A corpus-based study of translator style: Oeser’s and Orth-Guttmann’s German translations of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Beautiful and Damned


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Abstract

The present thesis comprises a corpus-based study of translator style, comparing two German translations of the novel The Beautiful and Damned by Francis Scott Fitzgerald. The translations, by Hans-Christian Oeser and Renate Orth-Guttmann, were both published in 1998. The study isolates linguistic features in which the individual styles of the translators manifest themselves on the textual level and investigates the influence these microlevel linguistic choices have on the macrolevel of the novel. An electronic corpus was compiled, comprising The Beautiful and Damned and its two translations, both entitled Die Schönen und Verdammten. An initial data-driven exploration of the corpus suggested that the use of modal particles could be a feature of translator style. A quantitative analysis was carried out to discover potential patterns of the use of modal particles by the translators, and the results showed that while both translators use modal particles to the extent and in the general context one would expect, they differ considerably in their choice and use of individual modal particles. The subsequent qualitative analysis takes a pragmatic approach, and discusses selected modal particles according to their communicative function, their role in speech and thought acts and in the narrative, and in context of the respective narrative points of view. The thesis then investigates how the translators’ use of modal particles changes the narrative point of view and how that affects the macrostructure of the novel, confirming the hypothesis that one translator focuses on the characters while the other presents a societal study. Finally it is argued that the use of modal particles is in line with other strategies used by the two translators, such as their use of loan words and speech-act report verbs.
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