



Roy Youdale: Using Computers in the Translation of Literary Style: Challenges and Opportunities

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Reviewed by

Mona ARHIRE

Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania
Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics
mona.arhire@unitbv.ro

Traditionally, literary translation and computer tools never met on common ground, with literary translators hardly displaying willingness to engage in technical aspects of translation. The scholarly literature is in this respect fairly consistent, observing that literary translators seldom or never resort to CAT tools (Slessor 2019; Ruffo, 2018, 2020, etc.). Despite reluctance to technology still persisting with literary translators, as of the last few years, the issue has gained increasing attention, and scientific events in translation organized by the most reputed translation associations worldwide have dedicated sections to it (e.g. EST, IATIS, etc.); or even events such as the Computer-Assisted Literary Translation (CALT) workshops in Swansea, the Literary Machine Translation workshop in Dublin, etc.

Translation Studies (TS) has particularly become acquainted with the use of electronic tools, especially since the 1990s, when Descriptive Translation Studies adopted the Corpus Linguistics methodology to foster TS. This marked the advent of a new and highly fruitful study area, that of the Corpus-Based Translation Studies (CBTS). The number of studies in this area has been soaring around the world, benefiting both the theoretical and the applied facets of TS due to the use of electronic tools to analyse reliable data retrieved from sizable computer-stored corpora. Among the wide range of research topics pertaining to CBTS, corpus-based investigations of style have been constantly undertaken based on translations employing diverse language pairs (e.g. Baker 2000, Boase-Beier 2011, Hyde-Parker 2008, Kenny–Winters 2020, Rothwell 2018, Saldanha 2011, Toral 2014, etc.).

Roy Youdale's *Using Computers in the Translation of Literary Style: Challenges and Opportunities* proposes a novel technique for the investigation of the literary style, which improves literary translation and offers a new research methodology

to be further explored and completed. The method combines close and distant reading (Moretti 2013) applied to the translation of literary texts, and it is based on “creative reverse engineering” (p. 5), in a three-step approach which encompasses (1) the observation of the effect of the text on the readership, (2) the identification of the means generating it, and (3) the attempt at recreating that effect in the TL version. Importantly, the use of computers in the process of literary translation is considered “a way which neither dilutes nor deskills the art of translation, but actually enhances it” (p. 1). In addition, as the author states, the method is superior to close reading alone in that it offers a better-informed translation from a stylistic point of view. By means of the quantitative analysis of large-scale and reliable data retrieved by the computer tools, the stylistic level can be more accurately pictured, as well as the language devices generating it.

The book is organized into six main chapters, two of which are theoretical in nature, and four are descriptive in applying the methodology to the author’s own translation of the novel *Gracias por el Fuego* by Mario Benedetti (2014) from Spanish into English. Two appendices supporting the arguments can be accessed at the end of the book, one comprising research data and the other exhibiting extracts from the SLT and the author’s own translation.

The study’s preliminaries are section-wise introduced ahead of the main chapters: The first section offers a brief overview of scholarly contributions regarding style in translation to support the need for “stylistic awareness” to produce better translations; the second section discusses strengths and limitations of traditional methodologies, while highlighting features impossible to grasp by close reading unaided by computer tools; thirdly, Youdale expresses precisely what this innovative approach has to offer, and, finally, presents the case study. All these preliminary incursions into the topic lead the way to Chapter 1, *Using Computers in Literary Translation*, which envisages “the opening up of a wider debate about various ways in which computer technology could be productively incorporated [...] without involving either deteriorating in quality of translation or translator deskilling” (p. 11). In support thereof, it offers examples of the use of CAT tools (CATMA, Sketch Engine, and Voyant Tools) and MT in literary translation, along with an applied account of CDR (close and distant reading). The chapter presents a historical account of translation technology (1.1) and subsequently considers the effects of these technologies upon human translation (1.2). Subchapter 1.3 refers to the CDR approach to the translation of style with the author’s intention to perform “reverse engineering” (p. 5) by means of a computer-based analysis of the effects of the SLT upon the readership and recreating them in the TLT. A (provisional) four-stage CDR-related translation process is proposed herein for the application of CL (Corpus Linguistics) and text visualization tools along all the stages of translation.

The second chapter, titled *Analysing the Source Text: Structure and Style*, emerges by providing information about the author of the source text, the novel

itself, and its reception. The corpus summaries are provided by Sketch Engine and Voyant Tools, and the computerized quantitative data analysis is justified in contrast to close reading and is accompanied by an account of its relevance in translation. A section within this chapter addresses handy distant reading analysis methods based on user-friendly software tools, the results thereby obtained being subject to close reading with a view to identifying stylistic features of the SLT and enhancing the literary translator's work. The features set under the lens include lexical frequency and distribution, themes and features of the author's style, and structural features of the style, such as sentence length, vocabulary range, and register. Sections 3 and 4 of this chapter demonstrate the CDR application to two features of the text, namely title and characterization. The suitability of the wording in the title is the focus of the former section, while the latter feature entails the extraction of proper nouns to constitute a list of characters. This list serves for the analysis of individual characters, the relationships between literary heroes, and the discourse analysis of one character's speech. Finally, this section presents the use of network analysis and visualization to create a map of all the characters and their relationships and interactions.

CDR, Translation Theory and the Attempt to Create an 'English Bendetti' is the title of the third chapter, which accounts for the usefulness of the CDR approach to investigate the style of the SLT before engaging in its translation. Then, as the author explains, a foreignizing approach is adopted in translation as an ethical principle rather than as a set of linguistic strategies, with a view to obtaining stylistic equivalence in the TL. This relies on a combination of Nida's formal vs. dynamic equivalence principles (1964/2004) and on a stylistic analysis of Bendetti's previously translated texts. Narrowing down to the translation of *Gracias por el Fuego*, the author discusses the phenomenon of foreignization in relation to the choice of the text, the visibility of the translation through retention of cultural reference, and the reflection of SL dominant features of style in the translation. To check the validity of his approach, the author undertook a preliminary comparative stylistic investigation of previous translations from the same author.

The following four chapters are dedicated to *Applying the Methodology*, each of them thoroughly illustrating the concrete stages of the computer-assisted research applied to the corpus, with relevant examples and figures. The first part of the application, as presented in Chapter 4, employs the recursive use of CDR to investigate translation challenges stemming from three cultural elements present in the text, namely (i) culture-specific items proper; (ii) the use of different languages in the source text, including the target language; and (iii) the use of *usted* and its formal interpersonal register. The application also entails manual counting and automatic lexical searches achieved by means of CATMA (Computer-Aided Textual Markup and Analysis) and MS Word. Section 4.1 argues that the translation of CSIs benefits better from regarding them in

groups and taking account of their narrative and stylistic functions at a micro- and macro-textual level than from their individual analysis. The second section of this chapter discusses the stylistic and narrative functions (e.g. humour and portrayal) stemming from the use of different languages in *Gracias por el Fuego*, which fulfils several stylistic and narrative functions. It is suggested that such CSIs should remain untranslated and accompanied by glossaries where the context does not offer clues for their decoding.

In Chapter 5, punctuation is analysed in relation to sentence length as a contributor to narrative configuration and to stylistic effect. Short and long sentences are dedicated separate sections and assessed by means of the CDR approach. The main results of the electronic quantification of both long and short sentences in the entire novel and by chapter are presented in figures. These results led to considerations on the manner in which sentence length triggers various stylistic peculiarities and themes, which can be evaluated in terms of their possibly problematic transfer to the TL.

Part 3 of the methodology is dedicated to *Comparing Source Text and Draft Translation*. The chapter is grounded on the argument that the CDR approach can be applied not only to the investigation of the ST but also to compare it to the translation. The four sections address different criteria to compare the two texts by displaying them in a parallel corpus. The focus of the comparison lies on Benedetti's style and adopts the following methodological steps: applying the standard CDR analysis, comparing sentence length, repetitions, and function words. All this analysis highlighted necessary changes to the draft translation for the sake of consistency and in order to enhance the stylistic resemblance of SLT and TLT.

As the title of the last part of the methodological applications exposed in Chapter 7 announces, it discusses *The Auto-Analysis of Translator Style*. More particularly, the translator's unconscious linguistic patterns and the way they impact the translation are central in this part of the analysis. It employs recurrent features of translation, such as explicitation, simplification, and normalization, and attempts to assess whether domestication has been overused and whether the target language text complies with the nature of "normal" English language. In section 7.1, the translation of style in general and the translator's individual style in particular are investigated in six steps, which provide them with "a useful triangulatory dimension" (p. 188) impossible to derive exclusively from the analysis of TTs and offer information on mainly unconscious translation practices. The findings of the analysis exhibit a stylistic tendency to raise awareness of stylistic peculiarities and adapt the practice of translation accordingly. Section 7.2 accounts for the CDR-grounded assessment of how the stylistic auto-analysis impacts the manner of translating. The linguistic usage has been examined in four parallel corpora in three languages: English, Spanish, and Greek. Despite the

limitations to the findings, the author argues that this approach can be further developed into a methodology for the higher-precision analysis of the literary translators' unconscious stylistic habits. There are actually three methods suggested for this purpose, all of which rely on parallel corpora comprising SLT and the translator's own TLT, which can be processed by electronic tools.

The concluding chapter chiefly refers to the experience exposed in the previous chapters to shed light on the potential of the proposed methodology and to evaluate its strength and weaknesses. The evaluation criteria refer to: i) SLT analysis with a view to setting translation goals; ii) aiding the first draft translation; iii) comparing ST and draft translation; iv) auto-analysis of the translator's style. Realistically, Youdale points to inherent limitations of any new methodology, which, in this particular case, mainly relate to decontextualization and the relevance of quantitative data for the envisaged outcome, which requires sensible human judgement and intervention. Overall, Youdale concludes by expressing confidence in the potential of this emerging study area which is called Computer-Assisted Literary Translation (CALT). The argument supporting this belief is that "a combination of close and distant, or computer-assisted, reading can bring corpus-linguistic (CL) and text-visualisation tools and techniques to bear creatively and productively on the process of literary translation" (p. 216). What is more important here though is related to the advantages that this methodology offers and the promising development for the future. Indeed, such research is valuable also due to its potential to serve the further and dedicated development of CAT tools so as to create such tools that are helpful in literary translation. And it is literary translators, like Youdale himself, who are in a favourable position to evaluate the CAT tools during their practice. So far, there is probably no tool dedicated particularly to literary translation (the methodology herein resorted to three different software tools). Besides, referring to CDR, the main investigation method in this study, Youdale emphasizes that "the methodology only works because it combines both types of reading in a partnership of equals" (p. 222).

In the meantime, MT for literary translation is being heavily worked on, with quite promising results (Matusov 2019). But, by the time MT is able to satisfactorily (if ever) replace human translators, the advantages of CAT tools are obvious and do not affect the translator's voice and creativity. In addition, they can considerably contribute to the retention of the artistic content, the literariness of a work of literature – for, as it is widely acknowledged, dealing with style is of utmost importance in literary translation, being the imprint of any writer's literary personality. The development and adjustment of CAT tools for literary translation depend to a large extent on research such as Youdale's book offers. Thus, the methodology could be introduced, tested, and further developed in a collaborative endeavour and constructive dialogue among academics, researchers, and practitioners in translation studies.

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