

Investigating the Perspectives of Translation Experts on Defining the Criteria of Translation Assessment

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses a highly important topic since it examines translation quality from the perspective of translation professionals. This essay's major goals are to establish translation quality and outline the evaluation standards that will be used to evaluate new translators throughout their training and evaluation. Additionally, this study uses two separate focus groups with six translation and conference-interpreting professionals to shed light on the nature of the link between translation theories and translation quality. The focus group decides on three dimensions—content, form, and delivery methods—as the benchmarks for translation quality. In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the translation quality assessment criteria proposed in this paper, a number of significant conclusions have been drawn.

Keywords: *Translation Quality; Translation Theories; Assessment Criteria; Focus Group*

INTRODUCTION

Translation quality (TQ) has never had a great deal of interest among researchers, since only a few studies have been conducted on this vital topic. In fact, many reasons encourage this study to look for certain solutions to put a hand on the reasons and factors that might affect the assessment of translation quality. Having considered the differences and contradictions among translation assessors in both written and oral modes of translation within the academic educational field, this paper tries to approach some important issues relating to translation quality from different angles. Furthermore, this interview helps find out the proposed criteria of *Translation Quality Assessment* (TQA) employed by translation assessors in the academic context and training institutions. Therefore, ten experts in translation and conference interpreting were requested to participate in an interview. However, only six experts responded.

Research Main Questions

- 1- What are the criteria employed by translation assessors in assessing TQ of both written and oral translation in a training context?
- 2- Do assessors depend on certain models of TQ in their assessment process? What are the models of TQA translation assessors depend on during the assessment process?
- 3- What are the most important factors might affect the assessment process of TQ?
- 4- How do translation theories contribute in interpreting the variations of TQ?

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Significance of the Study

This study is a preliminary study in which the views of translation experts on the area of translation quality will be determined. In addition, this study provides basic touches for a broader and more comprehensive study relating to the translation quality. Moreover, the study tries to approach factors might affect the TQA of trainee translators.

Research Objectives

The main objective of conducting this paper is to uncover certain issues related to the great variations among the assessors when assessing trainee translators. These great variations were noticed through two tests of simultaneous interpreting and written translation to a group of trainee translators who were assessed by some translation assessors. The tests were conducted for the purpose of detecting the extent of differences in the assessment of the translation quality by translation assessors to a group of trainee translators. Accordingly, this issue prompted the researcher to interview some experts in the field of translation for the purpose of determining the criteria employed in TQA, and finally identify factors that might affect the assessment process of the translation quality. As a result, there must be some reasons interpret the great variations in the assessment of each trainee translator.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Very few studies have been done using a qualitative research method in dealing with TQA. Harding (2019) argues the role of qualitative research methods because this type of research can provide the researcher with different views about his research area. Furthermore, this method allows making interaction with people and supporting the researcher with primary information shaping the first lines of his study. This study tries to approach TQA field from the standpoints of some experts in translation and conference interpreting field. A focus group approach might be a useful tool to solve some outstanding issues (Budden, 1999). The researcher intended to conduct two or more successive interviews as a pilot study to meet his study requirements. As stated by Mischler (1996) a pilot study can be considered as a pre-testing for the main instrument of the study. It is true because just at the early stages, the study might initially discover the pitfalls before the study progression. Moreover, the pilot study provides a feedback might involve the sample of the study or warn the researcher that he/she has to do some changes regarding the main issues of the study (Elliot, 1996). Over ten experts in translation and conference interpreting were invited to participate in focus group interviews with open-ended questions as usual in this type of interview. Only six experts attended the interviews. Sliverman (2016) argues that this type of interviews with open-ended questions can give more opportunity to the researcher to obtain more information regarding his/her topic under investigation. This type of interviews can give an opportunity to the researcher to adapt his questions in accordance with the interviewees' answers (Mishler, 1996). Additionally, focus group interviews provide in-depth questions and can create clear understanding of the concepts and ideas related to the main themes of a study (Gill et al., 2008). Furthermore, as stated by Budden (1999) these interviews with open-ended questions let the interviewees guide or, if necessary, alter the direction of an interview in a way or another in order to support the intention of his study.

Justification for using a focus group interviews:

Focus group can provide several forms and serve many purposes at a time (Morgan, 2009: 403). Morgan also emphasizes the role of a focus group in the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. The most important reasons Morgan (2009) states that the focus group is very beneficial for applied studies. The focus group also has an advantage over other methods of interviewing; it is considered as a part of the population of the study. Moreover, a focus group technique is considered as a moderator that moderates, opens fruit discussions, proposes ideas, and guides the interview session/s in order to obtain better information. Taking notes by the research or an assistant is also possible in this context (Brinkmann, 2013). The focus group has become more widespread among the new directions of the studies. Wilkinson (1998) stresses the role of a focus group and multiple interviews due to their flexible and dynamic nature since they resemble the everyday discussions.

Translation Quality

Scholars and researchers in the translation studies proposed many definitions, however; still this field is under wide investigations. Koby et al. (2014) proposed two translation quality definitions: broad and narrow. Both definitions focus on certain criteria of translation quality that ought to be followed during the assessment process. The two definitions involve some criteria such as grammar, content, style, target culture... etc. Another definition introduced

by House (1997), she defines TQ that source text (ST) and target text (TT) should have the same function; therefore, any quality of translation is measured to the extent of producing the same function of the ST. As a result, the TQ is measured by the functional compatibility between the original and the target text. In other words, this **functionalist approach** determines the quality of translation in terms of whether it is good or not. Functionalism is an enormous concept that deals with the function of ST in relation to the TT (Wang, 2018). In fact, (Pym, 1993) states that Christiane Nord in her book (1991, p. 25) said: *“translation process depends entirely on the relationship between ST and TT”*. Translation quality assessed differently by assessors because the quality is a kind of flavor one sees differently from others. According to House (2015), every translator has his/her own view towards dealing with translation, a translator may apply a different translation methods than others, and consequently, the criteria of the assessment would be different based on various translation schools.

Translation Theories

Generally, translation becomes an instrument of transferring values, promoting enrichment of the language itself, and its development. It transfers the values of a common heritage that each generation strives to transmit, correcting and, interpreting them according to the criteria and customs of time. Every language develops depending on its own dynamics, following a re-established sense, or randomly, depending on the circumstances. Many theories of translation have been evolved due to the need for exchanging information. Translation theory can be defined as: *“translation theory is a science which studies the systemic examination of translation and its task is to structure the translation process and the text.”* (Tanrikulu, 2017, p. 97). House (2015) emphasizes the role of translation theories in determining TQ. Therefore, the relationship between translation theories and TQ is a necessary issue that should be further explored.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It has become very necessary to look for some experts in translation that might be able to clarify the reasons behind the assessment variations among the assessors. Furthermore, these experts are expected to introduce some factors might affect the assessment of the translation quality. It was suggested to conduct interviews with some experts in translation and conference interpreting in order to generate ideas and views about the assessment of the translation quality. Mishler (1996) states that the interview technique might be used as a pilot study to collect primary data before designing further instrument such as a questionnaire. Moreover, because of the great variations assessors showed in their TQA of the trainee translators, this study suggests another method that can be more helpful in determining the reasons, in advance, of these variations in assessing translation quality i.e. an interview method. The study adopts two successive interviews as an instrument that can provide primary and fruitful information to support this study. Though a focus group technique has little attention by the researchers, this type can provide an important instrument to break the narrow methodological barriers and to save time, as well (Wilkinson, 1998).

Interview Procedures:

Primarily, ten translation experts were requested to attend an interview session as **key informants** in translation /conference interpreting to respond to interview questions; however, only six of them responded. Brinkmann (2013) proposes that the number of the interviewees can be in between (6 – 10). Interview questions were introduced to the informants who are the focus group this paper depends on in answering the introduced research questions. The focus group examined the questions and gave their views about some questions. By reading and discussing with each other, the focus group extremely engaged to set forth some ideas and views about the core elements of the questions introduced. The floor was with them to open discussions. Some informants added some other ideas related to the idea of the study. This interview was noted down, and then transcribed.

The second interview was more complex and comprehensive; the informants were received verbal questions from the researcher. Notes were written down detected from their answers. They were requested to write down some of their answers for documentary purposes. In relation to the assessment direction of the translation quality, most informants said that the quality in our context is completely subjective one. However, some of them have other views that some translation assessors try their best to let the assessment be an objective one.

The main question introduced to the informants dealt with the translation theories and their influence on the translation quality and the criteria that should be employed during the assessment process. Moreover, the informants were asked to deliver their opinions regarding the question (*Is there any assessment model at hand applied in assessing the*

translation quality?). Most of their answers were negative. They commented that there is no clear integrated model can help translation assessors mutating their assessment to an objective one. Key informants, in addition, stressed that most translation assessors have significant variations in their assessment to the translation quality. However, the variations of the assessment ought to be as low as possible.

Translation theories have a significant role in the two sessions of the discussion conducted with the key informants. Translation theories have a great influence on translation quality and an important role in shaping translation quality, this issue discussed widely by the informants. They also stressed that the translation theories when employed carefully by translators/trainee translators can improve the translation quality, thus facilitating the text or message to the receivers. Translation theories can guide the translator through a variety of techniques and strategies in choosing proper equivalences on the levels of words, sentences and texts. Most informants agreed that the decision-making process is completely depending on the determination of a proper translation theory that fits the ST message. Informants have further indicated to the importance that assessors should be acquainted enough with translation theories and their employments in the translation process and assessment process, as well. All the informants confirmed that the translation theories should have a fundamental role in the pedagogical implications and have to be included in the courses of any translation department, in addition. Sign-vehicle also regarded in this analysis. Sign-vehicle is defined as any information that can be of a great benefit in interpreting the data extracted from the interview, that might be a word, sentence, gesture, hand movement...etc., (Krippendorff, 2004).

Data Coding Procedure:

The process of data coding was done after filtering and probing the interview answers to get some relevant codes. The two interviews conducted with the focus group were transcribed and coded into main category: **Translation Quality**. The category was further indexed into three dimensions, as shown in the table below:

Assessment Criteria Dimensions		
Content	Form	Delivery
Standard of Textuality	Grammar	Translation Techniques & Strategies
Covering Main Ideas	Cohesive Devices	The application of Translation Theories
Proper word Meaning	Spelling	Time Saving
Suitable Equivalences	Punctuation	Correct use of Punctuation Marks
Writer's Intentions	Verb Tense Mastering	Final form / Delivery Techniques

Interview Coding Categorization

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Unanimously, the focus group agreed that almost all the TQA models are hard to be applied in the academic context due to their complex structures, precisely; most of them are structured to meet the assessments of professional translators; but not for the training context. Another controversy issue spread in the academic environment in which many researchers reject the most current TQA models followed in the marketplace that are not suitable to meet the training purposes of the newcomers to translation field.

Moreover, trainers / teachers in translation field undermine some TQA models due to their ambiguous nature. From the academic perspective, TQA models are divided into two main categories: (functional approach and equivalence approach). The content analysis of the interviews reveals that the models followed in the translation classes are equivalence-based approaches neglecting the functional ones. That means the assessment models depend only on some restricted models such as error analysis, content-based meaning and grammatical mistakes. It seems that these models are specific and cannot rise to the basic standards applied in translation training, not even in assessing the quality of translation.

Examining the content of the table above one can clearly understand that the interviewees did not go further to mention the details of the dimensions. However, the focus group could set the key elements of the concepts of this project.

For the translation quality category, most informants stressed that there are only three dimensions of the translation quality as represented by *content, form, and delivery*.

Content Category:

Content as emphasized by most informants is the most important part of TQA. In this category, the informants discussed the most important issues related to the meaning on the three levels: word, sentence, and text. This category as described by the group of experts as the most important one since it conveys the core elements of the given message. For a suitable equivalence item, all the interviewees stressed the importance of using the right equivalence in the right context. The first criterion stressed by the informants is *standards of Textuality*. This criterion involves seven standards: cohesion, coherence, informativity, acceptability, intentionality, intertextuality, and situationality. These standards are stressed by all informants due to their importance in getting a good translation quality that should be realized by translators. Apparently, this criterion has the most consensus among the informants. They said that during the translation process it is recommended that the translator conveys the main ideas but this does not mean ignoring the secondary ones. Certainly, informants consider this might be more effective at conference interpreting mode. *Proper word meaning and suitable equivalence* are other criteria that have been emphasized, especially in written translation. The last criterion of the content dimension is the *writer's intention* or intentionality where it was emphasized by the informants, because of its importance in conveying the content of the message and the important information that must be conveyed to the TL with clarity, transparency, and fidelity.

Form Category

Some interviewees lessened the perfect *grammar* that the translator should show during the translation process. While others disagreed with this turning point, they emphasized the role of grammar in communicating the intention of the text or message. Sometimes grammatical mistakes might affect the whole meaning of a written text, as stated by some informants. Moreover, they stressed that trainee translators should have at least the basics of grammar; however, professional translators should master grammar in all its aspects. Another item of grammar is the *cohesive devices*. This item is also stressed because it has a direct connection with translation, as noted by most informants. *Spelling* also discussed by informants that has a great impact on meaning. This item might change the whole meaning, for example: dessert/desert, bark/park... etc. For *punctuation* item: the informants commented that this item also has an important role in translation due to its pivotal role in determining the meaning of a sentence. *Verb tense mastering*: it is widely believed that the verb tense is a controversy area, as seen by grammarians, for non-native speakers for a certain language. Moreover, this item has different views among informants that some said it has little impact on whole meaning of a sentence.

Delivery Techniques

This dimension is widely stressed by all informants. They all agree that this dimension is the core of any piece of translation whether it is a written or an oral translation. The item of translation techniques and strategies is widely stressed by informants due to their importance in the process of conveying the ideas of the ST. Theories of translation have more attention and discussion among the informants. Some said the application of a certain theory helps translator/interpreter supporting his/her selection of the method of translation that fits the text type. Furthermore, translation theories can shape the correct project in dealing or solving the problems might come up during the translation process. However, *"not all the problems are expected to be settled"* as reported by all informants who involved in this study. Thus, the translator should resort to certain strategies in order to solve problems might appear during the translation process.

Almost all informants ensure the importance of *time controlling* as a factor that extremely affect the process of translation, especially during the oral interpreting process. Translators/interpreters ought to manage and preserve their time during the interpreting process (consecutive and simultaneous interpreting). Because time might be very limited, especially in oral translation, the translator should pay attention to the limitation of time and organize his time during the translation process. Since languages have different rules of using punctuation marks, it is necessary for translators not to apply these rules randomly. Translators have to be aware of using these writing elements. For example, English and Arabic have different rules of using punctuation marks; therefore, translators should inevitably master these rules. Obviously, translators have to take care of using punctuation marks, for example; the use of '*comma*' for its importance in determining the meaning being communicated. Furthermore, informants discussed the last item and the most important one, is the *delivery techniques* and *strategies*. This item, as emphasized by informants, is a vital tool for smooth and acceptable translation. For example, translators have to choose among translation techniques and strategies when confronting any problem during the translation process.

For question number one, only four informants characterized the criteria of translation quality in a compatible way with the literatures. However, they emphasized the content and the form criteria ignoring the delivery techniques as a major criterion of assessing the translation quality. The other two informants have a clear vision regarding the criterion of delivery through their description represented by mentioning the items of the quality assessment such as: the application of translation theories, translation techniques and strategies, and time controlling. With regard to question number two, consensually all informants argued that most assessors do not depend on a certain model of assessing translation quality, since the term 'Quality' is a 'Taste' belongs to the assessor himself/herself. Another reason for the variations in TQ that translation for some translation experts is an 'Art' rather than a science. However, they support some models as 'House model' of translation assessment, 'Wadding's model' of assessment and some other models. The most important factors affect the assessment process, question number three; only two informants commented that depends entirely on the assessor's assessment background. Regarding question four, only three informants gave their opinions. They stated that the translation theories have a deep impact on framing and determining the translation quality level. The level of translation quality might be high or low relying mainly on the proper application of a suitable translation theory that fits the text type. Seeing that translation theories are practical in their nature, they powerfully take part in improving translation quality.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the informants have different views regarding the criteria of translation quality. However, they could have some common points regarding the research main ideas. They define translation quality as a final product of a process of translation. Translation quality might be so poor, poor, acceptable, high or so high. Mostly, an outcome product is characterized by certain features. The quality of translation is governed and being changed by those features. Quality is something cannot be judged easily because translation quality is a sort of personal taste of self-created rules. For these reasons, an outcome quality would be distinctive and subjective in nature. Consequently, in translation assessment, a rule-driven quality is quite an absence. The main criteria of translation quality, as informants characterized, are content, form, and delivery. It is recommended to conduct further studies in the field of translation quality assessment including the factors might affect the process of the assessment. Using a mixed-method approach in exploring the assessment criteria needs for quite attention because this approach gives more detailed results as stressed by most scholars.

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