

A ‘Golden’ Opportunity? Towards of digital-informed literary translation criticism model

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Abstract

The celebrated Chinese author 張愛玲 Eileen Chang (1920–1995) is known for her chiselled style full of disillusioned irony, for the strength of her writing and for the depth of her symbolic imagery (Kam 2012; Lee 1999; Zhang 2003). One can wonder to which extent the complexity of her prose has been rendered into French.

In this paper, we will demonstrate how digital humanities and the combination of machine learning technologies and automatic language processing tools can contribute to refining literary translation criticism. These reflections are part of a project to develop a new model for this purpose.

This study will focus for one short story by Eileen Chang translated by Emmanuelle Péchenart: 《金鎖記》 *Jin Suoji* (*La Cangue d’or* in French). Through a comparison with general monolingual Chinese corpora (available on SketchEngine), we will extract keywords and frequency lists from the original text to lexically characterize Eileen Chang’s style and verify the claims made by critics. Representative extracts will then be selected and submitted to automatic translation tools (GoogleTranslate, DeepL, 百度翻譯 Baidu Fanyi, ChatGPT), to see whether they could give thought-provoking counterproposals compared to the published French version.

These analyses will help us determine how Péchenart’s ‘voice’ as a translator has potentially altered Chang’s one as an author. Applications for teaching post-editing of literary texts will also be dealt with.

Biography

Professor Kevin HENRY is a professional translator in humanities and an associate professor at the Faculty of Translation and Interpretation-School of International Interpreters of the University of Mons (Belgium), where he is heading the ChinEAsT (Chinese and East Asian Languages, Translation and Cultures) laboratory. A specialist in translation criticism, discourse analysis and Chinese phraseology, he devotes his research to the critical history of literary exchanges between China and the French-speaking world, to the deconstruction of Chinese political discourse across languages and to the treatment of Chinese idioms in translation.