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Book Review

Liu, K. (2020). *Corpus-assisted translation teaching: Issues and challenges*. Springer. ISBN 978-981-15-8994-2

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Corpus-assisted translation teaching: Issues and challenges is an insightful attempt at presenting a broad picture of the approaches that are crucially dependent upon the application of corpora in translation teaching. The goal of this interdisciplinary and empirical volume is to introduce “corpora into translation classrooms” (Liu, 2020, p. 1) and “to study the extent to which corpora can have an impact on translation training” (ibid.). Liu Kanglong has the merit to adopt an empirical approach and, as duly noted by Liu (2021), to show that corpora are effective pedagogical tools to improve translation skills and enhance students’ translation competence by resorting to “authentic data collected from a well-designed translation study” (p. 312). Previous studies are mostly conceptual, such as Zanettin et al. (2003) and Zanettin (2012), largely anecdotal and semi-empirical such as Bowker (1998), and sometimes descriptive (Biel, 2017). Moreover, previous research seems to focus on a certain aspect of teaching, instead of adopting a holistic and comprehensive approach. A case in point is Frankenberg-Garcia (2015) who describes the reaction of thirteen MA translation students at the University of Surrey regarding the use and application of corpora to everyday translation. In comparison to these studies, Liu’s book is, to my best knowledge, the first to adopt both translation experiments and surveys to systematically look into students’ translation performance and their reactions to corpus-assisted translation teaching. One of the most important hypotheses in the book is that the use of corpora may contribute to the improvement of translation quality.

Nowadays, the view according to which “translation is taught as a supplement for better understanding of foreign language[s]” (Liu, 2020, p. 1) may still be found in certain translation classrooms; however, many new approaches, such as situated learning, are proposed and supported by numerous scholars.¹ These new approaches have gone far beyond the old debate on translation employed as a tool for language learning, which in the past was known as the grammar-translation method (GTM). The GTM aimed to make the language learner’s task seemingly easier by resorting to made-up sentences

¹ For more information, readers may refer to Vol. 10, Issue 1 of *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*, which was a special issue titled “Situated Learning in Translator and Interpreter Training: Bridging Research and Good Practice.”

illustrating particular grammatical features (Vermees, 2010). Corpus-assisted translation teaching aims to exceed the prescriptive pedagogical methods of the GTM and at the same time attempts to use current technological advances in corpus linguistics in order “to better equip translation students with the necessary skills required in the translation market” (Liu, 2020, p. 3). This is an admirable effort which provides insightful ideas for translation trainers and practitioners alike. Admittedly, empirical studies, especially in the form of monographs, focused on analysing the practical use of corpora in the preparation of translation students are still lacking, especially in the language pair Chinese-English and English-Chinese, and in this, *Corpus-assisted translation teaching: Issues and challenges* certainly fills a gap in the literature.

Over the last three decades, language teaching has resorted to an innovative resource for pedagogical purposes, namely corpora, “since Johns (1986, 1991) first advocated concordancing as a [learning] tool [...] to acquire vocabulary and grammar rules” (Liu, 2020, p. 16). The first corpus-based studies of translated texts back in the 80s “evaluated the quality of translational versus original language and were conceived within the discipline of contrastive linguistics” (Laviosa, 2002, p. 1). Corpus-based research became “fully integrated into translation studies in the 90s” (ibid.) (Baker, 1993, 1995, 1996) and has thus matured expeditiously. However, empirical and longitudinal studies exploring the role of corpora in the translation classroom are still lacking in the field of translation teaching.

The book is divided into seven chapters and nine appendices. Chapter 1 introduces the main theoretical issues and presents the research rationale as well as a description of the research design.

Chapter 2 presents a detailed and in-depth literature review, with a special emphasis on corpus-based translation pedagogy, including Gavioli and Zanettin (1997), Aston (1999), Hunston (2002), Laviosa (2002), Maia (2003), Olohan (2004), and Zanettin (2012). As noted by the author later in the book, corpora have been “more of a research apparatus for researchers than an actual useful teaching tool” (Liu, 2020, p. 47). This introductory chapter presents readers with an overview of the historical development of corpus linguistics and the relationship between corpus linguistics and translation research. Readers who are not familiar with the different types of corpora may learn more about the differences between monolingual, comparable, parallel, *ad hoc* or DIY, and learner corpora.

Chapter 3 describes a parallel corpus, namely the Hong Kong Parallel *cum* Comparable Corpus (HKPCC), which is used both for training and experiments by the author. The total of Chinese characters in this corpus, in all its four sub-corpora, exceeds 100 million tokens. As for the text types, the corpus comprises three major genres, namely the Hansard,² laws, and news. However, the experiments are done using exclusively the news texts, because this text type is relatively easier since it does not involve special or technical knowledge. The Hong Kong News sub-corpus counts nearly 15 million words and almost 27 million Chinese characters (Liu, 2021, p. 42). A corpus of this size seems to be representative and is a good start to teach translation with the aid of corpora. Previous research often used corpus tools designed for research purposes for translation teaching and students have found that they are not user-friendly. Web-based platforms designed specifically for teaching purposes can greatly

² The official report of the debates and discussion of the Legislative Council, the legislative body of Hong Kong, as defined in <https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=hklchansard>

overcome these weaknesses as students do not need to spend too much time learning to use the PC-based corpus software, which is primarily for research rather than teaching purposes.

Chapter 4 discusses the research settings, participants, data collection means, data analysis and description of the syllabus. In particular, the author introduces the methodology used in the study. The author argues that he adopts a mixed method research model. The student participants are third year undergraduates majoring in English business translation with similar education backgrounds. The students' ages range between 18 and 22. The participants are predominantly girls (39 in total). In both classes there are only ten boys in total. To ensure credibility, the author uses triangulation of multiple data collecting methods, including, observations, a focus group, translation experiments and surveys. The researcher also conducted a pretest to ensure that the experimental group and control group are comparable before the teaching experiment took place.

Chapter 5 elaborates the background check survey and provides an analysis of the translation experiments (Chinese to English and English to Chinese). For reasons of space, the results are not presented in this review. Readers may refer to Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 presents the results of the survey on corpus use, which had to be completed by the students at the end of the study. The survey is analysed with quantitative methods, while the author also provides a qualitative analysis of the interview.

Chapter 7 offers a description of the overall findings. The author argues that **“in comparison to conventional reference tools such as dictionaries, the use of parallel corpora [seems to] contribute to better translation quality when student translators are translating from their mother tongue (L1) into a foreign language (L2)”** (ibid., 139, in bold in the original). Also, the author found that the larger the translation unit gets the less effective the parallel corpus becomes.

As mentioned by other scholars in the literature, translation students are the key players in translation teaching settings; however, their views and roles have seldom been studied (Li, 2002, Moratto, 2010, Moratto, 2019), especially in the prescriptive and theoretical models, which tend not to incorporate students' views. *Corpus-assisted translation teaching: Issues and challenges* is, “for the most part, student-oriented in terms of data gathering” (Liu, 2020, p. 4) and this is one of the book's key strengths. The author-researcher employed the mixed research method in education (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) to understand better how corpora can be used in translation teaching. The three main forms of data collection are surveys, translation experiments and focus groups. The book dedicates plenty of space to the theories underlying the study and to the methodology adopted. Liu Kanglong devotes considerable energy to explaining methodology, as well as analysing the data obtained in this study. This may be a useful guide for other researchers.

Admittedly, this book presents a study in which the two experiments (C-E and E-C translation tests) are analysed and discussed in great detail. What is interesting to notice is that students in the translation test from Chinese into English made more improvements than in the test from English into Chinese. Both tests affirmed the hypothesis that the translation quality improves thanks to corpus; however, there is a discrepancy in the effect between the two types of tests. This concept is reiterated in Chapter 6 where the author claims that “as far as translation direction is concerned, most students agreed that the parallel corpus is more useful for translating out of the mother tongue rather than into

it” (ibid., p. 135). It would have been interesting for the author to formulate more than one hypothesis as to why this seems to be the case. A preliminary hypothesis is indeed formulated in the last chapter, where the author argues that corpora benefit translators more in the encoding than in the decoding process. If one were to further explicate this, it could very well be that while corpus-assisted translation teaching may benefit translation into one’s L2 because it is perceived as a way to learn new collocations and set phrases, the absorption of the same semantic and pragmatic content may be slower and less efficient, or even uncalled for, when translating into one’s L1; this is due to the fact that most semantic units have already been internalised in one’s L1, thus making it more difficult and challenging to substitute them with other, potentially better or more appropriate, equivalents.

While the volume’s vigorous coverage of theoretical and empirical aspects of corpus-based pedagogy is impressive, the study is limited in terms of generalisability, because the corpus and the translation tests used in this book are both focused on non-literary texts. Therefore, the results probably cannot be applied to all text types. Second, the prescriptive nature of parallel corpora (in the sense that only parallel texts are included whereas adaptive and creative translations which often contain non-parallel texts are excluded) runs the risk of strengthening the prescriptive side of translation teaching, which seems slightly contradictory to the initial premise according to which the book is grounded in descriptive translation studies (DTS). One cannot deny, though, that translation, as it is envisaged in numerous university curricula, is supposed to have some prescriptive elements. Methodologically, the study can also improve in several ways. For example, only the news genre was used by the student participants in the translation experiments despite the multi-genre design of the parallel corpus. The student participants are mainly students from the Chinese mainland while the corpus contains mostly parallel texts in the Hong Kong context. Moreover, the corpus-assisted teaching syllabus is not detailed and systematic enough. The author’s most substantial accomplishment is having conducted a student-centred experimental study on the usefulness, or lack thereof, of corpus-assisted translation teaching in traditional classroom settings. Notwithstanding the possible limitations of the study presented in this book, the author’s merit is the attempt to unfold and emphasize the potential advantages of how corpora can be used for pedagogical purposes in Chinese-English and English-Chinese translation teaching and to show that corpora are effective pedagogical tools to improve translation skills and enhance students’ translation competence by resorting to authentic data.³

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³ For reasons of space, we cannot further elaborate on more specific applications of the study to translator training. Readers may refer to the book for in-depth discussions.

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