

Guest Editorial Preface

Special Issue on Empirical Translation Studies

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In October, 2020, we launched a call for papers focusing on “New Developments in the Study of Translation Technology” in *The International Journal of Translation, Interpretation, and Applied Linguistics (IJTIAL)*. This was for an issue that was to follow the journal’s first special issue on Computer-Aided Translator Training (CATT) that had been published on July 1, 2020 as Volume 2, Issue 2 shortly after the journal’s inauguration in April, 2019, and it was hoped that it would further advance technology-related studies of translation. However, it later transpired that the submitted articles were mainly on the subject of technology-supported translation studies. Although they could be considered as falling within the scope of technological translation studies in the broadest sense, we took the decision to change the theme of this special issue to Empirical Translation Studies, in order better to reflect the topic of the articles that are included.

Distinct from theoretical laws, empirical scientific laws can be “confirmed directly by empirical observations” (Carnap, 1966: 225). Empirical research “seeks new data, new information derived from the observation of data and from experimental work”, and “seeks evidence which supports or disconfirms hypotheses, or generates new ones” (Williams & Chesterman, 2002: 58). In essence, translation studies is an empirical science, which is based on translation experience (Liu, 2005: 15). Some scholars consider that through the incorporation of other complementary methods, the field of Corpus-Based Translation Studies will “eventually emerge as Empirical Translation Studies” (Sutter, Lefer & Delaere, 2017: 2), while we argue that Empirical Translation Studies can at present best serve as an umbrella term encompassing Corpus-based and Corpus-driven Translation Studies and other branches of translation studies based on the analysis of data. Specifically speaking, Empirical Translation Studies seeks observable translational data to confirm or falsify some proposed theory or to form new hypotheses. The focus of the term lies in “observable data”.

The four articles in this special issue all belong within Empirical Translation Studies. They utilize observable data to explore their respective topics. We divide the four articles into two categories. The first two articles, which discuss the translation of pragmatic texts, make up the first category. The article by Ying Zheng, Chang Peng and Yuanyuan Mu discusses the role of pre-editing under the guidance of controlled language rules in improving the quality of machine translation (MT) output. The authors use the descriptions of certain makes of wireless earphone as their translational data and conduct their pre-editing experiment and comparative study between the outputs with and without pre-editing; they find that their proposed controlled Chinese rules and corresponding pre-editing methods significantly improve the quality of Chinese-to-English MT output. Their findings could be used directly in commercial translation practice. Their pre-editing methods are particularly useful

when translating Chinese source texts into multiple target languages. The contribution by Yukai Hu, Wenjing Zhang and Yike Gao discusses register variation during crisis translation. The authors collect all the English translations of pandemic prevention manuals released by the Global MediXchange for Combating COVID-19 (GMCC), a non-profit program jointly established by the Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation. They use these to build a small-scale corpus of 19,103 tokens for their specific research purpose. Utilizing the theoretical framework of Douglas Biber's Multidimensional Analysis, they compare translations with non-translations according to six dimensions and find these GMCC-released English versions of pandemic prevention control manuals as texts of crisis translation to be rich in features such as explicitation, nominalization, and phenomena relating to the texts' information content. Thus, the authors conclude that learned exposition is closest to crisis translation in terms of register.

The second category also comprises two articles, which use corpus-based approaches to investigate style in literary translation. Yang Liu explores the translator style of two Chinese translations of *Moment in Peking*, a China-themed novel written in English by Lin Yutang (1895-1976). Using DIY parallel and comparable corpora, the author finds that the general corpus statistical data of Zhang Zhenyu's version are similar to those of famous Modern Chinese Novels (MCN) as extracted from the Chinese Corpus Retriever for Linguistic Attributes (CCRL), while the general corpus statistical data of Yu Fei's version are close to those of MCN in CCRL. As for concrete style markers, the author demonstrates different preferences on the part of the two translators in terms of reduplicated words and culture-specific items at the lexical level, and syntactic parallelism and word-order modification at the syntactic level. It turns out that the two translators each manifest their own translator style in macro statistical data and micro style markers. Finally, the article by Bing Zhang analyzes the style of five English versions of *Fushengliuji* (Six Chapters of a Floating Life) written by Chinese intellectual Shen Fu (1763-1832). Selecting the first chapter of *Fushengliuji* as the translational data that forms the basis for comparison, the author performs some general statistical calculations, analyzes culture-specific items and computes the respective overall readability. The research findings mainly suggest that (1) the versions by Graham Sanders and Shirley Black use a richer vocabulary, while that found in Lin Yutang's and Wu Hwei-Ching's versions is smaller; (2) Leonard Pratt & Chiang Su-Hui's version enjoys the highest readability, as it contains many annotations; (3) as for culture-specific items, Lin's and Wu's versions mainly adopt the technique of combining transliteration and literal translation, while those of Pratt and Sanders mostly use annotations. The author concludes that all these differences in style result from the translator's particular socio-cultural background and a consideration of the target text readers' expectations.

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We hope that translation studies scholars will further collaborate with scholars from other related fields and significantly promote technology-related translation studies as well as technology-supported translation studies to the ultimate enrichment of the field of Empirical Translation Studies.

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