

A Mystery or a Route? A Systematic Literature Review of Transcreation and Translation Studies

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Abstract—Transcreation is an inter-cultural and inter-linguistic activity, which has obtained particular academic interest recently. However, few studies have reviewed the current status quo on transcreation systematically, although transcreation has been applied in various fields such as literature and advertising translation. In this study, a systematic literature review is conducted to shed light on this topic by identifying and analysing genres, foci, methods, and theories related to transcreation. The databases cover Scopus, Web of Science and CNKI from 1995 to 2023. A total of 61 publications were identified with PRISMA 2020. The qualitative findings showed that (1) most studies of transcreation focus on literary and advertising, while other fields of audiovisual, news and political, training and interpreting need to be explored; (2) research foci of transcreation strategies, culture and ideology gain more attention while transcreation process and evaluation, localization and persuasion have not been much examined; (3) content analysis is most frequently adopted while other qualitative methods are less used. Besides, there is a lack of using quantitative and mixed methods; (4) systematical functional linguistics is often used as a pointcut to examine strategies of transcreation. Besides, multimodal social semiotics is used to explore transcreation through texts, pictures and videos. Other linguistic theories and cross-disciplinary theories remain unexplored in transcreation. In conclusion, this study provides a review of transcreation and translation studies and reveals some research gaps that could enlighten future studies.

Index Terms—PRISMA, qualitative analysis, systematic literature review, transcreation, translation studies

I. INTRODUCTION

In an academic context, transcreation was introduced by scholar Lal (1957, 1964) in the Indian tradition of translation, where he put forward the requirements for translators to edit, reconcile, and transmute when translating. Moreover, the purpose of transcreation as intended by Lal is to capture the spirit of the text and recreate it in a different language to engage the reader. Although it originated in literature, transcreation has been introduced in advertising, audiovisuals, news and political translation recently.

Transcreation vs. Translation

The definition of transcreation has long been debated since its occurrence. Some scholars regard it as a kind of translation strategy in projects requiring linguistic and cultural adaptation (Kassawat, 2020; TAUS, 2019), which denies the independence of transcreation as a professional practice. On the contrary, some scholars stress distinctions between transcreation and translation. One of the obvious distinctions is creativity, indicating that transcreation is not just a translation of the source text, but the creation of new text content (Rike, 2013). In other words, transcreation gives more freedom for translators to modify, omit and even add elements to the adapted materials (Mangiron & O'Hagan, 2006, p. 20).

By contrast, some scholars didn't attribute differences to creativity but to cultural adaptation (Ray & Kelly, 2010). Transcreation is basically understood as an effective way to ensure that message is culturally relevant and appropriate for the target audience, which puts transcreation between translation and copywriting or copy-adaptation. The same case in marketing and advertising, transcreation is regarded as a service or an economic activity (Carreira, 2022, 2023) which

transfers brands and messages from one culture to another, making texts more appealing to the target consumers (Pedersen, 2014).

As can be seen in the development of defining transcreation, the scope of transcreation has been expanded from initial literary to advertising and audiovisual translation. The reason transcreation has been widely applied in advertising lies in the fact that transcreation puts more emphasis on cultural adaptation. For instance, translation is not enough when global brands aim to access local markets; it is necessary to speak to the audience using the right cultural nuances (Pedersen, 2014). In this opinion, transcreation is considered an added value for translation, since translation transfers words from one language to another while transcreation transfers brands and messages from one culture to another. Besides, transcreation has been applied in game localization, where creativity remains the most important element that gives greater freedom for translators to adapt texts to offer the same game experience to the targeted audience (Gabbalo, 2012). Furthermore, it is noticed that transcreation is also used in some fields that are less connected with creativity such as medical field and law (Hu & Wu, 2020; Simmons et al., 2011). In these domains, transcreation also works as a way to adapt materials to the targeted culture and make them more understandable for targeted readers.

Since studies on transcreation have been increasing and applied in different fields from literary to advertising, the research status quo and gaps in transcreation need to be figured out in this study, which is hoped to have a better understanding of transcreation and translation studies.

Research Questions

This study provided an overview of current literature on transcreation with the following research questions:

1. What is the research status quo of transcreation and translation?
2. What are the limitations and research gaps of current studies?

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A systematic literature review is carried out based on PRISMA 2020 in this study due to its detailed flow of charts delineating different phases of systematic literature review: identification, screening, eligibility, and qualitative syntheses (Liberati et al., 2009).

A. Database and Search Strategy

The systematic literature review was conducted based on these three databases: Scopus, Web of Science and China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). Scopus was selected due to its largest single abstract and indexing database (Burnham, 2006). Web of Science was chosen as it was considered the most comprehensive database covering the most peer-reviewed journals in social sciences (Steinhardt et al., 2017). CNKI is chosen as “the largest academic Chinese journal full-text database worldwide covering various disciplinary studies” (Li, 2020, p. 41). Besides, studies published in core journals were selected in CNKI to ensure high quality. This choice of three databases increases the quality of the included studies.

Year 1995 was chosen as the starting point for it is the earliest study on transcreation in three databases; thus, the duration of studies included is from 1995 to 2023. Considering the relevant theme focused, the searching keyword is “transcreation” in searching titles, keywords, and abstracts in Scopus and Web of Science while “创译” (*chuang yi*, transcreation) is chosen in CNKI database. All searches were conducted between October 1, 2023, and December 31, 2024. The criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of studies are listed below (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Criteria	
Inclusion	Journal articles are included; The publications between 1995 and December 31, 2023 are included; Articles published in English and Chinese are included; Articles on transcreation and translation studies are included.
Exclusion	Books, theses, book chapters, conference papers, proceedings and review papers are excluded; Articles not related to translation studies are excluded; Non-core journal articles are excluded from CNKI.

B. Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

There are 433 publications from CNKI, 190 from Scopus, 127 from Web of Science and 5 from snowballing (see Figure 1). The total number is 654 after the removal of duplicates. At the screening stage, 378 articles from CNKI were removed because only articles from core journals were included. 108 articles were excluded for their irrelevance with translation as they fell into the fields of medical and public health based on their abstracts. 18 articles not written in English or Chinese were excluded due to the author’s language ability. A total of 115 full-text articles were assessed for their eligibility. After 50 articles that mentioned transcreation but were not focused on translation were excluded, 65 articles were included. After quality assessment based on critical appraisal (Crowe, 2013), 4 studies were excluded because they only referred to transcreation while focusing on other themes. Finally, 61 articles were extracted and analysed.

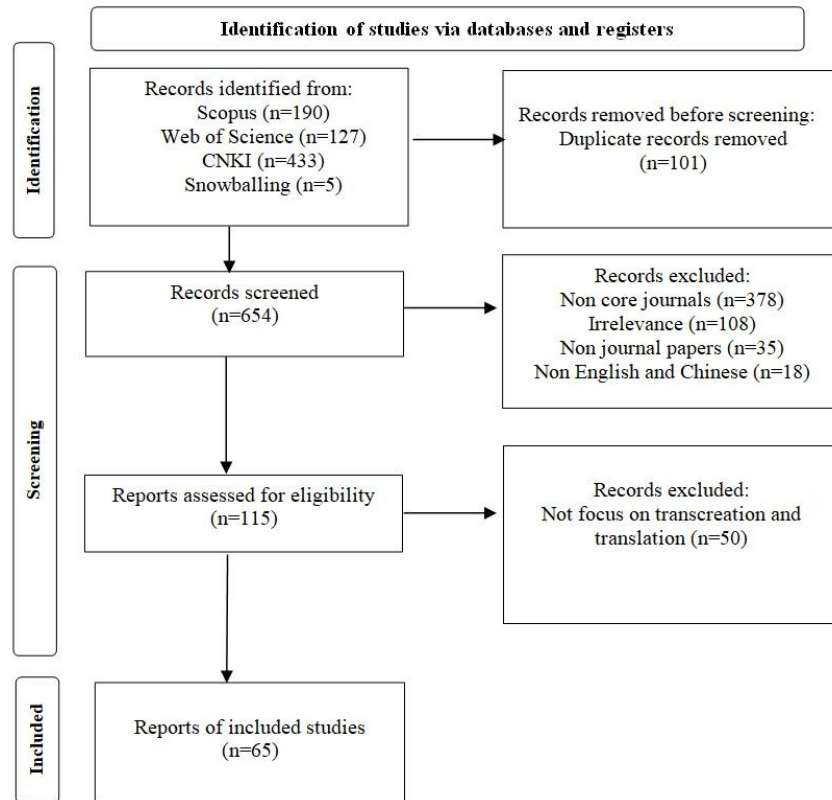


Figure 1. Flow Diagram of Study Selection Process Adapted From PRISMA 2020

III. DATA EXTRACTION AND SYNTHESIS

There are four sections in results interpretation, research genres, research foci, methods applied in transcreation studies, and theories applied in transcreation studies. In general, there is an increasing trend for publications (see Figure 2).

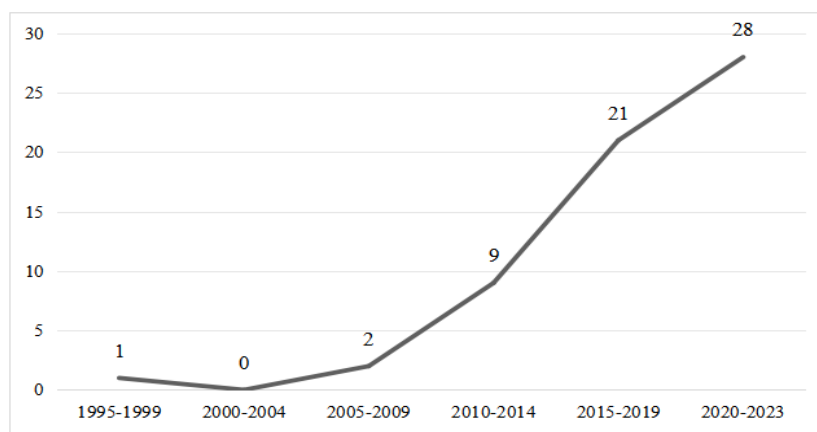


Figure 2. Distribution of Transcreation Studies From 1995 to 2023

In Figure 2, the result presents the distribution of transcreation studies between 1995 and 2023. First, from 1995 to 2009, the number of studies on transcreation has a relatively slow increase and there are totally three studies. Second, the number of studies on transcreation has increased rapidly from 2009 to 2019. More specifically, there was an outstanding rise in the number of studies from 2015 to 2019 with totally 21 articles included. Third, compared with the previous period, the number of studies on transcreation continued to increase steadily from 2019 to 2023 with 28 studies included. Basically, the number of studies related to transcreation has been on the rise since its first occurrence in 1995, but at different paces in different periods.

A. Research Genres

The genres of relevant studies most concentrate on literary and advertising, combined with other genres of audiovisual, news and political, medical, training and interpreting and law (see Figure 3).

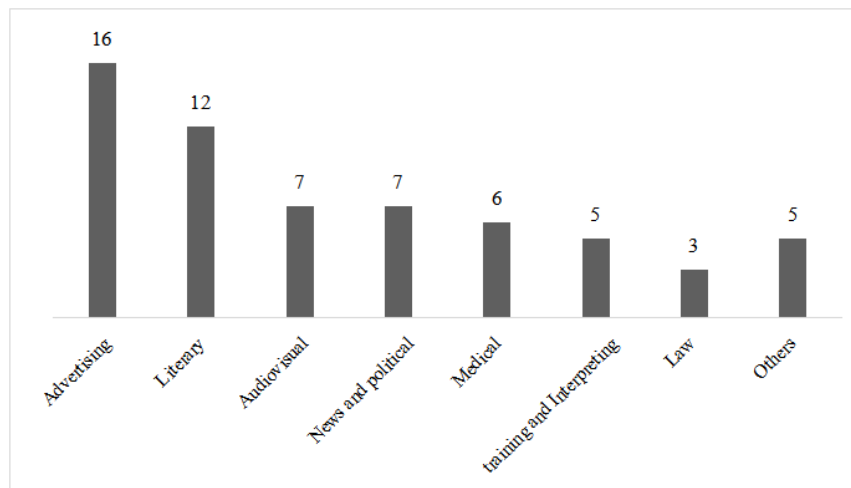


Figure 3. Distribution of Genres of Included Studies From 1995 to 2023

As shown in Figure 3, advertising and literature are relatively most focused on studies of transcreation. Specially, there are sixteen articles focusing on advertising texts and the included studies mainly concentrate on luxury advertising (Ho, 2021; Zhu et al., 2023) and corporate website content (Al-Omar, 2020; Kassawat, 2020; Wang et al., 2021). It should be noticed that one study selected texts from both the corporate website and YouTube of a beer company called Estrella Damm (Corrius & Espasa, 2023). As for literary, there are twelve articles concentrating on literary texts, involving poetry (Chakravarty, 2021; Wu, 2022), comics (Borodo & Wood, 2023; Nam & Jung, 2022), novels, short stories and lyrics (Nishimura & Itoh, 2020). It is notable that one study selected adventure comic Thorgal as a sample and compared its two translated versions of US and UK, proving transcreation is used in textual and visual aspects (Borodo & Wood, 2023).

Compared with other genres, studies of transcreation in legal contexts are relatively scarce. There are only three articles focusing on law transcreation and the texts include legal language and law terms. For example, legal language is focused on one study to verify the existence of transcreation in legal translation (Husa, 2017). Besides, studies of other genres including audiovisual, news and political, medical, training and interpreting are medium in number. Specifically, seven articles discuss audiovisual translation with games (Fernández, 2014; Mangiron & O'Hagan, 2006), subtitles (Chaume, 2018), dubbing (Yahiaoui, 2022), and transmedia projects (Malenova, 2018). Besides, five studies are relevant to news and political translation, involving news translation, political books and Chinese diplomatic discourse (Zhang & Fan, 2022). In addition, there are six articles focusing on the translation of medical texts involving smoking cessation materials, cancer prevention messages and traditional Chinese medicine. At last, other genres involve food tags, public signs and the definition of transcreation.

B. Research Foci

As shown in Figure 4, there are 8 research foci listed in columns. Most studies of transcreation examine transcreation strategies and culture and ideology. Besides, some efforts are being made to explore the definitions of transcreation, teaching and training, process and evaluation, localization, persuasion and untranslatability.

Firstly, most studies discuss transcreation as one of the translation strategies parallel to literal translation and free translation, but give no specified framework for transcreation (Ai, 2014; Galvan, 2019; Gao & Hua, 2021). For example, transcreation was put forward as a translation strategy together with free translation and literal translation in the English translation of science fiction *Three-Body*. However, there are five studies offering categorizations of transcreation strategies. For instance, Untari (2023) classified the transcreation strategies of online news headlines into three aspects: bombasting, referencing, and bamboozling. Pedersen's (2014) transcreation strategies were adopted to examine the advertising translation of fragrance products, which include substitution, specification, direct translation, and retention. Another study conducted by Moron and Calvo (2018) categorised transcreation strategies into omission, addition, modification and domestication. While these frameworks of transcreation are only suitable for texts in limited fields, there is a need to develop more complete frameworks of transcreation in future studies.

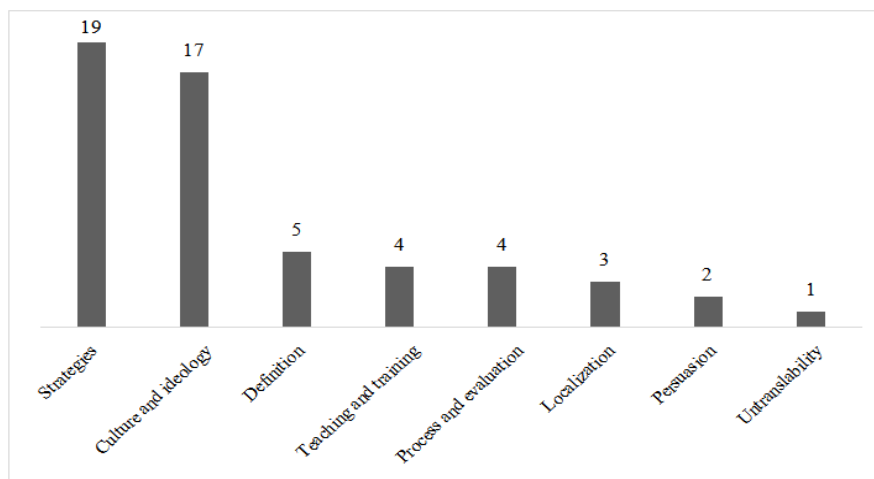


Figure 4. Distribution of Research Foci From 1995 to 2023

Secondly, culture and ideology receive much attention in studies of transcreation, which cover various texts of political, medical, comics and advertising. There are three studies focusing on the ideology of transcreation. For example, one article discusses ideological differences reflected by the transcreation of news articles on two web portals Blic and N1, which indicates that the motive of transcreation is to influence the general opinion, beliefs, and attitudes of people (Petrović, 2023). Apart from ideology, culture is also discussed in transcreation, including cultural adaptation, stereotypes, the translator's role, cultural images and cultural references. More specifically, there are studies related to medical texts analysing how to employ methods of transcreation to make translated texts more adapted to the targeted readers and meet the health literacy and informational needs of the group (e.g., Piñero, 2018). It is noticed that two studies focus on the translator's role in cultural mediation (Katan, 2016; Rike, 2013), giving evidence of the translator's invention in texts by transcreation. Besides, there is a study taking Xu Yuanchong's English translation of Tang poetry as an example to examine the reshaping of cultural image by transcreation strategy (Wu, 2022).

Thirdly, studies also involve practical teaching and training of transcreation. For instance, it has developed an expert-validated competence model for transcreation teaching in higher education (D áz-Millón & Olvera-Lobo, 2023), and another transcreation training project named TeCreaTe offers practical experience in commercial transcreation. In addition, there are several studies discussing workflows and quality evaluation of transcreation (Carreira, 2021; Risku, et al., 2017). For example, a study mentioned that the typical translation evaluation grid used in transcreation makes fewer errors, showing its feasibility in advertising text (Benetello, 2018).

Fourthly, compared with other research foci, localization, persuasion and untranslatability have not been examined sufficiently. Specifically, it seems that localization is more linked to games than other fields. Besides, persuasion is often used in exploring textual content on websites such as tourism and corporate. For example, a study carried out by Ho (2021) compared the way that how persuasion effect is achieved between the source text and the target text.

C. Methods Applied in Transcreation Studies

As shown in Figure 5, qualitative research method domains were included in 85% of studies, showing its feasibility in transcreation. The quantitative method accounts for 8% of studies, mainly referring to corpus-based analysis. Mixed methods usually include both qualitative and quantitative methods, accounting for 7% of the total studies. The quantitative method and mixed method are illustrated in detail and the qualitative method will be discussed later.

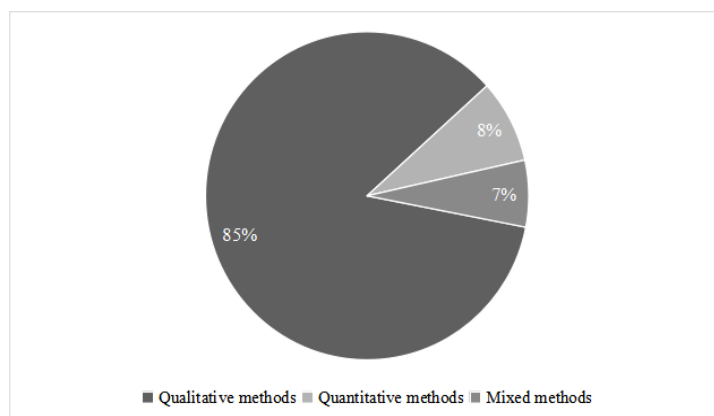


Figure 5. Distribution of Research Methods in Transcreation From 1995 to 2023

As for the quantitative method, it refers to corpus-based analysis, which is often used in discussing persuasion and strategies of transcreation. For example, one study selects parallel articles in English and Chinese from the websites of the three best-selling luxury fashion brands to build a corpus and examines the optional shift of evaluative epithets to compare how persuasion is achieved between the source texts and the target texts.

Besides, the mixed method is used in four articles. One study was done by D áz-Mill ón and Olvera-Lobo (2023), who applied NVIVO and SPSS to analyze the data to develop an expert-validated competence model for transcreation teaching. Another study was carried out to develop an interactive visual lyrics transcreation system. Preliminary experiments with 19 participants were made to determine the best combination of user interface components.

Not surprisingly, among those articles reviewed, content analysis appears to be the primary method of studies in transcreation; other qualitative research methods such as multimodal discourse analysis, Spradleyan analysis, DPT surveys and ethnographic field studies are also used in several studies (see Figure 6).

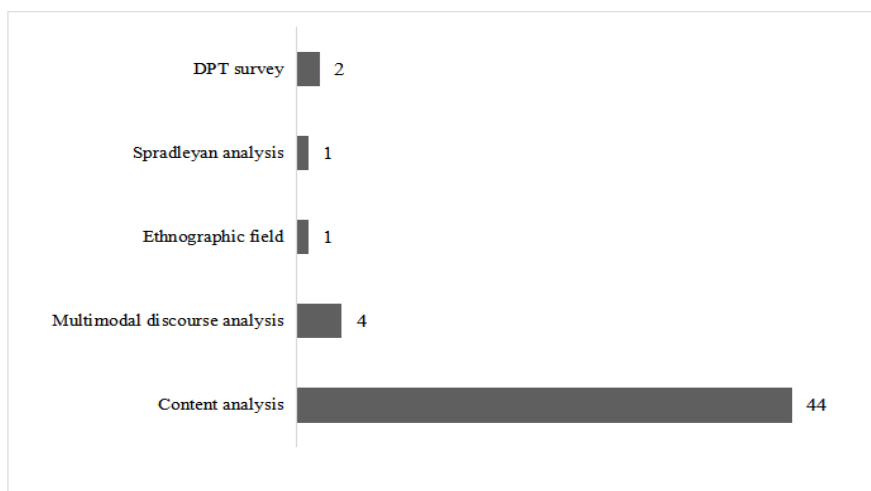


Figure 6. Distribution of Qualitative Research Methods in Transcreation From 1995 to 2023

Most studies use content analysis to examine transcreation strategies, culture and ideology and localization. Studies relating to transcreation strategies usually offer some exemplifications of transcreation in case studies. For example, when analysing advertising translation, Ai (2014) adopted transcreation as one of the translation strategies along with literal translation, addition and omission. Another study carried out by Hu and Wu (2020) used content analysis to deal with translation of Chinese law terms such as “人民调解” (ren min tiao jie, people’s mediation) and “恶势力”(e shi li, evil forces), which well explained transcreation strategies under law context. However, these studies provide some examples to explain transcreation rather than use a framework of transcreation, lacking theoretical support for analysis. Meanwhile, content analysis is used in cultural studies of transcreation. For instance, a study on the translation of Bengali Dalit short stories adopted content analysis to analyse transcreation guided by different cultural dimensions (Pal & Bhattacharjee, 2022). Besides, transcreation is more linked to website and game localization. For instance, one study analysed the transcreation of a case study from a superhero game: Batman Arkham Asylum, giving some examples of using transcreation as a compensation strategy.

Meanwhile, multimodal discourse analysis has received attention in recent years. Although translation has been largely focused on conventional written texts, it should be seen in a broader perspective from multimodal features (Rike, 2013). One study from Al-Omar (2020) focused on adjusting the ideological values to the target language audience through the transcreation of both verbal and non-verbal elements in advertisements. Two studies examined the transcreation of texts and pictures from adventure comics and medical materials to make them more adaptable to the culture of the target language. Considering current studies using multimodal discourse analysis are concentrated on culture and ideology, there is a need to explore transcreation in other research foci such as localization.

In addition, a study was carried out with an ethnographic field study at a marketing implementation agency in London, during which a group of transcreation managers was followed over a period of four weeks, which provided a case for exploring the process and workflow of transcreation. Besides, two studies using the DPT survey to explore the definition of transcreation were by a common author, Carreira (2022, 2023), focusing on economic characteristics, the dual definition of service and strategy of transcreation through interviews with transcreation professionals. At last, one study adopted Spradleyan analysis as a method (Untari et al., 2023), which included four stages of domain analysis, taxonomy analysis, componential analysis and cultural theme analysis, to realise the click baiting purpose through the transcreation of news headlines.

D. Theories Applied in Transcreation Studies

There are several articles using linguistic theories to study transcreation. These theories involve systematic functional linguistics (Fang & Song, 2014; Ho, 2021; Malenkina & Ivanov, 2018; Wang et al., 2021) and multimodal social

semiotics (Rike, 2013). One study focused on interactional metadiscoursal markers on tourism websites to uncover rhetorical and persuasive means of promotion and communication (Malenkina & Ivanov, 2018). Besides, a study conducted by Fang and Song (2014) focused on how actual transcreation happens through lexicogrammatical choices in Australian health product labels made by the translators, which refers to the addition of new content. Another study adopted Martin and White's appraisal framework to compare the persuasion effect between source text and target text. These studies indicate the feasibility of systematic functional linguistics applied to transcreation and provide potential studies for exploring relevant linguistic theories.

Another study adopting multimodal social semiotics gave a description of the semiotic resources including verbal text, images, animations and layout, showing how the communicative purpose is achieved through transcreation (Rike, 2013).

IV. DISCUSSION

Firstly, as mentioned in 3.1, transcreation focuses most on advertising texts and least on law texts. There are two underlining reasons. Firstly, advertising can be classified as operative text according to Reiss's (2000) text typology. It is acceptable to deviate from the content and form of the original text to a large extent when translating, aiming to infect readers with equivalent expressions. This opinion falls within the definition of transcreation, which also allows translators to modify, omit and even add elements to deliver a similar effect on target readers. Besides, there are lots of creative wordplay, assonance and alliteration in advertising, which require transcreation rather than straightforward translation. Thus, transcreation has been frequently applied in advertising field in recent years. More specifically, advertising texts of luxury and corporate websites are most concentrated, showing a neglect of studies focusing on other kinds of texts such as household, electronic products, and cosmetics. Secondly, compared with advertising, law text belongs to informative text, where faithfulness comes first in translation to ensure source text information is transmitted accurately and completely. Consequently, transcreation in law context seems to be scarce compared with other genres. Apart from law context, it shows a neglect in other texts such as technology, food, public signs and interpreting. At last, some studies selected materials from websites for online advertising and corporate profiles. Other channels of social media such as Facebook and Twitter can also become sources of materials.

Secondly, transcreation strategies receive the most attention compared with other research foci, showing the study of transcreation has reached a stage where a transcreation framework needs to be formed. Besides, several studies focus on the definition of transcreation, which indicates it is at the primary stage of studying transcreation and the academic aims to distinguish transcreation from translation and figure out the characteristics of transcreation. Culture and ideology in transcreation are also focused, offering evidence that transcreation has been explored to explain specific social phenomena at a linguistic level. Besides, localization and persuasion should gain more attention. Localization can be examined through transcreation studies mainly in games and websites, which make translation more culturally adaptable to the target language. Besides, advertising and audiovisuals can also be explored in localization and transcreation in the future studies. Although persuasion is less focused in transcreation studies, its natural connection with language makes it more feasible in later studies. Currently, most studies on persuasion use systematic functional linguistics to examine shift through translation, but there is a large space for other linguistic theories that can be used. At last, research foci such as localization, persuasion, teaching and training, process and evaluation, and untranslatability should be given more attention in transcreation.

Thirdly, as mentioned in 3.2, qualitative methods are most frequently used in studies of transcreation, while mixed method and quantitative method are relatively scarce. The reason can be attributed to the definition and characteristics of transcreation. Since transcreation is the combination of translation and creativity, and there are few quantitative measurements to identify creativity in translation, most studies on transcreation adopt the qualitative method. Therefore, there is a need to study transcreation with quantitative methods, especially in measuring the reception effect and persuasive effect of the target readers in transcreation projects and teaching. Besides, most studies adopted content analysis as a research method, which indicates textual limitations have not been broken through in current transcreation studies. There is a potential to use multimodal discourse analysis to study transcreation in foci of game and website localization, culture and ideology.

Fourthly, some studies included aim to analyse how to realise transcreation by borrowing some concepts or frameworks from linguistic theories. Specifically, some concepts from systematic functional linguistics such as metafunctions, appraisal framework and lexicogrammatical choices are borrowed to explore transcreation. It has been seen that most studies of transcreation only use some concepts from linguistic theories, while concepts and theories from other disciplines, such as advertising and literature, can also be used in transcreation studies to promote more independent and complete transcreation theories.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study offers a systematic literature review of transcreation in translation studies from 1995 to 2023 to examine the research status quo of transcreation in four aspects: research genres, research foci, methods applied in transcreation and theories applied in transcreation studies. Firstly, involved genres in transcreation developed from

literary at first to advertising and audiovisual, mainly because the concept of transcreation is in line with advertising in new markets. Other genres such as news and political, medical, training and interpreting and law need to be further explored in the future. Secondly, research foci mainly focus on transcreation strategies, culture and ideology. While most studies of strategies don't give a framework for transcreation, which needs to be improved in later studies. Besides, studies on localization, persuasion and untranslatability in transcreation need to be explored in future studies. Thirdly, qualitative methods are most frequently used in transcreation studies, while quantitative method and mixed method are relatively less used. In the qualitative methods included, content analysis domains are most frequently used method. Other methods such as multimodal discourse analysis, ethnographic field, Spradleyan analysis, and DPT survey are less used. Besides, multimodal discourse analysis should be more used in game and website localization. Fourthly, systematic functional linguistics is often regarded as a pointcut to study transcreation in current studies, other linguistic theories and theories from other disciplines such as advertising and literature need to be considered in studies of transcreation.

There are some limitations to this study. First, books, chapters, proceedings and theses are excluded and there are only three databases selected in this study, leading to a limitation in the data. Second, this study only selected articles written in Chinese and English, with a neglect of other languages. Third, this study focuses on research genres, foci, methods and theories, while other subjects are also needed to be explored to contribute to the comprehensive findings of transcreation and translation studies.

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