

“From Precision to Persuasion: Transcreation as the Creative Evolution of Specialized Translation in Marketing, Advertising, Medical, and Legal Fields”

“Adapt, Create, Communicate: The Power of Transcreation Across Disciplines”

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Abstract

The relationship between translation and transcreation has become increasingly relevant across specialized domains that demand both linguistic precision and cultural resonance. While traditional translation emphasizes accuracy, transcreation introduces creativity and cultural adaptation, particularly in sectors such as marketing and advertising where emotional and persuasive communication are vital. This paper examines how translation and transcreation operate across four key fields: marketing, advertising, medical, and legal translation. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks from translation studies and industry-specific research, it explores how each field negotiates the tension between fidelity and creativity. The study argues that transcreation serves not only as a creative strategy but as an ethical and communicative necessity in globalized communication. Case studies and current industry research (2020–2026) are analyzed to illustrate how translation and transcreation complement each other in achieving both linguistic accuracy and intercultural effectiveness.

Keywords: translation, transcreation, marketing, advertising, medical translation, legal translation, cultural adaptation, professional communication

1.0 Introduction

Translation is no longer a purely linguistic activity; it is a socio-cultural process embedded in professional and global contexts. In specialized fields—marketing, advertising, medical, and legal—the translator’s task extends beyond transferring words into another language. Translators must also **mediate meaning, adapt messages, and recreate intent** for specific audiences. This expansion of scope has given rise to the practice of *transcreation*—a hybrid form of translation that blends fidelity with creative adaptation.

The term *transcreation*, popularized in advertising and marketing, has since entered academic discourse to describe situations where literal translation fails to convey emotional or persuasive impact (Bastin, 2020; Jiménez-Crespo, 2022). Yet, transcreation is increasingly being recognized in non-creative domains like medicine and law, where communicative clarity and cultural sensitivity are vital.

This paper examines translation and transcreation across four fields: marketing, advertising, medical, and legal. It argues that while **translation ensures accuracy, transcreation ensures relevance and impact**. Together, they form the dual pillars of effective multilingual communication in globalized societies.

2.0 Theoretical Framework: Translation and Transcreation in Applied Contexts

2.1 Defining Translation and Transcreation

Traditional translation theory focuses on equivalence, accuracy, and fidelity (Nida, 1964; Catford, 1965). In contrast, transcreation emphasizes *cultural adaptation* and *creative re-expression* (Pedersen, 2021).

The distinction lies not in the linguistic act but in the communicative purpose. Translation seeks to preserve meaning; transcreation seeks to reproduce **effect**.

As Jiménez-Crespo (2022) notes, transcreation requires the translator to “recreate messages to evoke the same emotional and persuasive response in the target audience as in the source audience.” It thus bridges linguistic translation and marketing localization, applying literary creativity to pragmatic communication.

2.2 Functionalist and Skopos Theory

Hans Vermeer’s *Skopos theory* (1978) is particularly useful here. It posits that translation should be guided by its purpose (*skopos*). For marketing and advertising, the *goal* is to persuade, not merely inform—making transcreation the natural choice. Similarly, in medical and legal contexts, the *goal* is precision and clarity—requiring translation that is context-sensitive but ethically constrained.

2.3 The Continuum Model

Schäffner (2019) proposed a continuum where translation and transcreation are not opposites but points along a scale of adaptation:

Type	Focus	Example
Literal translation	Faithful reproduction	Legal contracts
Communicative translation	Clear, target-oriented	Medical consent forms
Transcreation	Persuasive and emotional recreation	Advertising slogans

This continuum allows professionals to choose the appropriate strategy depending on the communicative intent and ethical stakes of their field.

3.0 Translation and Transcreation in Marketing

3.1 From Localization to Transcreation

Marketing translation involves not only rendering text but also localizing visuals, tone, and humor for target audiences. Localization ensures linguistic adaptation, but *transcreation* ensures emotional impact. A slogan like “Because you’re worth it” (L’Oréal) cannot be literally translated into other languages without losing its empowering nuance; hence, it is transcreated to reflect local values of beauty and self-worth.

3.2 Cultural Resonance and Consumer Psychology

Transcreation in marketing requires deep knowledge of consumer psychology. As Fernández-Costales (2020) observes, global brands must adapt messages to align with local cultural codes. For instance, Coca-Cola’s campaigns in China emphasize *family harmony*, while in Western contexts they emphasize *individual happiness*. Both communicate similar emotional appeals but through culturally distinct imagery and language.

3.3 Case Studies

- **Pepsi’s “Come alive” campaign** failed in China when translated literally as “Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave,” illustrating the risks of neglecting transcreation (Bastin, 2020).
- **Nike’s “Just Do It”** has been transcreated differently worldwide—ranging from motivational individualism in the U.S. to communal strength in Japan—showing how a universal brand message adapts to cultural psychology.

3.4 Ethical Dimensions

Ethically, transcreation in marketing walks a fine line between adaptation and manipulation. According to Schäler (2023), the translator-transcreator must respect cultural sensitivities while maintaining brand identity. This balance between persuasion and integrity reflects the broader ethical dynamics of creative translation.

4.0 Transcreation in Advertising

4.1 Advertising as Performative Language

Advertising is inherently performative: it does not describe reality but creates desire. Hence, literal translation often fails to convey humor, wordplay, and emotion. Transcreation allows for *recomposition* of slogans, imagery, and rhythm to achieve the same impact.

For example, the **KFC slogan “Finger-lickin’ good”** was once mistranslated into Mandarin as “Eat your fingers off,” leading to ridicule (Jiménez-Crespo, 2022). This highlights how cultural and linguistic nuances can radically alter meaning.

4.2 Semiotic and Multimodal Aspects

Advertising communication is multimodal—combining text, image, and sound. Translators must transcreate *across semiotic systems*, not just words. Pedersen (2021) notes that effective advertising transcreation requires collaboration among linguists, graphic designers, and copywriters to harmonize cultural codes and aesthetics.

4.3 Transcreation Strategies

- **Linguistic transformation:** replacing idioms or metaphors with culturally equivalent imagery.
- **Emotional equivalence:** ensuring the same persuasive tone.
- **Contextual adaptation:** aligning messages with cultural norms or taboos.

4.4 Ethical and Legal Constraints in Advertising

While creative, advertising transcreation must respect ethical and legal guidelines (e.g., truth-in-advertising laws). The European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA, 2024) underscores that transcreation cannot misrepresent facts, especially in pharmaceutical or food industries. Thus, even in the most creative fields, **translation ethics remain central**.

5.0 Translation and Transcreation in Medical Contexts

5.1 The Imperative of Accuracy

Medical translation is one of the most ethically sensitive areas in translation practice. Errors can lead to fatal consequences. Hence, *fidelity and clarity* are paramount. Yet, in multicultural societies, literal translation may fail to communicate vital information to patients with limited linguistic competence or different cultural conceptions of health.

5.2 Transcreation in Health Communication

In public health campaigns, transcreation bridges this gap. For example, health messages about vaccination or nutrition are often adapted culturally to improve comprehension and trust (Martínez-Gómez, 2023). The *World Health Organization* employs transcreation for multilingual campaigns to ensure emotional resonance without compromising factual accuracy.

5.3 Linguistic and Cultural Challenges

Different languages encode medical knowledge differently. Concepts like “mental health,” “disability,” or “chronic illness” carry varying cultural connotations. According to Pöchhacker (2021), translators must transcreate metaphors and culturally embedded expressions to avoid misunderstanding. For example, idioms for mental distress in African or Asian contexts require creative cultural mediation rather than direct translation.

5.4 Ethics in Medical Transcreation

The ethics of medical transcreation involve balancing *cultural sensitivity* with *clinical accuracy*. As Olohan (2024) argues, transcreation in health contexts is not artistic liberty but *compassionate adaptation*—ensuring that the message heals rather than harms.

6.0 Translation and Transcreation in Legal Contexts

6.1 Law, Language, and Precision

Legal translation differs fundamentally from other types: it is bound by *precision, consistency, and liability*. A mistranslation in a contract or treaty can have profound consequences. Legal terminology is context-specific, embedded in distinct legal systems. Hence, literal fidelity is essential.

However, globalization and multilingual law-making (e.g., the EU, WTO, or UN) demand a certain degree of **transcreation**—adapting legal concepts to systems that lack exact equivalents (Cao, 2022).

6.2 Comparative Legal Transcreation

Legal transcreation occurs when concepts are culturally or systemically incommensurable. For instance, the Anglo-American concept of *trust* has no direct counterpart in civil law traditions. Translators must *transcreate* meaning through explanatory paraphrase or functional equivalents (Harvey, 2020).

Similarly, in international arbitration, the language of arbitration clauses must convey identical legal force across jurisdictions—a complex act of transcreation that balances fidelity with functional adaptation.

6.3 Ethics and Responsibility

Legal transcreation requires high ethical accountability. As Sarcevic (2021) emphasizes, translators are not mere intermediaries but **co-constructors of legal meaning**. Every lexical decision has potential juridical consequences. Thus, creativity in legal transcreation must remain strictly bounded by professional ethics, transparency, and accountability.

7.0 Comparative Overview Across Domains

Field	Translation Focus	Transcreation Focus	Risk	Goal
Marketing	Consistency and localization	and Emotional appeal, brand adaptation	Cultural mismatch	Consumer resonance
Advertising	Clarity of slogan	Persuasive creativity	Misinterpretation	Audience engagement
Medical	Terminological accuracy	Cultural comprehension	Miscommunication	Patient safety
Legal	Linguistic precision	Conceptual equivalence	Legal ambiguity	Judicial clarity

This table demonstrates that while **translation ensures communicative safety**, **transcreation ensures communicative success**. The challenge lies in determining how much creative freedom is permissible within the ethical and professional constraints of each field.

8.0 Ethical and Professional Implications

8.1 The Translator's Agency

Transcreation redefines the translator's agency. In creative domains, the translator becomes a co-author; in medical or legal contexts, a cultural mediator and ethical gatekeeper. As Tymoczko (2020) observes, translation ethics must evolve to recognize the *situated agency* of translators across professions.

8.2 AI and Machine Transcreation

Artificial intelligence increasingly assists translation across industries. However, machine translation lacks cultural intuition and emotional intelligence. Recent studies (Chen & Wang, 2025) confirm that AI-transcreated marketing texts often fail to align with local emotional registers, leading to brand dissonance. Thus, human transcreators remain indispensable.

8.3 Toward an Integrated Model

Future practice should integrate translation and transcreation within a *hybrid professional model*:

- **Marketing/Advertising:** creative teams trained in linguistics.
- **Medical/Legal:** certified translators trained in intercultural ethics. This interdisciplinarity ensures both precision and resonance, reflecting the complex realities of global communication.

9.0 Conclusion

The comparative analysis across marketing, advertising, medical, and legal contexts reveals that translation and transcreation are not mutually exclusive but complementary. Translation safeguards **accuracy**, while transcreation ensures **cultural vitality and communicative relevance**.

In commercial communication, transcreation drives brand identity and audience connection. In medical and legal communication, it safeguards understanding and justice. Across all domains, the translator-transcreator emerges as a crucial intercultural agent—part linguist, part artist, and part ethicist.

In the future, as technology automates literal translation, *transcreation* will define the human value in multilingual communication: the ability to bridge emotion, ethics, and culture through language.

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