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Using computers in the translation of literary style. Challenges and opportunities

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Translation in Early Modern Japan is a most welcome addition to the study of Japanese history and translation.

Note on contributor

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Using computers in the translation of literary style. Challenges and opportunities, by Roy Youdale, London and New York, Routledge, 2020, 242 pp., £115.00/£36.89 (hardback/e-book), ISBN 9780367131233 / 9780429030345

Using Computers in the Translation of Literary Style. Challenges and Opportunities (2020) by Roy Youdale is a courageous book whose time has come. It is a daring feat because, to the best of my knowledge, it is the first stand-alone volume to combine literary translation and computational approaches in translation studies to date. It is also probably much anticipated by translation scholars flirting with the burgeoning field of digital humanities (DH). However, it is also a very cautious and self-effacing work because of the digital approaches and tools it puts forward, as well as because of the author's choice to remain in his area of expertise, that is, translation studies.

Like many other scholars in the humanities, Roy Youdale – a research associate at the University of Bristol's School of Modern Languages/Translation Studies – sensed the huge potential of the notion of "distant reading", coined for the first time exactly twenty years ago by Moretti (2000). He could not have been more right as the computational analysis of large amounts of humanistic works has been at the core of fields like literary studies for a long time now and has refashioned research practices in meaningful ways. More importantly, Youdale rightfully proposed *combining* traditional close reading with quantitative methods via computer-aided literary analysis, an approach he calls, rather predictably, "close and distant (CDR) reading". The practice is certainly not new in the humanities. J. Berenike Herrmann, for instance, proposed a "mixed-methods digital stylistics" study of Franz Kafka's prose (2017). The approach was more broadly theorized as far back as 2010 by Nicole Hayles, with another notable essay in *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (Hancher 2016).

Departing from the definition of translating literary style as "creative reverse engineering", that is, attempting to create a stylistic equivalent of the effects a text has on its translator as a reader, Youdale's approach promises to offer five advantages over traditional analysis: (1) better lexical choices; (2) numerical testing of a translator's interpretation of the source text's stylistic features; (3) revealing relevant linguistic patterns that a human agent cannot otherwise detect; (4) stylistic comparison between source and target languages; and (5) a

means to investigate a translator's own style. Thus, the author proposes technology both to aid the practice of translation and, although to a lesser extent, to assess literary translations. He also illustrates the CDR approach with a case-study that speaks of Youdale's relentless dedication to what appears to have been a lifetime interest: his own translation of Latin-American Mario Benedetti's novel *Gracias por el fuego* (1965). He does so by arguing convincingly against translators' de-skilling in the process and proving that human agents remain salient even when technologies are greatly involved.

Chapter 1 positions CDR within the field of translation studies and in relationship to the more widely used computer-aided translation and machine translation, aiming to stir much-needed productive debate on the usability and effectiveness of computational approaches in relation to literary texts. It also presents tools which are not usually employed in corpus linguistics (CL), but which could complement those traditionally used in CL. Tools such as Computer-Aided Textual Markup and Analysis allow for a more contextualized examination than concordances, which then facilitates the above-mentioned creative reverse engineering of the translated text. Moreover, tools like Sketch Engine allow grammatical analyses of the ST and TT, as well as fully-searchable parallel corpora inquiries for problematic translation cases, alignment of ST and draft TT, and many other such affordances for a whopping 90 languages. The chapter provides a useful comparative review of available CL software (AntConc, CATMA, ParaConc, Sketch Engine, WordSmith Tools, and Voyant Tools), alongside software for contextualized analysis (visualization).

The provisional model of CDR applied to the process of literary translation presented at the end of Chapter 1 is illustrated with an abundance of examples over the following four stages. The first stage of the model draws on four stylistic features: narratological, lexical, grammatical, and context & cohesion. Then the translator prepares the initial draft by analyzing the noted features, building custom corpora, running CQL queries, using visualizations, as well as "standard" analyses related to corpus summary, word and keyword lists, average sentence length, lexical richness, N-grams, and word clusters. The third stage consists of the initial translation and pattern investigation of the ensuing draft by running the same analyses as the ones run on the ST, while the fourth provides the ST and TT comparison for revision purposes.

Chapter 2 contextualizes Benedetti's novel in terms of structure and style, with particular attention paid to characterization. Chapter 3 positions CDR in the wider sub-field of translation theory and argues for information maximization as a stepping stone in well-informed translation decision making, irrespective of genre, style, historical period, or of any translation policy underlying a translator's agenda. Youdale also offers a comparison of the existing versions of Benedetti's text, for which digital analysis proves to be particularly effective. Chapters 4–7 illustrate in detail the four stages of the CDR model, with special emphasis on the translation of culture and punctuation, on comparing the source text with the draft translation, and, finally, on the (self-)evaluation of the translator's style. The underlying research data and the translation used for the self-analysis are appropriately provided in the Appendixes.

The final section is dedicated to the assessment of the potential and limitations of the methodology. Aiming to broaden computer-assisted literary translation with a set of methods and tools borrowed from the field of literary studies, Youdale is right to argue that combining CL analysis tools, text visualization software, and traditional close reading "might bear creatively and productively on the process of literary translation," (199) with better results during the revision process and, to a smaller extent, for the analysis of translatorial style.

The limitations the author is rightfully aware of are related to a number of stylistic features which are not quantifiable via the tools used during his research – such as humor, irony, or metaphor. Therefore, I feel compelled to say that the volume is only an *introduction* to using computers for the *quantitative* analysis of literary style. The "current" opportunities referred to in

an otherwise very general title are not exactly up-to-date and a sneak peek outside the author's area of expertise would have enriched the proposed quantitative research with things that for now can only be considered limitations. Youdale retains readily available and very simple black-box tools. There is certainly some pedagogical merit in his choice. But, just to give a sense of what is currently available, the Text Visualization Browser resource (http://textvis. lnu.se), cited by the author himself, lists no less than 57 text analysis and visualization tools between 2017 and 2019 only. Furthermore, DH-related references stop somewhere in 2013 (Matthew L. Jockers' *Macroanalysis*), while translation studies references are up to date. DH has seen unprecedented development over the past few years and, while it is understandable that not many translation scholars are well versed in programing languages such as Python and R, making the Voyant Tools your visualization software of choice in 2020 sabotages any such otherwise admirable endeavor. This fact alone suggests that the publication process may have been somewhat strenuous, with hasty revisions and updates before print.

Youdale's book barely scratches the surface of computational approaches to literary text analysis because artificial intelligence develops at an unprecedented speed. But even so, it is a necessary and passionate book that paves the way for further innovative computational methodologies in literary translation, alongside scholars like Claesen (2014), Herrmann (2017), and the many members of the *Computational Stylistic Group* before it. More importantly, it is a contribution that will hopefully make even the most "technology-resistant" translation studies scholar dare align their research methods to the affordances of the twenty-first century.

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