

# The Transcreation Brief: A Definition Proposal

Oliver Carreira  
Pablo de Olavide University

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## *Abstract*

The transcreation brief seems to be a key part of the adaptation processes at this kind of projects. Despite the importance that many professionals, companies and researchers give to this document, we do not have a clear definition about the characteristics of this tool. In fact, in many cases it is not even clear if this is a specific document at all.

This proposal offers a quick view about what we know about this key element of the transcreation process. After establishing the differences between the concepts of client brief, creative brief and transcreation brief, a tentative analysis of examples of these documents is carried out in order to determine what are the elements that make the transcreation brief a different document to others that are quite similar in a common workflow.

## *Key Words*

Transcreation, creative translation, transcreation brief, creative brief, advertising translation.



## *1. Transcreation: A Practice in Construction*

Transcreation is a relatively new phenomenon, although its importance in the language services market has grown considerably over the last few years. Due to the recent nature of this practice, its definition is an ongoing process, which is nourished by the contributions of the different agents involved. At its simplest, transcreation could be defined as the combination of translation and

copywriting (Sattler-Hovdar, 2019). It is not a mere form of translation, as it involves the creation of new content. TAUS (2019) expands on this concept:

...a translation that is enhanced by creativity and focus on style, register, and emotive impact, and modified to suit a new audience which can be a group of users, a country, a region, etc. Typically it covers advertising, banners, slogans, word logos. [...] transcreated content is by nature more subjective. Trust from the stake-holder in the transcreator is important. Building trust comes from the right preparation, a detailed brief, some rounds of suggestions and idea-exchange. Transcreation is found most often in advertising content, or brand-orientated content, where the principal aim is to sell to customers, and where taglines or straplines often require intensive reworking.

Since the beginning of the current transcreation boom, which could be traced back to the year 2000, when the term was registered as a trademark by UPS Translations (Phillips 2014), the vision of transcreation as a synonym for advertising translation has been the most prevalent. This is the one we found in professional publications, such as Ray and Kelly's report (2010):

The term “transcreation” is now more commonly applied to marketing and advertising content that must resonate in local markets in order to deliver the same impact as the original. The term may be applied when either a direct translation is adapted, or when content is completely rewritten in the local language to reflect the original message. Most often, transcreation includes a hybrid of new content, adapted content and imagery, and straightforward translation.

In the academic field, authors like Pedersen (2016) agree with this line and propose the following characteristics for transcreation:

- It implies the creative adaptation of marketing, sales and advertising content.
- The process implies a change in the original terms and meanings, giving priority to the effect and impact caused.
- The brand concept plays an important role, even if adapted to the audience.
- This is a value-added service; it goes beyond mere translation.

The previous definitions consider transcreation as a *service* offered at the language services market. However, this is not the only view on the phenomenon. For example, Malenova (2017) considers that transcreation is a

*strategy*, a way to do things in different areas of the translation domain. The scope for this idea is audiovisual translation:

As the result of the case study, transcreation in AVT can be defined as a strategy of creative rethinking of a source text segment with subsequent generation of a totally new target text segment in conformity with the given AV context as a polysemiotic complex, taking into consideration characteristics of the communicative situation, technical constraints and an anticipated response of the spectators.

In the same line, Chaume (2018) also includes transcreation as a modality that lies within audiovisual translation:

Transcreation is an enhanced type of audiovisual translation mode, and is a direct consequence of digitalisation. [...] Transcreations are all forms of semiotic adaptation and manipulation where some or most — if not all — semiotic layers of the original (audio)visual product are localised, that is, manipulated.

Mangirón and O'Hagan (2006) propose a similar idea. For them, game localization is a form of transcreation:

In game localisation, the feeling of the original 'gameplay experience' needs to be preserved in the localised version so that all players share the same enjoyment regardless of their language of choice (O'Hagan and Mangirón, 2004). No oddities should be present to disturb the interactive game experience, and this is the reason why game localisers are granted quasi absolute freedom to modify, omit, and even add any elements which they deem necessary to bring the game closer to the players and to convey the original feel of gameplay. And, in so doing, the traditional concept of fidelity to the original is discarded. In game localisation, transcreation, rather than just translation, takes place.

Finally, at the literary field, De Campos (in Leal Lima, 2017) considers that transcreation must be a creative reinvention of literature and not a mere reproduction of these texts:

Transcreation defines poetic translation as an artistic practice aimed at experimenting with new forms and poetic procedures. Highlighting the expressive and formal differences between languages, it postulated that poetry could not be simply transposed from one idiom to another, but that it had to be reinvented.

The views on transcreation as a service and as a strategy should not be considered as exclusive. Actually, it is quite probable that transcreation might

be a dual natured phenomenon, where both approaches are compatible. In an interview-based study with professionals of the language services industry, Carreira (in press) concludes as follows:

The results suggest that the professionals share the current view of transcreation, although they highlight a second perception of the phenomenon as a multidisciplinary strategy that would overlap with other modalities of a creative nature.

## *2. The Brief: A Basic Element*

If we consider that transcreation is a service offered at the language industry, one of the formal elements that define this practice is the presence of the brief. This document is commonly mentioned in publications by different agents of the industry, such as the ones by TAUS (2019), SDL (Lizuka, 2019) or Lionbridge (Pierse, 2020) among others. However, its definition is not always clear and precise. We will further develop this concept later on in this proposal. For the moment, we can define it in general terms as the document used by transcreators to understand the linguistic and business needs of the brand, product or campaign that is being adapted to a local market (Paglia, 2010). To further develop this concept, we must examine it from three points of view: its role in the translation field, the position it takes in the workflows of the advertising and marketing industries, and the different types of brief that we found in this professional context.

### *2.1. The Role of the Brief in the Translation Field*

If we take into account the aforementioned definition by Paglia (2010), a brief is a set of instructions that define the scope where a language professional carries out their job. Calvo (2018) proposes a classification for these, based in the intersection of the *skopos* concept (Vermeer, 2004) and the realities of the market:

- Virtual absence of explicit specifications: the language professional must infer the information that needs or ask the client for it.
- Explicit specifications covering basic functional data: this includes information about the objective of the project and the conditions that must be achieved.

- Complex brief (multi-layered brief system): they include detailed information about the conditions of the project. In this category, we find elements such as style guides, *lockits* (localization kits), creativity and adaptation guidelines, etc.

In this work, we will refer to this last type of brief.

## *2.2. The Role of the Brief in Advertising Campaigns*

In order to understand the importance of the brief in transcreation (if we consider this practice as a service comparable to advertising and marketing translation), we must analyze the workflow followed in order to develop an international advertising campaign. To understand this better, we propose the following fictional example, based on IAB (2008), Burgoyne (2013) and Pedersen (2016).

Let's say that the OmniCola company wishes to launch a new drink in several international markets. For this purpose, they contact Sterling & Cooper, an advertising agency. The representatives of the company meet with an executive of the accounts department (in charge of the relation with customers) and deliver a client brief. By sharing this document, OmniCola communicates to Sterling & Cooper all the info they need to know about the new drink and its characteristics, as well as the needs of the company and some ideas to promote it. Another possible scenario at this stage is to have an account executive working hand by hand with the company to develop together a client brief.

In the next phase, the client brief is handed to the strategic planner: the person in charge of strategy and the one that develops the creative brief. This document includes the proposal of Sterling & Cooper for OmniCola. Once the document is approved by the company, it is shared with the creative team, made up of copywriters and members of the art department (the ones responsible to develop image and video content). They will work together to develop several options, under the supervision of the creative director, who must choose the definitive idea and share it with OmniCola.

If the company accepts the proposal made by Sterling & Cooper, we would switch to the production phase, where we would have several agents participating according to the chosen format of the campaign (print, electronic, video, image, etc.) and the media (TV, radio, social media, print media, etc.).

Once the ‘baseline campaign’ has been developed, we would be at the adaptation stage. Here, we would need the intervention of a language services company or a creative adaptation services provider in order to achieve the desired level of localization for each target market. This is where transcreation would come into play. In order for transcreators to do their job properly at this point, they would need a transcreation brief.

### *2.3 Client Brief, Creative Brief and Transcreation Brief*

If we take into account the previous description of the workflow, we must distinguish between three types of brief:

- Client brief: includes information about the brand and product of the company willing to carry out an advertising action, as well as their wishes and needs. The intended target of this document is an advertising agency.
- Creative brief: collects the information included at the client brief and develops it in a format that is useful for the creative team in charge of the design of the advertising campaign, for a later presentation to the client. The intended target of this document is a series of advertising professionals within the agency and the client.
- Transcreation brief: details the information, instructions and guidelines that transcreators must follow and take into account in order to adapt a campaign to a local market.

We find quite a lot of mentions about the client brief (Hackley, 2005; Mackay, 2007; Miertoiu, 2014, etc.) and the creative brief (Altstiel & Grow, 2006; Sutherland, 2007; Ibach, 2009; Burtenshaw, Mahon & Barfoot, 2011, etc.). However, there are few academic references specifically related to the transcreation brief. At the time of writing this article, we could only find four mentions. First of all, Freedman International (2015), which lists the four elements that a good transcreation brief must include: context, objectives, specifications and budget. Secondly, Morón and Calvo (2018: 130), who consider that the creative and the transcreation brief are at the same level: “The role of the ST is subordinated to or replaced by the creative brief (also called transcreation brief)”. In third place, Huertas Barros and Vine (2019), who mention the transcreation brief as one of the project stages set out by

transcreation companies. Finally, Lemoine (2015), who details the basic elements that a transcreation brief must include:

- Requirement: What kind of content are we producing? A brochure, a letter, an ad...
- Purpose: What is the client's marketing/communications goal? Details such as short-term or long-term are important.
- Deliverables: What does the client expect to receive?
- A translation with the same number of sentences? A list of key glossary terms?
- A translation with the same number of paragraphs?
- Something completely original? (copywriting, artwork, etc.)
- Target audience: Who will be reading/viewing this copy? Again... details, please.
- Positioning: What is the current positioning in the market, actual and perceived?
- Response: What reaction should this elicit from the audience? Brand awareness, customer loyalty, the first purchase...
- Tone: formal, casual...
- Distribution: Will this be sent over mail, email...?
- Timeframe: By when is the final version needed? How many client review rounds there will be?

At this point, we may say that the term "brief" is often used interchangeably to refer to the three documents detailed at the beginning of section 2.3. However, these are clearly used at different moments of the workflow, with specific audiences and clear purposes. A possible explanation for this indistinctive use (a conjecture, since it is exclusively based on the professional experience of the author) is that, in many projects, the functions fulfilled by each of these documents are satisfied by a single brief. This is mostly due to temporal, organizational and economic restrictions. Another conclusion at this point is that there is little information about the nature and contents of the transcreation brief.

### *3. A Proposal Based on the Analysis of Public Briefs*

In order to gather more information about the transcreation brief, we propose a descriptive and comparative analysis of this type of documents. An ideal methodology for this purpose would require access to real client, creative and transcreation briefs belonging to the same brand/product in several advertising campaigns. However, these documents are confidential by nature and their access and disclosure are heavily restricted.

As an alternative for this drawback, we propose working with documents publicly available online. For this purpose, we will use the following corpus:

- Client brief: we were unable to find this type of documents. As an alternative, we will use the information at two guides for developing this kind of brief published by advertising associations. The first was authored by the Association of Canadian Advertisers<sup>1</sup>. The second was jointly developed by IPA (Institute of Practitioners in Advertising), ISBA (Incorporated Society of British Advertisers), MAA (Marketing Agencies Action Group) and PRCA (Public Relations and Communications Association)<sup>2</sup>.
- Creative brief: we are using briefs for Nike<sup>3</sup>, RedBull<sup>4</sup>, PayPal<sup>5</sup>, Hush Puppies<sup>6</sup> and Reebok<sup>7</sup>.
- Transcreation brief: we could not find any document of this kind, so we'll be using templates developed to write this type of brief. We will use the ones available at the websites of the translation companies On Target, Text Trans and Translate Media.

Once we have defined the set of documents we are working with, we will analyze them in order to determine a series of categories. Our final objective is to verify if the transcreation brief is indeed a specific category of document that must be recognized as such within the transcreation workflow. Due to the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.acaweb.ca/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/09/THE-CLIENT-BRIEF-FINAL-Eng-July-18-06.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thegoodpitch.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/BriefinganAgency.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.slideshare.net/MoniqueWare/creative-brief-42740423>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.slideshare.net/befrank86/brief-11759318>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.slideshare.net/aaga8/paypal-creative-brief>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.slideshare.net/anshurocks/creative-brief-example>

<sup>7</sup> <https://i.pining.com/474x/a4/6b/f6/a46bf6e0e1f3652726709058c0c7ca6d--creative-brief-example-marketing-trends.jpg>



methodology followed, we do not expect to obtain universal conclusions that may be applied to all transcreation briefs, but rather provide a descriptive perspective on our results.

### 3.1. Analysis of Guides for Writing Client Briefs

As mentioned in the previous section, we are analyzing two guides published by agents of the advertising industry. These documents are oriented to customers who need the services of this kind of companies to market their products or services and include guidelines to streamline the process.

There are two elements that these two guides share. The first is a list of questions that guide the design of the client brief: “Where are we now?”, “Where do we want to be?”, “What are we doing to get there?”, “Who do we need to talk to?” and “How will we know we’ve arrived?”. This coincidence is not by chance. These questions were formulated by Stephen King, the father of strategic planning, while working for the advertising agency JWT in the 1960s. Later, they were compiled by this company in a guide in 1974.

The second element is how these questions can be used as a starting point and modelled in order to develop the different section headers. This information is especially interesting, since it allows us to have a list of categories that we can use in a later comparison. We detail these at table 1.

SECTION	DESCRIPTION
Background	Marketing/Sales objectives
	Brand
	Previous learnings
Communications	Target audience
	Consumer insights
	Key message/proposition
Implementation/process	Dates
	Budget
	Response mechanisms
	Evaluation/success criteria
	Mandatories/guidelines
	Approvals

Table 1. List of categories found at each section of the client brief.

### 3.2. Analysis of Creative Briefs

Here we are analyzing the creative briefs for five different brands: Nike, RedBull, PayPal, Hush Puppies and Reebok. For this purpose, we are focusing on the headings appearing at these documents. The results of the comparison are shown in table 2. The first row includes the document analyzed, the column includes the names of each heading and the intersection of each column and row indicates the presence (or not) of each section.

	Nike	RedBull	PayPal	Hush Puppies	Reebok
Audience	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Background information	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Competitors	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO
Goals/Objectives	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Message	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Problem	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Product features	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO
Voice	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES

Table 2. List of categories found at each section of the creative brief.

In this case, there is a considerable alignment between the categories found at the five documents:

- “Audience”, “Background information”, “Goals objectives” and “Message” sections are present in the five documents.
- “Competitors” and “Product features” appear only in two of the creative briefs.
- “Problem” and “Voice” are only found in one of the five documents considered.

*3.3. Analysis of Transcreation Brief Templates*

In this section, we are analyzing the three transcreation templates mentioned in section 3, following the same methodology detailed at section 3.2. The results are shown in table 3.

	On Target	Text Trans	Translate Media
Audience	YES	YES	YES
Brand info	YES	YES	YES
Budget	YES	NO	NO
Challenges	YES	NO	NO
Contact info	NO	YES	NO
Creative aspects	NO	YES	NO
Deadlines	YES	NO	NO
Deliverables	YES	NO	NO
Existing materials	NO	YES	YES
Media	NO	YES	NO
Message	YES	NO	YES
Objectives	YES	YES	YES
Product info	YES	NO	YES
Resources	NO	YES	YES
Tone/style	YES	YES	YES

Table 3. List of categories found at each section of the transcreation brief.

In this case, we find different levels of alignment between the proposed categories:

- There are four categories found in the three documents: “Audience”, “Brand info”, “Objectives” and “Tone/style”. This might indicate that these sections are the most important at the transcreation brief.

- There are four categories that appear in two of the three documents: “Existing materials”, “Message”, “Product Info” and “Resources”. This could point to an intermediate level of importance.
- There are seven categories that are included in only one of the three briefs considered: “Budget”, “Challenges”, “Contact info”, “Creative aspects”, “Deadlines”, “Deliverables” and “Media”. This might show their lower level of importance.
- The three templates are not equally exhaustive from an informational point of view. If we assume that the more comprehensive document is the one where we find a higher number of these categories, the template by On Target would take the first place (10 categories) followed by Text Trans’ (9 categories) and Translate Media’s (8 categories).
- Despite the previous point, the presence of a higher or lower number of categories would not necessarily indicate that the document includes information of better quality. For example, the category “Audience” is quite detailed in the template by Translate Media (since it allows detailing data such as sex, age or business segment). However, this same information, while requested in the other two templates, is not required with the same degree of granularity.
- Though we are defining three levels of importance based on the number of categories appearing at the documents, there are several elements that might point to the fact that the limits between these are fuzzy. For example, “Brand info” has been included at the first level of significance, while “Product info” is on the second. It’s logical to think that, in order to produce a good transcreation, we would need information both about the brand and the product. Therefore, the lack of the “Product info” category in one of these documents (Text Trans) would point to an inadequate design or maybe it was assumed that this information should be included in the “Brand” category (or perhaps in another). We find a similar situation at the categories “Tone/style” and “Message”. The first deals with the voice we must use in the transcreation, while the second would detail the information we wish to convey. The lack of the second would make quite difficult the definition of the first.

- We've found a series of categories related with management issues. Though it is logical to find this kind of data in templates developed by language services providers, we may assume that they do not provide useful information for the transcreation process itself. Here, we may include categories such as "Budget" or "Deliverables".
- It is surprising to find that the "Creative aspects" category is only found in one of the templates. We consider that the level of creativity that the linguist may or not assume is an essential information for a transcreation project.

#### *4. Conclusions*

After the analysis of the previous documents, we have found different categories of information present in all three groups of briefs. For example, those related with audience, brand, message or campaign objectives. We were also able to detect partial coincidences, such as those related to tone and voice (present at the client and transcreation briefs) or budget (mentioned at the client and transcreation briefs). This type of coincidence is somehow logical. After all, we are talking about kinds of documents that are part of a common workflow.

Regrettably, we were unable to clearly identify the information categories that would define the transcreation brief as an independent category of document. There are several possible explanations for this. On one hand, the type of documents chosen for this study was not the ideal. As we mentioned before, we would need access to real client, creative and transcreation briefs belonging to different campaigns. On the other, there is the possibility that the transcreation brief might not exist at all. We disagree with this last option, since there are several indications that point in an opposite direction.

First of all, the number of different categories on the transcreation briefs is higher than the ones found in the client and creative briefs. A tentative explanation for this would be that, at this stage, the volume of information required to carry out the adaptation process is higher than in previous steps. If the client and creative briefs were enough to complete the transcreation stage, we would not find this disparity in the number of categories.

Secondly, the types of information found at the transcreation briefs confirm that the problems that need to be solved at this stage are different than those faced in previous briefs. Here we are specifically talking about sections such as “Creative aspects” or “Tone/style”. These point to a level of specificity that would make essential the presence of the transcreation brief as a work document.

Finally, we consider that the functionalist argument is perhaps the strongest argument for the definition of the transcreation brief as a differentiated element. As mentioned before, this document is used in a specific moment of the workflow to develop an international advertising campaign, by a particular group of professionals and with different objectives to the ones considered at the client and creative brief phases.

From this point, we consider that it is important to continue this line of research. However, due the confidentiality terms that these documents are subjected to, any further research action must take place within a scope of collaboration between researchers, advertisers, advertising agencies, companies from the language industries and creative adaptation services providers in order to allow productive results.

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