

FINDING ORTESE'S VOICE FOR FERRANTE FANS

A Stylometric Study of Neapolitan Chronicles

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INTRODUCTION

This project examines two English translations of Anna Maria Ortese's 1953 *Il mare non bagna Napoli*, completed 63 years apart. I conclude that the retranslation constitutes a re-reading through the lens of a modern popular author.

This paper uses stylometric methods originally developed to resolve disputed authorship to compare *Neapolitan Chronicles* to English translations of Ortese and best-selling author Elena Ferrante. These methods classified nearly the entire book as more like Ferrante, rather than Ortese.

Neapolitan Chronicles is a collaboration between translators Jenny McPhee and Ferrante's acclaimed translator Ann Goldstein. This paper scrutinizes their claim to have "merged into yet another translator, who was at once invisible, and at the same time, had a style all her own."

FRAMEWORK

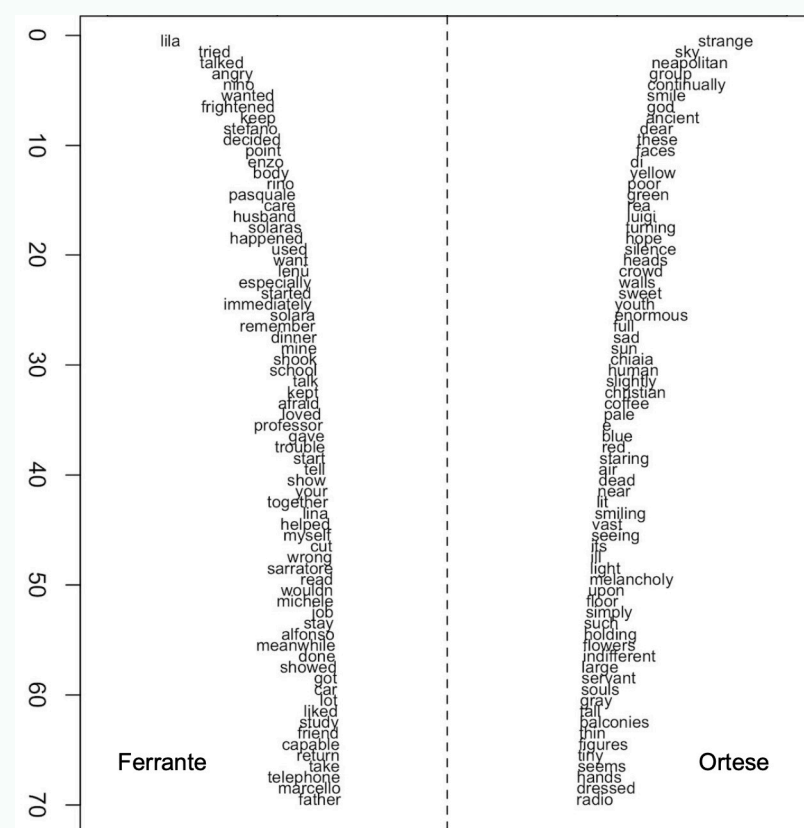
My computational analysis relies on a code library created for stylometry in the programming language R by Drs. Maciej Eder, Mike Kestemont and Jan Rybicki. This library, which was originally developed to resolve cases of disputed authorship, analyzes authorial style by detecting patterns in each author's most frequent words. I present the results using methods that previous stylometric scholars have established as valid: scoring the texts based on stylometric similarity, comparing the most frequent words used by each author, and training a classifier to distinguish the authors' style.

Eder, Maciej, Mike Kestemont and Jan Rybicki. "Stylometry with R: A package for computational text analysis." R Journal, vol. 16, no. 1, 2016, pp. 107-121.

Eder, Maciej. "Rolling stylometry." Digital Scholarship in the Humanities, vol. 31, no. 3, 2016, pp. 457-469.

STYLOMETRIC OPPOSITION

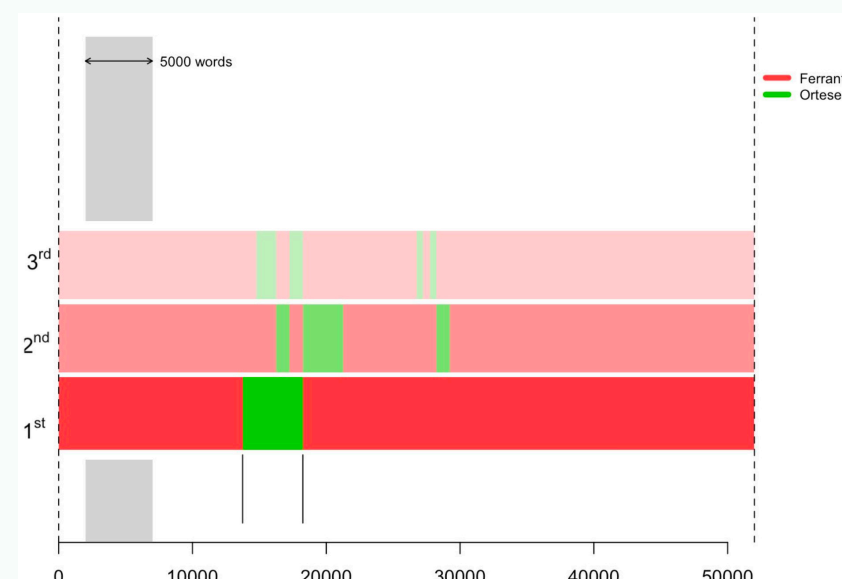
Below are the results from using stylometric opposition to compare *Neapolitan Chronicles* with Goldstein's translations of Ferrante's Neapolitan tetralogy. Stylometric opposition identifies the words that are "most unique" to each corpus.



On the left are the 70 words most unique to Ferrante. On the right are the 70 words most unique to Ortese. Their distance to the right or left is based on the Zeta score of how distinctive they are. Many of Ferrante's most unique words are about school, family, or fear. Many of Ortese's most unique words come from her visual descriptions of a blighted city. Notably, these lists are packed with "content words" (which address a book's topic) rather than "function words" (such as conjunctions, articles, prepositions and pronouns). Function words are a much better indicator of an author's signature style. Typically, when comparing two different authors, the results of stylometric opposition are dominated by function words. The results indicate these corpora use function words in very similar patterns—a classic sign of a deep similarity of writing styles.

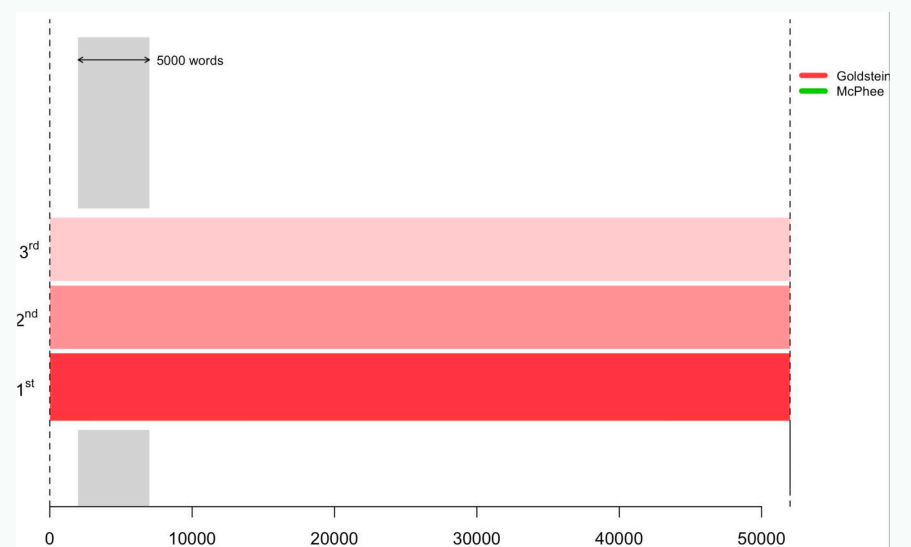
ROLLING CLASSIFIER: FERRANTE OR ORTESE?

Below are the results of a "rolling classifier" trained to recognize the most frequent words in Goldstein's Ferrante translations and other English translations of Ortese. The classifier analyzed *Neapolitan Chronicles* passage by passage and classified the entire book as more stylistically similar to Ferrante works, rather than Ortese works—with the exception of one story: "The Gold of Forcella," which has the most unique style.



ROLLING CLASSIFIER: GOLDSTEIN OR MCPHEE?

Below are the results of a rolling classifier trained on Goldstein and McPhee's solo translations.



The classifier classified all parts of the book as more like Goldstein's work. The results support Goldstein and McPhee's claim to have "merged into yet another translator" with a coherent style throughout the book. Yet they don't support the claim that this translator had "a style all her own." Rather, this blended translator possesses the style that Goldstein used when translating Ferrante.

STYLISTIC FEATURES

Goldstein's translations are unconventional with respect to the way that translations from Italian have traditionally been taught and evaluated. To define it in Dr. Lawrence Venuti's framework of foreignization versus domestication, she foreignizes the style.

Italian fiction tends to use longer sentences than English. Translators traditionally break those sentences up into shorter sentences. But Goldstein bucks this convention and tends not to break them up.

Goldstein often preserve gerunds as they were used in the original. This means she ends up using them in certain ways that are normal in Italian but unusual in English. And she often preserves Italian idioms by calquing them word for word.

CONCLUSIONS

(1) Goldstein and McPhee's collaboration achieved a unified style, yet their blended translator doesn't have "a style all her own." The pair essentially adopted the style Goldstein used for Ferrante translations.

(2) *Neapolitan Chronicles*' style is more similar to Goldstein's Ferrante than it is to any other English translations of Ortese. Goldstein and McPhee essentially "Ferrantized" Ortese's work to appeal to Ferrante fans. They subdued the unique "feverish" style of Ortese's stories.