

Towards a Methodology for Gender and Translation Studies: Theory and Practice

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Abstract: This paper aims to propose a corpus-based approach to analyze the reconstruction of gender issues in the process of translation. It will firstly review existing studies combining the corpus-based approach with translation studies. Then a brief introduction of gender and translation studies will be given. By reviewing the three above-mentioned dimensions, it argues that a corpus-based approach should be introduced into gender and translation studies.

Keywords: Corpus; Gender and Translation Studies; Chinese-English Translation

1. Corpus-based translation studies

(1) According to Olohan (2004), a corpus is a collection of texts that are selected following a specific set of criteria and presented in electronic format. Specifically within the field of translation studies, the employment of corpora has now generated a well-established area of research and has already proved to be distinctly fruitful with regard to a number of concerns within the discipline. The existing studies fall into two major categories. The first includes research on the identification of patterns specific to translated text (Baker, 1993; Olohan, 2003; Tirkkonen-Condit, 2004), and the second includes the study of translator's style (Baker, 2000; Saldanha, 2011; Winters, 2007). In what follows, I will review the two categories of studies respectively ^[1].

(2) The studies dealing with the identification of patterns specific to translated text include Baker (1993), Olohan (2003), and Tirkkonen-Condit (2004). Baker (1993) made a breakthrough in translation studies by suggesting a corpus-based approach to research 'translation universals'. In this paper, Baker argued that corpus linguistics provided an adaptable methodology especially for descriptive translation studies.

(3) The studies focusing on translator's style include Baker (2000), Winters (2007), and Saldanha (2011). Baker (2000) made the first attempt to define a methodological framework for analyzing the style in literary translation. By building the translational English corpus (TEC) and analyzing one subset of it, the researcher concluded that it was possible to identify a specific thumb-print or style of a literary translator ^[2].

(4) The review above indicates that, to date, significant advances have been made with regard to the application of corpus-based approach in the area of translation studies. In what follows, I will review the emergence of gender and translation studies as a branch of translation studies.

2. Gender and translation studies

As Flotow (2007) concluded, the course of gender and translation studies could be divided into two paradigms. The

first paradigm is shaped by feminist movement and feminist activism. It reflects the orthodox preconception that there are two binary types of people in every culture which are identified as women and men. Owing to this identification or self-identification, women and men are identified and treated in different ways, with those called women usually at an inferior position. As Flotow argued, to date, most publications discussing gender issues and translation subscribed to this first paradigm.

The second paradigm derives from the relatively new idea that sexual orientation and gender, class distinction, ethnicity, race and other socio-political factors is so diverse that it is impossible to define anyone as primarily male or female. This new paradigm has generated works arguing gender as a discursive and contingent act, a performing activity and a theatrical representation. And when it comes to translation, it could also be argued as “a representation, a performance of another author’s work, and hence, is invested with power” (Flotow, 2007). It is in this sense that an analogy could be drawn between translation studies and gender studies. That is, the performative nature of both gender and translation serves as the interface between the two field of studies in this second paradigm. Here, the gender studies are usually associated with gay and lesbian interests, and the translation studies tend to deal with works in which conventional perceptions about genders are doubted and examined^[3].

3. Introducing a corpus-based approach into gender and translation studies

(1) As Flotow argued, although the two gender paradigms viewed sexual identity as differently-constructed, by now they had generated similar types of work in the field of translation studies. That is to say, so far, the new gender paradigm has not provoked a corresponding new paradigm in translation studies.

That is not to say, however, that there have been no existing research in translation studies discussing the second gender paradigm. The problem is that there is no clear theoretical and methodological framework to guide research in this new area. The problem to be tackled, therefore, is how shall we establish a new paradigm corresponding with the second gender movement? Specifically, how would we decide the naming, the contour, the research methods in this newly-emerging discipline? In what follows, I will try to give some possible solutions based on all I have reviewed above.

(2) Some scholars have already made attempts to solve it. Some maintain that the notion of “feminism” should be downplayed in order to facilitate the exploration of how gender and translation are connected. And the name they suggest to replace “feminist translation studies” is “gender and translation”. Besides, a linguistically based, gender-theory inspired and critical discourse analysis-informed approach is suggested in conducting the so-called gender and translation studies.

(3) But in view of all that has been mentioned so far, I would argue that this “revalorization” is self-contradictory, and their attempts to improve their previous theories are merely being revisionist. To get rid of the binary and therefore radical features in previous studies of gender and translation, words like “women” or “feminist” shall be avoided when we name this new discipline. I suggest that the name of “gender and translation” to be more inclusive and plural, and it also serves as a consistent name with the second gender paradigm. But I would also say that early feminist translation studies could be incorporated as a subcategory of gender and translation^[4].

(4) Besides, as what I have reviewed above, although considerable advances have been made concerning the application of corpus-based approach in the area of translation studies, previous studies mainly focus on translator’s style or identification of patterns specific to translated text. Therefore, I would suggest corpus-based methodology to be employed in gender and translation studies in order to keep away from biased or subjective interpretation of texts, which might be a hotbed of most of the gender issues nowadays.

References

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