**Translation technology as a tool in comparative literature research:
A case study on the usefulness and limitations of machine translation
applied to previously untranslated literary texts**

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Abstract

The paper intends to investigate the extent to which translation technology may be reliable in the translation of literary works when the researcher does not know the source language. Researchers in comparative literature who focus on texts in different languages may find themselves in situations where a literary work has not been translated in any of the languages they know. In such cases, the work would be effectively inaccessible, and commissioning a translation would be too expensive. The discussion is based on a case study concerning the translation of a nineteenth-century tragedy from German into English. It will describe the methodology applied in the study, the choice of the appropriate machine translation tool, an analysis of the raw output according to types of comprehensibility issues and the post-editing process required to render the target text adequate for the needs of the Comparative Literature researcher. The conclusion sums up the challenges and limitations of current machine translation tools specifically in the genre of drama, with comments on how the findings may be pertinent or not in the case of other literary genres.

Biography

Professor Sergio PORTELLI is a Professor at the University of Malta, where he is Head of the Department of Translation, Terminology & Interpreting Studies at the Faculty of Arts. He teaches Terminology, Computer-Aided Translation, Intercultural Communication, and Italian-Maltese/English translation. Most of his publications are in the fields of Literary Translation, Comparative Literature, Italian Studies and Cultural History. He is also a literary translator and a former translator of the European Parliament.