more economical wording. Protests would almost certainly result if the print were so small as to be virtually illegible.

Shortening the text requires creative translations. When I first prompted ChatGPT with a limited character count (a maximum of 250 characters) on 18 April 2023, it chose a solution that was new but not appropriate and therefore not creative in Kußmaul's terms, namely cutting the text off at the end. This seemed to remain its preferred method of shortening texts for some months. In other words, it was unable to display the type of creativity needed here. However, when I gave it the same prompt once more in November 2023 and May 2024, it produced acceptable versions of the Turkish passage cited above in Example 3:

Example 4: Limited character count

Nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg besetzten britische und französische Truppen kurz Ankara. Eine kleine französische Einheit zog in dieses unvollständige Gebäude ein, verließ es aber am 27. Dezember 1919, als Mustafa Kemal Pascha in Ankara ankam. (GPT-4o, 15 May 2024)

After the First World War, British and French troops briefly occupied Ankara. A small French unit moved into this incomplete building, but left it on 27 December 1919 when Mustafa Kemal Pasha arrived in Ankara. (DeepL, translation of GPT-4o's German version, 15 May 2024)

If we compare the translations generated by DeepL (Example 3) and GPT-4o (Example 4), we can see that GPT-4o uses various translation procedures designed to shorten the text. On the level of accuracy, it omits the fact that the French left not only the building but the city. Moreover, it substitutes a generalization, "unvollständig" ("incomplete"), for the reference to the, as yet, only partly tiled roof. On a purely linguistic level, the phrase "für kurze Zeit" ("for a short time") is replaced by the single short adverb "kurz" ("briefly"). Instead of DeepL's initial subordinate clause with its passive construction, GPT-4o uses a more concise main clause with an active predicate ("besetzten," "occupied"). These linguistic solutions

make sense. So does the generalization in the context of the source text as a whole because the incomplete roof is mentioned in the previous paragraph, which I have not cited here. By contrast, the fact that the French withdrew from Ankara does seem a relevant piece of background information for the target audience. This omission is therefore somewhat problematic. However, it is noteworthy that GPT-4o is able to constructively respond to a prompt specifying a maximum character count at all.

Translation problems relating to layout and prior knowledge can be a challenge for students as well as AI systems. When faced with a layout such as that in Figure 2, students may well recognize text length as an issue that needs to be addressed. They may also be able to identify translation procedures that can be used to meet layout requirements. However, implementing them can be a different matter because some students are reluctant to take responsibility for the modifications that this involves. As far as additional explanations are concerned, one hurdle for some students seems to be realizing their desirability. Since students usually are to some extent familiar with the source culture, becoming aware of the target audience's lack of prior knowledge requires a perspective change that does not come automatically but can be learned.

5 Distinct Target-Text Function

In the previous two sections, the functions specified in the translation briefs were similar to the functions served by the source texts. However, functions can also be quite different. My third example text is the website of a company specializing in card payment systems, more specifically the page on which the members of the Board of Directors are introduced (cf. Bileşim 2021). The translation brief reads:

The target text is to be used together with the source text in a textbook on business Turkish. It is to help learners with a B1–B2 level to understand both the language and the contents of the Turkish text. For this purpose, further explanations can be provided in addition to the translation itself.

The fluent translations for which neural machine translation is notorious would help learners of Turkish less than a more literal version. In this case, however, the translation produced by DeepL is fairly literal. The problems it fails to solve are of a different nature (Example 5).

Example 5: Linguistic mismatches

Ergin KAYA
Yönetim Kurulu Başkanı
Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilimler Fakültesi Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü’nden mezun olmuştur.

Ergin KAYA
Vorsitzender des Verwaltungsrats
Er schloss sein Studium an der Universität Ankara, Fakultät für Politikwissenschaften, Abteilung für öffentliche Verwaltung, ab. (DeepL, 7 May 2023)

Ergin KAYA
Chairman of the Board of Directors
He graduated from Ankara University, Faculty of Political Sciences, Department of Public Administration. (DeepL, 15 May 2024)

In Example 5, the two linguistic issues that I want to discuss occur only in the German version. The first of these is the German term “Verwaltungsrat,” which DeepL uses to translate “Yönetim Kurulu” (“Board of Directors”). Turkey, like countries such as Britain and the United States, has a one-tier system with a single board of directors, whereas Germany’s two-tier system comprises two governance bodies, namely the management board (“Vorstand”) and the supervisory board (“Aufsichtsrat” or “Verwaltungsrat”). In German texts referring to the one-tier system, it is customary to use the English term “Board

of Directors” (cf., e.g., Welge/Eulerich 2011/³2021: 37–38). However, the correct term alone would not be the best possible solution. Since the target text is to be published in a textbook for learners of business Turkish, a desirable addition would be to explicitly draw attention to the difference between Turkish and German corporate governance. This information might, for instance, be provided in a footnote or in the margin, depending on the publisher’s preferences.

In addition to having DeepL translate the source text, I also prompted ChatGPT with the text and the brief (7 May 2023). Its first version was quite similar to that provided by DeepL. When I objected that this took no account of the needs of the target audience, it produced a new version, in which it retained most of the capitalized Turkish designations (e.g. “Yönetim Kurulu” and “Ankara Üniversitesi”) and added German translations in parentheses. GPT-4o’s response to the same brief in May 2024 consisted in adding a list of Turkish and German terms at the end of the translation (e.g. “Ankara Üniversitesi: Universität Ankara”). In the context of my translation brief, these solutions obviously make no sense because the text will be published in parallel in Turkish and German, and learners will be expected to read the source text itself with the aid of the target text.

The second linguistic issue that calls for a creative solution is the verb phrase “mezun olmuştur” (“graduated”). The German translation provided by DeepL, “schloss sein Studium [...] ab,” is perfectly correct on the level of denotation: literally, “mezun olmak” means “become a graduate,” and “sein Studium abschließen,” “complete one’s studies.” These translations are functional in so far as they will help learners understand the words of the source text. However, there is a clear difference on the level of pragmatics. The Turkish phrase “mezun olmak” is the one most commonly used in this type of

introduction. By contrast, a Google search shows that the German phrase “sein Studium abschließen” mostly occurs in specific microcontexts, for instance when the degree conferred or the graduation date is mentioned in the same sentence. In the translation produced by DeepL (as well as ChatGPT), it strikes me as odd because a relevant microcontext is lacking. Interestingly, in May 2024, GPT-4o chose a denotatively similar phrase, “seinen Abschluss machen,” whereas DeepL employed the most usual German solution, “studieren” (“to study”). However, this solution on its own will not necessarily tell learners all they need to know. It would be desirable to add an explanation alerting them to the pragmatic difference between the Turkish and German phrases.

Neither DeepL nor GPT-4o as yet achieves the creativity required by this specific translation brief. Some students, too, may find the brief a challenge for a variety of reasons. One reason is probably that their degree programmes do not systematically prepare them for what Nord (1989: 102–103; 2016: 32) calls documentary translation, i.e. a translation type that “‘documents’ a communicative interaction or any of its aspects in which a source-culture sender communicates with a source-culture recipient under source-culture conditions.” Outside optional masters’ courses devoted to official (certified) translation, students at FTSK will most often be expected to produce fluent target texts. While they will usually be aware of the importance of briefs and skopoi, their nascent repertoire of translation strategies may still be too restricted to fulfil the requirements of an aid to understanding the source text.

6 Conclusion

In the preceding sections, I have discussed three types of translation problems: source-text defects, the target audience’s prior

knowledge and its implications for text length, and a translation brief requiring a non-fluent target text. In all three cases, DeepL failed to produce appropriate solutions. So did GPT-4o (despite at least one follow-up prompt in each case), with the single exception that it was able to shorten a text, albeit in a less than fully satisfactory manner.

Interestingly, the issues that AI systems had difficulties handling often prove conceptually difficult for students as well. While some students may also struggle to achieve appropriate solutions on a purely linguistic level, linguistic translation procedures, whether reproductive or creative, seem to come more naturally to many than translatorial strategies derived from the brief and skopos. Weaknesses of ChatGPT identified by Giray et al. (2024: 45–47), such as a lack of contextual understanding, an overreliance on training data, and limited critical thinking, are not the exclusive domain of AI, though their origins and implications are of course quite different for AI and humans. This brings to mind Katan’s observations on narrativity:

Narrativity, the “understanding of the characters, events and experiences that are the subject of the discourse” (Alleyne, 2015, p. 62⁹) is a singularly human ability. It is not what machine translation (however deep learning and neural) can be programmed to do. Nor is this ability stressed as a competence that the *homo sapiens* translator is expected to excel at. Yet, when translation involves those higher stakes and where there is a clear audience shift to an outsider readership, the translator could stress their added value actively demonstrating what machines can’t do by becoming a *homo narrans* translator. (Katan 2023: 87)

While my skopos-based approach to translation has always involved expecting human translators to produce texts that first and foremost make sense in the target situation, I agree with Katan that this ability now constitutes a unique selling point for humans faced with AI competition. Yamada (2023) argues

9 The quotation is actually from p. 81.

that GPT-4, in contrast to tools such as DeepL and Google Translate, can be prompted with information such as the purpose of the translation and the target audience. However, the examples he discusses concern what Nida (1964: 166–176) calls “dynamic equivalence,” which may be substantially easier to achieve for an AI system than the variety of *skopoi* with which I have experimented. It remains to be seen whether or not AI will in the future make progress in the direction of *skopos* adequacy, but for the present, “locat[ing] the textual gap between what is written, the writer’s model of the world and that of the implied and the new readership,” and consequently “translat[ing] for the new implied readership” (Katan 2023: 87), seem to remain the preserve of humans.

If this is the case, then what can *skopos* mean in connection with AI? Is *skopos* something that AI could in the future learn to achieve mechanically, by means of predictions based on further and/or different training data? Rather than pursue this line of thought, I suggest that we might benefit from adopting the philosophical perspective taken by van Lier (2023).¹⁰ She argues in favour of viewing large language models (LLMs) and humans as collaborative agents:

LLMs do not generate texts *by themselves*. In practice, they *co-produce* texts together with their user. [...] Without a prompt, ChatGPT will not generate a text. Without the right prompt or critical feedback, ChatGPT will not generate *meaningful* texts. At the moment, then, ChatGPT, or any LLM for that matter, does thus not generate texts in isolation. Rather, producing (meaningful) texts in these cases is a *collaborative production*, one that necessarily involves both the (human) user and the system. (van Lier 2023: 80; emphasis in original)

The relationship between the two components in this collaborative agent is hierarchical. The human component is autono-

10 For the reference to van Lier (2023), I am indebted to Krüger (2024: 19).

mous, while the LLM component can be regarded either as a tool or as an artificial agent (cf. van Lier 2023: 80, 84). In van Lier's approach (2023: 83, 80), attributing agency to systems does not involve "any claim about whether things that appear to be up to certain systems are truly 'up to' them. I will merely hold that if it appears like they do, then it makes sense to refer to these systems as agents."¹¹ However, even if we consider LLMs agents in this sense, they are—at present—"supervise[d] and guide[d]" by the human component of the collaborative agent.

As far as translation is concerned, Asscher (2023: 16) points out that the translator's conscious agency may play a central role "[i]f future definitions of translation [...] attempt to differentiate human and machine translation." Adopting van Lier's perspective would involve questioning the attempt while retaining the concept of agency. Human translation and AI translation do not need to be regarded as clearly separable. Rather, the human component is the leading one in the collaborative agent that produces the target text. It is the human component that defines the skopos and determines in how far the AI component has achieved it. Likewise, it is the human component that decides in how far the prompts used have been appropriate and in how far training might be improved.

The examples that I have discussed in the context of skopos as a source of creativity suggest that human translators should see themselves as agents, irrespective of whether they work on their own or collaborate with an AI system. Their perceived agency would, among other things, involve a self-image

11 Cf. Rozmyslowicz (2020: 223–246), who argues that, from a theoretical point of view, the translator as agent is what Nietzsche calls a "grammatical habit" rather than an objective fact. It would be worth exploring connections between Rozmyslowicz's argument and van Lier's concept of agency as applied to LLMs.

of the translator as the person who is in charge of the target text and takes responsibility for its appropriateness. It would enable the translator to exploit the potential of a skopos-based approach to translation by implementing both obligatory and desirable creative solutions that are tailored to meet the requirements of the target situation.

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