Corpus-based Translation Studies: A Quantitative or Qualitative Development?

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Abstract

Baker's (1993) earliest paper on the potential of corpus-based translation studies argued that corpora would provide an empirical basis for descriptive translation studies. Since then corpora have been used principally in the investigation of "universal" (or, more tentatively, "general") features of translation, on the one hand, and in the study of the specific styles of individual translators, on the other. A number of extensive case studies have now been conducted, and advances in corpus-based methodologies have been made, but it is not altogether clear what corpora have added to our understanding of basic theoretical constructs in translation studies. Has the quantitative shift led to a qualitative shift, as Tognini-Bonelli (1996) has argued in the case of linguistics in general? In this paper I aim to investigate whether or not our understanding of aspects of our object of enquiry has shifted in any way after a decade of using corpora in translation studies. Taking such concepts as the unit of translation, equivalence, and the translator's voice as examples, I ask whether exposure to more data, and new ways of looking at this data, have led us to rethink or refine any of these concepts.