

# Analysing Translated Allusions: Exploring a Statistical Approach

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*Tässä artikkelissa testataan, mitä tilastollinen analyysi voi kertoa alluusioiden käännösstrategioista ja niihin vaikuttavista tekijöistä. Ritva Leppihalmeen (1994a, 1997a) vastaanottotutkimusta lukuun ottamatta alluusioiden kääntämistä on tarkasteltu lähinnä tapaustutkimuksissa. Artikkelini pyrkiikin laajentamaan tutkimusmenetelmiä analysoimalla tilastollisesti osaa väitöskirjani (2010) aineistosta eli alluusioiden käännöksistä Dorothy L. Sayersin 1940- ja 1980-luvuilla suomennetuissa salapolisiromaaneissa. Analysoin, ilmeneekö käännösstrategioiden jakaumassa tilastollisesti merkitseviä eroja käännösajankohdan, alluusioiden tuttuuden tai pintamerkityksen koherenttiuden perusteella. Tulokset tukevat väitöskirjan laadullista analyysia osittain: eri aikakausien suomennosten käännösstrategioissa on eroja ja tuttuja alluusioita on säilytetty useammin kuin vieraita. Eroja on tosin myös yksittäisten käännösten välillä, ja tuttuuden jaottelua sekä koherenttiuden ja tuttuuden yhteyksiä on selvitettävä tarkemmin. Tilastollisella analyysillä näyttää kuitenkin olevan annettavaa käännettyjen alluusioiden tutkimukselle.*

**Keywords:** allusion, intertextuality, literary translation, statistical analysis

## 1 Introduction

An allusion is an intertextual reference that evokes another text (the referent) and conveys implicit meanings to readers who can recognise the referent and interpret the alluding text in relation to it (Ruokonen 2010: 30–33; based on e.g. Ben-Porat 1976, Perri 1978, Pasco 1994, Leppihalme 1997a, Irwin 2001). As the referents can be culture-specific, allusions often present a challenge to translators and, thus, a subject of interest to translation researchers.

Research on the translation of allusions has nevertheless been mainly limited to qualitative case studies as will be illustrated in Section 2 below. The present article explores how an example of such qualitative data, the allusions in Dorothy L. Sayers' detective novels translated into Finnish in the 1940s and the 1980s (Ruokonen 2010), can be reorganised for the purposes of a statistical analysis (Section 3) and whether the initial results of such an analysis indicate that the statistical approach is worth pursuing (Section 4). More specifically, I will look at whether there are statistically significant differences between

- the translation strategies used in the 1940s and the 1980s;
- the translation strategies for unfamiliar vs. familiar allusions; and
- the translation strategies for coherent vs. incoherent allusions.

## **2 Previous Research**

The most influential empirical research on the translation of allusions has been conducted by Ritva Leppihalme (1994a, 1994b, 1996, 1997a, 1997b). Her major contributions (1994a, 1997a) include a descriptive analysis of how allusions were translated into Finnish in seven novels by different translators, mostly published in the 1980s, and an extensive reader-response study with a total of 135 respondents and 17 excerpts with translated allusions. Leppihalme's main finding was that allusions were frequently retained as such or translated literally (1997a: 90, 96). According to her reader-response studies, such retentive strategies often failed to convey similar meanings to target-text (TT) readers as to source-text (ST) readers, and could result in puzzling, incoherent 'culture bumps' (*ibid.*: 170–172). Consequently, Leppihalme recommended using a broader range of different strategies (*ibid.*: 124), such as replacing the allusion by a phrase conveying its meaning or by recreating the (stylistic) impact of the allusion by other means.

Leppihalme's work is both empirically sound and very accessible and has inspired a considerable number of master's theses (e.g. Tuominen 2002, Bertell 2014) and case studies (e.g. Dastjerdi & Sahebbonar 2008; Salehi 2013). Among these, Tiina Tuominen's (2002) reader-response study is particularly noteworthy, with its 18 respondents and 7 long excerpts from two Finnish translations of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones* novels. Tuominen's results were partly similar to Leppihalme's: retaining unfamiliar allusions could give rise to negative or uncertain reactions (Tuominen 2002: 58, 80, 86).

Nevertheless, Leppihalme's take on allusions is limited in the sense that she focuses on ST allusions that have a fairly straightforward and stable 'consensus meaning', or a fairly 'collective and culture-specific type of understanding among the ST readership' (1997a: 23). This is also the meaning that the translator should try to convey to TT readers (*ibid.*: 138); if TT readers are puzzled by unfamiliar allusions or interpret them in a way 'deviating from the response norm of ST readers' (*ibid.*: 139), this is considered a problematic culture bump. In contrast, literary research emphasises that allusions often have complex functions that emerge in a dialogue between the alluding text and the referent text (e.g. Ben-Porat 1976, Pasco 1994, Magedanz 2006).

Apart from the research (inspired) by Leppihalme, few new theoretical or methodological openings have emerged. Searches in the Translation Studies Bibliography (TSB) and the BITRA Bibliography of Interpreting and Translation with the term 'allusion' in February 2016 did produce a large number of hits, but a closer look at the titles and abstracts revealed that the translation of allusions or intertextuality was a major aspect in a rather small number of articles (TSB 10, BITRA 30, excluding Leppihalme's and the present author's work). Otherwise, the word was often used in a broader sense, to indicate any implied reference. The contributions focusing on allusions were mostly quali-

tative case studies exploring the translation of allusions in a particular context such as audiovisual translation (e.g. Salehi 2013) or in the works of a specific author (e.g. Davies 2008; Seago 2014), with little to contribute in terms of theory or research methods. Exceptions include articles by Christiane Nord (1990), who discusses how to analyse and translate quotations and allusions from a functionalist perspective, and by Eva M. Almazán García (2001), who applies Relevance Theory to the decision-making in translating allusions.

My dissertation (2010), which has provided the data for the present article, was also essentially a qualitative case study. The material consisted of over five hundred allusions in five detective novels by Dorothy L. Sayers (1893–1957) and their Finnish translations (see Table 1 in Section 3 below for details). The aim was to discover how the allusions had been translated into Finnish in the 1940s and the 1980s: which translation strategies the translators in the two periods had used and what kinds of interpretive possibilities the translations offered to TT readers. The analysis of translation strategies was based on what was essentially a streamlined version of Leppihalme's classification (see Ruokonen 2010: 140ff. and Section 3 below). For the interpretive possibilities I developed a classification of my own to describe them more fully (see Ruokonen 2010: 90–116), instead of assuming that unfamiliar allusions retained in translation would automatically become culture bumps. I also classified the ST allusions on the basis of their cultural and textual characteristics (see Ruokonen 2010: 58–86 and Section 3 below) and analysed the links between these characteristics and translation strategies in order to discover whether unfamiliar ST allusions had been translated with modifying strategies more frequently (or familiar allusions retained) and whether ST allusions that were incoherent in their text-context had been modified more often than allusions that made sense even without their referents.

It bears repeating that the method in my dissertation was essentially qualitative although at the time I described it as partly quantitative (Ruokonen 2010: 202). The foundation of the analysis was a close examination of individual allusions in their text-context even though the results were partly illustrated through frequencies of translation strategies (in the entire translation, for unfamiliar allusions etc.).

The results suggested, among other things, that the translations from the 1940s were more modifying than the later ones, with even extensive omissions of several pages and paragraphs (Ruokonen 2010: 227–234), and that familiar allusions were frequently retained (*ibid.*: 219–220). Interestingly, unfamiliar allusions could also be retained as long as they made sense in their immediate text-context (*ibid.*: 220–22).

There were also possible links between the results and the working conditions of the translators in the two periods. The three translators of the 1940s probably all worked as part-time translators, and their schedules must have been hurried: one turned out up to

eight translated novels per year (Ruokonen 2010: 181; 2011: 81–82). In contrast, in the 1980s three out of the four Sayers translators translated full-time (Ruokonen 2010: 195; 2011: 87). The omissions and modifications in the 1940s may also be linked to the rationing of paper and to contemporary views of detective novels as simple puzzles that the reader should be able to enjoy without being distracted by complex allusions adding depth to the characterisation and themes (Ruokonen 2010: 172–174; 2011: 84–85).

On the whole, the way Dorothy L. Sayers’ novels have been translated should offer a fairly representative look into how detective novels were translated into Finnish in the 1940s and the 1980s. Along with the large number of allusions in the novels and the changing translators, this representativeness makes it relevant to test whether the data can be analysed quantitatively.

### 3 Material and Method

The material of my dissertation is shown in its entirety in Table 1 below (combined from Ruokonen 2010: 46; 2011: 79). The epigraphs, previously analysed separately, will be excluded from the quantitative analysis here. The full data thus include 499 ST allusions, excluding epigraphs; the present study covers the three translations shaded in the table, or 193 ST allusions.

**Table 1:** Source texts and translations studied

ST	ST allusions (n)	1940s’ TT	1980s’ TT
<b>WB=Whose Body?</b> (1923)	91	<b>WB1944=</b> <i>Kuka ja mistä?</i> Tr. ‘Niilo Lavio’ (pseudonym for Unto Varjonen; see Ruokonen 2010: 181)	<b>WB1986=</b> <i>Kuka ja mistä?</i> Tr. Kristiina Rikman.
<b>CW=Clouds of Witness</b> (1926)	102 (epigraphs excluded)	<b>CW1948=</b> <i>Kuolema keskiyöllä.</i> Tr. Oiva Talvitie	–
<i>Strong Poison</i> (1930)	108	–	<i>Myrkkyä.</i> Tr. Paavo Lehtonen
<i>The Five Red Herrings</i> (1931)	71	–	<i>Yksi kuudesta.</i> Tr. Hilikka Pekkanen
<i>The Nine Tailors</i> (1934)	127 (epigraphs excluded)	<i>Kolmesti kuollut</i> Tr. ‘V.Vankkoja’ <sup>1</sup>	<i>Kuolema kirkkomaalla.</i> Tr. Annika Eräpuro

These three translations were selected because they include one retranslation (WB1986) where allusions were mostly translated by retentive strategies, which was common in

<sup>1</sup>Most likely a pseudonym (Ruokonen 2010: 181), but the translator has not been identified.

the 1980s' translations. It will be of interest to see if there is a statistical difference between a retranslation and an earlier translation. CW1948 was included to see if statistical differences would emerge between two translations from the same period.

The classifications used in the present, quantitative analysis are the same as in the qualitative analysis of my dissertation, but they are partly applied differently. To start with the translation strategies, I originally used the seven-category classification described below (Ruokonen 2010: 155–156), developed on the basis of Leppihalme (1997a), Nord (1990) and Gambier (2001). The abbreviations PN and KP come from Leppihalme: PN stands for 'proper name' and KP for 'key phrase': a (modified) quotation or a paraphrase of the passage alluded to (Leppihalme 1997a: 10; Ruokonen 2010: 67–68). The examples are from my material. The present quantitative analysis applies the same classification but focuses on the division into **retentive** and **modifying** strategies, which signal the degree to which the translation departs from the source text.

#### A) Retentive strategies

##### 1) Replication

- 1a) KP retained untranslated, in exactly the same form as in the ST: *et iterum venturus est*
- 1b) PN retained in exactly the same form as in the ST: *Sherlock Holmes – Sherlock Holmes*
- 1c) Adaptive replication: minor phonological, orthographic and morphologic adaptations not attributable to an existing translation, such as *Cerberus* rendered in Finnish as *Cerberos* instead of the conventional *Kerberos*.
- 2) Minimum change: a literal translation not based on an existing translation; unlike in Leppihalme's definition (1997a: 84), however, the translation may convey stylistic and formal markers, as in the following example:

**ST** He's tough, sir, tough, is old Joey Bagstock, tough and devilishly sly (WB: 44)

**TT** Sitkeä se vanha Joey Bagstock on, sir, sitkeä ja kiero kuin piru (WB1986: 103)

'Tough that old Joey Bagstock is, sir, tough and twisted as the devil.'  
The existing translation of this reference to Charles Dickens' *Dombey and Son* uses the expressions *itsepintainen* ('persistent') and *hiton ovela* ('damned cunning'; Dickens/Tuomikoski 1925 [1991]: 104, 146)

- 3) Existing translation: the TT passage resembles an existing TL translation, either exactly or with minor modifications: *Pilgrim's Progress – Kristityn vaellus*

#### B) Modifying strategies

- 4) Adding guidance: the ST allusion is retained but complemented by an explanation about its meaning, source, etc. For example, the Greek hero *Theseus* may be easier to identify if accompanied by a reference to *labyrinth*, as in *kuin mikäkin Theseus labyrintissä* (CW1948: 155).
- 5) Reducing guidance: the ST allusion is retained, but hints about its meaning, introductory phrases, stylistic markers, etc., are reduced or omitted as in the following example:

**ST** Here a great deal of insistence - - produced - -, finally, the American Ambassador and a Royal Personage while the meat was still in their mouths. (CW: 228)

**TT** - - hänen itsepäisyytensä sai esille - - vihdoinkin Amerikan suurlähettilään ja erään kuninkaallisen henkilön, joilla oli vielä ruoka suussa. (CW1948: 177)

'his stubbornness brought about the appearances of - - finally the American ambassador and a royal person who still had food in their mouths'

The ST passage, which echoes Psalm 78:30–31, is stylistically different from its text-context. The Finnish, in contrast, uses a more conventional expression (not an existing translation).

- 6) Replacement: the ST allusion is replaced with another allusion (see Example 2 below), a proverb, an idiom or a metaphor, or with a non-allusive phrase: *Sherlocking* may simply become *sala-poliisintehtävät*, 'one's work as a detective' (WB: 27; WB1944: 51)
- 7) Omission: the ST allusion is omitted.

As mentioned in Section 2 above, the ST allusions in my dissertation were also classified on the basis of their cultural familiarity, coherence and stylistic markedness. Of these, the present study covers cultural familiarity and coherence, which according to the previous qualitative analysis seem to have the most influence on the translators' decisions (Ruokonen 2010: 219–226).

**Familiarity** was determined on the basis of the publication history of the referent text in Finnish and/or the centrality of the character or the passage evoked (Ruokonen 2010: 62–65). This produced the following three-fold division:

- 1) **Probably familiar:** the referent is a central character in a referent text that has been published in Finnish at least five times. The character may even be mentioned in contemporary schoolbooks: *Sherlock Holmes, Ulysses, Samson*;
- 2) **Possibly familiar:** the referent or the referent text is available in Finnish, but has been published less frequently or is a less central character: *Manon Lescaut, Sir James Barrie*;
- 3) **Probably unfamiliar:** the referent text is not available in Finnish at all, or the referent is a minor character or a passage that has not become proverbial: *A plague on both your houses, Hear the tolling of the bells*.

**Coherence** was linked to the degree to which an allusion makes sense in its text-context for readers unfamiliar with its referent but with reasonable language skills and knowledge about the world (Ruokonen 2010: 78–80). This classification also includes three categories:

- 1) **Coherent:** Meaning intelligible in a literal sense even without the referent. When characters are lost in moors and hear the 'long, terrible shriek' of a horse drowning in a bog, the meaning is quite clear even if the reader does not link the scene to Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Ruokonen 2010: 84);
- 2) **Partly coherent:** Literal meaning not quite clear, but the allusion makes sense on a metaphorical level or the text-context offers hints about its meaning. When readers already know that someone is a private detective, a comment such as 'You'll be helping the police, I expect - - I was forgetting you had such a reputation as a Sherlock' should make some sense even for readers unfamiliar with Arthur Conan Doyle's detective (Ruokonen 2010: 82);
- 3) **Incoherent:** Literal meaning unclear, metaphorical meaning makes little sense, as when A asks B in a pub if B has heard about a murder and B responds in the words of *Macbeth*: 'Put on your nightgown, look not so pale' (Ruokonen 2010: 80-81).

In reality, both familiarity and coherence are probably closer to continuums and experienced differently by individual readers. Thus, the categories can only describe the *potential* that allusions hold for readers in a particular context – but exploring this potential is necessary if we are to get some grasp of what the readers of the past could make of the allusions. Arguably, the continuums could also be divided up differently, but as the three-fold categorisations above had been applied in the qualitative analysis of my dissertation, it made sense to use them in the quantitative analysis as well, rather than

reduce the continuums to their extremes without testing if the three-fold division can produce statistically significant differences.

For the quantitative analysis, the data required some reorganisation as some of the allusions consisted of two parts, typically a proper name and a key phrase, having different degrees of familiarity. In Example 1 below, at least educated Finnish readers in the 1940s could be assumed to have some idea of who Shakespeare was, as many of his plays had been translated into Finnish and he appeared in contemporary schoolbooks (Ruokonen 2010: 65), but the modified reference to *Julius Caesar* (III, i) was probably unrecognisable to all except the keenest readers of Shakespeare.

- (1) The nerve of men like Quangle & Hamper has *not its fellow in the universe*, to adopt the expression of the great *Shakespeare*. (CW: 198; italics MR)

In my dissertation, the two parts of such an allusion could be classified separately (the PN as probably familiar, the KP as probably unfamiliar) because in the qualitative analysis the allusion could be considered in its entirety. For the quantitative analysis, such allusions were re-classified into one category according to their more familiar part; it seems logical that even partial familiarity would affect the translators' decisions.

Similarly, some allusions consisting of two parts had been translated by a combination of translation strategies, as in Example 2 below, where a probably unfamiliar reference to *Pilgrim's Progress* has been partly replaced by a Biblical proverb, but the source has been retained (in the context, this works out well; see Ruokonen 2010: 236–237):

- (2) ST Sir Reuben was as well loved home as he was hated abroad - - like 'a saint abroad and a devil at home' - only the other way on, reminding one of the *Pilgrim's Progress*." (WB: 23)  
TT Sir Reubenia rakastettiin kotona yhtä hartaasti kuin vihattiin kodin ulkopuolella - - samaan tapaan kuin sanotaan että 'kukaan ei ole profeetta omalla maallaan' - päinvastoin vain, tulee aivan *Kristityn vaellus* mieleen (WB1986: 55)  
'Sir Reuben was loved at home as devotedly as he was hated outside home - - in the same way it is said that "nobody is a prophet in his own country" - only in the opposite sense, reminding one of *Pilgrim's Progress*.'

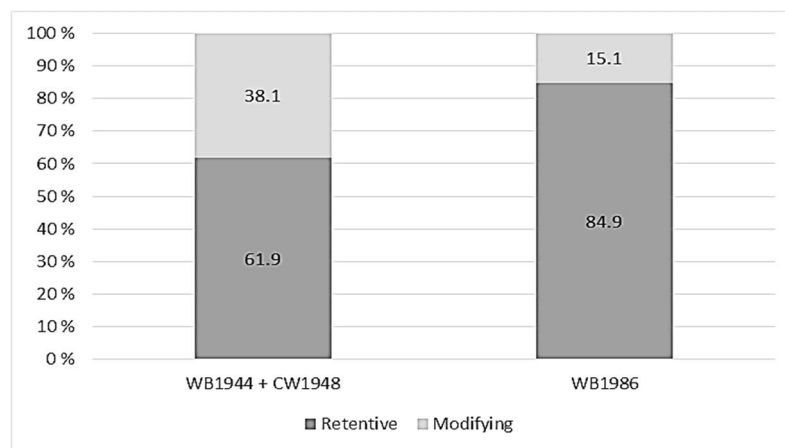
For the quantitative analysis here, such allusions were described as either retentive or modifying, depending on the degree of variation from the source text. In this case, although the source of the allusion has been retained, the replacement of *saint abroad* is such a major change that classifying the whole as a modifying strategy seems justified.

The 19 allusions omitted in CW1948 as part of extensive passages (from one paragraph to several pages) were excluded from the quantitative analysis here. In the qualitative analysis of the dissertation, such cases could be considered separately, but here they might have biased the results.

The data were then tested for statistical significances between the distributions of retentive and modifying translation strategies used 1) in the 1940s and the 1980s; 2) for translating probably unfamiliar, possibly familiar vs. probably familiar allusions; and 3) for translating coherent, partly coherent vs. incoherent allusions. The Chi Square ( $\chi^2$ ) values were calculated by the author using Microsoft Excel 2013 (function: CHITEST). The threshold for statistical significance was set at the conventional  $\chi^2 < .05$ , with values below  $\chi^2 < .001$  considered statistically highly significant. Dr Jukka Mäkisalo of the University of Eastern Finland, an expert in statistics, was consulted during the analysis, but the responsibility for any possible errors rests with the author.

#### 4 Results

As far as the **distribution of translation strategies** is concerned, the results support those of the qualitative analysis in my dissertation. When the strategies of the two translations from the 1940s are compared to WB1986, modifying strategies are more frequent in the former group as shown in Figure 1 below. The difference is statistically highly significant ( $\chi^2 < .001$ ).



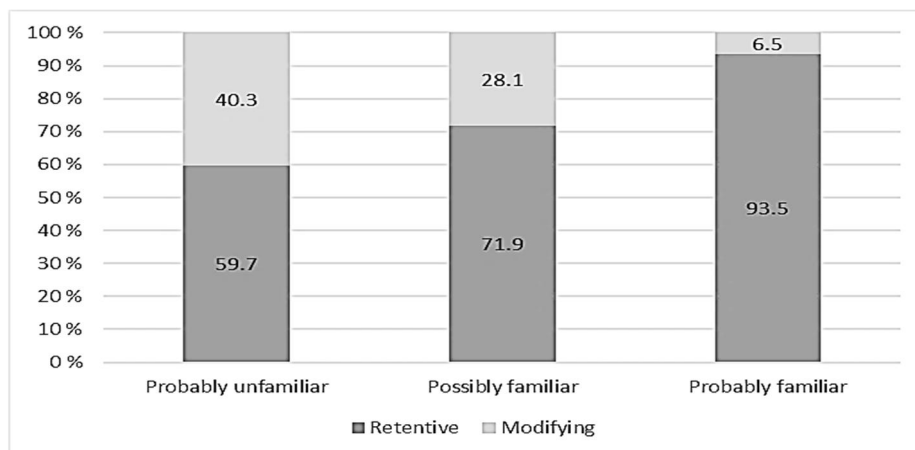
**Figure 1:** Percentages of retentive vs. modifying strategies in the translations analysed

However, there is also a highly significant difference between the translation strategies used in CW1948 and WB1944 ( $\chi^2 = .007$ ), with CW1948 being the more modifying of the two: even after the exclusion of extensive omissions, 47.8% of the strategies in CW1948 are modifying, as opposed to the 27.9% in WB1944. This indicates that there may also be variation among translations from the same period of time.

The quantitative results concerning **familiarity** partly support the qualitative ones. As shown in Figure 2 below, the degree of retentive strategies increases among allusions that are possibly familiar and again among allusions that are probably familiar (when all the three translations are considered as a group). The difference between probably unfamiliar and probably familiar allusions is statistically significant ( $\chi^2 < .001$ ), as is the



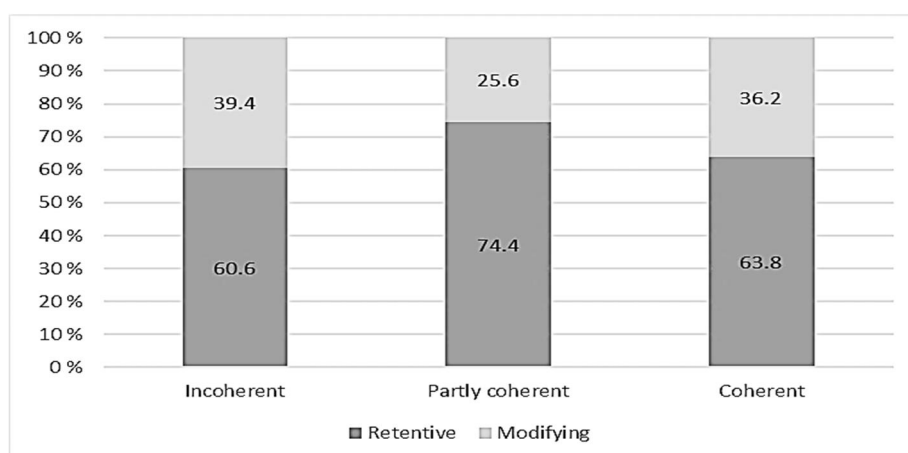
difference between possibly vs. probably familiar allusions ( $\chi^2=.004$ ). However, the difference between unfamiliar and possibly familiar allusions falls short of being significant ( $\chi^2=.082$ ).



**Figure 2:** Percentages of retentive vs. modifying strategies used to translate allusions with different degrees of cultural familiarity

This may suggest some fluidity between the categories of familiarity (cf. Section 3 above). For the purposes of a future quantitative analysis, the categories of possibly and probably familiar allusions could perhaps be merged; when such a two-fold division was tested in the data, unfamiliar allusions were modified more frequently than familiar ones ( $\chi^2<.001$ ).

It may also be the case that familiarity is more strongly linked to **coherence** than the qualitative results of my dissertation suggested. At least coherence on its own does not produce statistically significant differences in the distribution of translation strategies, as Figure 3 below illustrates.



**Figure 3:** Percentages of retentive vs. modifying strategies used to translate allusions with different degrees of coherence

As we can see, in terms of percentages, modifying strategies are almost equally frequent in the incoherent and coherent categories, although one would expect incoherent allusions to be modified more frequently than coherent ones. Moreover, the differences between the translation strategies used for three different categories of coherence are not statistically significant, the lowest chi value being .089. Then again, the qualitative results of my dissertation did not suggest that incoherence would affect translators' choices on its own but when occurring with unfamiliarity (Ruokonen 2010: 219, 224). Thus, more data are needed to check particularly whether incoherent and unfamiliar allusions have been translated differently from coherent and unfamiliar ones. This will require reorganising the full data of the dissertation.

## **5 Discussion**

On the whole, the quantitative results partly support the qualitative findings of the dissertation. It appears that the rough division of translation strategies into retentive and modifying ones can bring to light statistically significant differences between translations. As this division is fairly low-effort to establish, particularly if taken into account from the outset and in contrast to other, more elaborate classifications, it could be used to complement other methods in investigating differences among translations from different periods of time or genres, perhaps even individual translators' styles (cf. Pekkanen 2010), contributing to our understanding of the history of translation and translators.

The results also call for expanding the analysis to the remaining material of my dissertation to clarify the links between familiarity, coherence and translation strategies and to investigate whether familiarity could be analysed in a more relevant manner in terms of binary categories, as these partial data seem to suggest. It would be particularly important to gather more evidence on whether allusions classified as familiar by the researcher have been frequently retained by the translators in the data. If this is the case, it would suggest that it is possible to systematically assess the familiarity of allusions in a historical context in a way that is relevant to translators, which in turn would bring us closer to understanding the experiences of translators and readers in the past. While the method used in my dissertation for assessing familiarity is probably more appropriate for case studies than for quantitative analysis due to the time and effort it requires, it could be expanded from allusions to intertextuality, realia or similar phenomena.

There are also caveats concerning the analysis method. In the future, more attention may need to be paid to the influence of the individual source texts: the percentage of unfamiliar allusions in each ST varies, from roughly 60 to 70% (Ruokonen 2010: 205). It also needs to be acknowledged that while the time and effort required by the statistical analysis was reasonable for the present article, it was preceded by hundreds of hours of work extending over several years: identifying allusions, tracking down referents,

classifying ST allusions and describing translation strategies. The best way to use the statistical methods described here would thus probably be to take them into account from the beginning and to work in cooperation with other researchers and on data analysed from other perspectives as well. This would both keep the workload manageable and ensure that the statistical results can be viewed in context.

## 6 Conclusion

This article set out to explore a statistical approach to analysing translated allusions by using material from a previous, qualitative study (Ruokonen 2010). After some reorganisation, the data were analysed to discover whether there were statistically significant differences between the translations from the different periods or based on the familiarity or coherence of the ST allusions.

The results did show significant differences between the translations from the different periods. Foreign vs. familiar allusions had also been translated differently, although statistical differences only emerged in terms of binary categories rather than the original three-fold classification, which calls for further investigation. The links between familiarity and coherence also require further analysis, as does the fact that there were statistically significant differences between individual translations from the same period.

Although further testing on the full data of the previous study is thus required, a statistical analysis of translated allusions may be worth pursuing as a method that can complement previous, mainly qualitative research. Applications to similar phenomena, such as intertextual references, realia or culture-specific items, could also be explored.

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