Foreword

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BENJAMINS

Corpus Use
and Translating

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TRANSLATION

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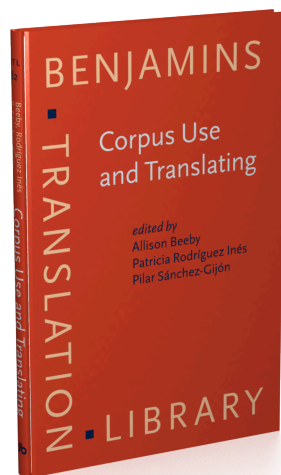
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The *Corpus Use and Learning to Translate* workshops were born out of two beliefs. First, that language corpora, if selected and used appropriately, are able to provide more abundant and reliable information to the translator than traditional reference tools, such as dictionaries and "parallel texts". Second, as previous work in foreign language teaching had suggested, that corpora are able to offer learning environments which empower learners and increase their autonomy, allowing them to develop their knowledge and awareness while at the same time providing them with a range of opportunities for using the language – amongst which, for engaging in translation.

Much of the discussion within CULT has focussed on the potential of different types of corpora – from large established monolingual mixed reference corpora to small do-it-yourself specialised monolingual or comparable ones, from parallel corpora of original texts and their official translations to corpora of learner translations. A lot of work has gone into developing better ways of constructing appropriate corpora, and better tools to interrogate them within a "translator's workbench". At the same time, there has been continual discussion of how we can develop translators' ability to exploit corpora effectively.

The difficulty of using corpora is that they rarely provide immediate answers to a translator's problems. Unlike translation memory or machine translation systems, they do not instantly present a preferred candidate for the user to accept, modify or reject. Corpus data has to be interpreted and evaluated comparatively to reach conclusions, and this requires not only technical skill (perhaps the least of the problems, since learners' computational competence is often greater than their teachers'), but above all critical thought. Training would-be translators to use corpora goes hand in hand with educating them to think about the translation process and the learning process, developing their sensitivity as to how they can use corpora in these processes.

It is difficult to deny that corpus use is anti-economic in the short term, and this is probably why, while increasingly taught in translation schools, it has not

yet become widely established among professional translators. Regardless of its potential to improve translation quality and to provide a fruitful learning environment, corpus consultation remains time-consuming, and corpus construction enormously more so. One part of the problem is whether and how we can improve the efficiency of corpus use for the translator, facilitating both consultation and construction, and do so without compromising its quality as a translating and learning tool. A second part of the problem, however, concerns attitude. Not all translators, be they learners or professionals, appreciate that corpus use may have a medium- and long-term payoff which can override what they often perceive as short-term disadvantages. Following on from the papers from the first two workshops (Bernardini & Zanettin 2000; Zanettin et al. 2003), this third CULT volume offers further contributions for a debate which is far from being concluded.

References

Bernardini, S. & F. Zanettin (eds.) (2000). *I corpora nella didattica della traduzione – Corpus Use and Learning to Translate*. Bologna: Cooperativa Libraria Universitaria Editrice.

Zanettin, F., S. Bernardini & D. Stewart (eds.) (2003). *Corpora in Translator Education*. Manchester: St Jerome.