

Corpora, Prototypes and Literary Translation

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Project Summary

How can corpora be used to enhance the processes by which we determine which lexical items are prototypical in a language, and to what extent do prototypes vary interlingually? Are such differences reflected in translated literature, and could a knowledge of internal category structure be of benefit to literary translators? My Ph.D. research suggests that these questions may be fruitfully addressed from a corpus linguistic perspective, combining monolingual corpus-based methods with informant-based research to identify prototypes in British English and Standard German, and using these as a lens through which to analyse translation strategies.

Corpora and Prototypes

The poster shows how traditional methods of measuring internal category structure (see Battig & Montague, 1969; Hampton & Gardiner, 1983; Glauer et al., 2007) may be modernised using corpus methodologies. It argues that the content of the British National Corpus and *Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* reveal far more about the frequency of use of lexical items in everyday language and the ideological attitudes and concerns (Anderson & Corbett, 2017, p. 34) of speakers than a study of probability of production could. It demonstrates that corpus-based results may be combined with those of an informant-based study (modelled on Rosch's (1973, 1975) work on goodness-of-example) to create an average measure of prototypicality, contributing to a cognitive framework from within which to analyse translation strategies.

Corpora and Literary Translation

By drawing parallels between the role of literary translators as 'couriers of culture' (Landers, 2001, p. 72), and the corpus linguistic view of language as reflecting and reproducing culture across generations (Laviosa, 2002, p. 8), it is argued that these complementary disciplines may be combined to examine current language in literary texts and their translations from the perspective of the experiences, cultures and worldviews of individual language users.

The poster depicts the role of *Tetrapla* (Woolls, 2008-2015), a software program optimised for the analysis of English-German-English translations, in identifying translation strategies in a custom-made parallel corpus of popular fiction. By referring to prototypicality values assigned to individual lexical items, translation phenomena are discussed from the perspective of prototype theory, which could explain why a *moulting* old feather duster, for example, may be described using prototypical equivalent *zerzaust* (unkempt), rather than lexical equivalent *mausernd* (moulting), in translation. This example gives weight to Aitchison's suggestion that it 'may be more important to replace a prototypical instance with another prototypical

instance rather than with an exact lexical equivalent' (1996, p. 18), and the extent to which this is the case more generally is discussed with reference to further instances.

Implications

Results have the potential to make a contribution to the underexplored area of prototypicality in applied linguistics (Geeraerts, 2010, p. 255), and to facilitate broader discussions of interlingual differences in semantic structure. In practice, findings may equip literary translators with an awareness of prototypicality, which could contribute something of value in terms of cultural knowledge exchange at a time when interest in translated fiction in the UK is at an all-time high (Flood, 2016).

Reference List

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