Using Forensic Stylistics and Corpus Analysis for Detecting and Investigating Plagiarism in Literary Retranslation: The Plagiarism Controversy of John Payne and Sir Richard Burton

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This research examines the issue of plagiarism and the theft of the original text when translating works into the same language by more than one translator. The paper proposes an analytical approach that utilizes computer-based stylistics and forensic techniques to detect and investigate plagiarism. The method involves analyzing translation samples and comparing them with the original works to identify instances of plagiarism. A case study involving the translation of a work by the British scholar Richard Burton is presented, demonstrating the effectiveness of the proposed approach in detecting plagiarism.

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ABSTRACT

Scholarly attempts to uncover plagiarism in literary retranslations have for the most part adopted a manual comparison of segments (Wright, 1904; Leighton, 1994). Recent computerized studies related to investigating plagiarism in retranslation also present methodological issues related to data scalability or to the methodological approach (Turell 2004, Şahin et al. 2015). The present paper discusses the difficulties of tracing plagiarism between retranslations and proposes a corpus-based target-text-oriented approach for detecting and investigating plagiarism in retranslation by blending methods from forensic stylistics and corpus linguistics. In this paper, I argue that investigating plagiarism in retranslation in this way highlights the potential of this method of analysis to reveal something of the linguistic ‘fingerprint’ of the original translator and so trace it in the plagiarized version(s). To this end, I reinvestigate a classical retranslation plagiarism controversy involving John Payne and Sir Richard Burton over the English retranslations of One Thousand and One Nights, as a case study. The combination of corpus qualitative and quantitative analyses used provided pieces of evidence that Burton had palatized in his translation. The findings of the case study suggest the potential viability of the proposed method in investigating and revealing plagiarism in retranslation, especially in cases where plagiarizers replace words with their synonyms to hide their plagiaristic act.

KEYWORDS: Arabian Nights, orientalism, corpus-based analysis, N-gram analysis, retranslation, translation plagiarism, plagiarism in retranslation, John Payne, Sir Richard Burton