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Review of Roy Youdale's *Using Computers in the Translation of Literary Style: Challenges and Opportunities*

LOLA SUNDIN
Monash University

Youdale, Roy. *Using Computers in the Translation of Literary Style: Challenges and Opportunities*. Routledge, 2020.

Roy Youdale's *Using Computers in the Translation of Literary Style: Challenges and Opportunities* is a thought-provoking and insightful exploration of the crossroads of technology and literary translation. In an age when machine translation is advancing rapidly, this book investigates the unique complexities of maintaining the nuances and style of literature through automated means.

Three years have passed since the publication of this book, and during this timeframe, we have witnessed remarkable advancements in technology. These transformative developments underscore the increasing relevance and significance of embracing automated translation within the realm of literary translation. It is noteworthy that the field of literary translation has traditionally demonstrated a certain resistance to change, especially when compared with other domains of translation. However, the swift evolution of technology now emphasizes the need to continuously adapt to changing landscapes, even in this traditionally conservative sector.

The book, which contains an introduction and eight chapters, begins with a comprehensive overview of the history and development of machine translation, providing a solid foundation for readers, whether they are experts in the field or newcomers seeking to understand the landscape. Youdale's writing is clear and accessible, making the complex subject matter approachable to a broad audience. The author presents a fundamental question that arises in the translation of literary style – the concept of style itself – which after providing definitions by other scholars, the author himself defines as “the distinctive linguistic characteristics of a particular text, which comprise both conscious and unconscious elements of language use” (3). Subsequently, the introduction delves into an exploration of the pros and cons of the practice of close reading. It is from this discussion that the concept of distant reading is introduced. Shortly thereafter, a detailed presentation highlights the advantages of adopting a combined close and distant reading (CDR) approach, which is described as “a convenient way of referring to the methodological approach to the translation of literary style” (7). With this innovative approach in mind, the author then proceeds to explain the criteria used in selecting the case study – his own translation of Mario Benedetti's *Gracias por el fuego* – which comprises the majority of the book.

One of the key strengths of this book is its balanced examination of both challenges and opportunities presented by using computers in literary translation. Youdale highlights the potential benefits of automation, including increased efficiency and the ability to translate vast amounts of text in relatively short periods. At the same time, he addresses the limitations and intricacies of preserving literary style, which is often deeply rooted in cultural and historical contexts. Youdale's thorough exploration of these challenges is commendable. He delves into the difficulties of maintaining the cultural and contextual elements of literature, as well as the subtleties of authorial voice and tone, in which shifts may result in mistranslations. The author also offers valuable insights into the potential for machine learning and artificial intelligence to improve over time and bridge some of these gaps.

Throughout the book, Youdale provides various examples of problems and challenges posed by machine translation to illustrate his points effectively. He identifies issues associated with aligning sentence lengths in machine translation (131-132) (though it seems important to exercise awareness regarding the limitation of length as a criterion or indicator for gauging accuracy or equivalence, especially when comparing texts in unrelated languages); as well as relating to grammatical norms and structure which may be difficult for machine translation to identify, because these are “internalised and often language-specific” (144). These offer readers a tangible understanding of the subject matter when using computers in literary translation, and also, the importance of continuing to use human judgement in the production of literary translations.

While the book's content is exceptional, it would benefit from more in-depth technical explanations for readers with a background in machine translation or computational linguistics (even though this is what allows newcomers to the field to seamlessly gain an understanding of the topic). Additionally, a more extensive exploration of the ethical and cultural implications of machine translation in literature would have been a valuable addition. As an increasing number of professions integrate artificial intelligence into their tasks, it becomes especially important to uphold principles of safety and regulation, and the language sector is no exception.

In conclusion, *Using Computers in the Translation of Literary Style: Challenges and Opportunities* by Roy Youdale is a well-researched and informative exploration of an increasingly relevant topic. It offers a balanced view of the potential benefits and obstacles in applying computer technology to the delicate art of literary translation. This book is a valuable resource for scholars, translators, and anyone interested in the evolving landscape of computer-assisted translation in the world of literature. Youdale's work serves as a crucial step in understanding the complexities and possibilities that lie ahead in this ever-evolving field.