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**Translation and the Double Bind of Imaginative Resistance**

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## Abstract

Imaginative resistance is a reluctance to buy into morally deviant fictional worlds. While most people have little trouble imagining acts of violence happening in fiction, they will struggle to entertain the idea that such acts could be the moral thing to do, even within a fictional universe. Although this phenomenon has received a lot of attention from philosophers, it is absent from the Translation Studies literature despite its relevance. In this paper, the significance of imaginative resistance for the literary translation process will be explored. A number of areas will be identified where translation research can make an important contribution to philosophical debates on this issue. In particular, imaginative resistance will be theorized as a new translation double bind. By bringing together research from two disciplines, this paper aims to encourage novel ways of thinking about both the translation process and the puzzle of imaginative resistance.

Keywords: imaginative resistance; double bind; literary translation; fiction; morality.

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**Introduction**

Judging from the popularity of translated fantasy novels and dramas such as *Lord of the Rings* or *Game of Thrones*, professional translators do not seem to have any problems imagining and rewriting fictional stories with elements of pure fantasy such as dragons and magic. However, if a novel requires translators to imagine that infanticide or genocide are morally good, would they be able or willing to reproduce this piece of fiction for a new target audience? The difficulty that we sometimes experience when trying to imagine stories that portray normative paradigms that disagree with our own is known in the philosophical literature as imaginative resistance. Although this term will be unfamiliar to the majority of translation scholars, I aim to illustrate the relevance for Translation Studies (TS) of this complex phenomenon.

The purpose of the current research is thus twofold: first, to demonstrate how imaginative resistance can shed new light on the literary translation process, and second, to identify areas where developments in TS can make a significant contribution to philosophical debates on this issue. In the first part of this article, the construct of imaginative resistance (IR) will be defined and explained in relation to the philosophical literature. Subsequently, its significance for translation work will be explored, with a particular focus on two areas of IR research that are most relevant for the theory and practice of translation. In the third part of the article, inspired by Robinson’s (2012, 2013, 2014) somatic model, the conundrum of imaginative resistance will be theorized as a new translation double bind in order to encourage innovative ways of thinking about the construct. The final section of this paper will provide avenues for future research and discuss the implications of IR for translator education.

### What is imaginative resistance?

Meskin et al. (2018, 5) define the phenomenon of imaginative resistance as “the comparative difficulty that we encounter in engaging with certain kinds of imaginings—cases of morally deviant imaginings being the paradigmatic example”. In other words, imaginative resistance (IR) occurs when individuals who are otherwise competent imaginers struggle to engage with fictional works that present certain morally objectionable claims such as, for instance, killing a child simply because there are too many in the world. Although some scholars have recently suggested that IR can also take place with some types of non-fictional texts, the concept was mainly explored with fictional works possibly because, as Brock (2012, 463) argues, reading fiction is generally how a moral education is gained and, as such, reasoned moral evaluations within fictional text are taken as assertions, rather than acts of story-telling. The phenomenon was initially discussed by Hume in 1757, but the name “imaginative resistance” was used for the first time in a 1994 article written by Richard Moran which sparked renewed interest in the phenomenon. Tamar Szabó Gendler then wrote more extensively about the concept in a 2000 article entitled “The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance” in the *Journal of Philosophy*. Since then, various approaches to IR have developed, all of which provide valuable insights into different aspects of this complex phenomenon.

To begin our discussion, it seems useful to explain in what circumstances IR can occur. Many different kinds of utterances found in fictional texts can trigger imaginative resistance, but a number of accounts have focused on the following sentence expressing a particularly morally dubious proposition:

*In killing her baby, Giselda did the right thing; after all, it was a girl.*

According to IR scholars (e.g. Weatherson 2004; Walton 2006; Gendler and Liao 2016), if readers come across this sentence in a text, they are likely to react in a number of ways which give rise to distinctive philosophical puzzles, the most intriguing being the imaginative puzzle which is concerned with the reasons underlying a reader's difficulty with imagining that Giselda really did the morally right thing. This puzzle explores how readers psychologically respond to sentences like the one above (see Appendix A for additional examples of such utterances). Interestingly, Nanay (2010, 588) provides the following description of the imaginative puzzle:

When we read [the Giselda utterance], the last phrase of this utterance startles us and makes us stop. Our engagement with this fictional text is interrupted for a moment. What is to be explained is why we are reluctant to (or find it difficult to) engage with such fictional narratives, why these sentences are 'striking, jarring in a way that the earlier sentences are not' (Weatherson, p. 2), or, to put it differently, why these sentences 'pop out' (Gendler, p. 159). We feel that there is something wrong with these sentences; sometimes we go back and read them again to check whether we got them right the first time. Our engagement with the fiction breaks down.

The readers' difficulty in imagining morally despicable propositions when reading fiction can be explained by the fact that their focus and attention, which is normally directed to the narrative, is suddenly and unexpectedly redirected to the author or narrator's intention(s), that is, to what s/he could have meant by the utterance. Nanay (2010, 591-2) argues that when the readers' attention is directed away from the world of fiction in this way, it breaks down their engagement with the fictional world. The reader then wonders whether the author or narrator could really be saying (or condoning) what they appear to be saying or whether it is, in fact,

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3 some kind of trick. Indeed, an important aspect of IR is that, although readers have no  
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5 problem acknowledging that there could be *characters* in a story who, for example, believe  
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7 that female infanticide is morally right, they will resist the idea that the author or narrator  
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9 could have such different moral standards from their own.<sup>1</sup> Brock (2012, 447) argues that  
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11 moral evaluations result in imaginative failure only when the moral reasons for action  
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13 supplied in the text by the author or narrator are found to be wanting. In addition, individuals  
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15 are thought to be particularly resistant if the fiction where the world of the story takes place  
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17 “does not differ naturalistically from the real world” (Currie and Ichino 2013, 326). The  
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19 problem of imaginative resistance has generated much discussion in philosophical circles  
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21 and, as the next section highlights, there are several points of contention.  
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### 28 *Philosophical accounts of imaginative resistance*

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30 According to Miyazono and Liao (2016, 233) there are two main subfields of philosophy that  
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32 have investigated the concept of imaginative resistance more or less in parallel: philosophy of  
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34 mind, the branch of philosophy which explores the nature of the mind and its relationship  
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36 with the body; and philosophical aesthetics, the branch of philosophy which explores issues  
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38 having to do with art, beauty, and related phenomena. While the former has focused on  
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40 understanding imagination’s place in cognitive architecture, the latter has investigated the  
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42 phenomenon of imaginative resistance in connection with fictional narratives. Until recently,  
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44 cognitive accounts dominated the field and there were two understandings of where  
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46 imaginative attitudes could sit in one’s cognitive architecture: imaginative attitudes were  
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48 either considered to be “belief-like” and part of cognitive imagination, or “desire-like” and  
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50 part of conative imagination (Miyazono and Liao 2016, 235). Figure 1 illustrates these  
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52 differing understandings of the phenomenon.  
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[Figure 1 near here]

It is now also thought by some (e.g. Gendler 2008b; De Sousa 2010) that the constraint experienced during IR may not be linked to imagination at all, but actually lies elsewhere in our cognitive architecture. Gendler (2008a, 2008b) suggests that imaginative engagement (or nonengagement) with fiction is linked to a cognitive state she calls *alief*: “Aliefs are, roughly, innate or habitual propensities to respond to apparent stimuli in automatic and associative ways. Alief-driven responses may be in tension with those that arise from one’s explicit beliefs and desires” (Gendler and Liao 2016, 414). The idea is that aliefs are antecedent to other cognitive attitudes such as beliefs and cognitive imagination, and perhaps even shape these. Miyazono and Liao (2016, 242) extend this argument to suggest that one’s deeply held moral commitments are encoded in aliefs, thus triggering the powerful emotional and cognitive responses that underpin imaginative resistance when one is being asked, for example, to imagine that Giselda’s female infanticide is morally right. This alief-based account of IR marks a significant departure from previous accounts of the construct. Interestingly, emotions have also been put forward as an alternative explanation for IR, in the sense that our emotional responses could also be constraints that contribute to our imaginative resistance (e.g. de Sousa 2010). Recent work in the field of process-oriented translation studies also points to the key role of emotions in shaping implicit cognitive responses, thus adding weight to the no-imagination accounts of IR. I will return to this point in the second part of the article.

While the IR literature broadly agrees that individuals resist imagining moral propositions that they do not believe in, despite being able to imagine nonmoral ones, it is clear that there is a lack of consensus about the scope of the phenomenon, the mechanisms for evoking imaginative resistance, and the psychological components implicated in it. Currie and Ichino

(2013) suggest that there may be multiple related phenomena that demand different psychological explanations. One of the most interesting debates in this area, however, concerns the nature of IR and whether it is a case of being *unable* or *unwilling* to imagine morally repugnant worlds. Gendler and Liao (2016, 407) divide the literature on this issue in three categories: cantian theories, wontian theories, and eliminativist theories.

In brief, cantian theories maintain that IR is linked to the *impossibility* of engaging in a morally deviant imaginative activity. In this perspective, individuals are not able to imagine certain moral violations because their real-life morality automatically overrides any effort to accept a deviant moral claim (Black and Barnes 2017, 71). Individuals simply can't imagine as they have been invited to.

Wontian theories maintain that IR is linked to an *unwillingness* to engage in a morally reprehensible imaginative activity. In this view, individuals are unwilling to imagine certain things, perhaps because doing so would feel like desiring that morality (Currie and Ichino 2013, 326). Individuals simply won't imagine a morally deviant attitude as they have been invited to. As Gendler and Liao (2016, 409) put it: "one won't imaginatively take on morally deviant attitudes that could infect one's attitudes toward real-world persons and circumstances". We will return to this point about moral contamination.

As opposed to cantian and wontian theories, eliminativist theories do not accept the existence of IR. They maintain that "the appearance of a philosophical problem arises from the bizarre so-called stories that philosophers have concocted" (Miyazono and Liao 2016, 237), and that it is only because philosophers have focused on isolated and a-contextual utterances that they believe that there is a problem to be explained (e.g. Tanner 1994; Todd 2009; Gendler and Liao 2016). Indeed, without the provision of a fictional context within which a morally problematic sentence would be embedded, it is not clear that one's reaction

is necessarily due to IR as opposed to something else (e.g. bafflement at an unusually brief and peculiar sentence).

The aim of this article is not to arbitrate between these different positions, but to highlight that they exist and that each may shed some light on the puzzle of IR. What is now clear from recent experiments conducted by Liao, Strohming, and Sripada (2014) is that there really is a phenomenon of imaginative resistance that exists outside of philosophy journals and conferences, but also that the issue of context—which is often missing from IR accounts—needs to be incorporated into accounts of the phenomenon. Therefore, although there is no definite answer as to whether human beings simply do not *want* to or *cannot* engage with morally deviant worlds (and current thinking seems to suggest that it is probably a bit of both), it is the eliminativist theories which have helped to refine the problem and shed light on the importance of the interaction between particular morally dubious statements and their contexts.

### ***The role of context***

The fact that philosophers have traditionally focused their discussions of IR on single statements or very brief scenarios divorced from context and “constructed for the sake of making a philosophical point” (Miyazono and Liao 2016, 237), such as the ones in the appendix, has partially prevented the development of more complex or sophisticated explanations of the phenomenon of IR. As Nanay (2010, 589) insightfully argues: “the same readers may experience imaginative resistance when they encounter a sentence in one context, while not experiencing anything of that sort when they encounter it in another context”. Although this assertion may seem obvious to translation scholars, it is only in recent years that philosophers writing on the topic of IR have started to consider the importance of

context and questioned their earlier understandings of the construct (Gendler and Liao 2016, 410).

The role of context was perhaps most convincingly discussed by Todd (2009, 191) who argued that “it is difficult to decide about the status of the relevant propositions vis-a-vis their imaginability without some context in which they would normally (as part of fiction) be embedded”. He observed that an isolated proposition asserted outside of any clear context is unlikely to provoke a meaningful reaction. It was previously suggested that IR happens when there is author failure, that is, when the creator of the fictional world and authority for that world causes readers to mistrust him and his moral evaluations, either due to a breakdown of his/her authority or a lack of skill. Black and Barnes (2017, 71) indicate that this mistrust on the part of readers and the subsequent engagement breakdown happens because the author fails to provide enough context to warrant the suspension of our moral disbelief. In fact, Liao, Strohminger, and Sripada (2014, 350) found that adding context to stories in the tradition of Greek mythology helped readers to accept as fictional and to imagine moral propositions that they would not have approved of otherwise. However, while adding context may go some way towards reducing the constraints on our imagination for certain fictional worlds, such as Greek mythology, it is perhaps less likely that this also works when the world of the story is almost identical to the real world where we would expect compliance with real world moral norms. The type of fictional world created is thus also likely to be an influencing factor on the experience of IR.

There is, therefore, one contextual element in particular which has drawn philosophers’ attention, and which is also a topic of interest in translation: genre.

The genre conventions that govern a story partly determine which authorial say-sos can be fictional and audiences’ genre expectations partly determine which

propositions can be easily imagined [...] Psychologically, genre expectations can be thought of as schemas for processing stories. When a story expresses a proposition that violates the audience's genre expectation, the audience experiences comparative difficulties with imagining that proposition because the story becomes comparatively difficult. (Liao, Strohming, and Sripada 2014, 344-6)

The fact that readers have different expectations of the genres they encounter means that a morally deviant proposition encountered in one type of genre might not cause a reaction but this same proposition encountered in another genre might evoke IR. IR thus depends on our reactions to the context and genre in which the problematic utterances occur: a morally despicable proposition will be more puzzling and more likely to trigger IR if encountered in a realistic novel than it would if encountered in an absurd one, or in a surreal genre or parody. Other fictional worlds where moral deviance might be more acceptable are black comedy, fairy-tales, mythology, or religion-influenced texts. Miyazono and Liao (2016, 240) illustrate this point well when they explain that many people are prepared to imagine that divine command theory is true in creation myths and other religious stories, but that they would not readily imagine this to be the case in other contexts.

Scholars therefore recently converged on the idea that genre conventions can influence one's imaginative responses to fictions.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, imaginative resistance is still thought to occur in all kinds of texts/genres even if it is perhaps more frequent in realistic genres. As Nanay (2010, 599) puts it: "it would be a mistake to deny that imaginative resistance can occur in what Gendler calls 'distorting fictions'". While acknowledging that IR is more commonly experienced in literature than in visual fiction, films, theatre performances or narrative paintings, Nanay (597) also notes that there are exceptions to the rule—for instance, if an actor suddenly turns and speaks directly to the camera, a cinematic technique referred to

as “breaking the fourth wall”, the audience will also feel the “pop-out” that is characteristic of imaginative resistance. Research in this area, however, is still in its infancy and it would be worthwhile to investigate further the various sources of contextual differences that might shed light on the phenomenon of imaginative resistance. As an initial step, philosophers may be interested in the work undertaken in the areas of audiovisual translation and/or theatre translation on the links between issues of genre and audience responses.

Now that the concept of IR has been defined and an overview of the philosophical discussion to date has been provided, the next section will explore further the significance of IR for translation and focus on two areas of IR research that hold particular relevance for the theory and practice of translation.

### **The significance of imaginative resistance for translation**

As the phenomenon of imaginative resistance affects (mostly) readers of realistic fictional works, one might wonder how it affects translators of these texts. On the one hand, translators are also readers and are therefore equally likely to encounter difficulties in imagining and engaging with the morally deviant worlds present in source texts. On the other hand, translators may be duty-bound to translate these fictional texts for target readers belonging to a different languaculture. If translators experience IR, are they still able to do this effectively? What is the impact on the translation process of a translator’s disengagement with the fictional world of the ST? If translators cannot or will not imagine morally repugnant propositions expressed by a source text author or narrator, are they able to proceed with their task? And what happens if/when they do proceed—do they add their own context to the narrative in order to suspend their moral disbelief? Are they able to re-create the “pop-out” effect characteristic of IR if they mistrust the author’s moral evaluation that it was based on? And is it even possible or desirable to do so if the target text is going to be read by an

audience from a different context and with potentially different genre expectations? Although there is currently no empirical research that might provide answers to these questions, one might speculate that translators' engagement with texts as both intimate readers and rewriters could render their experience of the phenomenon of imaginative resistance particularly difficult and, thus, worthy of investigation.

This is therefore another research avenue for the interdisciplinary field of process-oriented translation studies, sometimes referred to as translation psychology or translation process research (Holmes 1988; Jääskeläinen 2012; Apfelthaler 2014). Alice Kaplan (2013, 67) notes that "while there are many theories of translation, very little has been written about the everyday psychology of translating". To an extent this statement is debatable as one might argue that almost everything written about translation is linked to psychology in some way, that is, to ways of behaving and thinking. Nevertheless, the scientific study of translators' psychological processes is a comparatively recent phenomenon in the field of translation studies. It is only in the last forty or fifty years that translation (and interpreting) scholars have been inspired by cognitive, experimental, and individual difference psychology. Over time, these traditions have permeated the field and impacted on its development, enabling researchers to study the translator's 'black box' from a variety of different perspectives. In particular, the influence of attitudinal and affective factors on translation performance has recently gained ground, and much has been written about the role of emotion regulation, intuition, empathy, ideology, and other affect-related constructs in the performance of translation (e.g. Lehr 2013; Hubscher-Davidson 2013a, 2013b, 2017; Apfelthaler 2014; Rojo and Ramos Caro 2014; Rojo 2015). In line with this trend, there are two areas of IR research (discussed below) which have the potential to influence the future direction of translation process research (TPR). In turn, developments in TPR can usefully contribute to philosophical discussions on these topics in the imaginative resistance literature.

### *Transportation*

Our affective responses to fiction are well-documented and empirically informed. For instance, Cova and Teroni (2016) point to empirical evidence demonstrating that there are clear cases of affective reactions towards fictional entities that motivate real behaviour and, in a spate of recent articles, several scholars (Mar, Oatley, and Peterson 2009; Oatley 2012, 2016; Fong, Mullin, and Mar 2013; Johnson et al. 2013) have linked engagement in literary fiction with improvements in empathy, interpersonal sensitivity, and theory-of-mind. Often, our emotional engagement with fictional texts has been discussed under the label of the so-called phenomenon of transportation. Meskin et al. (2018, 6) define transportation as “the experience of becoming immersed in the world of a story to the extent of having the impression of leaving the real world for a while”. Slek (2014) reports that intense reception and perceptions of fictional texts can even mentally transport us into the body of protagonists, and that this transportation can provoke changes in brain function and structure. In a previous publication (Hubscher-Davidson 2017), I hypothesized that transportation also takes place when translating literature and that, due to the deep engagement with the text and often intense nature of literary translation, the process of identification and transportation could affect translators in more profound ways than regular readers. This hypothesis remains to be empirically tested,<sup>3</sup> but it seems fair to postulate that translators are likely to be immersed in the fictional worlds they read about for longer periods of time than regular readers, and that the critical distancing of a professional reading does not erase “the more elemental relationship” that one develops when reading fiction (Bush 2013, 38).

It is therefore interesting to note that Liao and Gendler (2011, 85) have called imaginative resistance the opposite of transportation, going so far as to suggest that it is “an extreme case of being not transported at all”. In a sense, IR is essentially a failure to be transported



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3 because, rather than feeling immersed in the fictional world, readers' engagement with the  
4 story is abruptly interrupted and they "pop back" into the real world. Gendler and Liao (2016,  
5 411) therefore assert that there are links between work on IR and work on transportation.  
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10 One area in particular where work on transportation can illuminate the puzzle of IR relates  
11 to the basis for becoming absorbed and carried away imaginatively in a story. Oatley (2016,  
12 621) reports that emotion constitutes this basis and plays a key role in fiction, as "it can signal  
13 what is significant in the relation between events and our concerns". Johnson et al. (2013,  
14 307) also highlight the importance of emotions as they argue that individuals who become  
15 fully immersed or transported into a story experience high levels of imagery, cognitive  
16 engagement, and emotional involvement, with mental imagery being tightly linked to  
17 emotional experience. In order to become fully transported when reading, it is necessary to  
18 take on characters' perspectives and to experience what the characters experience, to feel  
19 vivid emotions, and to become emotionally impacted by the story. Positive correlations were  
20 found between levels of transportation and story-consistent emotional experience (Mar et al.  
21 2011; Green, Chatham, and Sestir 2012; Oatley 2016). Similarly, the key role of affect in  
22 reader immersion was explored by translation scholars Rojo, Caro, and Valenzuela (2014) in  
23 a study of reader responses to the metaphorical and nonmetaphorical translations of figurative  
24 expressions embedded in narratives. This is another indication that affect can play an  
25 important role in processes of (non)engagement during both reading and translating, and that  
26 useful connections can be drawn between work on IR and work on translation.  
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31 It is also interesting to note that emotions have the potential to influence core beliefs.  
32 Indeed, emotions are said to constitute and strengthen our beliefs (e.g. Mercer 2010) which  
33 indicates that the more readers are emotionally involved in a story, the likelier it is that they  
34 will lose access to real-world facts and embrace story-consistent beliefs: "transportation is  
35 likely to create strong feelings toward story characters; the experiences or beliefs of those  
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characters may then have an enhanced influence on readers' beliefs" (Green and Brock 2000). It has therefore been argued that individuals who encounter a story that they feel is morally deviant are actively (consciously or subconsciously) resisting emotional transportation into it for fear of influencing their moral belief system. They resist imagining a world where, for instance, Giselda's female infanticide is morally right because "there is pressure on us to believe that analogous cases of female infanticide in the real world are morally right as well" (Miyazono and Liao 2016, 240). This reshaping of our real-world moral views and beliefs as a result of engagement with fiction is also sometimes called moral contamination or imaginative contagion (Gendler 2000, 2003, 2006). Currie and Ichino (2013, 326) explain the phenomenon as such:

A story which asks us to imagine that female infanticide is good is likely to invite emotional responses such as regret at the failure to kill this female infant, or pleasure at having succeeded, which we find objectionable simply because feeling certain ways about imaginary scenarios places us closer than we wish to those who feel that way about comparable real ones.

Although it has been noted in the literature that imagining moral deviances could potentially improve one's real-world moral views in the case of genres such as satire (e.g. Liao 2013), the emotions and desires involved in reading realistic fiction indicate that there is a real risk of "catching" deviant moralities that might be embedded in it. Since we have noted earlier that literary translators can be intimately engaged with the texts they work with, it seems important to highlight that they may be particularly susceptible to this effect. As argued elsewhere (Hubscher-Davidson 2013a, 2016, 2017), professional translators can become very adept at picking up on emotional cues and signals sent out by others as a result of actively

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engaging with literature and its variety of emotion eliciting content. They can also borrow others’ emotions through processes of emotional sharing when translating and, like interpreters, they are vulnerable to emotional contagion leading to the manifestation of vicarious trauma.

When encountering texts with deviant moralities of the Giselda kind, it has been shown that highly transported readers are less likely to notice the type of inconsistencies that cause imaginative resistance (Black and Barnes 2017, 72). As such, it could be argued that literary translators who are deeply engaged with their work might not experience the kind of IR that less transported readers will experience.<sup>4</sup> If this is the case, it is not good news for translators as IR is said to work as a protection against moral contamination. Additionally, we can assume that—due to the nature of their job—translators will be tolerant and willing to entertain alternate cultural realities, world-views, and moralities, so they may be predisposed to imagine morally deviant fictional worlds, and thus even more vulnerable to moral contamination. It could also be mooted that length of engagement with morally-deviant literary texts places translators at risk of habituation, that is, of becoming so used to being exposed to alternate moralities that these no longer have the same “pop-out” effect, and resistance eventually wears off. These risks to the translator’s psychological and moral well-being deserve to be investigated further.

Reviewing the transportation literature shed precious light on the links between IR, emotions, beliefs, morality, and the translation process. The next sub-section will focus more specifically on what factors can influence the experience of IR.

***Individual differences***

The second IR research finding that is of relevance to process-oriented translation studies is the presence of individual differences in imaginative resistance. Indeed, previous research has

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3 shown that IR varies as a function of individual differences amongst participants (Liao,  
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5 Strohming, and Sripada 2014; Barnes and Black 2016; Black and Barnes 2017). Similarly,  
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7 it has been established that translators have psychological, social, cultural, and biographical  
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9 traits that can be linked to individual differences in the way that they handle translations.  
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12 Saldanha and O'Brien (2013, 147) remarked that "in much of the translation process research  
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14 published to date there are consistent observations of individual differences within groups".  
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17 The presence of individual differences means that translators will inevitably respond to  
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19 morally questionable claims in various ways.  
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22 When discussing what might trigger IR, Nanay (2010, 588) aptly observes that the kinds  
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24 of sentences that trigger IR very much depend on the individual, their moral sensitivity and  
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26 sense of humour. He adds that it is extremely problematic to assume that some people have  
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28 the "right" kind of moral sensitivity, whereas others have a deviant one. Recent studies have  
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30 found that the experience of IR depends on individual differences in terms of familiarity with  
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32 the genre of the fictional world (Liao, Strohming, and Sripada 2014), willingness—and  
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34 ease of—cultivating different perspectives and engaging with immoral scenarios (Black and  
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36 Barnes 2017; Camp 2017),<sup>5</sup> individual sociohistorical contexts of narrative reception (Clavel-  
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38 Vasquez 2018), as well as past experience and understanding of the scenario in question  
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40 (Kim, Kneer, and Stuart 2018). Additionally, Gendler and Liao (2016) mention very briefly  
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42 in the conclusion to their entry on IR in the *Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of*  
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44 *Literature* that cultural variations in IR is an area where future research progress can be  
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46 made. Beyond this, however, the role of cultural differences has been largely ignored by  
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48 philosophers despite the fact that moral attitudes clearly vary as a function of cultural  
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50 backgrounds.  
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56 Cultural and individual differences are an area where TPR and IR scholars could engage  
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58 with each other in fruitful collaborative research. When exploring translators' individual  
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3 differences in the area of emotions, I noted that culture could modulate the integration of  
4 emotional information. I also found that there is a continuum of strength of engagement with  
5 a ST and that, depending on where translators are situated along this continuum at any one  
6 time, this may ultimately determine success in expressing a source text's emotions in  
7 translation (Hubscher-Davidson 2017). This theory could also apply to imaginative  
8 resistance, in the sense that there may be a continuum of resistance whereby too much or too  
9 little imaginative resistance could be detrimental for readers (and translators). Translation  
10 scholars and practitioners have also discussed in some detail the bodily sensations and  
11 cognitive impact triggered by negative emotions aroused during the reading and translation  
12 process (e.g. Maier 2002, 2006). It would be worth investigating whether experiencing IR  
13 could lead to similar physical symptoms in some individuals.

14  
15 If we accept that emotions, thoughts, beliefs, cultural, individual differences etc. influence  
16 translators' engagement with works of fiction, then we must also accept that all of these  
17 factors will bear upon their experience of imaginative resistance. Understanding the role of  
18 individual differences and how these impact on our moral and ethical responses to texts can  
19 ultimately help us to develop coping strategies for overcoming barriers to engagement, if and  
20 when this might be desirable.

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22 It is important, however, to bear in mind that some of these individual difference factors  
23 are not consciously accessible. Liao, Strohming, and Sripada (2014, 344) observed that  
24 genre expectations, for instance, tend to be formed and deployed "quickly, automatically, and  
25 effortlessly". Expanding on the idea of a continuum of resistance, it could also be argued that  
26 IR activity takes place according to a continuum of IR possibilities that range from  
27 explicit/conscious to implicit/unconscious resistance.<sup>6</sup> Translators may thus not have high  
28 levels of conscious cognitive control to either prevent or foster the experience of IR. This  
29 could be a concern as Shreve (2009, 257) highlighted that the translator's activity of adapting  
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3 a text to the perceived needs of the target audience requires particularly high levels of  
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5 conscious cognitive control. Apfelthaler (2014, 313) has also stressed the need for translators  
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7 to be able to know what another person intends as well as anticipate the target audience's  
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9 reactions. However, translators experiencing IR more or less consciously may not be able to  
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11 fully understand authorial intention or to anticipate target reader expectations, reactions, and  
12  
13 potential levels of IR in response to the translated text. This could impair their ability to adapt  
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15 a text effectively to target audience needs. Empirical work in TPR has demonstrated that  
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17 other psychological factors that are not fully salient/accessible can influence translational  
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19 decision-making, such as creativity (Bayer-Hohenwarter 2009), expertise (Englund  
20  
21 Dimitrova 2005), or intuitions (Hubscher-Davidson 2013b). IR could be a very relevant new  
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23 area of empirical investigation in process-oriented translation studies.  
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28 Following on from this point, and inspired by Robinson's somatic theories, the third  
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30 section of this article will make the argument that imaginative resistance is a new translation  
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32 double bind working partly beneath the level of conscious awareness.  
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### 37 **Double bind: transportation vs. resistance**

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39 In what follows, I wish to consider, in a somewhat condensed manner, how the problem of IR  
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41 is essentially a double bind for translators of fiction. A double bind can be defined as "a  
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43 psychological predicament in which a person receives from a single source conflicting  
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45 messages that allow no appropriate response to be made" (Merriam-Webster 2018). Before  
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47 explaining what the IR double bind might consist of, I would like to provide an example from  
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49 a realistic genre with its own fictional context where the creator of the fictional world's moral  
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51 evaluations caused mistrust and resistance amongst audiences. This example will frame the  
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53 subsequent discussion of the IR double bind.  
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In a book which explores, amongst other issues, the imaginative experiences of audiences to contemporary adaptations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* tales, Kerchy (2016) illustrates how imaginative resistance affects audiences with the example of Cullin's fiction novel *Tideland*, in which an eleven-year-old girl whose parents die of a drug overdose wanders around an old farmhouse imagining surreal adventures with only doll heads for company. Kerchy (2016, 90) argues that *Tideland*'s thematization of taboo topics such as the neglect and endangerment of a minor, substance abuse assisted by a child, necrophilia, paedophilia, molestation of/by a mentally impaired person etc. qualify as immoral acts that provoke psychological discomfort. Indeed, she notes that if we imagine that the girl is happy, as we are invited to, this also invites us to believe that, for instance, child-abuse is unproblematic (90). The film audience and novel readers of *Tideland* experience IR because, according to Kerchy, their normativized moral assessments prevent them from conceiving such fictional realities. My argument is that this would also be the case for translators of *Tideland* whose thoughts and behaviours are governed by implicit and conflicting ideological norms (Robinson 2014) which may, like other double binds, paralyse them.

Gregory Bateson ([1972] 1985, 206-8) developed the following three stage theory of the double bind:

- (1) do X
- (2) do not-X
- (3) find yourself unable to escape the situation

Inspired by Bateson's model, translation scholar Douglas Robinson applied it to the field of Translation Studies. He recounts the example provided by Bateson of a young schizophrenic man who is visited in the hospital by his mother and goes through the three stages of the

double bind: (1) at first, he is happy to see her and tries to hug her, but she flinches; (2) he pulls back but is scolded by her for being afraid to express his emotions; (3) the young man then becomes confused and is scolded further. Once his mother departs, his panic and rage resulting from the situation lead to an assault on an orderly. This example qualifies as a double bind because there is more than one level of bind, precluding escape from the primary bind. Indeed, the common expression “stuck between a rock and a hard place” would not, on its own, qualify as a double bind as a further bind at a higher level is needed, such as, “and something terrible happens to people who reject being stuck”.

In a series of articles on the topic of translation double binds, Robinson (1995, 2006, 2014) expands Bateson’s model and theorization of the concept. Arguing that Translation Studies has inherited “a deeply ingrained set of normative avoidance addictions—taboos—that continue to shape our thought and behaviour today” (1995, 1), Robinson describes five levels according to which translation double binds function:

- (1) Do X
- (2) Do not-X
- (3) Internalize the command to do both, and expect censure for failure
- (4) Repress all of this, and despise anyone who reminds you of it
- (5) Idealize the command-giver.

According to Robinson, double binds can result from conflicting normative theories such as the implicit ideological norms mentioned above in the case of *Tideland*. Amongst other examples, Robinson provides us with the “source vs. target” double bind, which implies simultaneously (1) respecting the source author and text and (2) respecting the target culture and reader, (3) internalising the command to do both (aiming for TL fluency as well as ST



loyalty) and expecting censure for failure as you realize you cannot do both, (4) repressing all this by acting like the impossible is possible and despising anyone who compromises while compromising yourself, and finally (5) idealizing the command-giver which can be different people (source author, target reader etc.) that encapsulate normative conceptions. Although vastly simplified, this summary of Robinson's "source vs. target" double bind illustrates well the conflicting commands and norms that are more or less implicit in translators' work but that they are nonetheless expected to abide by. Another example is the "nationalist vs. migrant" double bind (Robinson 2006), where it is argued that translators' loyalties to countries, cultures, and languages are also governed by conflicting ideological norms.

In the case of imaginative resistance, I would like to argue that there is a "transportation vs. resistance" double bind at play: (1) the translator engages with the source text and translation task and is transported into the narrative (believes the source author/narrator), while at the same time (2) s/he attempts to maintain critical distance and to resist imagining morally deviant content (does not believe the source author/narrator); (3) the translator understands without being told that it is not possible to be both transported into and resist transportation into the narrative, and that failure to do both means that the translation cannot be completed successfully which, in turn, impacts on professional credibility and worth, self-confidence etc. The next stage is to (4) repress this situation, perhaps by translators deluding themselves that there really isn't a problem/puzzle to overcome, that a solution can always be found, and that scholars who suggest the opposite are misled. Finally (5) translators may identify, idealize, and embrace the command-giver as the spirit of ideology, norms, or professional ethics channelled inside them but reject the thought of it as a controlling or regulatory force that gives them commands. In the case of *Tideland*, it could also be argued that the translators will idealize the source author and, thus, convince themselves that they understand the authorial intention underlying the existence of immoral acts as fictional

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3 realities. This may lead them to translate in a particular way because they believe implicitly  
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5 that this is the way the (idealized) source author would have wanted it.  
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8 There are undoubtedly many different ways that the “transportation vs. resistance” double  
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10 bind can be further developed. My intention in this section was, first, to supplement  
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12 Robinson’s earlier account of translation double binds to accommodate the role of  
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14 imaginative resistance and, second, to illustrate the conundrum that translators can find  
15  
16 themselves in when they encounter IR in their work. Ultimately, the double bind theory also  
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18 provides philosophers with a new vantage point from which to explore the intricacies and  
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20 complexities of imaginative resistance. Indeed, considering IR as a double bind seems  
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22 particularly appropriate in light of Stear’s (2015) recent suggestion that the imaginative  
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24 puzzle could be understood as mainly normative in character.  
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### 31 **Future directions**

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33 In addition to the theoretical advances outlined above, there are two major areas where the  
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35 imaginative resistance literature has the potential to influence translation studies and vice  
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37 versa: empirical research and translator education.  
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40 I previously alluded to the idea that developments in translation studies (particularly in the  
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42 DTS branch of Holmes’s map) can contribute significantly to philosophical discussions on IR  
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44 and offer a rich resource to philosophers trying to solve this puzzle. Indeed, so far  
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46 philosophers have looked to the extant psychological literature for answers, but they bemoan  
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48 that “psychologists simply have not focused on responses to the kind of propositions that  
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50 have interested philosophers, such as propositions regarding moral deviance” (Gendler and  
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52 Liao 2016, 411). Translation scholars, on the other hand, have published on issues of ethics,  
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54 morality, and philosophy, as well as on various aspects of cognitive and normative behaviour  
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56 (see for example *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Philosophy* or *The Wiley-*  
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3 *Blackwell Handbook of Translation and Cognition*). These studies seem to me to be an  
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*Blackwell Handbook of Translation and Cognition*). These studies seem to me to be an essential point of reference for philosophers who are currently starting to test the stormy waters of empirical research. Indeed, Gendler and Liao (2016, 411) argue that theories about IR have rarely undergone empirical scrutiny:

In traditional discussions of imaginative resistance, philosophers often rely on introspective reports of what they find difficult to imagine, difficult to accept as fictional, and phenomenologically jarring. This reliance on introspective reports may be one reason why, as we noted earlier, there remain substantial disagreements about the scope of imaginative resistance.

Although the use of empirical methods has been mostly neglected in philosophical aesthetics, empirical and experimental studies are abundant in TS. Saldanha and O'Brien (2013, 4) observe that the emphasis on evidence, hypotheses, and operationalization that are usually associated with empirical research in TS is the hallmark of good academic practice. There are several experimental studies in TS that have the potential to shed light on aspects of the imagination and reader engagement that puzzle philosophers and that provide realistic and detailed accounts of decision-making events. For instance, the experimental studies on the cognitive processing of metaphors carried out by Gibbs (2010), Gibbs and Tendahl (2008) and Gibbs, Tendahl and Okonski (2011); or the experimental work carried out by Rojo and Ramos Caro (2014) on the impact of ideology on translation processes and choices.

Joint endeavours aiming to investigate IR with an empirical lens would clearly benefit both philosophers looking for new ways to explain the phenomenon and evidence their claims, and translation scholars aiming to understand a new socially-situated cognitive mechanism impacting on the translation process. Liao, Strohminger, and Sripada (2014) have recently

demonstrated the utility of empirical methods for investigating imaginative resistance by conducting two studies with empirical tools, and Black and Barnes (2017) have attempted to operationalize the IR construct in a self-report scale. To my knowledge, these are the only studies so far that have attempted to directly examine IR. Nevertheless, these studies had limitations such as not using stories explicitly expressing morally deviant propositions, or using very brief scenarios which may not trigger IR to the same extent as fictional narratives with more context and three-dimensional characters. The types of materials used in translation experiments (e.g. source texts of 250 words or longer), as well as the culturally diverse participants and varied research tools and measurements, could help to remedy these weaknesses. Empirical collaborative work in this area thus has the potential to benefit both fields in significant ways.

Translation education is another important area that can benefit from research into IR. The questions raised in Section 2 regarding the translator's ability to translate fictional texts effectively when experiencing IR relate to the processes underlying the various effects of (im)moral claims on one's translational behaviour. Gentile et al. (2009) indicate that, according to social learning theory and the more recent general learning model, a stimulus such as a prosocial video game can induce short- and long-term effects, such as prosocial behaviours in real life, through several learning mechanisms. Johnson et al. (2013) expanded the principles of the general learning model beyond media to narrative fiction, demonstrating that the act of reading a fictional story containing prosocial content could induce an internal state (affective empathy) congruent with the story content, which in turn elicited short- and long-term prosocial behaviour on the outside. In line with this learning model, one might therefore expect that the act of translating 'ethically acceptable' narrative fiction could also foster the learning of different types of skills which might influence subsequent short- and long-term translational (and other) behaviours. It could be speculated, however, that

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translating stories with morally deviant imaginings could also be an effective teaching tool, as we have seen that there are likely to be individual differences in terms of people’s internal state, or cognitive and affective reactions to IR. The effects of IR could, after all, be adaptive for some individuals as well as maladaptive for others. Some translation educators, such as Shreve and Angelone (2011), have remarked on the importance for translators of learning to self-monitor and to exercise control over the progress of a problem-solving sequence in order to develop effective working mechanisms. Being made to reflect on their triggers and consider how they will handle IR situations could be the kind of learning trial propounded by the general learning model whereby translators’ cognitions, emotions, and levels of physiological arousal are temporarily altered (Harrington and O’Connell 2016, 3). This experience could thus become a vital pedagogical tool in the development of translators’ self-monitoring skills. In any case, it is essential that translators learn to navigate the double bind of IR, and develop coping strategies, if they are to transfer morally deviant texts to new audiences. Johnson et al. (2013) showed that imagery training (believed to enhance transportation) for readers resulted in better story comprehension, increased empathy, and prosocial behaviour. It is possible that imagery training for literary translators that is tailored to IR and non-IR scenarios could also increase the salience of their internal states, lead to moral/ethical development, and perhaps even to protection against moral contamination. Finding out whether this is the case would seem to be a worthwhile enterprise.

**Conclusion**

In this article, the construct of imaginative resistance has been defined and explained in relation to the philosophical literature. Its significance for translation work has been discussed, with a particular focus on two areas of IR research that are most relevant for the theory and practice of translation and that have the potential to influence the future direction

of translation process research. Finally, imaginative resistance was theorized as a new translation double bind whereby translators who are governed by what Robinson (2014, 37) terms “ideosomatic pressures to conform” find themselves torn between a desire to be transported into morally deviant fictional narratives and an equally strong desire to resist doing so. This new perspective on the double bind aimed to encourage novel ways of thinking about the IR puzzle. The last section of this paper drew together some possible avenues for future research, such as the design of empirical and collaborative studies on IR, as well as pedagogical implications of the construct.

Overall, this paper served two important purposes: to introduce translators and translation scholars to a unique and complex phenomenon over which philosophers have spilled a lot of ink but which, until now, had never been discussed in Translation Studies despite its relevance; and to highlight areas of debate in the imaginative resistance literature where knowledge, techniques, material, and expertise in translation can be brought to bear. In this way, the present research has the potential to make a significant contribution to (1) the current wave of interdisciplinary research into socially-situated cognitive translation processes, and (2) the future progress of philosophical enquiries into the puzzle of imaginative resistance. Although this article could serve as a linchpin bringing together the two disciplines, it does not, however, enable us to know specifically how the double bind of IR operates during the translation process or which cognitive mechanisms are involved. In a sense, the theoretical reflections in this study raised a number of new questions that need to be answered, and served to demonstrate that such future (empirical) research would be valuable.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that scholars have distinguished cases giving rise to IR from cases giving rise to the related phenomenon of hermeneutic recalibration, which has been defined as “a common literary technique of temporarily puzzling the reader so as to cause her to reconsider and reinterpret the work” (Gendler and Liao 2016, 407). While hermeneutic recalibration entails an eventual acceptance of the utterance expressed as fictional, IR is more persistent and the perplexity remains even after one has fully digested the work.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note here that the topic of genre conventions and their impact on both translator behaviour and reader response is already an established area of study in TS.

<sup>3</sup> Recent work in audiovisual translation (e.g. Wissmath, Weibel, and Groner 2009; Wilken and Kruger 2016) has explored target viewers’ transportation into particular fictional worlds in relation to dubbed, subtitled, and audiodescribed content. To my knowledge, there is currently no published research in TS which discusses the translator’s own propensity to be transported from a cognitive perspective.

<sup>4</sup> A counter-argument is that translators’ professional (critical) reading of the text could lead them to question the author or narrator’s motives more so than other readers (it is, after all, the nature of the job) and thus to experience the disengagement effect of IR to a greater extent than “regular” readers. In this case moral contamination is unlikely, but the translator runs other risks such as an inability to complete the translation successfully due to not being persuaded by the narrative.

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, it was also found that the fact that individuals can imagine a morally repugnant scenario does not mean that they necessarily find it less objectionable than individuals who have less ease in imagining said scenario (Black and Barnes 2017, 77). However they may, as we have seen, be more affected by it in terms of their emotions and beliefs.

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3<sup>6</sup> To some extent, the idea that IR may work below conscious awareness is also consonant  
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5 with Cantian theories which peddle the idea that IR happens because individuals are not able  
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7 to accept morally deviant claims due to a process that automatically overrides one's effort to  
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9 do so. This is also aligned with the account of emotional and alief-driven automatic responses  
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11 to texts.  
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### 18 **Disclosure statement**

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21 No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.  
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### 27 **Note on contributor**

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30 Séverine Hubscher-Davidson is Senior Lecturer and Head of Translation at The Open  
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34 emotions on translators' work in particular. She has published articles focusing on  
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36 translators' personalities, intuition, tolerance of ambiguity, and emotional intelligence. Her  
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38 monograph *Translation and Emotion* was published with Routledge in 2017.  
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## Appendix

### Example 1

#### *Death on a Freeway*

Jack and Jill were arguing again. This was not in itself unusual, but this time they were standing in the fast lane of I-95 having their argument. This was causing traffic to bank up a bit. It wasn't significantly worse than normally happened around Providence, not that you could have told that from the reactions of passing motorists. They were convinced that Jack and Jill, and not the volume of traffic, were the primary causes of the slowdown. They all forgot how bad traffic normally is along there. When Craig saw that the cause of the bankup had been Jack and Jill, he took his gun out of the glovebox and shot them. People then started driving over their bodies, and while the new speed hump caused some people to slow down a bit, mostly traffic returned to its normal speed. So Craig did the right thing, because Jack and Jill should have taken their argument somewhere else where they wouldn't get in anyone's way.

Source: Weatherson, Brian. 2004. "Morality, Fiction, and Possibility." *Philosophers' Imprint* 4 (3): 1-27.

### Example 2

The historical village of Trent was characterized by the citizens' fervent desire to uphold their moral values. No one objected when James was beaten to death as punishment for leaving the gate to the cornfield open: they had lost the entire crop. The result of such clear-cut decisions was a happier, safer community.

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Source: Black, Jessica E., and Jennifer L. Barnes. 2017. “Measuring the Unimaginable: Imaginative Resistance to Fiction and Related Constructs.” *Personality and Individual Differences* 111: 71-79.

Example 3

It was a good thing that little Billy was starved to death since he had, after all, forgotten to feed the dog.

Source: Black, Jessica E., and Jennifer L. Barnes. 2017. “Measuring the Unimaginable: Imaginative Resistance to Fiction and Related Constructs.” *Personality and Individual Differences* 111: 71-79.

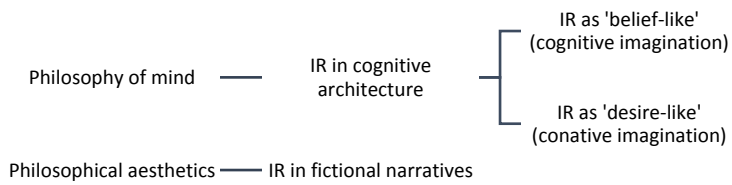
**Figure**

Figure 1. Philosophical accounts of imaginative resistance