

# A Corpus-Assisted Study of Translation Criticism and Translation Quality Assessment

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## Abstract

Translation criticism is mainly used to assess the quality and value of translation works, which is different from the traditional descriptive translation research. At present, some researchers often confuse the two, resulting in some corpus-based translation criticism stopping at the descriptive level and hindering the development of translation criticism. In view of this, this paper attempts to clarify the difference between corpus-assisted translation criticism and corpus translation studies, corpus translation criticism, and to explore the research scope of corpus-assisted translation criticism and refine its research design. In addition, the paper explores the development direction of this research paradigm and the limitations due to the constraints of current corpus technology and natural language processing technology. This paper aims to further promote the development of translation criticism in a scientific and systematic direction, so that scholars can more effectively assess translation quality and guide translation practice.

**Keywords:** translation criticism, corpus, translation quality

## 1. Introduction

Translation criticism is the link between translation theory and translation practice (Newmark, 1988: 184), which refers to the historical, comprehensive and systematic observation and analysis of the translation process and translation results based on certain translation standards and translation norms, using scientific methods, and evaluating objectively and impartially the translator's translation ability, translation style, translation concepts, and the quality and value of translation works. In recent years, the research

on translation criticism in the domestic translation community is going deeper, with both holistic thinking and sub-systematic theoretical explorations (e.g., the theory of ecological translation criticism, the theory of translator's behavioural criticism, the theory of corpus translation criticism, etc.), and discusses the actors, goals, functions and boundaries of translation criticism research from the perspective of systematic theory in an attempt to establish a system of translation criticism discourse (Fu Jingmin & Zhang Hong, 2020).

However, translation criticism still has some

problems at present. Firstly, due to the fact that there are many types of translated texts, and the text structures of some source languages and target languages are quite different, while the relevant translation standards and translation norms are not clearly defined, researchers of translation criticism are unable to evaluate translations and translators' behaviour according to the established standards. Secondly, the analysis and evaluation of translation process and translation results are mainly based on critics' intuition and experience, and some researchers even equate descriptive translation research with translation criticism, stopping at describing and interpreting the translation phenomenon without placing it at the level of standards and norms for quality assessment. Thirdly, there are academic and practical differences in translation criticism, which restricts its development in the direction of systematisation (Li Yan & Xiao Weiqing, 2018).

With the development of corpus technology, the corpus linguistics method gradually enters the vision of translation criticism (Xiao Weiqing, 2005), and researchers can present certain translation phenomena with precise data, so as to promote the objectivity and scientificity of translation criticism; however, so far, the number of case studies is not large, and they have not been implemented into the assessment of translation quality of translations, and they are shallow, and they have not considered the overall development of the discipline from the perspective of systematisation. However, so far there are not many case studies, and they have not been well implemented in the assessment of translation quality, and they are superficial, not considering the overall development of the discipline from a systematic perspective, and not giving full play to the guiding effect of translation criticism on translation practice. In addition, although some researchers have proposed that corpus-based translation criticism is a research paradigm and explored its connotation and significance, there has been no in-depth discussion on how corpus linguistics and translation criticism can be systematically combined, nor has there been any use of case studies to illustrate how to achieve the established research goals (Hu Kaibao & Sheng Dandan, 2020).

Against this background, this paper will first clarify what 'corpus-assisted translation

criticism' is and distinguish it from two other concepts that are easily confused with 'corpus-based translation studies' and 'corpus-based critical translation studies'. On this basis, the scope and research design of corpus-assisted translation criticism are discussed. Secondly, the paper will also discuss its future research priorities and reflect on the limitations of this research paradigm due to the current corpus construction and technological reasons. This paper aims to further promote the development of translation criticism in a scientific and systematic direction, so that scholars can more effectively assess translation quality and guide translation practice.

## **2. Corpus-Assisted Translation Criticism and Corpus-Based Translation Studies, Corpus-Based Critical Translation Studies**

Corpus-assisted translation criticism mainly starts from the probabilistic characteristics of language use, adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to statistically and analytically analyse specific linguistic forms in the translation corpus or parallel corpus, and discovers all kinds of regular translation phenomena, from which historical, objective and systematic evaluations of translations are made, which can then be used to guide the translation practice (Wang Guofeng & Zhang Danqi, 2020). The corpus-assisted approach was proposed by Partington (2004) and used in discourse research, and now some researchers do not distinguish it from the corpus-based approach. Some researchers do not distinguish it from corpus-based approaches. The corpus-assisted approach is not a purely computer-assisted approach. The term 'assisted' is intended to emphasise the important role of the researcher in the research design and process. In other words, the researcher plays a decisive role in the selection of the research question, the development of the analysis process, and the interpretation of the analysis results (Liu Ming & Chang Chenguang, 2018).

Corpus Translation Studies and Corpus Translation Criticism, on the other hand, belong to translation research in the traditional sense. By observing a large number of translation facts and based on data statistics, researchers systematically analyse translation phenomena and reveal translation laws. Corpus Translation Studies covers the research contents of traditional translation studies and descriptive translation studies, focuses on common

problems, translation of specific linguistic forms and translator's style studies, and is mainly concerned with the study of the essence of translation and the translation process (Baker, 1993; Wang Kefei, 2006; Hu Kaibao, Zhu Yifan & Li Xiaoqian, 2012). For example, based on corpus, Zhou Jing (2019) explored the cognitive pathway of translators' cultural proprietary items; Gao Qi and Mo Aiping (2020) conducted a translation study of children's literature to investigate the linguistic style of children's literature translation, and so on. Corpus Translation Criticism, on the other hand, conforms to the 'social turn' of translation studies, integrates the related theories of critical discourse analysis and descriptive translation, reveals the influence of ideological factors such as political factors, gender consciousness and national consciousness and the individual consciousness of translators on translation, and pays attention to the role of the subjectivity of the translators in the process of translation (Hu Kaibao, Li Tao & Meng Lingzi, 2018).

Compared with Corpus Translation Studies and Corpus Translation Criticism, Corpus-assisted Translation Criticism takes the evaluation of translator's translation ability, translation style, translation concept, translation process and translation quality as the main research objectives and is orientated to research problems. In the research process, there is no primary or secondary relationship between the theories and methods of Corpus Linguistics and Translation (Criticism) Studies, and the researcher balances the use of the two perspectives to obtain accurate quantitative data from large-scale source language corpora, translation corpora, parallel corpora, or multilingual corpora, to provide a reliable data base for qualitative translation criticism. In the process, the researcher may discover translation phenomena that cannot be observed with intuition and experience and may also overturn research conclusions previously reached with intuition and experience.

### **3. Scope of Research and Research Design of Corpus-Assisted Translation Criticism**

The strengths of corpus-assisted translation criticism can be summarised as the objectivity of the research results, the transparency of the research process and the reproducibility of the research. The organic combination of corpus linguistics and translation criticism can not only promote the objectivity and scientific process of

translation criticism, but also expand the research scope of translation criticism by drawing on some descriptive translation research methods.

The scope of research can broadly include the following five aspects: (1) to use corpus technology to analyse the specific linguistic forms of the source language text corpus and the corresponding translated text corpus, to accurately depict various translation phenomena, and to evaluate the quality and value of the translated text; (2) to speculate on and try to restore the translation process on the basis of accurately depicting the translation phenomena, and to analyse the translation concepts, strategies and translation methods of translators, and to evaluate the translation concepts, translation ability, translation style and translation quality of translators; (3) to analyse the characteristics of the translated language shown in a specific translator's translated work corpus, or to compare the translated work of a specific translator with that of a specific translator; (4) Comparing the corpus of translations of the same translator in different periods, comparing his/her translations in different periods, analysing the changes of his/her translation style and translation philosophy over time, and evaluating the quality and historical value of these translations; (5) Analysing the corpus of translations of different translators in the same source language, comparing the quality and value of their translations, and Explore the similarities and differences in their translation styles and translation concepts.

After defining the research objectives, the researcher needs to arrange reasonable research procedures, determine the research corpus and reference corpus, etc., and use the corpus technology to generate and interpret the data, and evaluate the quality of translation and the reasonableness of the translation process, etc. In addition, the corpus technology is one of the many methods used by the researcher.

In addition, corpus-assisted research is more open, and corpus technology is one of the many methods used by the researcher, who can also use other methods as a supplement, or adopt 'triangulation' to verify the results of the data generated by the corpus (Marchi & Taylor, 2009; Baker & Levon, 2015). For example, questionnaires and interviews with translators, relevant cognitive experiments (eye movement,

EEG, magnetoencephalography experiments, etc.) to investigate the translation process; questionnaires and interviews with readers of the source language and the target language, relevant cognitive experiments to investigate their reading responses; reconstruction of similar corpora and validation using the same research methods and steps; validation using other theoretical perspectives or research methodologies, and so on.

#### **4. The Development Direction of Corpus-Assisted Translation Criticism**

From the above case studies, it can be seen that the corpus-assisted approach provides a solid data foundation for qualitative translation criticism; the 'exhaustive' investigation of certain translation phenomena makes translation criticism 'systematic'. Of course, the 'systematicity' demonstrated in this study only focuses on the translation of a certain key term, which is still only a point for the assessment of translation quality. However, it is only when there is a point that a comprehensive quality assessment can be made; a multi-point analysis will finally form a more comprehensive quality assessment. There is still a lot of room for the development of corpus-assisted translation criticism research, and from the current situation of translation criticism research, we still need to strengthen the construction of the following aspects:

First, there is an urgent need to focus on the development of classification criteria for the translation of various types of texts. In formulating the standards, in addition to the consideration of linguistic equivalence, the differences in the information content and structure of the source and target language texts should be fully taken into account. For example, for Chinese-English tourism translation, the information carrying capacity of the source-language text is usually much larger than that of the target-language text, and if it is translated in full accordance with the information capacity of the source-language text, it will overload the cognition of the target-language readers, and even cause them to give up reading, so the English translation must be considered to a certain degree of abbreviation or rewriting. As for Chinese-English academic translation, the paragraph organisation of some source language texts (especially the earlier humanities and social sciences texts) may be quite different from the common organisation of

the target language 'topic sentence + promotional sentence (+summary sentence)', which requires some adjustments or rewriting.

Secondly, the scope of corpus construction should be expanded to further advocate multi-angle and multi-level translation criticism. In corpus construction, researchers need to follow the established translation standards and norms to screen various types of corpus, in order to select standardised, high-quality source and translation texts, which will provide a linguistic basis and textual basis for subsequent translation research and translation criticism, and a model for subsequent translation practitioners. In the process of research, translation criticism researchers need to analyse from different levels such as words, small sentences, parts of speech, macro-contexts, etc., and continue to introduce theories and methods of linguistics, psychology, sociology and other disciplines, so as to improve the research credibility and validity as much as possible, and to deepen the research of translation criticism continuously.

Finally, the translation styles, translation concepts, translation behaviours and significantly influential translation works of well-known translators, especially those in the field of applied translation, are analysed and evaluated from the perspective of translation criticism. On the one hand, the translation styles, translation concepts, translation behaviours and translation results of important texts of well-known translators are often more exemplary than those of ordinary translators and general translations, so their analysis and evaluation are more exemplary for later translation practitioners, which in turn can promote the formulation of translation standards and translation norms for relevant text types. On the other hand, applied translations are more often project-based, with more anonymity of the translators, and very little research on the translator's style involving specific authors; however, applied translations actually account for the vast majority of the translation market, so such research and evaluation will undoubtedly do more good than harm to improving the quality of applied translations. From the point of view of corpus availability, perhaps we should start with academic translations, build up a corresponding corpus, and carry out co-temporal or ephemeral analyses.



## 5. Conclusion

The corpus-assisted translation criticism research paradigm organically combines quantitative corpus linguistics and qualitative analysis of translation phenomena, representing a new idea and trend of cross-fertilisation between corpus linguistics and translation criticism research. The researcher uses corpus technology to process large-scale corpus and based on the existing linguistic knowledge and translation knowledge, the researcher conducts text-based qualitative analyses of specific translation phenomena and interprets them in the light of the linguistic context and various macro-contextual factors, and evaluates the translator's translation style, translation concept, translation process, and the quality and value of the translator's translations. The researcher is familiar with and masters the theories and methodologies of the two disciplines of corpus linguistics and translation (critical) studies, familiarises himself with the texts in the corpus by all means, makes use of corpus software, draws on all the theories and methods of corpus linguistics, translation (critical) studies and other disciplines that are available to him, and switches between quantitative research findings and qualitative analysis of the translation phenomenon in order to seek for the most desirable analytical path, and carries out multi-angle and in-depth analysis. Path, to conduct multi-angle and deep-level research, with a view to guiding the practice of translation and continuously improving the quality of translators' translations.

Needless to say, there are still some limitations in this research paradigm, but with the development of corpus technology and natural language processing technology, these limitations will gradually disappear. In terms of data processing and statistics, according to the current technical means, vocabulary density, vocabulary richness, average sentence (paragraph) length, commonly used words, rare words, statistics of specific word classes, etc. can be calculated by corpus software; however, some linguistic forms (e.g., terminology, passive sentences, active sentences, compound sentences, etc.) which are not automatically labelled by the corpus are difficult to be processed automatically and need to be labelled manually or semi-manually, which makes it difficult for researchers to deal with large-scale corpora. In addition, linguistic units beyond

words and sentences are difficult to be analysed in a cross-linguistic comparative manner with current technology; corpora (especially large-scale parallel corpora for application translation) are difficult to be obtained; and systematic analyses from point to point are a huge amount of work.

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