

## Objectivity in Translation Quality Assessment

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### *Abstract*

*This paper aims at exploring the implications and applications of translation quality assessment. It attempt to shed light on some of the models suggested by experts and theorists in translation and translation criticism and tries to pinpoint which of the models would be most feasible for an objective translation quality assessment. The paper is divided into five parts: introduction, objectivity and criticism, models for translation quality assessment, practical quality assessment of translation, and conclusions.*

**Key Words:** Model, Approach, Translation Criticism, Text Type.

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### **Introduction**

Translation is an activity of enormous importance in the modern world and it is a subject of interest not only to linguists, professional and amateur translators, and language teachers, but also to specialists in various other fields of life, and writers on the subject have approached it from different points of view.

Translation criticism is an essential link between translation theory and its practice; it is also an enjoyable and instructive exercise, particularly if you are criticizing someone else's translation or, even better, two or more translations of the same text. One would soon realize that a text may be differently translated, depending on the preferred method of the translator.

Once the process of translation has been completed, the next important step is the assessment of the translation. This should cover the entire range of possible problems: accuracy of rendering, intelligibility, stylistic equivalence, etc. but to do this, one must focus attention upon the extent of verbal correspondence alongside the amount of dynamic equivalence.

This means that assessing the translation does not consist in merely comparing texts to see the extent of verbal consistency or conformity because a translator can be consistently wrong as well as consistently right, but in determining how the potential receptors of a translation react to it.

This does not mean, of course, that a translation is to be judged merely on the extent to which the people like the contents. Some people may object strongly to the themes and the concepts which are communicated, but there should not be anything in the translation itself which is awkward, unnatural, and misleading or incomprehensible, unless, of course, the message in the source language has these characteristics.

The task of the translator is to produce the closest natural equivalent, not to edit or to rewrite. But to judge these qualities one must look to the potential readers. And more importantly, the task of the translation critic is to maintain as objective an account of the translation as possible when assessing its quality.

### **Objectivity and Criticism**

'The demand to be faithful in translation is a starting point' (Popovic, 1970: 80).

The final stage of the process of translation, which extends from the original author to the translation reader, is target text assessment. The concern here is not only to check the fidelity of the translated text but also its acceptability to its intended readership.

Much has been devoted recently to the subjectivity of translation criticism and/or assessment, and the objectivity of such a process. Models and procedures were suggested in this respect by many scholars, and some of these models are highlighted in this paper.

Saadeddin (2000: 73) argues that all the constituents pertaining to text production are involved in translation criticism, which needs to be taken into consideration in quality assessment.

The aim of the models and procedures is to minimize, as much as possible, the subjective element of criticism in favor of the objective one, that diagnosis and justification should be the base for the critical judgment to minimize subjectivity. (Ibid: 76).

### **Models for Translation Quality Assessment**

Much has been written in favor of objectivity in translation quality assessment. The following is but a glimpse on some of the models proposed by a number of experts and scholars in translation and translation criticism.

Nida and Taber (1969) suggest that the transfer takes place in the brain, which inevitably results in some personal problems, which are likely to distort the process. Problems, which are mostly unconscious predispositions about translation procedures that appear in the work, finally change the effectiveness of much that the translator may honestly be attempting to do.

Testing of the translation, they suggest, should cover the problems of accuracy of rendering, intelligibility, stylistic equivalence, etc. To do this, the focus should be on verbal correspondence and dynamic equivalence to test the verbal consistency and the reaction of the potential receptors of a translation.

Reiss (1971: 24-47) distinguishes four text types; the content-focused text, which is judged in terms of its semantic, grammatical, and stylistic characteristics; the form-focused text, which is judged in relation to its aesthetics, as well as its stylistic, semantic and grammatical characteristics; the appeal-focused text, which is distinctive in always presenting information with a particular perspective, an explicit purpose, involving a non-linguistic result; and the audio-medial text, which is distinctive in its dependence on non-linguistic (technical) media and graphic, acoustic, and visual kinds of expression.

After defining the text type and the appropriate translation method, according to Reiss, it is possible to assess the degree to which the translator has met the relevant criteria. The critic, then, moves to examining the linguistic features and their equivalents in the target language.

This includes the semantic elements, the lexical elements, grammatical elements, and the stylistic elements.

The extra-linguistic elements also affect the form of the original and the version in the target language, and that is why the critic should take them into consideration as well.

These determinants make the difference between the optimal and potential equivalents. These, Reiss suggests include the immediate situation, the subject matter, the time factor, the place factor, the audience factor, the speaker factor, and effective implications. This is all done bearing in mind the special function of a translation.

Newmark (1982) suggests four basic procedures for translation criticism:

1. To analyze the intention, predominant language function, tone, themes, register, style (syntactic and lexical), literary quality, cultural features, putative readership and setting of the SL text, and to propose an appropriate translation method;
2. To make a detailed comparison between the SL and the TL text, noting all significant semantic, stylistic, pragmatic and ideological differences (either in the whole RL text or in ransom passages);
3. To assess the differences between the total impression of the SL and the RL text, particularly including their interpretations of the subject-matter;
4. To evaluate the translation.

Sager (1983: 125) suggests that different text types entail different translation methods leading to different end products. And thus translation could be assessed for the appropriateness of the purpose intended for it. To be objective, Sager suggests, the evaluation procedure should be repeatedly applicable, and well-defined parameters are necessary.

Among the difficulties of translation process is finding the appropriate equivalent in the appropriate place. The right expressions in the right place alongside the sense of the original are the basis in every process of transference from one language into another.

Broeck (1985) suggests that objectivity in criticism should be based on a systematic descriptive model, the AT (Adequate Translation) element is a relative one, because who or/and what decides that a certain translation is an adequate one, since translation is a matter of choice. He even suggested a scheme for the consecutive, partly simultaneous, operations.

He (1985: 60) suggests three stages of comparison of target text and its source: the first is analyzing the reconstructed source text elements possessing textual functions (textemes) which lead, as he says, to formulating an Adequate Translation. The second stage is comparing the target text elements corresponding to these textemes, taking into account the various shifts, or deviations, with respect to the source text. The third stage is of giving a general description of the differences between the actual target text and source text equivalence and the Adequate Translation, depending on the second stage. This stage states the real degree or type of equivalence between target text and source text.

Newmark (1988: 186) suggests a plan of criticism: (1) Text analysis. (2) The translator's purpose. (3) Comparing the translation with the original. (4) The evaluation of the translation. (5) The translation's future.

He also emphasizes that there are five topics to be covered in any comprehensive criticism of a translation, and briefly these entail analysis of the SL text, the translator's interpretation of the SL text purpose, comparison of SL with TL, evaluation of translation, and assessment of the translation's place in the TL.

Massoud (1988: 18) says that the definition of a good translation differs from one age to another, and the emphasis in our age is on communication, and to make sure this is done, she gives eight tasks to distinguish a communicative translation from an incomprehensible or misleading one.

Newmark (1991) proposes three points of reference to be used in translation criticism. The first is to examine the translation closely at the author's level and see if it reflects his language, culture, and literary or non-literary tradition. The second is to examine its conformity to the target language norms (the linguistic difference between the translation and the original). The third is a non-linguistic one examining the translation and the original in relation to the truth, the material facts, and moral and aesthetic principles.

Shunnaq (1992) proposes four main models of translation, and these are: the grammatical model; the cultural model; the interpretive model; and the text linguistic model. While Saadeddin (2000) proposes a checklist that he describes as neither exhaustive nor conclusive. It has three provisional divisions, which somehow overlap in some areas: background interpretive constituents, readership's role, and text constituents.

### Practical Quality Assessment of Translation

For the practical aspect of this paper, a stanza from a poem entitled 'the Shadow and the Cross' by Salah Abdul Sabour, an Egyptian poet, is taken as an example with two renditions.

هذا زمن الحق الضائع  
لا يعرف فيه مقتول من قاتله، ومتى قتله  
ورؤوس الناس على جثث الحيوانات  
ورؤوس الحيوانات على جثث الناس  
فتحسس رأسك  
فتحسس رأسك!

This stanza of poetry is rendered into two different translations:

1. This is the age of the lost truth  
The killed person does not know who killed him and when  
People's heads are on the corpses of animals  
Animals' heads are on the corpses of people  
Grope your head  
Grope your head!
2. This is the age of the lost right  
The killed knows not his killer, and when he is killed  
People's heads be on the corpses of animals  
Animals' heads lie one the corpses of people  
Touch your head. Do it  
Touch your head. Do it.

Poetry is, of course, a form-focused text, and a dynamic translation is the most appropriate approach to be followed here.

A lot of elements cannot be reproduced here (musicality, rhyme, rhythm, etc.). Both translations tackled the original text through its most difficult way, and that is the translation of verse into verse. Cohesion is well balanced in both translations.

The first translation rendered the expression (الحق الضائع) into (the lost truth), which is closer to the context as shown in the second line, while the second translation rendered it into (the lost right), which is lexically closer, but not contextually.

The first translation avoided the repetition in the second line (مقتول، قاتله، قتلته) by using the relative pronoun (who), while the translator in the second, by using an unusual word-order (knows not his killer), was closer to the poetic style followed in English.

The expression (فتحسس رأسك) is rendered in the first translation into (grope your head), which means looking for something by feeling with the hand, like what one does in the dark, and this is closer to the text, and context, which talks about the (the lost truth), and is better than (touch) in the second translation. The repetition of (Do it) in the lines 4 and 5 of the second translation is put instead of exclamation marks, when a simple repetition with exclamation marks like the original, is better.

From these notes one could say that the first translation is closer to the original text than the second one, and that a hybrid of several models could be used for an objective translation quality.

## Conclusions

None of the models or procedures mentioned in this paper satisfies an exhaustive objectivity approach to translation criticism. Each one is oriented to serve, objectively, a certain text type or purpose, an exhaustive one, in my opinion, could be a hybrid of these models and approaches. "Translation criticism is an exercise of intelligence and imagination, and is only partially objective." (Newmark, 1982: 182).

Thus we could see that according to Reiss's (1971) model we were able to determine the text type of the source language, and according to Nida and Taber (1969) we were able to pinpoint the best approach to be followed for such a text type.

The models of Newmark (1982) and Broeck (1985) were applied, in simpler terms, by first analyzing, comparing, and then assessing, and according to the eight tasks of Massoud (1988) we were able to identify which translation is not only a good, but also a better translation.

There is a small element of uncertainty and subjectivity in any judgment about a translation, which would not eliminate neither the necessity nor the usefulness of translation criticism, as an aid for raising translation standards and for reaching more agreement about the nature of translation.

Through the incorporation of several models it might be possible to come up with an objective translation quality assessment.

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