

Review Article

# Corpus-Based Studies on Translator's Style: Retrospect and Prospect

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## Abstract

The past 20 years have seen significant advances in the corpus-based studies on translator's style, an important subfield of corpus-based translation studies. However, there is still a lack of a coherent and clear understanding of the research models, objects of study, and methodologies. This paper classifies different research models, reviews the representative achievements of the studies, analyzes the limitations of current research, and provides suggestions for future studies. This paper argues that the existing research methods need to be expanded, the objects should be enriched, and the research model requires further investigation. Studies in the future should expand the current research methodology from primary quantitative studies to semantic, pragmatic and socio-cultural parameters. Greater focus should be placed on analyzing the translator's style as demonstrated by linguistic features, such as language collocation and semantic prosody, as well as the subtext of the translated work, and non-linguistic features, such as the translator's choice of material for translation. Furthermore, attention must be paid to the examination of both the preferred linguistic patterns that the translator uses to reproduce the source text and the recurrence of these patterns across the translator's other translations of works by different authors.

## Keywords

Corpus-based Studies, Translator's Style, Limitations, Prospect

## 1. Introduction

Since Mona Baker first proposed using corpus methods in translation studies in the early 1990s, corpus-based translation studies have made rapid progress, giving rise to a number of research fields, such as corpus-based research on linguistic features of translated texts, translation norms, translator's style, translation teaching, translation cognition, history of translated concepts, etc. The analysis of the style of the translator is an important area of corpus-based translation studies. According to Baker, style is "a kind of thumbprint that is expressed in a range of linguistic as well as non-linguistic features". Specifically, it includes "the translator's choice of the type of material

to translate, his or her consistent use of specific strategies, the use of prefaces or afterwords, footnotes, glossing in the body of the text, etc." [1]. In the past two decades, there have been numerous research publications and fruitful discoveries in corpus-based study on translator's style [1-12]. Nonetheless, there is still a lack of a cohesive and precise understanding regarding the research models, objects of study, and methodologies. To clarify the issue of style in translation studies and advance our understanding of this field, the paper reviews the current research and explores the limitations of previous studies as well as the prospect for further research.

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**Received:** 7 September 2024; **Accepted:** 25 September 2024; **Published:** 10 October 2024



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## 2. Models of Corpus-Based Studies on Translator's Style

Baker introduced the corpus methods to the stylistic studies [1], which marked the beginning of corpus-based research on the translator's style. She advocates using corpus methods to investigate the conscious linguistic behaviour as well as unconscious choices of the translators. Her research concentrates on the examination of translated texts, with less emphasis on the influence of the source text on the translation. Based on Baker's research, Saldanha suggests two perspectives for investigating the translator's style, namely the "source-oriented" perspective and the "target-oriented" perspective [6]. The former, which is often referred to as the study of *translation style*, concentrates on how the translators reproduce the style of the source text. The latter, investigating the translator's consistent and distinctive features across several translations of works by different authors, is the analysis of the *translator's style* advocated by Baker [6].

Similar observations have been made by some researchers. Huang identifies the examination of the translator's style into two categories—the "parallel model" and the "comparable model" [13]. The parallel model emphasizes the analysis of certain linguistic phenomena of the source text in different translated versions, whereas the comparable model examines the distinctions between a translator's overall translation works and similar works by other translators, without taking the source text into account. In general, the source-oriented analysis of the translator's style always starts from identifying stylistic patterns in the source texts, while the target-oriented approach starts from searching for recurring patterns in the target texts. This paper will examine corpus-based studies on the translator's style from these two perspectives.

### 2.1. Target-Oriented Studies of Translator's Style

In her groundbreaking corpus-based research on translator's style, Baker compares the styles of Peter Bush and Peter Clark, using the Translational English Corpus (TEC). The examination of measures like standardized type-token ratio (STTR), average sentence length, and patterning of the reporting verb SAY indicates that Peter Clark's translations exhibit a preference for the use of past tense and direct speech, as well as a lower STTR and average sentence length, which makes his translations "less challenging linguistically" [1]. Based on British National Corpus (BNC) and TEC, Olohan compares the different linguistic habits of two translators in terms of the use of contractions [2]. Saldanha explores the styles of translators Peter Bush and Margaret Jull Costa by investigating the use of loanwords and verbs "say" and "tell" in translations [6].

Also, in accordance with Baker's target-oriented approach, Hou, et al. explore the translator Howard Goldblatt's style by analyzing corpus statistics and emphatic italics in Goldblatt's

translations of Mo Yan's novels. The result shows that the English translations of Goldblatt demonstrate a consistent style and possess the characteristics of original American novels [14].

It can be seen that the aforementioned target-oriented studies on the translator's style are primarily based on the examination of overall textual feature parameters generated by corpus tools as well as the analysis of specific linguistic items. It is important to note that mere differences in linguistic parameters cannot effectively distinguish the styles of different translators, nor can they provide a thorough analysis of the translator's style. What's more, current studies concentrate on the analysis of micro-level aspects of language, including high frequency words, keywords, reporting verbs, italicized words, foreign words, sentence types, etc. Fewer studies investigate the meso-level aspects, such as rhetorical devices, discourse coherence, and narrative styles, and macro-level aspects, such as ideology, social norms, and literary concepts, as well as other categories.

Some scholars reflected on existing research on the translator's style. Huang investigates Howard Goldblatt's style, using Gladys Yang's versions as a comparable corpus [7]. The findings indicate that the statistical measures offered by corpus tools, such as STTR, average sentence length, and the use of reporting verbs are not particularly efficient in distinguishing the styles of the two translators. According to Huang, "the T-type translator's style seems, based on the present corpus statistics, to belong to the translational style or translation universals, that is, to the universal features of the translated language" [7]. Therefore, the author suggests that the corpus-based study of translator's style "should take the source text into account and examine the regularities manifested in the distinctive strategies adopted by the translators in coping with specific source language phenomena in all their translations" [7]. Baker has also emphasized that "any patterns we might identify as distinctive on the basis of examining a translator's output, should next be compared directly with the source text in order to address the question of the potential influence of the source language and/or author style" [1]. Hence, the study of a translator's style should include a thorough examination of the source text.

Apart from the target-oriented studies on the translator's style, there is also a source-oriented perspective, which involves incorporating the source text within the research scope and analyzing various translators' versions of the same source text to identify the distinctive patterns adopted by the translators in handling the phenomena of the source text, thereby defining and summarizing the styles of the translators.

### 2.2. Source-Oriented Studies of Translator's Style

Current studies of the translator's style mainly focus on the characteristics of the lexical and syntactic structures of the translated text, the translation strategies used by the transla-

tors, and the narrative features of the translation, etc.

Firstly, the style of the translator is analyzed by examining the lexical and syntactic patterns in the translated text. Winters examines the translation styles of two German translators by comparing their translations of foreign words, transitive verbs, and modal particles in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned*. It is found that the translation of Orth-Guttmann is characterized by a higher frequency of foreign words and has notable differences in the usage of the particle "wohl" compared to Oeser's translation [3-5]. Mastropierro uses key cluster analysis to investigate two Italian versions of H. P. Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness*. The author observes that the two translators have differences in the use of Italian euphonic -d, locative clitics, and distal demonstratives [9]. Using an English-Chinese parallel corpus of Shakespeare's plays, Hu explores different uses of Chinese *Ba*-construction, *Bei* passives, and *De*-construction in two translations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* [15].

In general, there are many studies that analyze the style of translators by examining the lexical and syntactic structure of target texts [16-20]. Focusing on particular linguistic elements of the translations, such as modals, foreign words, connectives, culture-loaded words, transitive verbs, auxiliaries, pronouns, and sentence patterns, researchers analyze how translators handle these linguistic elements in their translations and subsequently summarize the translation style. Furthermore, these stylistic features are always combined with the translator's individual background as well as the sociocultural contexts of the target language to provide a reasonable explanation for the translator's unique style.

Secondly, the translator's style is investigated through analyzing the translation strategies and methods adopted by translators. Bosseaux compares the stylistic differences between the translators Marguerite Yourcenar and Cécile Wajsbrot by exploring their different treatment of personal pronoun *you* in the translations of Virginia Woolf's work *The Waves*. The study reveals that Yourcenar consistently chooses to use *vous* rather than *tu*, whereas Wajsbrot employs a more balanced distribution of both forms. As a result, Yourcenar's translation is regarded as "more formal and distant", while Wajsbrot's "more intimate and conveys more familiarity between the characters" [21]. Hu examines the translation styles of three translators, Liang Shiqiu, Zhu Shenghao, and Fang Ping, in terms of translating taboo language in Shakespeare's plays. The author notes that Liang Shiqiu and Fang Ping employ the foreignization strategy, whilst Zhu Shenghao favors the domestication strategy. This distinction arises from the translator's translation objectives as well as the translation norms under different historical contexts [15]. Based on an examination of translation methods of culture-specific words, Li compares the translation styles of Bonnie S. McDougall and W. J. F. Jenner in their English translations of Ah Cheng's short story *Qi Wang*. The analysis reveals that McDougall's translation prioritizes literal translation method and empha-

sizes the reproduction of both the aesthetic value and linguistic forms of the cultural material in the source text, demonstrating the translator's stance of spreading and promoting Chinese culture. In contrast, Jenner's translation employs a combination of free translation, literal translation, and transliteration, which indicates the translator's intention to reduce foreign cultural elements in the target text [22].

Thirdly, the style of a translator is also evaluated by analyzing the narrative features of the translation. The translation style can be described by analyzing the translator's treatment of the narrative point of views, narrative structure, and narrative discourse of the source text as well as how he or she constructs these narrative features in the target text. Bosseaux investigates the translation of free indirect discourse in the French versions of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* to analyze the impact of the translator's choices on the transfer of narratological structures [23]. Using Leech's theory of internal deviation, Johnson analyzes the narrative styles in Julian Barnes' novel *The Sense of an Ending* and its Italian translation. The author finds that the translation does not adopt the first-person narration which is dominant in the source text, and the translated text exhibits a higher frequency of time references and discourse markers of explanation [24]. Chou and Liu employ multidimensional analysis to reveal the differences in the sub-registers of the two English versions of *Honglouloumeng*, specifically narration and fictional speech [25].

The above-mentioned source-oriented research on the translator's style enables us to comprehend the translation style exhibited in translated works in relation to the use of lexical and syntactical structures, translation methods, and narrative features. Nevertheless, the characteristics of one translated work do not necessarily reflect the translator's overall style. So, this type of research would be more appropriate to be referred to as the analysis of specific linguistic phenomena in translated text, rather than the investigation of the translator's style. To accomplish the objective, it is necessary to compare the target text with the source text to summarize the translator's typical processing patterns; Meanwhile, we should investigate the translator's other translated works to examine if these patterns are consistent and distinctive across all of his or her translations. In other words, it's important to determine whether these patterns are the translator's habitual linguistic preferences and, if so, to summarise the translator's style, which means taking both source- and target-oriented models into account.

### 2.3. Comprehensive Model of Studies on Translator's Style

Some researchers have adopted a perspective that integrates both the source- and target-oriented models, which can be described as a comprehensive model for studying the style of translators. Li et. al examine Julia Lovell's style in translating Lu Xun's short stories by comparing word count, average

word length, STTR, and the usage of reporting verb *SAY* of Lovell's translation with the source text and three other versions by Wang, Yang, and Lyell. Furthermore, Lovell's translation of Lu Xun's stories is compared with her translation of Zhu Wen's *I Love Dollars: And Other Stories of China* to ascertain if the stylistic features in the translations of Lu Xun's works are her consistent and coherent patterns of choice [26].

In addition, due to the fact that some translators also engage in writing, we can initially conduct a source-oriented analysis of the translations to outline their specific translation style, then compare the translations with their original writings to see if the style is the translator's habitual linguistic behavior. Wang and Li examine the stylistic features of translator Xiao Qian by comparing his Chinese translation of Joyce's *Ulysses* with Jin Di's version and Xiao Qian's original Chinese writings. The analysis of the keyword lists indicates that Xiao includes specific lexical idiosyncrasy into both his writings and translations. Additionally, the syntactic comparison shows that Xiao frequently places adverbial phrases after the main clause in translations compared to his original works, which can be attributed to the influence of the English language [27].

It can be seen that the comprehensive research model addresses the limits of single source- or target-oriented perspectives, offering a more rational and thorough approach to exploring the style of translators.

### 3. Prospect of Corpus-Based Studies on Translator's Style

Corpus-based studies on the translator's style have made significant progress. Some studies investigate the style of translators by examining the coherent patterns in their various translations, while some studies explore the translation style by identifying patterns in the source text and examining how the translator deals with these patterns. Moreover, there is research that integrates the aforementioned two models, analyzing the reproduction of the translator's processing of the linguistic phenomena of the source text in their other translation works. Existing research covers both detailed micro analyses of translated texts, which involve examining corpus parameters and specific lexical and syntactic elements, and macro studies that explore narrative features, translation strategies, etc. Additionally, researchers integrate the stylistic features with the translator's backgrounds and ideological factors, as well as sociocultural contexts that constrain the generation of translated texts to explain the potential motivation for the style, thereby enhancing our understanding of the translator's distinctive and consistent style.

However, there is still potential for improvement in the current corpus-based study on the translator's style.

First and foremost, the research methods need to be expanded. Current studies mostly employ basic quantitative

research methods, with a particular focus on corpus statistics such as STTR, lexical density, word frequency, average word length, sentence pair type, keywords, etc. Although these data can provide some insight into the characteristics of translators, they are often of limited use and cannot precisely reveal the stylistic differences among translators. Research methods in the future should be broadened to semantic, pragmatic, and socio-cultural parameters. As Huang emphasized, "it is imperative to draw on the research methods from related fields such as corpus stylistics, quantitative linguistics, and computational linguistics, and combine quantitative data with qualitative analysis to expand the scope of translation stylistic research" [13]. In order to improve the reliability and accuracy of the research, more focus should be placed on introducing intricate quantitative research methods in the analysis of the translator's style.

Secondly, the content of the research should be further enriched. Current research mainly concentrates on statistical measures, lexical and syntactic patterns, narrative features, and translation strategies and methods of translated works. There have been few studies that analyze subtext and non-linguistic features of the translation. According to Baker, translator's style "is expressed in a range of linguistic – as well as non-linguistic – features", which includes "the choice of the type of material to translate" and "consistent use of specific strategies, including the use of prefaces or afterwords, footnotes, glossing in the body of the text, etc." [1] The subtexts and the translator's choice of material for translation are explicit expressions of the translator's voice. By analysing them we can develop an intuitive comprehension of the translator's style. Additionally, regarding the "linguistic features", there is a lack of research examining language collocation and semantic prosody, which investigates "the types of lexical collocations, the diversity of collocations, and the semantic prosody of specific words in translation" [8]. Through the analysis of lexical collocation and the evaluation of the positive, neutral, or negative semantic prosody formed by the collocation, we can have a better understanding of the linguistic features of the target text and the translator's process of translating.

Lastly, more investigation into the research model is required. Current corpus-based research on the translator's style primarily concentrates on either a single source- or target-oriented perspective, with the former being more prevalent. Few studies adopt a comprehensive model that integrates the two. The study aims to explore the translator's distinctive and recurring style in translation, and when it comes to translation, the source text cannot be neglected. Therefore, research on the style of the translator should examine regular strategies used by the translator to reproduce or reconstruct the patterns of the source text in the translation, and also assess whether the stylistic idiosyncrasies observed in this translation remain consistent across the translator's other translations of works by different authors, so as to confirm that these features are indeed part of his or her consistent style.

Therefore, to conduct corpus-based research on translator's



style, one can utilize corpus tools to extract linguistic parameters of the translated works, including STTR, average word length, average sentence length, lexical density, lexical richness, keywords, and high-frequency words, etc. Subsequently, preliminary information regarding the translator's style can be obtained by comparing these parameters with those of other versions of the same source text or data from a reference corpus. Secondly, based on the understanding of the translated works, one can further choose the parameters that highlight the translator's distinctive linguistic features for analysis, including loan words, culture-loaded words, preferred words, unique sentence structures, creative collocations, semantic prosody, translation strategies used by the translators, as well as narrative point of view and structures inherent to the translated text. Through the comparison of various ways that different translators address these features, one can identify the translator's distinctive style in translation. In addition, it is imperative to investigate the translator's other works to ascertain if the distinctive features are his or her consistent style or merely isolated instances of intervention. Finally, the motivation of translator's style should be explained. The analysis can be incorporated into the framework of intercultural communication, considering the impact of several factors, such as the translator's translation philosophy, translation objectives, cultural background, linguistic and cultural differences between the source and target languages, publication policies, and the socio-cultural contexts and ideologies of the target language.

## 4. Conclusion

Corpus-based studies on the translator's style have made significant advances since the start of this century. However, there is still a need to expand the research methodology, enhance the content, and explore research models. The future research should broaden its scope beyond the primary quantitative studies by incorporating more advanced quantitative research methods in the field of study and putting more emphasis on the analysis of collocation and semantic prosody as well as the subtexts and non-linguistic features of the target texts. Additionally, it's crucial to focus on the translator's preferred behavior to reproduce the stylistic patterns of the source text and how these choices are presented in the translator's other translations. The translator's style can be described by analyzing the features of translated texts. In order to obtain a profound comprehension of the stylistic features, it is necessary to explore the motive for the style, which includes the translator's purposes of translation, his or her ideological and cultural backgrounds, the linguistic and cultural distinctions between the two languages, the reception of the target readers and the sociocultural contexts of the target language.

## Abbreviations

TEC Translational English Corpus

STTR Standardized Type-token Ratio

## Author Contributions

Yi Li is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Funding

This work is supported by a grant from the Social Science Foundation of Beijing, China (Grant No. 20YYC019).

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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