Chaucer Abducted:
Examining the Conception of Translation
behind the *Canterbury Tales*

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ABSTRACT
In his Retraction, Geoffrey Chaucer describes himself as a translator. However, while his texts clearly draw directly from antecedents, they do not easily align to the source-target parallels that are so familiar in translation studies. Using abductive reasoning, this article asks whether the evidence supplied by the constituent stories of the Canterbury Tales suggests that Chaucer's understanding of translation was fundamentally based on the notion of excogitatio. It observes features of Chaucer's translation practices that may appear surprising or idiosyncratic to a contemporary observer, and asks, whether an underlying conceptualisation of translation that actively avoids reflecting the source text would make these features a matter of course. The article demonstrates that abductive reasoning is a useful tool for the first stages of analysing a text as a translation, allowing a researcher to ask how the translator may have perceived the act of translation.

KEYWORDS: abductive reasoning, Geoffrey Chaucer, Canterbury Tales, medieval translation, excogitatio.

1.   Chaucer as Translator

Medieval authors, like their present-day counterparts, could adopt any number of stances towards the use of material from antecedent texts. However, in the medieval world, plagiarism was still far from the literary taboo, and originality far from the ideal that both would become in later centuries (Andrews 2008: 106). During this time, it was *auctoritas*, or authority that was the defining quality of good literature. *Auctoritas* was acquired by incorporating the words of *auctors*, or antecedent authors, acknowledged or otherwise, into new works (Minnis 1988: 10-12). The use of categories such as "translator" or "original author" is, therefore, problematic when used in isolation to describe medieval text producers. Geoffrey Chaucer's work during the latter half of the fourteenth century has to be considered in light of this unfamiliar backdrop. Surprisingly perhaps, from the contemporary vantage point of considering him the father of English literature, Chaucer was considered during his own lifetime a translator, and indeed considered himself such. Chaucer's *Retraction*, a short

passage affixed to the end of the *Canterbury Tales,* bears out this categorisation. Here, Chaucer less than candidly denounces, and subsequently lists the various texts that constitute his literary life's work:

> Wherefore I beseke yow mekely, for mercy of God, that ye preye for me that Crist have mercy on me and foryeve me my giltes;| and namely of my translacions and enditynges of worldly vanitees (Chaucer and Benson 2008: 328).
> [For which reason I beg you sincerely, for the mercy of God, that you pray that Christ might have pity on me and forgive my sins;| namely my translations and compositions of worldly vanities]1

This practice of renouncing and simultaneously cataloguing one's own work on religious grounds was solidly based on traditional precedent. Chaucer's predecessors, such as St Augustine, Bede, and Jean de Meun, all produced similar documents that can be used today in the study of their otherwise often anonymous works (see Tatlock 1913).

The *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer's canon of 24 stories, held together with an overarching frame narrative, combine both "translacions" and "enditynges". However, for the same reasons that it is problematic to treat medieval figures such as Chaucer exclusively as translators or original authors, it is overly simplistic to see the above categories as mutually exclusive since they relate to individual medieval texts. The stories within the *Canterbury Tales* vary to a very great degree in their literary indebtedness to prior *auctors*. As a result, the canon can be seen as illustrating a spectrum of approaches to the incorporation of antecedent material, ranging from close, word-for-word translation at one end, to apparent originality at the other, together with everything else in between. Indeed, it could even be argued that no single tale exhibits any sole attitude towards source material. Each can be shown to owe something, however small, to a prior text, and equally, none seeks to recreate its source passively and in full (see e.g. Correale and Hamel 2002, 2005). The result is that direct parallels of source and target texts are often less easy to produce than more nebulous recognitions of the tales' indebtedness to identifiable antecedents.

In order to acknowledge this element of doubt, Beidler (1999: 41-42) has proposed the adoption of "hard analogue" and "soft analogue" as terminology for medieval source texts. A "hard analogue" is essentially a source text in all senses apart from that there is a lack of tangible evidence that the translator ever used it. Conversely, a "soft analogue" is a text that, despite its close textual similarities to the translation, may have been difficult or impossible

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1 All translations in this paper are my own unless otherwise stated.

for the translator to have used as a result of factors such as chronology. It should be noted that because of Chaucer's general lack of attribution of his translations, many of what are generally considered his sources would be defined as "hard analogues" in Beidler's terminology.

Defining translation as the incorporation of extant material, this article will explore a range of strategies Chaucer employed in translating from antecedent analogues in the *Canterbury Tales*. It will use abductive reasoning to argue that the way Chaucer conceptualised his text production practice in the *Canterbury Tales* appears to have been heavily influenced by the notion of excogitatio. The article will also argue that this excogitatio-influenced understanding of translation explains why Chaucer did not *just translate*, and what his intentions were in incorporating antecedent materials in his writings. In making this argument, the article will demonstrate that abductive logic can be of use in cases where translation has occurred in the eyes of the translating culture, though from the perspective of an external or retrospective observer, such a conclusion is less straightforward.

2.   The Notion of Excogitatio

Excogitatio [from thought] is a philosophy of text production that appears in the work of several well-known medieval grammarians such as St Augustine, Matthew of Vendôme, and Geoffrey of Vinsauf (Copeland 1991). The notion appears to have been inherited from Roman approaches to translating, which McElduff demonstrates entailed viewing source texts as resources to be exploited for the purposes of the translating culture (2013). Roman translators had not the least interest in the intentions of the source author (McElduff 2013: 98, 104). Instead, their prime interest was in manipulating the material in the source text such that it could be made to serve Rome in the best way (McElduff 2013: 87-89)

Similarly, medieval excogitatio is neither a question of originality per se, nor of derivation per se. Rather, it is the process of producing original texts that are directly indebted to antecedents, or from the opposite perspective, producing translations that actively attempt to break away from the interpretations found in their sources (Edwards 1999: 228). The process begins with a critical reading of the source text. The translator notes what has been said, and crucially, what has not. Subsequently, a target text can be produced that builds primarily on those avenues that have not yet been explored (Edwards 1999: 228).

One of the most direct descriptions of the process of producing a text in accordance with excogitatio is to be found in the work of Geoffrey of Vinsauf, who was active around the year 1200 (Parr and of Vinsauf 1968: 38). In his *Documentum de Modo et Arte Dictandi et Versificandi* [Instruction in the Method and Art of Speaking and Versifying], Geoffrey of Vinsauf expounds his theories of rhetoric. A pivotal part of his discussion centres on the relative aesthetic merit and difficulty of producing texts that distinguish themselves markedly from their sources.

> Post praedicta est notandum quod difficile est materiam communem et usitatam convenienter et bene tractare. Et quanto difficilius, tanto laudabilius est bene tractare materiam talem, scilicet communem et usitatam, quam materiam aliam, scilicet novam et inusitatam. Hoc autem testatur Horatius in Poetria iis tribus versibus: Difficile est proprie communia dicere, tuque Rectius Yliacum carmen deducis in actus Quam si proferres ignota indictaque primus. Sed, quamvis difficile, tamen est possible. (reproduced in Faral 1924: 309)
> [After the foregoing discussion, it should be noted that it is difficult to treat common and familiar material appropriately and well. And the more difficult it is, the more praiseworthy it is to treat such material well, that is, material that is common and familiar, than it is to treat the other kind of material, that is, what is new and unfamiliar. Horace testifies to this in the Poetria in these lines: It is difficult to treat common matter in a way that is particular to you; and you would do better to turn a song of Troy into dramatic acts than to bring forth for the first time something unknown and unsung. But however difficult it is, it is nevertheless possible.]
> (Copeland 1991: 169)

Armed with the post-modern understanding that an interpretation is, to some extent, particular to any given individual, it is, perhaps, counterintuitive for a contemporary reader to appreciate the echoed assertion here that treating well-known material in an original way is something to be lauded. This is particularly the case when one questions what can be considered "well-known", and arrives at the conclusion that the assertion might well be interpreted as indicating antecedent material in general. However, Geoffrey of Vinsauf goes on to elucidate strategies, or modes, that allow texts to depart substantially from their source material and give truly fresh interpretations:

> Primus modus est ne moremur ubi moram faciunt alii; sed, ubi moram faciunt, transeamus, ubi transeunt, moram faciamus. […]. Secundus modus est ne sequamur vestigia verborum, […] sed universitatem materiae spéculantes ibi dicamus aliquid ubi dixerunt nihil, et ubi dixerunt aliquid, nos nihil ; quod etiam prius, nos posterius, et e converso; […](Geoffrey of Vinsauf, reproduced in Faral 1924: 309-310)
> [The first mode is that we do not delay where others delay; but where they delay, let us go on; where they go on, let us delay. […]. The second mode is that we should not follow the pattern of the words, […] but rather looking at the whole of the material, let us say something at that point where they have said nothing, and where they have said something, we will say nothing; what they said first, let us say later and conversely; […]] (translated in Parr and of Vinsauf 1968: 85)

Thus, medieval excogitatio-based guidelines can be thought of as being diametrically opposed to many of their twentieth century counterparts, in which the faithful representation or reproduction of the source text for the target audience widely assumed the status of an ideal, however unrealisable (e.g. Borges 1999/2004; Jakobson 1959/2004; Steiner 1975/2004). They are clear in emphasising the undesirability of textual fidelity. Thirteenth century French author, Matthew of Vendôme in his own theoretical treatment of writing practice even invokes Horace's famous statement about the *fidus interpres* [faithful intermediary][2] to illustrate how devoid of aesthetic merit the production of a close or faithful translation was to the medieval reader:

> Sequitur de exsecutione materiae, in qua quidam male disciplinati solent plerumque delirare et a semita doctrinali turpiter exorbitare, qui in scolastico exercitio fabulas circinantes poeticas verbum verbo sigillatim exprimunt, tanquam super auctores metrice proposuerunt commentare ... Nec etiam aliquis verbo verbum proponat reddere fidus interpres. (*Ars versificatoria*, reproduced in Faral 1924: 180)
> [We turn now to the treatment of material, in which certain ill-trained people habitually overstep the line and shamefully depart from preceptive guidelines. When paraphrasing poetic fables in school exercises, they render word for word, down to every figure of speech, as if they sought to produce a metrical commentary on the authors . . . One should not try to render word for word like a fidus interpres.] (Copeland 1991: 168)

Indeed, centuries earlier, Cicero also unequivocally stated there was nothing worse than translating in such a way as to become the mouthpiece of another writer (McElduff 2013: 118). Thus, the medieval proponents of excogitatio inherited a conception of text production that saw translation and writing not as separate endeavours, but as two necessary ingredients of any literary text. They would have seen little merit in attempting to produce a text *ex nihilo,* or from nothing, as was the ideal under Romanticism (Spearing 1987: 93), because the resultant text would be devoid of *auctoritas*. However, as the assertions of Mathew of Vendôme demonstrate, they similarly would have seen very little appeal in a text that adopted a subservient attitude, and sought to channel the source author through the translator's work.

The fact that this attitude towards text production continues to be attested in the writings of medieval scholars does not mean that it was the only or, indeed, dominant view in the latter fourteenth century when Chaucer was active. The use of abductive reasoning here will

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[2] This gloss of *fidus interpres* as "faithful intermediary" acknowledges that the *interpres* in ancient Rome had a role that is highly distinct from the contemporary roles of translators and interpreters. McElduff demonstrates that in "Rome the word interpres could be used for any type of mediator" (2009: 136). It is, therefore, problematic to equate this famous statement about the *interpres* with contemporary conceptions relating to the distinction between translators and interpreters, for example.

demonstrate that a conceptualisation of translation based on excogitatio is an economical rationalisation for the translation strategies in evidence in Chaucer's work.

3.   Abductive Reasoning

Abduction is a form of logic that was developed by the American philosopher and logician, Charles Sanders Peirce in the latter nineteenth century (Flach 2000: 5). It was presented in its current form in one of his 1903 *Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism,* entitled *Pragmatism as the Logic of Abduction*, where Peirce laid out the pattern of inference that characterises this form of reasoning (reproduced in Peirce 1998: 226-241). On one hand, deduction begins with a set of known parameters and arrives at a conclusion that can be said to be true based on the truth of those parameters. On the other hand, abduction, like induction, is ampliative, meaning it does not simply reorder data, but generates new inferences. However, inductive reasoning bases its inferences on known parameters and attempts to extrapolate these to, as yet, unknown circumstances (Sloman and Lagnado 2005: 95). Thus, its conclusions are, to some extent, based on generalisation and probability, and are also subject to varying levels of certainty. Abductive reasoning, on the other hand, begins with known circumstances and attempts to extrapolate the, as yet, unknown parameters that brought them about. Walton illustrates the differences between these three styles of reasoning, the kinds of questions they ask, and the nature of the answers they produce with the following example:

> Deductive Reasoning: Suppose a bag contains only red marbles, and you take one out. You may infer by deductive reasoning that the marble is red.
> Inductive Reasoning: Suppose you do not know the color of the marbles in the bag, and you take one out and it is red. You may infer by inductive reasoning that all the marbles in the bag are red.
> Abductive Reasoning: Suppose you find a red marble in the vicinity of a bag of red marbles. You may infer by abductive reasoning that the marble is from the bag.
> (1996: 159)

Thus, abductive logic begins not with a set of known parameters or facts, but with an observation that Peirce describes as "surprising":

> The surprising fact, C, is observed;
> But if A were true, C would be a matter of course,
> Hence, there is reason to suspect that A is true.
> (Peirce 1998: 231)

Naturally, the definition of a "surprising fact" is open to large degrees of subjectivity, and this is, perhaps, a strength of abductive reasoning for the consideration of human practices when

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externally, or retrospectively observed. It acknowledges that an observer necessarily makes certain assumptions regarding, as in this example, the functions of a translation. However, since these assumptions are frequently challenged, abduction describes a pattern of inference that allows the observer to modify the same assumptions. It differs from deduction in that its results are not predicated on the validity of its constituent premises (Gower 1997: 14). Rather, it is a means of producing hypotheses that rationalise the occurrence of a given phenomenon and can be tested against similar cases (Anderson et al. 2005: 10). Indeed, one of the provisos suggested by Peirce is that the usefulness of abductive reasoning is hinged on the inferences created being open to experimental verification (Peirce 1998: 235). However, this necessity does not imply that the hypotheses must produce objective, empirically testable results:

> Induction "infers the existence of phenomena such as we have observed in cases that are similar," while abduction "supposes something of a different kind from what we have directly observed, and frequently something which it would be impossible for us to observe directly"
> (Fann and Peirce 1970: 9)

Abductive reasoning has informed a variety of styles of analysis that have been adopted by various humanities disciplines closely related to the study of historical translations. These disciplines include historical linguistics (McMahon 1996: 94), anthropology, and archaeology (Turner and Risjord 2007: 531). It allows for the observation of case studies as subjects intimately intertwined with their cultural contexts. Semiotician Umberto Eco (1994) has also illustrated the important function that abductive reasoning serves, consciously or otherwise, in a large number of other human interactions where rationalising or assigning meaning to otherwise confusing phenomena is important. Such practices include criminal investigations, medical diagnoses, literary interpretation and scientific discovery (Eco 1994: 160).

In this paper's analysis of Chaucer's texts, the C parameter, the surprising fact, will be a number of ostensibly idiosyncratic practices related to translation, observable in the *Canterbury Tales*. The A parameter will be an understanding of translation based on excogitatio. The aim will be to ask whether it is reasonable to hypothesise that Chaucer's conceptualisation was one closely related to excogitatio on the basis of his treatment of source material in the *Canterbury Tales*. Alternatively, to put it in the language of Peirce, the article will ask whether an understanding of text production influenced by excogitatio would make the occurrence of the idiosyncratic practices observed a matter of course. That is, the aim is to

demonstrate that Chaucer's translation practices in the *Canterbury Tales* are not as idiosyncratic as they may first appear, but represent a distinct approach to translation.

4.   Estranging Strategies

The first surprising feature to be noted is the great lengths to which Chaucer goes in avoiding representing, recreating, or reflecting the source. In numerous cases, such as those of the *Shipman's Tale*, the *Merchant's Tale*, and the *Franklin's Tale*, Chaucer dramatically renders the setting, characterisation, and even plot of a tale, such that it is quite unlike that of its source. Indeed, even in translations such as the *Tale of Melibee*, the *Second Nun's Tale*, and the *Clerk's Tale* where the number of altered factors is comparatively small, the same reluctance to reproduce the source text unaltered in the target language is in evidence. This tendency cannot be easily aligned to familiar notions of adaptation for the purposes of reader comprehension, adherence to target norms, or for explicitation since, where a new setting is chosen, for example, this is consistently at least as culturally divorced from Chaucer's London target audience as is the source setting.

An example is found in the *Franklin's Tale*, which Chaucer removes from the contemporaneous Neapolitan setting of its source text. He then chooses to adapt the tale, not to a domestic setting, nor to one that is likely to have been particularly well known by his target audience, but to the somewhat more recondite setting of ancient Brittany. Chaucer also chooses a notably different textual medium to convey his translation. He opts to replace the prose romance style of his source with a form of ballad known as the lay, a text-type that enjoyed a resurgence of popularity in French at the time, but would most likely have been less familiar to his target audience in English (Riddy 2000)[3].

Chaucer's source text here is *Menedon's Story*, a part of the *Questioni d'Amore*, which is one of the component sections of Boccaccio's *Filocolo* (Edwards 2002: 212). However, Chaucer's translation strategy is so oblique that as well as the setting and characterisation differing substantially between source and translation, direct linguistic parallels are also rare. What the

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[3] Given the widespread use of French in England, especially among the educated classes of this period it appears plausible that there would have been some knowledge of the *lay* form as it had existed in French. The *Lais of Marie de France* is a good example of the form as it was written in French in the late 12th century. Schenck (1987) also describes a thirteenth century list of some sixty-seven lays, found in the possession of Shrewsbury School.

Franklin's Tale inherits from the *Filocolo* is the pattern of events described, and the medieval theme of courtly love (see Paris 1883).

Menedon's Story opens with a description of a married lady who is pursued by a man called Tarolfo. In order to dissuade Tarolfo from bothering her, the lady imagines an impossible request that must be fulfilled before she would be unfaithful with him:

> Ella disse che volea del mese di gennaio, in quella terra, un bel giardino e grande, d'erbe e di fiori e d'alberi e di frutti copioso, come se del mese di maggio fosse, fra sé dicendo, "Questa è cosa impossibile: io mi leverò costui da dosso per questa maniera." (from *Il Filocolo*, ed. Antonio Enzo Quaglio, Vol. 1 of *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittore Branca, reproduced in Edwards 2002: 221)
> [She said that she wanted, in the month of January, in that land, a beautiful garden and large, of grasses and flowers, and trees and many fruit, as if it were the month of May. She said to herself, "This is an impossible thing: I will relieve myself of him in this way."]

Seemingly unperturbed, Tarolfo travels far and wide and comes across an old man called Tebano who says he can make this garden a reality, but asks for half of Tarolfo's wealth in return. Tarolfo agrees and the garden is produced. Tarolfo goes to tell the lady about the garden and she then confesses all to her husband, who tells her she must keep her promise. After marvelling at the garden, the lady goes to Tarolfo to be with him. But when she tells him that she is there at the order of her husband, Tarolfo is ashamed and releases her from her promise. In turn, when Tebano hears the story, he claims no fee from Tarolfo.

Chaucer's translation, the *Franklin's Tale,* tells the story of Dorigen, the wife of a Breton knight, who is left alone while her husband goes to fight in Britain. Dorigen worries that when her husband comes to return, his ship might be wrecked on the black rocks of Brittany's shore. Meanwhile, a squire called Aurelius is drawn to Dorigen, and courts her against her will. Dorigen seeks to be rid of Aurelius, and so, invents an impossible request:

> Looke what day that endelong Britayne| Ye remoeve alle the rokkes, stoon by stoon,| That they ne lette ship ne boot to goon| I seye, whan ye han maad the coost so clene| Of rokkes that ther nys no stoon ysene,| Thanne wol I love yow best of any man (Chaucer and Benson 2008: 181)
> [Until the day that from end to end of Brittany| You remove all the rocks, stone by stone,| That hinder ships and boats| I say, when you have made the coast so clean| Of rocks that there is no stone to be seen,| Then will I love you best of any man]

Aurelius visits a scholar of magic who is able to make the rocks disappear in return for a huge sum. Aurelius quickly agrees and goes to hold Dorigen to her promise. Meanwhile, Dorigen's husband, Arveragus returns, and is confronted by Dorigen who confesses the predicament she is in. Arveragus tells Dorigen that she must honour her promise so she should go to Aurelius.

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When Dorigen tells Aurelius she has come to fulfil her rash promise at her husband's command he is humbled, and tells Dorigen that he could not break up their bond. In turn, the scholar waives his fee when Aurelius tells him the story.

Both stories end with the same question to the audience:

> Dubitasi ora quale di costoro fosse maggiore liberalità, (reproduced in Edwards 2002: 231)
> [The question now is, which of them showed the greater generosity:]

> Lordynges, this question, thane, wol I aske now,| Which was the moore fre, as thynketh yow? (Chaucer and Benson 2008: 189)
> [Gentlemen, this question, then, will I ask you now:| which one was the noblest do you think?]

Chaucer is meticulous in establishing his setting shift from the outset. His tale begins "[i]n Armorik, that called is Britayne" (Chaucer and Benson 2008: 178), and is very thorough in remaining consistent in its application of the tale to the new setting. Chaucer adjusts the narrative style, character names, and other culture-specific elements appropriately (Edwards 1999: 226, 2002: 214). The tale is altered from the prose of its Italian source to a verse form appropriate to the lay, and details are altered to correspond more closely to its new Breton setting. The examples in the brief plot summaries above also demonstrate the shift that Chaucer undertakes in the centrepiece of the story. The impossible demand of a summer garden in the month of January is altered entirely in the hands of Chaucer in a manner that continues to fit the story, but that also explicitly complements the tale's new Breton setting. This example shows Chaucer did not restrict his alterations to textual elements he may have perceived as problematic for the comprehension of his target audience. Rather, his focus is on adjusting the tale in a way that complements his new choice of setting. In the process, he arguably makes the tale more specific to its new setting than the source text was to its own.

Thus, Chaucer translates this text from one non-domestic setting to another. Simultaneously, he translates not only the language from its Italian source to an English target, but also the prose source to a verse target. In translating the text into English, Chaucer's text undoubtedly makes the material more accessible to an English-speaking audience than is its Italian source. However, because he also elaborates on the culture-specific details, the degree to which this accessibility is achieved beyond the purely linguistic level is debatable. Chaucer makes use of specific toponyms, such as Pedmark [Penmarch] and Kayrrud, which may have been almost entirely unfamiliar to his target audience. Indeed, this lack of familiarity on the part of both

the target audience and Chaucer himself is illustrated by the tale's description of Penmarch's rugged coastline and treacherous rocks.

These rocks are of pivotal importance to the story, and while it is accurate to describe Brittany as rocky, the high shore and the outlying rocks that are also described (Chaucer and Benson 2008: 180) fit no precise location in Brittany (Chaucer and Benson 2008: 897). It may be, therefore, that even Chaucer was not personally familiar with the region he was describing in the *Franklin's Tale*, and his target audience may not have been familiar enough to spot the inaccuracy. This notion that the ancient Breton setting of the story was, to some extent, exotic to both Chaucer and his target audience is supported by his repeated references to classical Greek and Latin mythology that are arguably less consistent with Brittany than their Celtic counterparts.

Of course, the inclusion of some unfamiliar place names and incongruities in terms of culture and geography does not necessarily hinder the comprehension of a target audience. The tale's message can be understood without any knowledge of the location of Kayrrud, for example. However, by introducing such features that at least have a good potential to be problematic for the target audience Chaucer demonstrates his lack of interest in translating for the purposes of facilitating his audience's comprehension of the source text per se. Even on the textual level, Chaucer makes choices that complicate, rather than assist the consumption of his translation by the target audience. The poetic form that Chaucer selects for this tale is another element with which both Chaucer and his target audience appear to have been less than intimately familiar. Rather than retaining the source text's prose form, or adjusting the text to a verse form that was widely-known, Chaucer adapts the text to a Breton lay. In doing so, he employs a text type that was at least novel for his audience in the English context. In part, this novelty is illustrated by the fact that the tale begins by describing this ballad form explicitly:

> Thise oldee gentil Britouns in hir dayes| Of diverse aventures maden layes,| Rymeyed in hir firste Briton tonge,| Which layes with hir instrumentz they songe| Or ells redden hem for hir pleasaunce;| And oon of hem have I in remembraunce (Chaucer and Benson 2008: 178)
> [These old gentle Bretons in their days| Of diverse adventures made lays,| Rhymed in their first Breton tongue,| Which lays with their instruments they sang| Or else they read for their pleasure| And one of them I remember]

The addition of this description at the very beginning of the tale's prologue suggests that Chaucer did not assume his audience entirely familiar with the lay as a text type. He does not

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feel the need to use the prologue to any of the other *Canterbury Tales* to describe its text type in this way. Therefore, if the lay form had been widely known, it seems likely that this explicit description of the genre and its background would have been redundant. On the other hand, if the text-type were something exotic to Chaucer's target audience, it is quite natural that a gloss of this kind may be perceived as instrumental. This argument is supported by evidence provided by Beston (1974: 319), who notes that the lay, along with the French romance enjoyed a short revival of popularity in 14th-century England. However, based on the small number of surviving English examples, he goes on to demonstrate that the lay was almost certainly not widely known amongst English audiences at the time Chaucer produced his translation (Beston 1974: 320). Indeed, Beston compares the *Franklin's Tale* to lays composed in French and concludes that Chaucer's own acquaintance with the form was "slight" (1974: 330). It appears likely that, in fact, Chaucer's invocation of the lay here has less to do with the poem's genre than with a rhetorical strategy aiming to invoke the literary atmosphere of ancient Brittany from the very outset (Edwards 2002: 213; Hume 1972).

As a result, Chaucer's translation choices exhibit no underlying intention of facilitating the target audience's comprehension, not only in terms of lexis and setting, but also text type. Admittedly, Chaucer translates the Italian source text into Middle English, and so, arguably improves his target audience's ability to understand it. However, his various additions of features that complicate the interpretation of the translation above that of the source text demonstrate that he felt little if any duty towards either the source text or the target audience as might be expected in later conceptions of translation. By contrast, if Chaucer's aim were something similar to those described by the proponents of excogitatio, his actions in the *Franklin's Tale* are perfectly rational. Much as Geoffrey of Vinsauf, in his second mode, urged translators to look at the entirety of the source material and attempt to find ways to say something that has not yet been said, Chaucer generates a new interpretation on the source story. The *Franklin's Tale* does more than simply transpose a story to a new locale, it also emphasises the nobility and virtue of the ancient Celtic characters in a manner reminiscent of Arthurian legends such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* which is roughly contemporaneous to Chaucer (Morton 1961). Thus, his rethinking of *Menedon's Story* through the lens of a new, Breton setting appears to correspond closely with excogitatio. Indeed, the *Franklin's Tale* is arguably as original as it is derived, meaning it provides good evidence for an excogitatio-based understanding of the writing process.

5.   Elaborating Strategies

The second surprising feature noted here is Chaucer's tendency to include an appreciably greater quantity of foreign culture-specific information in his translations, without exhibiting any intention to gloss or explicitate the information held in the source text. This tendency is seen to some extent in the *Franklin's Tale,* observed above, where Chaucer's thoroughness to remove the story from its Italian setting to a new, ancient Breton one sees him include new passages about the lay, and about ancient Brittany itself. However, the *Franklin's Tale* is not alone in exhibiting this tendency while shifting the setting of a story away from that of its source text. A very similar shift occurs in the *Shipman's Tale*, which is transposed from the northern Italian setting of both of its sources to a location just north of Paris.

Unlike the *Franklin's Tale*, with its tendency to include elements apparently not well known by either Chaucer or his target audience, the *Shipman's Tale* exhibits a profound understanding of the world of French mercantile practices it depicts. For this reason, among others, the tale was long assumed to be a translation of some obscure French fabliau[4], and scholarly acceptance of its use of an Italian source has been more recent (Beidler 1999: 43; Scattergood 2005: 566). A major reason for this traditional division of opinion is the tangential fact that it has never been proven that Chaucer personally owned a copy of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. However, since medieval translators and writers rarely acknowledged their sources directly, and since Chaucer had ample opportunity to come into contact with copies of the hugely popular *Decameron,* the fact that the storylines of this tale and *Decameron 8.1* are too similar to be a coincidence seems evidence enough. In accordance with this argument, Beidler (1999) has convincingly argued, that since *Decameron 8.1* is the closest "hard analogue" to the *Shipman's Tale* found so far, it is counterproductive to discount it on the grounds of a lack of conclusive evidence. In agreement with this stance, Scattergood (2005: 567) further adds *Decameron 8.2* as a weaker analogue, suggesting that this story may have supplied smaller elements, though the number of concrete similarities between this text and Chaucer's is far fewer.

Decameron 8.1 is a story of marital infidelity, in which a wife agrees to be unfaithful with a local mercenary soldier, Gulfardo, who has fixed his attentions on her. For her troubles,

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[4] The fabliau is a genre of short, humorous story, often with a theme of adultery, which rose to popularity in medieval Europe (see Schenck 1987).

however, the wife asks for two hundred florins. At this avarice, Gulfardo is thoroughly disgusted by the woman and loses interest in her entirely. In order to teach her a lesson, he borrows the two hundred florins from the woman's own husband, Guasparruolo. Guasparruolo is then called away to Genoa on business, and the woman sends word to Gulfardo to come to her. As promised, the wife repays him with her body. When Guasparruolo returns from Genoa, Gulfardo tells him that he had no need for the loan. He tells the husband that he had returned the money to his wife accordingly, which means the wife is left out of pocket.

The *Shipman's Tale* is a similarly farcical story of deception. In it, the frivolous wife of a miserly merchant approaches a monk named Don John, with whom the merchant is good friends to ask for a one-hundred frank loan to pay off her debts. In return, she promises to spend the night with the monk while her husband is away on business in Bruges. Without the wife's knowledge, the monk borrows the money from her husband. Later, when the husband returns from Bruges and asks the monk to repay the loan, he replies that he has already returned the money to the wife. Subsequently, when the husband asks his wife, she says:

> […] he hadde yeve it me bycause of yow| To doon therwith myn honour and my prow,| For cosynage, and eek for beele cheere| That he hath had ful ofte tymes here.| […]Ye han mo slakkere dettours than am I!| For I wol paye yow wel and redily| […]Ye shal my joly body have to wedde;| By God, I wol nat paye yow but abedde! (Chaucer and Benson 2008: 208)
> [[…] he gave it to me because of you| To use to attend to my honour and my benefit,| For cozenage, and also for hospitality| That he has received so many times here.| […]You have much slower debtors than I!| For I will pay you well and readily| […]You shall have my pretty body as a pledge;| In God's name, I will only pay you in bed!]

While the two stories are similar in the cuckolded husbands being merchants, Chaucer's text makes much more effort to highlight and expand on this factor than does the Italian source.

> But so bifel, this marchant on a day| Shoop hym to make redy his array| Towards the toun of Brugges for to fare| To byen there a porcioun of ware;| For which he hath to Parys sent anon A messenger […] (Chaucer and Benson 2008: 203)
> [But it came to pass that this merchant, one day| Prepared himself to go| Towards the town of Bruges to trade| To buy there some goods;| For which he had already sent a messenger to Paris]

Indeed, *Decameron 8.1* mentions the husband's mercantile background only in passing:

> Pose costui, in Melan dimorando, l'amor suo in una donna assai bella chiamata madonna Ambruogia, moglie d'un ricco mercatante che aveva nome Guasparruol Cagastraccio, il quale era assai suo conoscente e amico (reproduced in Scattergood 2005: 571)

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> [While he was living in Milan, he came to love a very fine lady named Madonna Ambruogia, the wife of a rich merchant, who was named Guasparruol Cagastraccio, who was his close acquaintance and his friend.]

The weaker analogue, *Decameron 8.2,* by contrast, features not merchants but labourers:

> Ora avvenne che, tra l'altre sue popolane che prima gli eran piaciute, una sopra tutte ne gli piacque, che aveva nome monna Belcolore, moglie d'un lavoratore che si facea chiamare Bentivegna del Mazzo [...] (Boccaccio 1820: 675)
> [Now it happened that, among the folk who pleased him, there was one above all the rest, whose name was Mona Belcolore, the wife of a labourer who was known as Bentivegna del Mazzo […]].

Since so little of the copious mercantile material perforating Chaucer's translation can be attributed to his sources, questions about the origin of this material naturally arises. Indeed, the most likely source of this information appears to be Chaucer's extensive personal experience of trade. Chaucer was born in 1343 into a merchant family, trading in wine on what were then the outskirts of London (Butterfield, 2006: 14). Later, between 1374 and 1386, when Chaucer was actively working on the *Canterbury Tales*, he worked at the Custom House, the clearing house for the sale and purchase of wool and cloth (Butterfield, 2006: 14). He was also appointed controller of imports and exports, an extremely important role at the time, given that wool and cloth were England's main exports (Rossignol, 2007: 8). Thus, Chaucer would have had ample knowledge of the daily lives of merchant families that could easily have informed his translation. However, as a result of his expansion of this trading theme, Chaucer's tale is much longer than either of the Italian source texts. Another reason it is longer is that, unlike the source texts, throughout the tale Chaucer subtly but continually reinforces the idea that the story is set in France, and that the husband and wife involved belong to a mercantile family:

> And whan that he was come into the toun,| For greet chiertee and greet affeccioun,| Unto daun John he first gooth hym to pleye;| […]Daun John hym maketh feeste and murye cheere,| And hym tolde agayn, ful specially,| How he had wel yboght and graciously,| Thanked God, al hool his merchandise,| […] Daun John answerede […] ye so kyndly this oother day| Lente me gold; and as I kan and may,| I thanke yow, by God and by Seint Jame!| But nathelees, I took unto our dame,| Youre wyf, at hom, the same gold ageyn| Upon youre bench; she woot it wel, certeyn,| By certeyn tokens that I kan hire telle.| Now, by youre leve, I may no lenger dwelle; (Chaucer and Benson 2008: 207)
> [And when he came into the town| For his great fondness and great affection| He went to see Don John first;| […]Don John celebrated with him merrily, | And the merchant told him happily,| How well he had been able to trade, |all of his merchandise, by the grace of God,| […]Don John answered […] you so kindly lent me money the other day; and truly,| I thank you, by God and St James!| But in the end, I took it to your lady wife, | and gave it to her at your home| on your bench; she knows it well I am sure,| And I have evidence there for you.| But now, by your leave, I have to go;]

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Chaucer also alters the details of the tale, such that the sum borrowed is not two hundred florins, but a hundred franks, and such that the city where the husband travels on business is not Genoa, but Bruges:

> "Tornato Guasparuolo da Genova, di presente Gulfardo, avendo appostato che insieme con la moglie era, se n'andò a 1ui e in presenza di lei disse: "Guasparruolo, i denari, cioè li dugento fiorin d'oro che l'altrier mi prestasti, non m'ebber luogo, per ciò che io non potei fornir 1a bisogna per la quale gli presi: e per ciò io gli recai qui di presente alIa donna tua e sì gliele diedi, e per ciò dannerai la mia ragione.." (Scattergood 2005: 573)
> [On Guasparruolo's return from Genoa, straight away, having ascertained that his wife would be there, Gulfardo went to him and said in front of her: "Guasparruolo, the money, the two hundred gold florins that you lent me the other day. I did not need them, because I could not do the business that I borrowed them for, and so I brought them back here and gave them to your wife. Therefore, cancel my debt]

Chaucer's target audience is believed to have been a mixture of the elite of the city of London and a small number of highly literate scholars (Strohm 1989: 50). Therefore, this substantial elaboration and expansion of the mercantile aspect of this tale cannot simply be attributed to his audience having a greater degree of understanding of a merchant family's way of life than that of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Thus, these details can be assumed to have little if any connection with ensuring the comprehension of the target audience, nor do they obviously unlock otherwise implicit elements that are pivotal to the source story. Rather, the aim in expanding the target text in this way appears to be to experiment with an existing story, with certain parameters altered and details expanded.

The *Shipman's Tale* is, therefore, another example of a text that appears to demonstrate an understanding of translation inspired by the notion of excogitatio. Chaucer's removal of the Italian story to Northern France, and his emphasis of the quotidian lives of merchants may have little if anything to do with its familiarity or comprehension by the target audience. Nonetheless, the shift is clearly not arbitrary. Considering the enmity between England and France at the time, the shift gives Chaucer increased license to alter the basis of the central infidelity such that it is no longer the interloper who initiates the liaison, but the wife, who becomes more assertive, turning the outcome to her advantage. This twist appears more subtle than the change in setting that allows it, but it has the consequence that the interloper no longer borrows from the husband in order to pay the wife for her services. Rather, in Chaucer's tale, the wife asks for the money so she can pay her debts. She then uses her services to reimburse the interloper. In this way, while in the source text, events are largely out of the wife's control, Chaucer's translation has the arguable effect of empowering the wife

character, such that she not only initiates the infidelity, but also profits from it. Furthermore, his substantial enlargement of the tale chimes closely with Geoffrey of Vinsauf's first mode, in which he recommends the translator to move on where the source author delays and vice versa. Thus, this tale and its elaboration add to the body of evidence suggesting that Chaucer's conception of text production was related to the notion of excogitatio.

6.   Embellishing Strategies

The third surprising point to be analysed in this article is Chaucer's tendency to draw on more than one source text in the production of his translations. This feature has already been noted to a minimal degree in the *Shipman's Tale*, where *Decameron 8.2* appears to have been drawn on in conjunction to the main source text, *Decameron 8.1*. Indeed, the use of multiple source texts is relatively common in the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Second Nun's Tale*, the *Clerk's Tale*, and the *Franklin's Tale* all being examples. In many of these cases, Chaucer employs a primary source text for the main body of the story, and a number of secondary sources, which may be translations from the same primary, to inform the creation of his own translation. In cases such as the *Merchant's Tale,* however, Chaucer's use of multiple source texts is notably complex. Here, he also incorporates scenes that are particular to one or more of the secondary sources into his translation and so, innovatively embroiders his text.

The *Merchant's Tale* examines the theme of marital infidelity. It involves an elderly bachelor called January, who is introduced deliberating on the subject of marriage and the best kind of woman. Eventually, January decides to get married, and chooses a girl called May as his bride. The story describes at length the marriage ceremony, and January's eagerness for his subsequent first night with his new wife:

> Soone after that, this hastif Januarie| Wolde go to bedde; he wolde no lenger tarye.| He drynketh ypocras, clarree, and vernage| Of spices hoote t'encreessen his corage;| […] Thus laboureth he til that the day gan dawe;| And thane he taketh a sop in fyn claree,| And upright in his bed thane sitteth he,| […] The slakke skyn aboute his nekke shaketh| Whil that he sang, so chaunteth he and craketh (Chaucer and Benson 2008: 161).
> [Soon after that, this eager January| Wanted to go to bed without further ado.| He drank strong, wine, claret and vernage| With hot spices to increase his lust;| […] Thus he laboured until the break of day;| And then he took a sip of fine claret, And sat upright in his bed,| […] The slack skin around his neck shook| While he sang, and bellowed and croaked]

Shortly after the wedding, January loses his sight and has May remain by his side at all times to assist him. Meanwhile, May finds herself drawn to Damian, one of January's servants, and seeks a way to be alone with him. Damian hides in January's garden, and when May and January arrive, Damian meets May in the branches of a pear tree. January finds his sight is suddenly restored to him just in time to see May and Damian together in the pear tree. In response to January's understandably angry protestations, the ingenious May replies:

> […] Sire, what eyleth yow?| Have pacience and resoun in youre mynde.| I have yow holpe on bothe youre eyen blynde.| Up peril of my soule, I shal nat lyen,| As me was taught, to heele with youre eyen,| Was no thyng bet, to make yow to see,| Than strugle with a man upon a tree (Chaucer and Benson 2008: 167).
> [[…] Sir, what ails you?| Be patient and reasonable.| I have helped you with both your blind eyes.| For my soul's sake I shall not lie,| I was told that to heal your eyes,| There was nothing better to make you see, |Than to wrestle with a man in a tree]

Antecedents to this comical tale are attested in a large number of European and Arabic texts (Thompson 2005: 480). Direct links have been drawn, however, with *Novella LVII* of the Italian story collection known as *Le Cento Novelle Antiche,* or alternatively, *Il Novellino* (Dempster 1936: 154)*.*

Novella LVII is also an exploration of marital infidelity. In it, a very jealous man suddenly loses his sight and has his beautiful wife stay by his side at all times to assist him. The wife, however, soon becomes the object of a local man's affections, and taking pity on this man, the wife concocts a scheme so that she can be together with him. The wife tells the man to go to the garden and climb the pear tree he finds in it. The man does so. The wife and her husband also find themselves in the garden. The wife tells her husband that she would like one of the pears from the tree and proceeds to start climbing. Now, together with the interloper, the tree is shaken from side to side and the pears begin to fall on the husband below. The wife tells him that she is trying to reach the best pears on a certain branch. Then, suddenly, the husband regains his sight and looks up:

> Alora disse a la donna: Che fate voi co' cotesto homo? non è onore ned a voi ed a me, et non è lealtà di donna. Et la donna rispuose incontanente di subito, et disse: S'io non avessi fatto chosíe con chostui, tue non n'averesti mai veduto lume. (From Guido Biagi, ed., Le Novelle Antiche dei Codici, reproduced in Thompson 2005: 521)
> [Then he said to the lady: What are you doing with this man? This is not honourable to you or me, and it is not fitting for a lady. And the lady replied immediately, and said: If I had not done this thing with him, you would never again have seen light]

Clearly, *Novella LVII* includes many of the events and particulars of Chaucer's tale, including the rich man, the pear tree, the sudden restoration of the husband's sight, and even the wife's

quick-witted response. However, skeletally very similar as these two texts are, a number of important elements of the *Merchant's Tale* are not present in *Il Novellino*. Notably, these elements include the sense that May is not entirely to blame for her actions, the fact that January is of considerable age, that the marriage is one of convenience due to January's wealth, and that May is disappointed with January's efforts on the wedding night. However, all of these elements can be found scattered across other antecedent texts. For example, January's wealth, and the implication that his unappealing performance on the wedding night may have inspired the infidelity, together with the fortified wines he takes to regain his strength, can be found in *Decameron 2.10*:

> La quale il giudice menata con grandissima festa a casa sua, e fatte le nozze belle e magnifiche, pur per la prima notte incappò una volta, per consumare il matrimonio, a toccarla; e di poco fallò che egli quella una non fece tavola: il quale poi la mattina, ciccome colui che era magro e secco e di poco spirito, convenne che con vernaccia e con cenfetti ristorativi e con alri argomenti nel mondo si ritornasse. (Boccaccio and Foscolo 1825: 217).
> [The judge brought her home with great ceremony, and organised a spectacular wedding ceremony, but on the first night, when he made to consummate the marriage, things did not go in his favour: for in the morning, his frame was lean, dry, and withered, and could only be restored with vernage and with artificial restoratives and with other remedies.]

However, around a third of the *Merchant's Tale* is consumed by January's deliberations on the merits of marriage, and his examination of all the local maids, though this is nowhere to be found in any of the sources mentioned. For the main source of this part of the tale, we must look to an entirely different kind of text and a different language. Small sections of this deliberation are derived from shorter texts, such as *Epistola adversus Jovinianum* by St Jerome, and *Liber Consolationis et Consilii* by Albertano of Brescia (Beidler 2005). However, much of what is expressed in January's deliberation on marriage is inspired by *Le Miroir de Mariage* by Eustache Deschamps (Thompson 2005: 479). This text is a long French poem, in which a number of allegorical characters discuss the question of marriage (Thompson 2005: 481). Many of Chaucer's other tales employ secondary source texts, though these are often of a similar type and genre, or even analogues of the same story. The *Shipman's Tale*, for instance, used two sources that both focus on the themes of a wife's infidelity while her husband is otherwise disposed. Similarly, the *Second Nun's Tale* was translated from two adaptations of a single source text (Reames 1990). By contrast, the use of a long, satirical poem as the source for a large proportion of the fabliau-style *Merchant's Tale* demonstrates that Chaucer did not limit his choice of sources to closely related texts in terms of text type, genre, or even language.

This eclectic gathering of materials from a variety of source texts can be seen as corresponding equally to Geoffrey of Vinsauf's first and second modes. By using a range of source texts, Chaucer is able, in a relatively decisive manner to avoid following the "tracks of the words" (Parr and of Vinsauf 1968: 85). He delays where his source goes on, as the first mode urges. Concurrently, however, he also reformulates the story in such a way that the whole of the material is taken into account and something new can be said, as the second mode recommends. In adopting this strategy, Chaucer's translation is able to relay a unique sequence of events, create a new allegorical nuance, and generate the new sense that January brought about his own misfortune by choosing a wife who is too young for him.

The *Merchant's Tale* is, therefore, possibly the most direct evidence of a conceptualisation of translation that is fundamentally influenced by the notion of excogitatio of any text analysed here. It appears simultaneously to apply both of the modes described by Geoffrey of Vinsauf as methods for appropriating the *auctoritas* of antecedent texts, while avoiding translating them too closely.

7.   Conclusion: Abductive Inference

Abductive inference is the act of searching for a factor or set of factors that, if true, would rationalise the occurrence of an observed phenomenon. This article has taken the example of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to demonstrate the ability of this kind of logic to challenge assumptions. The article began by pointing out that Chaucer considered himself a translator, and then went on to find instances in the *Canterbury Tales*, in which antecedent texts have been drawn on. Next, accepting the incorporation of antecedent material as an act of translation, the analysis noted aspects of the text-production process that appear surprising with a parallel text-based conception of the translation process in mind.

Three aspects of Chaucer's approach to text production that are present in numerous tales have been noted. Subsequently their functions in individual tales have been explored. The first is Chaucer's deliberate employment of strategies that distinguish or estrange the translation from the source text. His use of elaborating strategies to complement his new choice of setting was the second aspect to be noted. The third aspect to be noted here was Chaucer's use of embellishing strategies, in which more than one source text has been drawn on concurrently to produce the translation.

It was argued that Chaucer's strategies of conscious alteration, which see him remove stories from the setting portrayed in the source text correspond closely to the second mode posited by Geoffrey of Vinsauf, in which he urged text producers to find ways to say something new with antecedent material. By contrast Chaucer's elaborating strategies appear to correspond closely to Geoffrey of Vinsauf's first mode, in which the translator is recommended to pause where the source text does not, and to move on where the source text does not. This appreciably ambiguous recommendation could be read as meaning the translator should intersperse a relatively short text, as is the source for the *Shipman's Tale* with novel features, which will allow the translation to generate a new range of interpretations. Finally, Chaucer's pronounced use of embellishing strategies, in which more than one source text is drawn on in the production of the translation, was noted. Unlike the previous two strategies observed, this assembly of parts of diverse texts corresponds equally to Geoffrey of Vinsauf's first and second modes. By drawing on multiple source texts, Chaucer would have been able to use antecedent material to say something not said by any of his source texts, as is the first mode. However, concurrently, the same strategy would have enabled Chaucer to interweave the antecedents, such that the range of interpretations is changed, as is recommended in the second mode.

Returning to abductive logic, these three aspects of Chaucer's translation practice can be seen as what Pierce terms "surprising" facts to be explained. The reasoning above demonstrates that in each case, a conceptualisation of translation that is fundamentally based on excogitatio is a factor that, if true, would make the "surprising" facts a matter of course. Thus, this analysis has demonstrated that there is reason to believe that Chaucer's understanding of translation was heavily influenced by the notion of excogitatio. This analysis has, therefore, produced a hypothesis that can be tested on further evidence. The hypothesis would also facilitate the production of theories aimed at rationalising Chaucer's individual strategies and their particular roles in his conceptualisation of translation.

Abductive reasoning offers a way of analysing translations, which avoids conflating choices consciously made by translators, with aspects of their practice that are indicative of their understanding of translation. Put another way, the example of Chaucer demonstrates that an individual's conceptualisation of what constitutes a translation is open to a large degree of variation. However, the ways long-dead historical figures may have conceptualised their actions is open to debate. Analysis based on abductive reasoning allows a researcher to return

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to such fundamental questions as how the word "translation" is interpreted in a particular case, formulating a hypothesis that can subsequently be tested on further evidence or similar cases. Subsequently, when the conception of translation has been established, further theories and hypotheses can be formulated to describe the individual functions of each observed strategy. Thus, particularly in cases where the mechanics of text production may have shifted between the translation being produced and the text being analysed, abductive logic appears to be a promising tool for the first stages of analysing texts as translations.

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