

LITERARY TRANSLATION AND QUALITY ASSESSMENT ANALYSIS –
ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN TRANSLATOR TRAINING

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to highlight the role of translation quality assessment in translation training so as to develop students' translation competence and skills to face translation problems. An analysis to assess literary translation quality is proposed before proceeding to discuss its pedagogical implementation.

2. Literary Translation Quality Assessment Analysis

Translation assessment is a broad notion to be applied to diverse areas of translation, principally published translation, professional translation and translation training. This paper focuses on literary translation and its relation to translation training in an attempt to bind educational and professional life.

To begin with, the question of translation quality assessment must be clarified. Translation quality assessment or translation evaluation (Maier 2000: 137) has commonly been constricted to an enumeration of translation errors, or even to subjective generic judgements concerning the target text. Evidently, an assessment model to be applied to literary translated texts must be settled in order to reach a systematic and reliable evaluative approach. Up to this point I support Susanne Lauscher's opinion as she assures that it is vital "to bridge the gap between scholarly approaches to translation quality assessment and practical quality assessment" (2000: 164).

Definitions of translation quality appear to be source-bound and too broad to be applied until Edmond Cary and R. W. Jumpert's *Quality in Translation* is published in 1963. To date, many translations have been described by means of the generic vague adjectives *good* and *bad*, although these adjectives have not been seriously qualified; they appear to be too ambiguously handled within generic and blurred assertions. That aside, comments on translation quality frequently contain an enumeration of translation mistakes which, although worth considering, does not include any further appreciation.

Evidently, a frame of reference concerning points of the text is pursued in order to comprise all factors affecting each translated text. As this suggests, there seems not to exist a unique concept of quality, for criteria and aims of assessment lead to diverse conclusions about the quality of a target text. It is clear that the notion of translation quality itself involves “fuzzy and shifting boundaries” (Bowker 2001: 347), which implies the impossibility of handling a universal framework of translation assessment. Evaluation involves a relative concept which must be defined taking the features of each text into consideration.

Broadly speaking, to assess the quality of a translated literary text, I consider it essential to perform a detailed contrastive analysis of the target and source texts at all levels, as well as to apply certain assessment criteria to the data collected in each step of the analysis. As was seen that previous proposals involve a highly problematic implementation of the same, partly due to heterogeneous reasons (principally due to a too prescriptive or linguistic approach), it is argued that an assessment analysis has to be flexible and broad enough to be adapted to the characteristics of each text in an attempt to combine the objectivity implicit in any criticism with the features of a specific target text. This assertion brings about the handling of an eclectic descriptive and critical assessment analysis as aspects taken from several proposals are considered. To a certain extent, some of the most often discussed notions of translation theory are embedded in this contrastive evaluative analysis, as well as notions from other similar fields, which highlights the interdisciplinary nature of translation assessment in close relation to the nature of translation studies.

To my knowledge, descriptive translation studies entail a background which is observed to be specifically appropriate at the first steps of an evaluative analysis (Toury 1995: 17-19) provided that a critical perspective is to be followed in further steps. As Viggo Pedersen argues, translation assessment must be based on a contrastive analysis of the target and source texts, for: “criticism is based in careful analysis of the texts concerned provided that it does not forget the importance of the TL context” (1997: 111). Consequently, a top-down analysis is to be applied, for literary texts are to be analysed within their cultural and social context.

As this suggests, macrotextual factors of the target and source texts must be deeply examined and compared, principally in literary translation (Snell-

Hornby 1995). After that, the contrastive analysis is supposed to explore the translator's discourse strategy. In this step units of analysis or segments must be established. Segments are functional units defined as: "units in a comparative analysis would always emerge as coupled pairs of target- and source-text segments, 'replacing' and 'replaced' items, respectively" (Toury 1995: 89). Segments are to be classified into several groups named *categories of shifts* (Leuven-Zwart 1990), so as to account for the translation devices or strategies which they involve such as expansions, reductions, modulations and transpositions (Delisle *et al.* 1999).

Finally, assessment criteria (Brunette 2000: 174) should be implemented as a central framework and reference throughout the analysis in an attempt to reach an assessment as objective as possible (Hatim and Mason 1997: 5; Brunette 2000: 180). Nevertheless, it does not seem viable to reach a framework which can be universally applied to the analysis and assessment of all diversities of texts (Sager 1989: 197; Hönig 1998; Larose 1998: 164; Bowker 2001: 347). Evidently, different criteria for revision or criticism are to be applied to different types of texts (Reiss 2000: 16), even within literary texts (Classe 2000: 1411). In fact, translation quality itself depends on a range of factors (Lauscher 2000: 150; Martínez and Hurtado 2001: 273). These same factors are supposed to constitute a central reference in the assessing.

In my opinion, the *helical procedure* which Gideon Toury applies to translation analysis is to be implemented to all steps of assessment analysis; as this suggests, analysis must be delimited as research advances. Quoting Toury:

In every phase, from the very start, explanatory hypothesis will be reformulated, which will then reflect backwards and affect subsequent discovery procedures. The normal progression of a study is thus helical, then rather than lineal: there will always remain something to go back and discover, with the concomitant need for more (or more elaborated) explanations. (1995: 36)

Similarly, Lauscher proposes the notion of flexibility applying it specifically to translation evaluation. In her view, translation quality assessment requires: "to be based on a yardstick which is flexible enough to integrate translation strategies designed in actual translation processes" (2000: 161). To my knowledge, this assertion is essential to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

To sum up, I claim that the analysis proposed on these pages can be considered in the assessment of translated literary texts provided that slight divergences are accepted accounting for the characteristics of each text. Consequently, I propose an assessment analysis of literary translated texts which must be flexible and broad enough to be always delimited in each study as research advances; each step is to be verified before proceeding to the analysis of the next one. As this suggests, the evident need for objectivity in translation assessment is to be combined with the characteristics which identify each translation process.

3. Assessment Analysis in Translation Training

After having outlined the literary translation quality assessment analysis proposed to be applied to published translations, its didactic implementation is to be discussed.

The pedagogical interest of a qualitative translation assessment has recently been highlighted (Martínez and Hurtado 2001: 279, Lee-Jahnke 2001). In my opinion, translation students are supposed to acquire appropriate translation competence by means of analysing and assessing literary translated texts.

Before proceeding any further, translation competence must be defined. This notion comprises a good translator's competence, levels of competence, and the progression in the acquisition of competence. I support PACTE's definition (2000) of translation competence. This research group assures that competence is the underlying system of knowledge aptitudes and skills required to translate. In their view, translation competence comprises several sub-types: communicative competence in the target and the source languages, extralinguistic competence, transfer competence, instrumental and professional competence, psychological competence, and strategic competence. Borders among these sub-types are almost blurred in some cases. To my knowledge, literary translation quality assessment analysis enables students to acquire and develop competence in these skills.

Obviously, a theoretical outline of literary translation quality assessment analysis should be first required for students to approach the analysis. Immediately after, students have to be conscious of the factors affecting the

translation process by means of practical exercises concerning the assessment. Needless to say, this contrastive assessment analysis must be applied both to direct and indirect translation to reach a wider perspective.

To begin with, it is essential to select appropriate literary texts to be analysed (Kelly 2000). Most narrative techniques, genres and periods must be covered. Whenever it is possible, it is highly worth assessing several target texts of the same source text; in so doing, different translators' proposals and decisions could be compared and assessed. Factors which influenced these decisions and the strategies followed could be contrasted.

The time factor is also worth highlighting in the selection of texts. Apart from current literary texts, target texts published long ago should be included, for it is highly challenging to judge and assess a translation published centuries ago. In so doing, it can be appreciated how translation practice has changed throughout centuries. It cannot be ignored that, as will be discussed later, the historical factor constitutes a central assessment criterion. Each translation has to be assessed within its social and historical context, for translation practice at that time is supposed to have conditioned the process.

After the selection of texts, assessment itself must be performed. Following a top-down approach, students should proceed to an exhaustive analysis and comparison of extratextual factors of target and source texts, which is especially significant in literary translation. On account of the nature of these factors most of them should be given to the student in order to facilitate the analysis in class. Students have to be conscious of data concerning the author, political, social and historical features of the period, among others. Data must be examined in order to verify to what extent the translation was affected. In any case, students should establish the degree of relevance of each factor in the assessment. Students' extralinguistic competence is to be developed in extratextual and textual analysis. Encyclopaedic and cultural knowledge are essential for students to approach a source text and its further translation; cultural references should be appropriately rendered in the target text. Evidently, students should be aware of the available resources concerning the rendering of this cultural knowledge.

That aside, during the sessions students are required to analyse, for instance, the relevance of the structure of the translation, the possible inclusion of footnotes, the translator's prologue, etc.

As was stated above, sub-types of competence are inter-connected. During the contrastive analysis of the target and source texts several sub-types can be acquired or developed at the same time. Communicative competence in both languages is acquired; students learn how to handle resources concerning the comprehension of the source text and expression or reformulation in the target text. Transfer competence, especially the ability to perform translation procedures can be also improved, as well as skills related to students' psychological competence in translation.

The next step of literary translation quality assessment covers an exhaustive textual analysis. The highlight of the analysis involves the study of shifts or deviations existing between the target and source texts. An in-depth contrastive analysis of the two texts enables students to identify translation shifts. Students must state if these deviations are justified or are due to the translator's own criteria or inventiveness. Segments should be established to examine the shifts which they involve. To facilitate the analysis, shifts should be classified into categories of shifts. In so doing, expansions, reductions, modulations, transpositions, etc., should be examined in an attempt to encounter a possible justification for these deviations. In addition, the translation of sayings, proverbs, and puns, among others, is relevant on account of the notable role played by the source text style in literary translation. Obviously, categories of shifts vary accounting for the characteristics of each text; students must be capable of redefining them in each analysis. That aside, students are required to analyse the deviation within its context so as to assess the translator's decision and the factors which influenced it. Evidently, in this step of the assessment analysis students' strategic competence is developed. Students are encouraged to identify verbal and non verbal procedures; comprehension and reformulation strategies are also to be handled and analysed. In addition, instrumental and professional competence, that is, translation competence directly related to professional practice can be developed. Needless to say, students have to be conscious of all available translation resources and technologies.

Assessment criteria have to be applied to all data collected during the analysis, for criteria imply an essential framework of reference. After having performed the contrastive analysis of the target and source texts discussed on previous pages, students should establish assessment criteria and their relevance

in each specific analysis. Students are required to identify factors which affected the translation process in order to draw conclusions about translation quality.

The form and type of text are supposed to condition further assessment criteria (Reiss 2000: 17). The type of text is determined by the translation communicative function in relation to the original text (Sager 1989: 90). The notable role played by the function or purpose of the target text has been frequently believed to be another assessment parameter (House 1997: 108; Nord 1991: 166; Hönig 1998; Larose 1998). Obviously, this functional aspect is supposed to be one of the most significant standards of quality, for the translator's decisions are deeply affected (Sager 1989: 97; Hatim and Mason 1997: 15). It is undeniable that translation quality depends on the translator's aim. Students should analyse these factors and their possible influence on the translator's decisions in order to draw conclusions about their appropriateness. The translator's purpose can be outlined or anticipated in the prologue. Evidently, those assertions must be verified during the analysis to reach an objective approach. Similarly, students are required to state the significance of the reader to whom the translation is addressed, especially if this factor was considered at the moment of writing the translation. The figure of the initiator is also highlighted (Sager 1989; Larose 1998; Schäffner 1988: 2). Students should analyse these data to settle to what extent the translation process was affected.

The valuable role of the historical factor must be specially highlighted in translation assessment. Actually, translation concepts are culturally and historically specific. Louise Brunette applies this assessment criterion in its broadest sense; in fact, it is designated 'context'. However, in my opinion, Brunette is handling a too broad notion despite the special relevance of the factors which it comprises. I claim that the criterion context should be divided into several criteria to facilitate their handling during the assessment. The term 'situation' suggested by Hatim and Mason (1997: 205) seems more appropriate. It can be assumed that this notion should be restricted to cultural and historical factors. Students have to be conscious of the vital significance of this criterion; each translation has to be assessed accounting for translation practice at the time it is published.

That aside, logic criterion is worth considering in the assessment (Brunette 2000: 175). Coherence and cohesion of the translation involve the structure of

logical information and the strategies to connect parts of the discourse, the connectivity of the relations in the target text. No translation can exist if these conditions are not fulfilled. Translation students should familiarise with mechanisms to achieve coherence and cohesion in translation.

Eventually, another two parameters should be regarded in literary translation quality assessment analysis: acceptability or relevance of the target text within its language (Toury 1995: 56), and the possible relation of translations with previous target texts, for target texts can influence others (Hatim and Mason 1997: 20). As far as acceptability is concerned, it is clear that a translation can affect and modify target literature and culture. A preference for acceptability often applies in appropriate literary translations (Chamosa 1997: 47). Data obtained in the contrastive analysis will enable students to state the translator's preference for the target or the source text norms and culture.

As can be supposed, serious hurdles must be faced during the implementation of these assessment criteria. Not all of them are relevant in an analysis on account of the non prescriptive nature of translation. Translation quality depends on a range of factors. Assessments should not be final or absolute, but particular to people, places and time in each specific analysis; evidently, parameters must be adjustable to these notions (Sager 1989: 100). In addition, in most cases, frontiers among criteria are blurred. As a result, the relevance of each criterion must be delimited as students' assessment analysis advances.

As can be deduced from previous paragraphs, to my knowledge, the most appropriate objective assessment criteria are mentioned in Basil Hatim and Ian Mason's (1997) and Louise Brunette's (2000) proposals. In any case, some of these criteria have been included in other approaches concerning evaluative, contrastive or translation analysis perspectives; actually, a consensus on certain criteria is even shown to be traced in current assessment proposals. It is also clear that the approach to assessment criteria cannot be prescriptive; criteria must be applied with rigour and flexibility to fill the deep gap between theory and practice.

As students are required to decide about the appropriateness of translators' decisions taking assessment criteria into consideration, the notion of translation error should be clarified. The classification of errors varies as it encompasses all translation levels. However, seriousness of translation errors

involves a central issue in any assessment. Nord (1996), for instance, assures that pragmatic errors are the most serious ones, followed by cultural and linguistic errors. By contrast, Kupsch-Losereit (1985) highlights the relevance of errors related to the source text (opposite sense, expansion, reduction, etc.) or to the target text (vocabulary, syntax, cohesion, etc.). To my knowledge, although these reliable assertions should not be ignored, the seriousness of each translation error depends on the extent to which the effectiveness of the target text is affected (Kussmaul 1995). Each error must be assessed within its text. During the assessment analysis students should identify the causes which led to translation errors. Deviations between the target and the source texts must be identified and classified accounting for their seriousness. All points should be taken into consideration. In so doing, students are aware of errors and, consequently, future translation errors should be avoided. During the sessions scales of error (Hurtado 1999) could be handled so as to determine the degree of seriousness and impact of the error within the target text.

Concerning the pedagogical implementation of the assessment analysis discussed on previous pages, the approach is two-fold: first, sessions are scheduled covering the whole assessment analysis in several consecutive sessions, second, a range of exercises concerning specific points are to be carried out. During the sessions students should be aware of flexibility to be applied to literary translation quality assessment analysis to cover all features of each text.

Assessment activities include complete or partial translation exercises concerning analysis, revision and comparison of literary translations. Comparative analysis of different translations of a single source text will enable students to judge and assess how translator's decisions were influenced. Translations covering diverse periods could be especially worthy to analyse how translation practice has changed.

Evidently, students must accomplish assessment exercises concerning sub-types of translation competence: for instance, exercises concerning cultural and documentation sources, exercises covering translation strategies and shifts to assess the resources handled by the translator.

Special attention should be paid to the identification of translation errors in all steps of the assessment analysis. Students must be encouraged to state the

degree of seriousness of each error, or to determine if deviations between the two texts can be justified.

4. Conclusions

As can be concluded, the Literary Translation Quality Assessment Model outlined in this paper is highly useful in translation training. Assessment analysis contributes to acquiring and developing students' translation competence. Activities concerning all sub-types of competence discussed on previous pages, should be performed in class. In addition, assessment analysis can be complete or partial accounting for its final aims.

By means of an exhaustive contrastive analysis of target and source text and applying certain assessment criteria, students' communicative competence, transfer competence and psychological competence can be further developed. Students are to be aware of mechanisms interacting in the comprehension of the source text and reformulation in the target text. Assessment activities bring to light students' ability and shortcomings. Extralinguistic competence is acquired by means of a contrastive analysis of extratextual elements included in both texts. Their significance is beyond doubt in literary translation. This skill is also further developed in the textual analysis itself, for students must assess how cultural references are rendered in the target text. In addition, students are supposed to develop instrumental and professional competence, especially to familiarise with all available resources. Finally, an exhaustive qualitative and quantitative analysis and classification of shifts enables students to develop strategic competence, for they will be capable to use translation devices and strategies.

Borders among sub-types of competence are blurred; evidently, all of them are interconnected in a good translator; this fact must be considered in the selection of exercises as several skills could be worked at the same time. Exploitation of texts is supposed to vary (multiple-choice tests, cloze texts, inferring questions, questionnaires, etc.) in an attempt to facilitate students' motivation.

To sum up, an assessment approach to literary translation enables students to judge translators' decisions and to be aware of all factors interacting in translation. Students are to develop their skills concerning the handling of translation mechanisms and resources, and translation strategies and devices.

Translation errors and their reasons are identified and assessed so as to avoid future errors.

Obviously, during these sessions students can face literary translation problems from a complete perspective, for the facing of both the target and the source texts enables students to handle both the translation process and product. Evidently, the need to acquire practical skills before becoming a professional translator is always to be highlighted.

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