

Reliability of Observational Data: Towards a Theory of Comparative Stylistics

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1.1 One of the most essential contributions to a theory of translation ought to come from a theory of comparative stylistics. If it were not for the terminological paradoxon, we could call comparative stylistics a "grammar of style," determining the universal parameters of style, which have their values set differently in different languages. The following is offered as an illustration of the type of problem a theory of comparative stylistics would have to deal with.

The question as to which of the linguistic structures of the target language qualify as translations of an original relates to their linguistic adequacy as much as to their equivalence with the original. Linguistic adequacy is determined by the grammaticality of the forms chosen and by their stylistic adequacy, which comprises the adequate register and stylistic level as well as the stylistic quality of the forms used in the translation. While the assertion of grammaticality should not present too many problems, at least not for the native speaker, the decision about stylistic adequacy is mostly considered a matter of individual likings and dislikings, lacking any objectivity. If we are to justify the differences between an original and its translation that go beyond the grammatical differences between source and target language, the arguments we can offer will in most cases not be any more specific than "it sounds better." And, what may be worse, not knowing how to justify such differences, many translators will stick to the linguistic structure of the original much more than necessary. Some will even consider any additional difference as illegitimate, and vehemently defend their