

Susan Bassnett's Philosophy in *Translation Studies*: A Corpus-based Analysis

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Abstract: As a well-recognized scholar in translation study, Susan Bassnett is known for her proposal of cultural translation which claims a turn from linguistically textual analysis to more sociologically cultural study in translation discipline. Susan Bassnett's philosophy in translation studies, however, is far beyond the proposal of cultural turn. Based on a corpus analysis on the text of *Translation Studies*, one of Susan's popular scholarly books, this study is expected to identify more data proofs of Susan's contributions, especially those ideas of translation history, translating process and translators' subjectivity, which will bring significant inspirations for those in translation explorations.

Keywords: Susan Bassnett, Translation Studies, Corpus-based Study, Translation Ideas, Philosophy.

1. Introduction

Translation studies, along with its establishment as a separate discipline since James S. Holmes' publication of *The Name and Nature of Translation Studies* in 1972, has achieved great advancement in many fields; especially in terms of linguistic analysis of textual equivalence, cultural analysis of contextual adaption, and sociological analysis of poetics, ideology and manipulation. During the developmental and progressive history of translation studies, Susan Bassnett stands among those iconic figures who have made significant contributions to this discipline and therefore, deserves to be fully explored.

Susan Bassnett is well recognized and often reviewed for her proposal and also promotion of culture translation, together with André Lefevere. But her philosophy of translation studies is more than so-called comparative literature and cultural translation. Her ideas included in her publication of the *Translation Studies* show a general but comprehensive system of her ideas in translation history, translating practice and translators' subjectivity, a full and close examination of which will be beneficial to all those who are searching on their road to the pursuit of truth and nature of translation studies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Book Review

As a productive scholar in comparative literature and translation studies, Susan Bassnett has issued many literatures in transdisciplinary studies as world literature, multilingual culture, and cross-cultural translation, including monographic publications and multi-authorial editions. Susan's role in English scholarship has aroused many interests, the majority of which are book reviews. Elrud (2010), for example, together with Santiago (2010) and Rosa (2016), has brought us some general reviews about Susan's interdisciplinary ideas that embodied in some of her books.

According to Elrud (2010), Bassnett is a specialist in translation theory and practice who sees translations as 'rewritings' or a "force for literary renewal and innovation",

affirms the vital role that translation plays in literary history and innovation and gives provocative and seminal reflections about 'dominant' and 'emergent' cultures. Susan creates the idea of 'plurivocality' and advocates the study in fields of history of translation and rereading but denies assigning them the status of a discipline.

By a short review on Susan's co-edition of *The Translator as Writer* with Peter Bush (2006), Santiago (2010) recalls their claims of the central interpretive role of the translator, especially that role of translators in literary translations like dramas, fictions and poetries. Santiago (2010) has highlighted the attentions on translators and translators' interventions, creations and subjectivities that Susan and Peter have paid in their publications.

Rosa (2016) has also found Susan's focus on the centrality of translators and of translations, which, just as he quotes, "is at the heart of (today's) global communication. What Susan has exposed, according to Rosa (2016), is first the fallacy of translation as an unproblematic simple process of mere linguistic transfer and second, most importantly, the misunderstanding of the idea of translational equivalence as sameness. And even more than that, Rosa (2016) identifies that Susan has also introduced a central notion of translation as rewriting which, to some extent, has acknowledged the central role of the often-disparaged translator and therefore is significant for further translation studies.

2.2. Face-to-face Interview

Different from the book reviews which tend to have a reflection of Susan's achievements in her scholarly publications, some other literature gives narratives and also discussions on Susan's concepts from perspectives of face-to-face interviews; among which, Zhang (2016) is a good example. Starting from the field of comparative literature, Zhang (2016) shows how Susan Bassnett develops her ideas about comparative literature, expounds her opinions about the cultural turn in translation studies, gives her responds to accusations of Eurocentrism and explains the global directions that comparative literature is going as well as the specific fields and demands that comparative literature study is expected to involve in and to ask for.

Similar to the interdisciplinarity that Zhang (2016) has highlighted about Susan's scholarly views, another paper published in the *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* in 2014 presents an interview with Susan Bassnett and stresses her opinions of cross-disciplinary studies. This time, what Susan Bassnett advocates is the relationship between other disciplines and translation studies, rather than comparative literature. Susan (2014) pays a special effort on the relationship between translation studies and cultural studies, especially on that of Adaption Studies and American studies. This piece of interview *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, Susan Bassnett (2014), is one of the few articles that focus on her writings in the book of *Translation Studies* and gives specific information of its publication. According to Susan (2014) early version of *Translation Studies* was not an "Anglocentric" form of thinking but more a "European" form of thinking from the outside of the Anglophone world.

2.3. Summary

Apparently, most of the scholarship about Susan Bassnett, however; mainly falls into the category of either book reviews or face-to-face interviews and offers some fragments rather than a full panorama of Susan's philosophy in translation studies. Those articles from Santiago (2010), Rosa (2016), and Zhang (2016), for example, though having their brief discussion from certain fields or perspectives on Susan's ideas of comparative literature and translation studies have their generally based their assumptions on personal readings and/or subjective judgements. The investigation on Susan Bassnett's scholarly achievements, therefore, calls for a detailed exploration from a large quantity of corpus with a solid support of data proof.

While the rise of corpus linguistics as a new paradigm, just as Baker (2019) claims, is available and also of great influence on the empirical study of translation, particularly with the respect to its theoretical and descriptive analysis, which indicates the practicability of using corpus-based methodology in exploring Susan's philosophy of translation studies.

3. Methodology

3.1. Text Selection

Translation Studies is a leading translation monograph produced by Susan Bassnett which tracks the historical developments of translation, examines its ways of advancement from cross-disciplinary points of view. The written book of Susan's *Translation Studies* is one of the top

recommendations for translation study students and researchers, occupies a high priority in the reading lists for both translation specialists and literary professionals and has been reprinted for many times in many years (from 1980 to 2013) with at least four editions.

There are totally four different versions of publications for Susan's *Translation Studies*, namely the 1st version in 1980, the 2nd edition in 1991, the 3rd version in 2002 and 2005 and the 4th edition in 2013. The text selected in this study is the 3rd edition of Susan's *Translation Studies* published by Taylor & Francis in 2005 in a form of electronic publication.

3.2. Corpus Design

With a rough conduct of textual digitalisation, Susan's written text of *Translation Studies* has been divided into 14 parts or files with its 3 main chapters as the 3 major sections and the rest parts of the book like its introduction, preface, note, index and bibliography having been separated as the other 11 individual files; the design of which is expected to be helpful for a close investigation on the main contents and specific ideas of Susan Bassnett's philosophy in translation and literature studies in terms of different aspects.

So, the corpus designed in this study is a complex corpus with a sub-corpus of full text of the whole book and 4 other sub-corpora of main contents of this book of *Translation Studies* (Susan, 2005).

3.3. Corpus Instrument

#LancsBox 6.0 is introduced in this analysis as a major device for corpus retrieval and also statistics analysis. By the individual use or a combination use of such tools as KWIC, Graphcoll, Whelk, Words, Ngrams, Text and Wizard, #LancsBox not only offers a powerful search at different levels of corpus annotation but also generates a comparative concordance of items, a full list of words, statistic figures of frequency, different dispersions between texts, graphic images of collocation and detailed report of research as well (Baker & McEnery, 2015; Wang & Pan, 2020). The multifunction of #LancsBox 6.0 is first very helpful for the accomplishment of data collection in the self-designed corpus and then, available to the statistical comparison in data analysis or discussion.

4. Data Collection

4.1. An Overview of Susan's *Translation Studies*

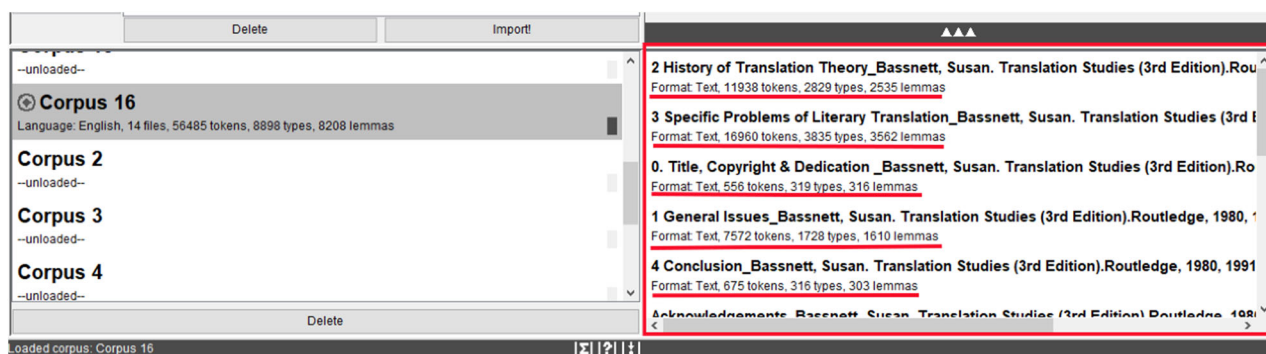


Figure 1. General Information about the Specially Designed Corpus

Table 1. The Structure of Susan’s *Translation Studies*: An Overview

| Section | Tokens | Types | Lemmas |
|---|--------|-------|--------|
| Title, Copyright & Dedication | 556 | 319 | 316 |
| Contents | 132 | 100 | 72 |
| General Editor’s Preface | 538 | 304 | 298 |
| Acknowledgements | 203 | 119 | 115 |
| Preface to the 3 rd Edition | 3582 | 1109 | 1017 |
| Introduction | 3459 | 1056 | 978 |
| Chapter 1 General Issues | 7572 | 1728 | 1610 |
| Chapter 2 History of Translation Theory | 11938 | 2829 | 2535 |
| Chapter 3 Specific Problems of Literary Translation | 16960 | 3835 | 3562 |
| Conclusion | 675 | 316 | 303 |
| Notes | 3002 | 1160 | 1061 |
| Select Bibliography | 5204 | 1640 | 1610 |
| Appendix | 689 | 451 | 446 |
| Index | 1975 | 900 | 801 |

An overview of the corpus shows a general description of Susan’s scholarly writing of *Translation Studies* which contains about 56485 tokens, 8898 types and 8208 lemmas and is specifically constituted with 3 main chapters along with pages of title, copyright, dedication, contents, general editor’s preface, acknowledgements, preface to edition, introduction, conclusion, notes, select bibliography, appendix and index.

The specific structure about Susan’s writing of her *Translation Studies* is shown as Figure 1 above with its detailed information can be drawn as Table 1, which gives us an overall image of Susan’s publication of the *Translation Studies*.

4.2. Central Issues of *Translation Studies*

A sub-corpus constituted with the text of the first chapter of the *Translation Studies* will be loaded in #LancsBox for a data collection of its KWIC concordance, keywords list and n-gram collocations, the details of which are expected to reveal the specific information of the general issues involved in Susan’s translation studies.

Take the use of KWIC concordance for example. In light of the textual theme of central issues in the sub-corpus, those items of “issue”, “problem” or more broadly “NEGATION” will be retrieved in the search engine of #LancsBox and thus, they can generate the corresponding data to show the focus as

well as omissions of Susan’s translation studies in the results.

When to explore the keyword list in sub-corpus of central issues, such categories of word classes filtered by lemma will demonstrate a clear range of items for the description of thematic concepts, topic ideas and scholarly concerns of translation studies that launched by Susan Bassnett.

4.3. Scholarly Ideas in *Translation Studies*

Similar to the previous collection of textual data about central issues in translation studies, the functions of KWIC, Words and Ngrams, etc., are fully performed in collecting data of scholarly proposals and theoretical ideas that may be included in the corpus of *Translation Studies*.

A list of words in the text of Susan Bassnett’s *Translation Studies* will definitely show her high priority of interests as well as her big concerns of issues in comparative literature and translation disciplines. By the tool of Words in #LancsBox, it is easy to draw a list of words used in her publication of *Translation Studies*. From Figure 2, for example, we can see some indicators of fields that Susan feel interested in. While the adoption of GraphColl, Whelk, and Ngrams will offer more information about Susan’ scholarly ideas in translation studies by data of word frequency and textual distribution.

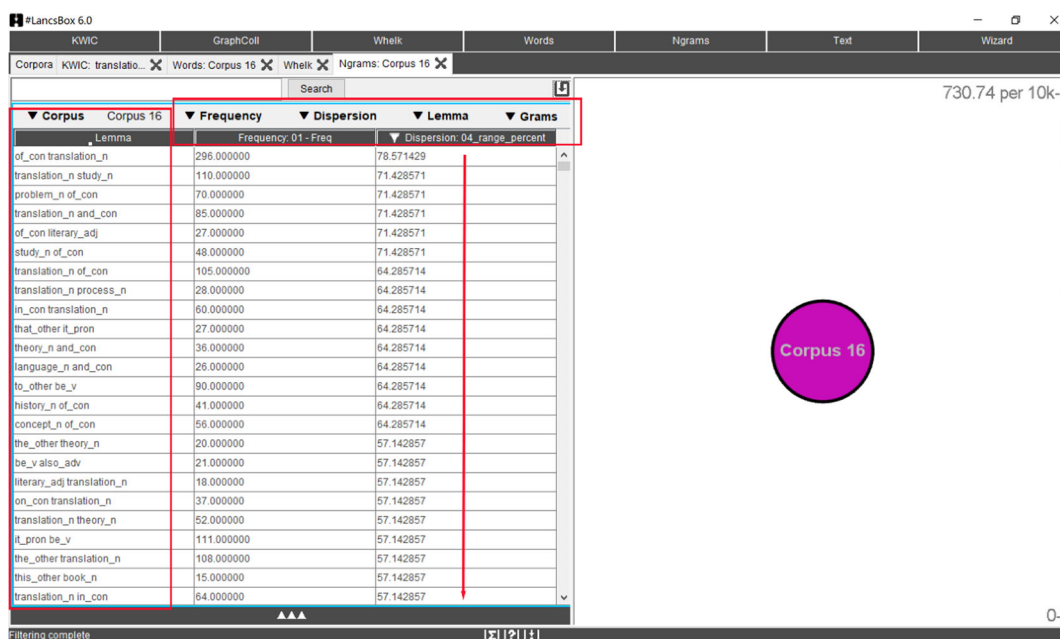


Figure 2. An Image of 2-gram Retrieval in the Designed Corpus

5. Data Analysis & Discussion

5.1. General Description of Susan's *Translation Studies*

A general description of corpora in #LancsBox 6.0 shows

the main structure of Susan's *Translation Studies* with its tokens, types and lemmas listed as Figure 1, while the results of a STTR analysis and proportion statistics (with the token of each section or chapter compared to that of the text of whole book) shown as follows.

Table 2. General Structure of Susan's *Translation Studies*: STTR and Proportion Statistics

| Section | STTR (1,000 words) | Proportion |
|---|--------------------|------------|
| Title, Copyright & Dedication | 573.74 | 0.98% |
| Contents | 757.58 | 0.23% |
| General Editor's Preface | 565.06 | 0.95% |
| Acknowledgements | 586.21 | 0.36% |
| Preface to the 3 rd Edition | 309.60 | 6.34% |
| Introduction | 305.29 | 6.12% |
| Chapter 1 General Issues | 228.21 | 13.41% |
| Chapter 2 History of Translation Theory | 236.97 | 21.13% |
| Chapter 3 Specific Problems of Literary Translation | 226.12 | 30.03% |
| Conclusion | 468.15 | 1.20% |
| Notes | 386.41 | 5.31% |
| Select Bibliography | 315.14 | 9.21% |
| Appendix | 654.57 | 1.22% |
| Index | 455.70 | 3.50% |

First, broadly speaking, the STTR analysis reveals its high use of diversity in Contents, Appendix, Acknowledgements, General Editor's Preface, Conclusion and Index, which means that Susan has proposed a wide range of topics in her writing of *Translation Studies* with a rich support of appendix and also having quoted multi-fields of reference. And the statistics of its proportions of different sections identifies those contents that Susan concerns most in her translation studies. They are "specific problems of literary translation" (almost 1/3 of the full corpus), "history of translation theory" (over 1/5 of the corpus' size), "general issues of translation"

(13.41%), "select bibliography" (almost 1/10 of the whole corpus), "preface to edition" (6.34%), "introduction" (6.12%) and "notes" (5.31%).

Then, some further analysis about the word list will bring us some more information about Susan's general ideas indicated in this book. A list of notional words downloaded from #LancsBox 6.0, for example, will give us a brief list of lemmas that are most deliberately used in Susan's *Translation Studies*. The following table of words shows those lemmas of verbs, nouns and pronouns that are most often used in this book with their frequency not less than 100 times.

Table 3. A Retrieval of Noun, Verb and Pronoun Lemmas that Used for More than 100 Times in the Full Corpus

| Lemma | Frequency: 01 - Freq | Dispersion: 01 CV |
|---------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| be v | 1538 | 0.77917 |
| translation n | 1159 | 0.593163 |
| have v | 408 | 0.918712 |
| text n | 344 | 0.800772 |
| it pron | 291 | 0.971131 |
| translator n | 284 | 1.111003 |
| his pron | 242 | 1.402751 |
| not adv | 207 | 0.982494 |
| language n | 181 | 0.675360 |
| he pron | 180 | 1.570654 |
| translate v | 171 | 1.161836 |
| study n | 167 | 0.803905 |
| theory n | 151 | 0.770542 |
| can v | 148 | 1.215954 |
| system n | 123 | 0.834742 |
| sl n | 121 | 1.586859 |
| press n | 116 | 1.951188 |
| work n | 110 | 1.318514 |
| what pron | 109 | 1.367497 |
| see v | 108 | 1.195633 |
| university n | 106 | 1.797790 |
| its pron | 105 | 1.136746 |
| tl n | 102 | 1.694161 |
| problem n | 102 | 1.219926 |
| london n | 101 | 1.934905 |

From the table above, we can conclude that the items of “translation”, “text”, “translator”, “language”, “study”, “theory”, “SL” (Source Language), “press”, “work”, “university”, “TL” (target language), “problem” and “London” are the nouns that are most mentioned by Susan Bassnett; which to some extent enable us to have a general impression about Susan’s interests and also concerns in translation studies.

5.2. Issues and Problems that *Translation Studies* Concerns

Just as identified in the former general description, issue is a keyword of the first chapter of Susan’s *Translation Studies*, and problem as one of its equivalences is high-frequently used in her full text of publication just as Table 3 shows above. So, the concerns of issues and problems in translation studies

must be an important part of Susan’s translation philosophy.

For obtaining specific ideas and concepts from Susan’s *Translation Studies*, the adoption of concordance and collocation is necessary for a close investigation of her concerns of issues and problems as well as claims and proposals just as what the three main chapters of this publication are meant to accomplish.

To have a survey on the issues and problems concerned in Susan’s *Translation Studies*, a KWIC concordance of lexical items as “issue” and “problem” and syntactical patterns as “NEGATION” will be very helpful to identify some specific information about the very examples of Susan’s philosophy of translation studies, their frequencies and their distributions. Also, the use of GraphColl is also very beneficial to have a better and clearer image of Susan’s ideas of issues and problems in translation studies.

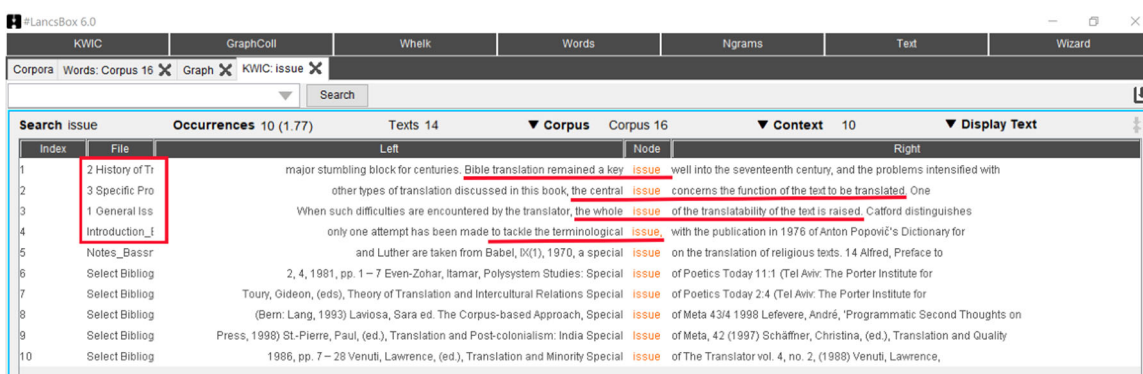


Figure 3. A KWIC Concordance of “issue” in the Corpus

Figure 3 has shown the ten results of a KWIC concordance of “issue” in the target corpus of Susan’s *Translation Studies*, with the first 4 of which used to indicate Susan Bassnett’s concerns of translation studies rather than the left 6 of which remained as note and bibliography. And correspondingly, the 4 issues of translation studies mentioned in 3 different parts of Susan’s scholarly writings are “bible translation”, “the function of the text to be translated”, “translatability” and “terminology”.

Therefore, a similar analysis of concordance and collocation can also be conducted to explore the use of “problem”, “question”, “difficulty” or even the pattern of “NEGATION” in the corpus of *Translation Studies* and to identify more clues of issues and problems in Susan’s scholarly texts, the results of which can be briefly summarized as the “loss, untranslatability, evaluation and equivalence of poetry, prose, theatre and poem translation”, etc. (see Figure 4 and Table 4 for details).

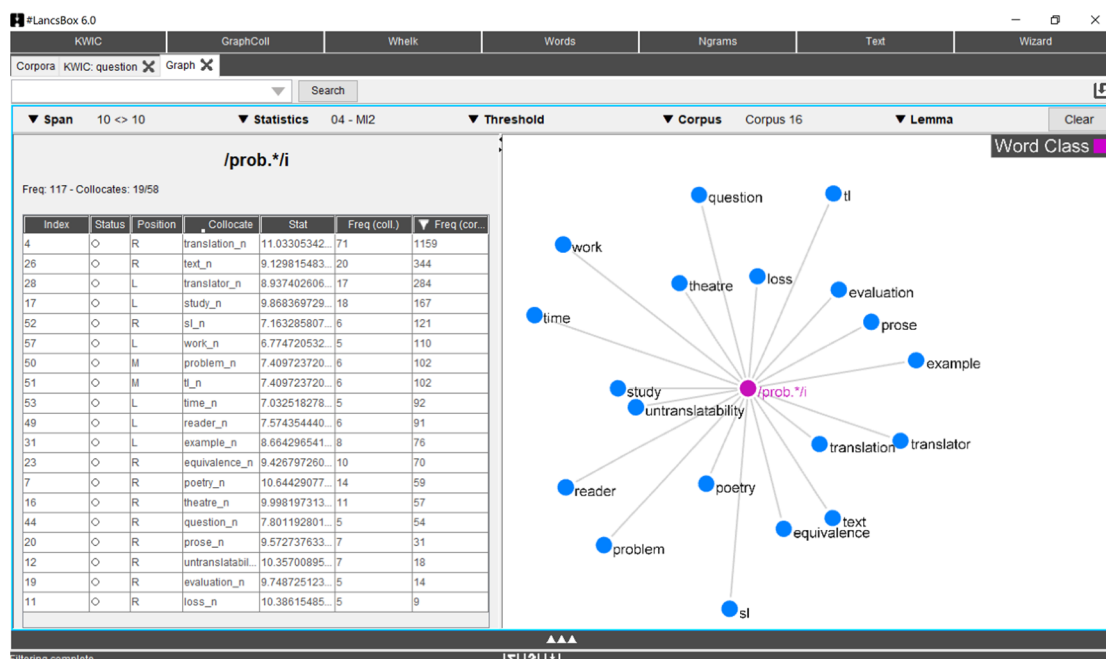


Figure 4. Graph of Collocates with “prob*” (problem or problems) in the Corpus

Table 4. Issues and Problems that Susan Concerns in Her *Translation Studies*

| Collocate | Statistics of Co-occurrence | Freq (coll.) | Freq (corpus) |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| loss n | 11.03305 | 5 | 9 |
| untranslatability n | 9.129815 | 7 | 18 |
| evaluation n | 8.937403 | 5 | 14 |
| poetry n | 9.86837 | 14 | 59 |
| prose n | 7.163286 | 7 | 31 |
| theatre n | 6.774721 | 11 | 57 |
| problem n | 7.409724 | 16 | 102 |
| equivalence n | 7.409724 | 10 | 70 |
| translator n | 7.032518 | 32 | 284 |
| study n | 7.574354 | 18 | 167 |
| example n | 8.664297 | 8 | 76 |
| question n | 9.426797 | 5 | 54 |
| translation n | 10.64429 | 98 | 1159 |
| text n | 9.998197 | 26 | 344 |
| poem n | 7.801193 | 7 | 99 |
| reader n | 9.572738 | 6 | 91 |
| tl n | 10.35701 | 6 | 102 |
| time n | 9.748725 | 5 | 92 |
| sl n | 10.38615 | 6 | 121 |

5.3. Ideas & Proposals Presented in *Translation Studies*

In spite of the issue and problems that Susan has tried to explain and discuss in her first part of *Translation Studies*, there are also some other import ideas and proposals that have been presented and then negotiated as parts of her translation philosophy in texts of the corpus. With reference to the list of key words, topic lemmas and thematic items as shown in Table 3, those concepts as the “literary translation”, “cultural translation”, “role of translator”, “function of text”, “history of translation theory”, studies in “source languages” and “target languages”, etc. have constituted into a systematic body of Susan’ translation philosophy.

Other items or indicators as “press” and “university”, especially those organizations as the Oxford, the Cambridge, the Pittsburgh, the Kent, the Ottawa, the Harvard, the Chicago,

etc., have displayed the source and reference of Susan’s translation ideas and their richness. Those scholarly institutions or research sites have also exhibited Susan’s innovative explorations of translation studies far beyond the border of English literature though some other words as London have still indicated that most of her arguments were mainly located on the geographically linguistic and cultural traditions of the Unite Kingdom.

With the help of KWIC, GraphColl and Ngram tools, a corpus retrieval by the use of #LancsBox will provide more details about the concepts embodied in Susan’s philosophy of translation studies. According to Table 5, the core of Susan’s translation philosophy can be revealed by her highlights of the concepts of SL text, translation process, literary translation, bible translation, literary text; be traced by her notes of the university press, New York and London Routledge and her quotes of John Benjamin and Lefevere André, etc.

Table 5. A List of 2-Gram Cooccurrence of the Noun Lemmas in the Corpus

| Lemma | Frequency: 01 - Freq | Dispersion: 01 CV |
|----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| translation n study n | 84 | 1.285636 |
| university n press n | 65 | 1.972945 |
| sl n text n | 54 | 1.705798 |
| translation n theory n | 35 | 1.687987 |
| new n york n | 31 | 1.608075 |
| translation n process n | 28 | 0.99786 |
| john n benjamin n | 25 | 3.352709 |
| amsterdam n john n | 22 | 3.320764 |
| editor n translation n | 20 | 3.605551 |
| new n comparison n | 19 | 3.605551 |
| london n routledge n | 18 | 2.765312 |
| literary adj translation n | 18 | 1.88005 |
| oxford n university n | 18 | 2.182002 |
| tl n text n | 18 | 2.410671 |
| lefevere n andré n | 18 | 3.121858 |
| clevedon n multilingual n | 17 | 3.605551 |
| bible n translation n | 17 | 2.463374 |
| literary n translation n | 16 | 2.114537 |
| literary adj text n | 15 | 1.838168 |
| his pron translation n | 15 | 1.853521 |

6. Conclusion

Therefore, from all above, a corpus-based study on Susan's book of *Translation Studies* identifies her philosophy in comparative literature and translation disciplines, which is mainly embodied in the following aspects: the concerns of issues of loss and evaluation of translation products, or untranslatability and equivalence in translation process, the review of historical traditions as "bible translation" and literary translation, and the highlight of functions of SL text, TL text and roles of translators.

And more specifically, some of the ideas and proposals presented in Susan's *Translation Studies* can be somewhat summarized as a recall of translation history, a discussion of translating process, and a claim of translator's subjectivity. By translation history, Susan has stressed the tradition of bible translation and different forms of literary translation. And by translation process, what Susan means is a procedure or an approach of involving not only a decision of linguistic replacement or a shift of expression but also an inequality of power relationships, or the status of different cultures. While in discussing the role of translators, Susan has attached great importance to their influence in linguistic transferring, cultural communication, social interaction and subjective construction.

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