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*Quantitative Methods in Corpus-Based Translation
Studies: A Practical Guide to Descriptive Translation
Research*

Michael P. Oakes and Meng Ji (Eds) (2013)

Reviewed by Ana Rojo

Most advocates of descriptive empirical research would agree that knowledge comes from empirical analysis. For empiricists, knowledge or ideas that cannot be proven in practice are only speculative and their work is mainly driven by their desire to turn theoretical speculation into empirical and measurable facts. In the field of translation, corpus-based translation studies have become one of the best representatives of this type of descriptive empirical research, adopting a more experimental and rigorous methodology that can provide data suitable to be analysed with statistical tools. And the task is by no means straightforward. As in linguistics, translation researchers work with concepts, such as language or culture, which are inherently fuzzy and difficult to apprehend and reduce to simple variables. Besides, the translation act involves a re-codification process into a different language that increases the complexity of the task and makes it more difficult to formulate research questions in terms of variables that are susceptible of objective and quantitative study. But despite difficulties, corpus-based translation studies have made successful attempts at moving towards more systematic and quantitative methods of analysis (cf. Baker 1996; Laviosa 2002; Olohan 2004; Beeby *et al.* 2009; Zannetin 2012).

The book reviewed here illustrates precisely the move of translation research in the direction of corpora studies by providing – as the editors themselves

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1 outlined in the preface – ‘a comprehensive guidebook to the essential quanti-
2 tative methods in corpus-based translation studies (CBTS)’ (p. vii). The fore-
3 most motivation for the book springs from a methodological limitation that
4 still constitutes a major hindrance in the advancement of quantitative trans-
5 lation research, namely, the scarce statistical background of scholars mostly
6 trained in linguistic and translation competences. As a consequence, most of
7 the studies carried out in CBTS have been essentially exploratory and the area
8 is still in need of developing adequate quantitative methods of analysis that
9 allow researchers to test theoretical models in the practice. This book is an
10 attempt to palliate this situation by introducing a number of case studies that
11 illustrate the application to translation research of some of the statistical tests
12 used in corpus linguistics.

13 The papers in the volume are classified into four different sections, which
14 mark the progression from theoretical aspects to empirical work. Thus, while
15 the first two sections still focus on some theory-driven aspects of research
16 design, the last two dive into practical work delving into the exploration of
17 some stylistic and lexical features of literary translations. Truth be told, even
18 the most theoretical sections are empirically biased in a worthwhile effort to
19 close the gap between theory and practice.

20 The first section comprises three papers devoted to exploring the inter-
21 play between theoretical aspects and empirical findings. The article by Bar-
22 bara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk provides a method to measure translational
23 equivalence by establishing a text profile of original text and translation based
24 on qualitative (e.g. perceptual, functional, emotional factors) and quantitative
25 criteria (e.g. keyness and collocation patterns). The fact that equivalence is no
26 longer conceived of as a static relationship but as a set of re-conceptualizations
27 of the original scene construal is one of the most valuable contributions of the
28 method proposed. The article by Stefan Gries and Stephanie Wulff describes
29 how theoretical translation models can be tested using the statistical method
30 of regression analysis. For readers who are not familiar with this method, their
31 paper provides a rather technical – but still graspable – and in-depth account
32 of how to compute simple binary logistic regressions and linear regressions
33 with the open source programming language R. One of the main fortes of the
34 paper is the fact that the different types of regressions explained are exempli-
35 fied by using data taken from the INTERSECT corpus of English texts and
36 their translations into French and German. The third article of this section,
37 the paper by Meng Ji, focuses on hypothesis testing by comparing two differ-
38 ent translations of Cervantes’ *Don Quijote* into Chinese. This paper proposes
39 a quantitative approach to explore the various relationships that underlie a
40 translation, namely, the relationship between source text (ST) and target text
41 (TT), between TT and target language (TL) and culture (TC) and between
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1 the style of TT and the diachronic development of TL in general terms. As in
 2 the two previous studies, the application of the method is illustrated with an
 3 empirical investigation, which explores the relationship between ST and TT
 4 by mapping out the distribution of archaisms in the three texts under study.
 5 In the second part of the study, a similar quantitative methodology is used to
 6 establish the relationship between the change in translated language and the
 7 diachronic development of modern Chinese by mapping out the distribution
 8 of idioms in one of the translations analysed and two large-scale modern Chi-
 9 nese corpora.

10 The second section of the book contains three other papers that introduce
 11 essential aspects of corpus statistics, such as the construction of a bilingual
 12 (Spanish and Norwegian) translation corpus (as in the article by Lidun Hare-
 13 ide and Knut Hofland), the different ways of describing a text by quantifying
 14 the frequencies of linguistic features (as in Michael Oakes' paper) and the var-
 15 ious clustering techniques that can be used to group translated texts and inter-
 16 pret information about the similarities detected (as in the paper by George
 17 Ke). Despite the authors' efforts to use examples that illustrate theoretical con-
 18 cepts, the weight on theory is greater than on practice, and the contents dis-
 19 cussed in this section focus, to a higher degree, on design fundamentals and
 20 technicalities of the discipline. Some of the aspects introduced here may in
 21 fact appear rather arid to readers who are not familiar with statistical meth-
 22 ods. But we agree with the authors that they are essential to understanding the
 23 practicalities of corpus statistics and therefore deserve a place in the spotlight.

24 The third part of the book introduces three studies that illustrate the use of
 25 various statistical techniques to explore three key questions in literary trans-
 26 lation: the possibility to discriminate between different translations of the
 27 same original text, the degree of consistency between original text and trans-
 28 lation and the possibility to measure individual translators' styles. The paper
 29 by Michael Oakes and Meng Ji demonstrates how bivariate statistical tests can
 30 be used to discriminate between different translations of the same ST. Much
 31 of the practical value of their work lies in the wide range of statistical tests
 32 applied (seven different tests) and in their application to analyse a suitable
 33 array of features: they use the Student *t* test for matched pairs to compare
 34 translations in terms of sentence length and emotion words, the Student *t* test
 35 for independent samples to compare the rate of occurrence of emotion words
 36 and the chi-squared test to compare multiword phrases. They also apply Pear-
 37 son's *r*, Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient and Wilcoxon's signed ranks
 38 matched pairs test to differentiate between translations in terms of sentence
 39 length, and the Mann Whitney *U* test to compare translations in terms of
 40 type-token ratio. The work by Jon Patton and Fazli Can contributes to explore
 41 the degree to which a translation deviates from the original text by applying
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1 stylometric analysis. They demonstrate how this technique serves to establish
2 the degree of consistency between original text and translation by comparing
3 five style markers: sentence length, most frequent words, word length in text,
4 word length in vocabulary and type-token ratio. The section closes with the
5 article by Jan Rybicki, which addresses another major concern of translator
6 scholars, the question of the translator's invisibility from a quantitative point
7 of view. Rybicki shows how the stylometric distance method known as Bur-
8 row's Delta – generally used for discriminating authorial 'uniqueness' – proves
9 inadequate for differentiating between individual translators' styles. The anal-
10 ysis carried out reveals a consistent tendency of the translations under study to
11 cluster by author and volume rather than by translator. This result has interest-
12 ing implications for translation studies, since it indicates that two translations
13 of the same text into the same language share much more than any other two
14 literary texts written in the same language.

15 The final section of the book comprises four papers that shift the focus
16 of study from literary translation to the analysis of translation lexis in gen-
17 eral. This part also addresses some relevant issues for translation studies from
18 a lexical and terminological point of view, such as the translation of scien-
19 tific terminology, ambiguous terms or derivational affixes. The section opens
20 with the study by Meng Ji, which tests the validity of statistical procedures like
21 hierarchical cluster analysis for the study of historical scientific translations.
22 The analysis identifies relevant patterns in the development of key linguistic
23 features (such as token length and functional particles) in modern Chinese
24 scientific language. The paper by Alexandre Sotov applies a branch of mathe-
25 matics known as game theory to analyse the relationship between translators'
26 use of techniques, such as transcription and explicitation, to render ambigu-
27 ous Vedic terms and source text content. He proposes a series of models of the
28 translation process that serve to illustrate the 'adaptive' nature of translators'
29 behaviour, showing how translators learn to adapt to the source text environ-
30 ment through a large number of trials. The work by Gard Jensen and Barbara
31 McGilivray applies three multivariate techniques (i.e. factor analysis, princi-
32 pal component analysis and correspondence analysis) to investigate whether
33 source language and translators' background can influence affix productivity
34 and use. The analysis reveals that translators' choice in affix use is more con-
35 strained by text type conventions than by source language or translators' back-
36 ground. The section closes with a paper that explores one of the central issues
37 of modern translation studies, namely, the degree to which translated texts
38 differ from non-translated texts in the same language. The paper by Gert De
39 Sutter, Isabelle Delaere and Koen Plevoets combines profile-based correspon-
40 dence analysis and logistic regression modelling in order to determine the
41 impact that different Dutch varieties or *lects* have on the lexical choices made
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1 in translated versus non-translated texts. Their hypothesis predicts that translated
 2 texts contain more formal lexemes than non-translated texts. As previ-
 3 ous work on translation universals has suggested, their results indicate that
 4 translated texts display features that differ significantly from those of non-
 5 translated texts. Nevertheless, and contrary to what was expected, the differ-
 6 ences are dependent on text type and source language.

7 On the whole, the book constitutes a worthy contribution that underlies
 8 the benefits that quantitative corpus linguistic methods can yield to the field of
 9 translation studies. Although from the point of view of translation scholars the
 10 statistical contents described may seem at times rather technical, the authors
 11 manage to keep the interest by suggesting rewarding applications to the anal-
 12 ysis of translated language. Moreover, their endeavour to propose feasible
 13 empirical studies provides valuable information about the type of linguistic
 14 features that are most adequate to explore the different research questions for-
 15 mulated. In this sense, the volume also succeeds in addressing a set of ques-
 16 tions that is representative of some of the pivotal issues in translation studies,
 17 from the controversial notion of equivalence between original and translation
 18 to the role played by individual translator's styles, different source languages,
 19 text type conventions or translation-specific features.

20 One of the reasons why translation scholars turned their backs on linguistics
 21 during the so-called 'cultural turn' of translation studies in the late 1980s was
 22 certainly the speculative nature of most linguistic approaches, which lacked
 23 empirical studies based on real translation data (cf. Snell-Hornby 1988, 2006).
 24 However, nowadays the empirical and quantitative base of corpus linguistics
 25 can finally pay off the experiential deficit of traditional linguistic approaches.
 26 The papers reviewed here give a taste of what might be possible to explore and
 27 achieve by applying corpus linguistic methodologies and statistical methods
 28 to research questions in translation studies. Perhaps, as De Sutter, Delaere and
 29 Plevoets claim in their paper, the time has come for 'translation scholars to
 30 look over the wall and interact with other corpus linguists more frequently' (p.
 31 343). Or even better, translation scholars and corpus linguists can at last work
 32 together to knock down the imaginary wall that has long kept them apart and
 33 take a new turn towards a more rigorous and systematic CBTS.

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13 **Book reviewed**

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