

NORM AND CREATIVITY: AN INTRODUCTION

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It is an honour for me to accept the kind invitation to write this introduction to the *Linguaculture* special volume on norm and creativity. This is an important subject, and close to my heart, following my own work on the style and ideology in the translation of Latin American literature in English.

To begin with, it is clear that the contributors' conceptualizations of norm and creativity are varied. They are applied at different levels of language and culture and across disciplines, encompassing linguistics, sociology, literary studies and interpreting/translation studies. In descriptive translation studies (Toury 1995/2012), norms are located on a continuum somewhere between conventions (which are less strong) and rules (which are more binding). They are generally agreed forms of behaviour which have a partly prescriptive effect. Different norms operate at different levels, from the macro-level preliminary norms that involve translation policy and directness to the micro-level operational norms that have to do with generalities of linguistic choices. The preliminary norms encourage a sociological approach while the operational norms focus on the nitty-gritty of language. There is also a constant tension between norms and the creative impulse of the author or translator, which fluctuates according to socio-cultural context, external factors and text-type. This tension, in which norms act as a constraint on creativity, is brought out in the articles in this volume.

Radu Andriescu writes on spoken or slam poetry, a relatively new type of performance in which the poet performs live before an often large audience who may also take part in the judging process. Such poetry is an exciting departure from the previously accepted norm and is marked by energy and contradiction. Andriescu describes how the incentive of acting in front of paying public is hugely attractive to the performers, teenage and adult alike. It brings poetry to a mainstream audience in a dramatic fashion yet at the same time imposes limits on the performance, as Andriescu observes:

[S]lam poets have to observe the conventions of a certain type of poetry competition, as well as use such identifiers (meter, rhyme etc). Moreover, youth slam comes with its own set of rules and conventions (for instance the use of metaphor and the rejection of clichés), which derive from the rigors of academy.

These constraints on creativity show the continuing pressure exerted by the institutional norm and derive from interiorized conceptualizations of what are the prototypical characteristics of poetry. Such conceptualizations tend to be assimilated by individuals in education or through the media in ways which are difficult to challenge.

Oana Cogeanu chooses another fascinating genre for the study of norms: African-American literature and travel writing. Her perceptive analysis of early writing in the tradition of the “talking book”, going back to James Gronniosaw in 1774, tackles the symbiotic relation between norm and creativity. In essence, Cogeanu sees “how a new norm is established by creative gesture against a previous norm, in a never-ending cycle”, a crucial observation to which I shall return at the end of this introduction.

Carmen Valero Garcés and **Brooke Townsley** both deal with behavioural norms in interpreting that operate at a macro-level. **Valero Garcés** adopts a sociological approach to the investigation of translating and interpreting in public services (TIPS), an area that has grown enormously in recent years in both research and practice. Research has now generally abandoned the assumption of the translation and interpreter as a transparent conduit of information between source and target text. Thus, Valero Garcés starts from the departure point that “the recognition of interpreting as a situated practice has shifted the focus of research from interpreters’ detachment to allegiances, from deontology to ethics, from training skilled practitioners to educating socially aware professionals”. She employs the Bourdieusian concepts of field and habitus to explain the results of a survey of 55 experienced interpreters in which they were asked to speculate on their likely response to different contexts, especially whether they consider they would remain neutral or whether they would side with one or other of the parties. Some questions required a decision about translation strategy. Of particular interest was the coupling of perceived impartiality with a strategy of literal translation, while advocacy was partnered with linguistic “mediation” in an intersection of ethical and discursive choices.

Brooke Townsley focuses on norms of interpreting quality and on the situation of the United Kingdom, where professional norms are in part determined by the Chartered Institute of Linguists’ (CIoL) Diploma in Public Service Interpreting exam and of the National Register of Public Service Interpreters. However, the existence of such norm-making

authorities does not in fact ensure the highest quality of practice since translating and interpreting are not regulated as strictly as some other professions (medicine, law, etc.). This lack of status has numerous negative consequences for interpreters in the UK: amongst others, despite the work of professional associations such as the Chartered Institute and the Institute of Translating and Interpreting (ITI), most interpreters are at the mercy of other norm-making authorities, which themselves may be in competition. This was brought home in two huge recent controversies: one was the question of control of the NRPSI and its authority for deciding criteria for admission; the second was the decision of the UK government, through its Ministry of Justice, to enter an exclusive contract for court interpreting with a single agency. Here, the professional norm of quality is challenged by the socio-political context in which the interpreter operates.

Four articles relate directly to norms of language use, and specifically to norm-breaking or norm-altering linguistic behaviour. In these, the role of the tools of corpus linguistics is central, and we must stress that this technological advance has revolutionized the study of linguistic norms and creativity. Thus, **Nadina Cehan & Anca Cehan** produce an illuminating study of the frequency of additional *have* in third conditionals (e.g. *If I had have been...*), considered to be non-standard. One of the highlights in this paper is the methodology itself, which is quite complex since the item under investigation is a colloquial construction with a wide range of linguistic realizations. The researchers use the British National Corpus, the Corpus of Contemporary American and Webcorp to retrieve over 900 occurrences. Their use of Webcorp raises some important issues: first, most of the incidences of this non-standard construction occur in this corpus, because, as the authors hypothesize (in my view correctly, in certain genres), “Web language may be thought of as coming closer to the benchmark of spoken English than other written media”. Yet they decide to discount from analysis “non-native” uses and lyrics/poetry. I wonder how far this is justified. Both are likely to show deviation from the standard linguistic norm but in legitimate communicative texts. Indeed, these texts may include genres that show a high level of the construction and their omission may inadvertently hinder the ability to draw valid genre-specific conclusions.

Daniela Doboş also focuses on grammatical structures in English, specifically the explanation and teaching of verb forms and tenses as basic building blocks of language. Her championing of the functional teaching of grammar with the goal of communicative competence is sound, as is her call for a “more personalizing style” for learners to review and practice concepts taught. Here, I think, is where a possible link can be drawn with the Cehan & Cehan’s approach: the best way for students to autonomously reinforce their

learning may be through the exposure to real-life examples featured in electronic corpora.

The indispensability of such corpora is evident in the articles by **Luminița-Irinel Trașcă** and **Sorina Postolea**. Trașcă analyses examples from a 37-million word corpus of the newspaper “Evenimentul Zilei” using part-of-speech analysis to identify noun+noun combinations, which are not generally considered to be native constructions in Romanian and other Romance languages. Trașcă suggests that Romanian has been influenced first by Russian, during the Communist era, and more recently in technological text types by English. Terms such as *tehnologia laser* (“laser technology”) have now come to be preferred over a more native construction such as *tehnologia cu laser* (“technology with laser”). There are several questions raised that are worthy of further investigation: primary is the question of the extralinguistic factors that influence such linguistic change; another is the process by which such shift or drift becomes accepted, internalized and then reproduced by the recipient culture. While Trașcă is correct to identify general political and ideological factors, it is far more difficult (yet hugely important) to seek pointers that reveal a direct relation between these and language change. Much of course depends on the status and policy of the receiving language: what can, or indeed should, a less powerful do to arrest these tendencies? Borrowing has always been an inherent part of language contact and such external influence can expand the potential of the recipient language. Furthermore, the ebb and flow of lexical and syntactic borrowings will alter over time as a language organically evolves, but in the globalized world of English as a lingua franca, we need to consider whether some protection is needed for less widely spoken languages.

Sorina Postolea writes on an area that more than any other shows the influence of English – information and communication technology. As she says, “in the case of the ICT field, with very few exceptions, all the new terms are coined in English”. This scenario creates a fundamental difference between English and other source languages: new terms are formed by what Postolea, following Humbley and Kübler, calls “primary term formation” in English and transferred through “secondary term formation” into other, target, languages. Postolea integrates her study into a translation studies framework, drawing on Vinay and Darbelnet’s taxonomy that includes borrowing and calque and direct translation. Interestingly, she proposes a new subcategory of borrowing, in addition to the “full” and “naturalized borrowings” – this is what she calls “integrated borrowings” an intermediate step in which the new term has yet to find a stable form in Romanian. Of particular interest is the example of *hard disk*, an illustration of the different transfer procedures:

it has been introduced into Romanian in all possible forms: as a full borrowing (non inflected *hard disk*), as a naturalised borrowing (*hard disc*, with one instance in which it was rather integrated *hard disc-ului*), as an integrated clipped form (*hardisk*), and as a loan translation (*unitate de disc*).

Postolea suggests that loan translation is the most common form of secondary term formation in Romanian, which is a finding worthy of further investigation and comparison with other languages. In addition, it is important to ask again what external factors determine one procedure over another and how one of a group of competing terms might win out in the long term.

Stefan Larsson provides a discussion of social and legal norms and a stimulating questioning of what is meant by creativity in the context of copyright in the digital age. The rise of the internet continues to challenge the romantic view of the loan author, or indeed translator. All forms of collaborative work and crowdsourcing depend on the intermingling of voices of the crowd, and ideas are now transferred more speedily and easily than before in ways which sometimes conceal their origin. The prevalence of search engines, working with what in essence are hitherto unimaginably massive corpora of texts in all languages, has transformed the working processes of those of us engaged in textual production. Intertextuality has become visible at the touch of a button which almost instantaneously retrieves previous instances of the search term which allows some evaluation of the linguistic norm. The question then becomes, what does this do to creativity? How long will it be before we can test for a neologism by its absence in a corpus of all language? Despite this, I still trust in the human's capacity for creativity and linguistic innovation, Cogeanu's "creative gesture against a previous norm".