Juliane House's Model of Translation Quality Assessment: A Response to Subjective, Theoretical Methods of Assessment

نموذج جوليان هاوس في تقييم الترجمة: رد على المناهج الذاتية النظرية

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Abstract:

Translation quality assessment is an ever-growing branch of translation studies. It attempts to evaluate translations and decide which translations were brilliantly performed and which ones lacked coherence and correctness. However, TQA has been accused of lacking objective criteria and of being unreliable in judging translations because of the differing views on the notion of TQA and the multiple criteria used by each researcher in building his method of evaluation. For this reason, subjectivity governed TQA from the start; yet, several scholars suggested methods that tried to counter this subjectivity. One of them is Juliane House, who designed an assessment method that is based on analysis, comparison, and description of errors. This paper sheds light on early methods of translation quality assessment and their subjective tendency. It also questions House's objectivity level and wonders whether she succeeded in defying subjectivity as opposed to her predecessors.

Keywords: House's Approach; Subjectivity; Subjective Methods of Assessment; Theoretical Views; Translation Quality Assessment.

ملخص:

تقييم جودة الترجمة فرع من دراسات التّرجمة يشهد حاليا الكثير من التطور. يحاول هذا الفرع تقييم التّرجمات وتحديد الجيدة منها وتلك التي افتقدت التماسك والصّحة، غير أن تقييم جودة التّرجمة اتُّهم بالافتقار للمعايير الموضوعية وعدم الاعتماد عليها في الحكم على التّرجمات والفصل في جودتها، وذلك بسبب الآراء المختلفة حول مفهوم تقييم التّرجمة و تعدّد وتنوّع المعايير المتّبعة من طرف الباحثين في بناء مناهجهم وأساليب التّقييم الخاصة بهم. ولهذا حكمت الذّاتية تقييم جودة التّرجمة منذ البداية، غير أنّ عددا من الباحثين في هذا المجال اقترح مناهجا لمجابهة هذه الذاتية. ومن بين هؤلاء جوليان هاوس التي صمّمت نموذج تقييم يعتمد على التّحليل والمقارنة ووصف الأخطاء. تّسلط هذه الورقة البحثية على أوائل المناهج في تقييم جودة التّرجمة وميولها نحو الذّاتية. كما أنّها تتساءل حول مدى موضوعية نموذج جوليان هاوس لتقييم التّرجمة، وفيما إذا نجحت في التّغلب على الذّاتية في التقييم، بخلاف من سبقوها.

كلمات مفتاحية: نموذج هاوس.، آراء نظرية .، الذّاتية.، مناهج التقييم الذّاتية.، تقييم جودة التّرجمة .

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1. Introduction

Translation quality assessment is the process that attempts to evaluate a translation by signalling the faults and mistranslations as well as the level of acceptability scored by the translator. It also attempts to clarify the process the translator went through while producing the product; hence, it's an evaluation of either process or product or both. Early views and methods of translation assessment were either based on instincts or readers' responses, which maximized their subjectivity level and rendered them unreliable for objective assessment. However, the field of translation assessment witnessed a gradual improvement in terms of minimising subjectivity, in the form of functional, discourse-based, and linguistic approaches of assessment. These views and approaches adopted quantitative, diagnostic, and statistical methods. Some considered the function of text the key focus of translation assessment; others discussed the importance of socio-cultural relations in assessment, whereas a lot of approaches were purely linguistic and proposed methods as such. Still, it did not quite solve the subjectivity problem due to the lack of practice and focus on theory.

Before introducing her method of translation assessment, Juliane House responded to these methods and approaches as well as views that attempted to theorize on translation quality assessment. House pointed to the lacking of a detailed theoretical side and the absence of procedures used to evaluate a translation, hence the impossibility of applying them to texts.

Juliane house's method of assessment came as a response to early attempts and previous theoretical views that lacked objective criteria or were solely theoretical. House, known as one of the most notable scholars in the field of translation studies and translation assessment, introduced her linguistic pragmatic method of translation quality assessment in 1977 and revised it several times afterward. House's approach which is based on textual analysis, comparison, and description is a detailed process of assessment that consists of a series of procedures, that take into account both source and target texts, classify translations into covert and overt translations, signal the errors and deviations, and point to the cultural dimension in translation. Moreover, House put her method into practice and applied it to some texts of varied fields, contrary to other scholars and researchers who skipped the practical part of the assessment. For this reason, House's approach of translation quality assessment stood out as a less subjective method that could achieve a high amount of reliability and validity.

2. Subjectivity

Subjectivity is the act of using the instincts and the personal inner psyche in judging something or someone, which means lacking objectivity or reason in giving an opinion; defining a notion or performing a task. Matsumoto defines subjectivity in his Cambridge dictionary of psychology as: "the process of making judgments based on personal experience, intuition, and interpretations rather than in terms of social definitions, culturally consensual viewpoints, or attempts at objectivity as in science" (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 527). Therefore, the paramount point here is relying on the self rather than separating facts from feelings in verbalising thoughts or analysing phenomena. Falling into subjectivity minimises objectivity, which is the opposite of biased thinking and intuitive ideas. Thus, researchers and scholars strive to achieve objectivity in their academic studies and research to reach some credibility and a certain level of reliability.

3. Translation quality assessment

Translation quality assessment or (TQA) is a sub-field of translation studies that was termed "translation criticism" in Holmes' map of translation studies (Holmes,1972). It focuses on the outcome of translation, signalling the positive points and the negative ones. Lauscher explains the essence of TQA and says:

> The judgement itself fulfils a purpose. It may serve to examine a translator's qualification for a particular job, to assess whether he or she has satisfied the requirements for a specific translation task, to inform a translation student about his or her progress, to inform the reader about the quality of the translation of new work of fiction. (Lauscher, 2000, as cited in Baer & Koby, 2003)

So purposes of translation quality assessment differ, however, the focus of TQA is always the resulting translated work which receives a particular value in the form of a judgement. This judgement, if not built on a strong theoretical ground and put into practice, exposes TQA to subjectivity, and renders its outcomes unreliable.

4. Early TQA subjective approaches
4.1 Impressionistic and mentalist views

They were based on personal feelings and subjective opinions, House says regarding these attempts to judge translations:

> … in the majority of cases these judgements are based on simple impressions and feelings, and as such, they are prone to lead to global undifferentiated valuations like the following: the translation doesn't capture the spirit of the original,… or this translation is as good as or even better than the original. (House,2015,p. 9)

In such a case, this so-called assessment becomes an opinion about the personality of the translator, which means the translator has to have a similar view as the reader or

the assessor for such a translation to be accepted or appreciated..

4.2 Behaviouristic stance

The behaviouristic approach attempted to adopt a more scientific way of judging translated products, mainly through observation, and testing. However, it was as well criticized for being subjective and lacking credibility in judging translations. This stance was advocated by both Eugene Nida and Charles Taber, who co-authored (Theory and practice of translation) in 1969. In their book, Nida and Taber called the process of assessing a translation "Testing" which comes after "restructuring".

In this respect, they say that to test a translation one must focus on dynamic equivalence which is "in the receptor language the closest natural equivalence of the source-language message…" and not verbal or formal correspondence which means source-oriented translation that strives to recapture the same form and content of the original message by copying for instance, as close as possible, original grammar elements (Nida & Taber, 1969, p. 12), In this sense Nida and Taber state:,"… Testing the translation does not consist in merely comparing texts to see the extent of verbal consistency or conformity (…) but in determining how the potential receptors of a translation react to it" (Nida & Taber, p. 163).

In other words, the key factor in evaluating a translation for these researchers is the receptors' response. Further, they explain that this type of testing or assessment is executed through a series of procedures that attempt to measure the quality of a translation by checking or observing the reaction of readers to translations. These procedures include the cloze technique, reaction to alternatives, explaining the contents, reading the translated text aloud, and publication of sample material.

Indisputably, the behaviouristic approach adopted by Nida and Taber was very limited in terms of judging the quality of a translation as they disregarded the source text completely; however, it is the subjectivity of these procedures that pose a serious issue. The core of subjectivity is relying on people's reactions and opinions to accumulate a final judgement about a translation. The absence of bias in such a case is nearly impossible because the assessor is the reader or the translator himself, besides the non-justified response, for when we want to have an objective assessment we clearly should have answers explaining why certain elements are vague or incomprehensible. Part of being objective in testing is justifying the judgement. We notice from the above-mentioned views and early attempts at suggesting approaches or theories of assessment, a limited consideration of the objectivity of such methods.

5. Theoretical endeavours
5.1 Functionalists

Another trial at judging translation, which as well sprang from response-based methods, yet different from the behaviouristic stance, is the functionalist school and the skopos theory represented by Katharina Reiss and Hans Vermeer who considered the skopos or the function of a text the basis of evaluation (Reiss & Vermeer,

1984/2014). In other words, the translated text has to have an equal function, which is the function of the source text, for the translation's quality to be met. Reiss also suggested text types to evaluate translations; and authored "Translation criticism: the potentials and limitations" (2000/2014), detailing a whole book about the theory and criteria of translation quality assessment. However, she didn't provide any practical approaches to assess translation, which directly reduces her theoretical endeavours into the scope of subjectivity. Part of rendering a study or a theory objective is testing its practicality and the degree of its reliability.

5. 2 Text and discourse-based approaches

They are approaches that tried to enrich assessment methods with their views that counter to a certain extent the early views on translation quality assessment, according to House these methods include descriptive translation studies, postmodernist and deconstructionist views, and linguistically oriented views (House, 2015, p. 12). The primary focus of these methods was the target text and its relationship with the target culture

5.2.1 Descriptive studies

Descriptive studies were advocated by Gideon Toury. The main idea in assessment is the workings of the target text in the target language and culture. In this respect, Toury says that translations are: "facts of the culture which hosts them" (1995, as cited in house, 2015, p. 12), which means a source text gains a new identity when translated, which makes assessment target-based. In evaluating translations descriptive studies take into consideration, to a large extent, the forms and functions of these translated texts in the target culture, which, according to House, renders the source text of minor importance in the evaluation. Though Toury made great efforts to provide a different theory about translation assessment; these efforts were purely theoretical, as he didn't provide us with a particular set of procedures to test its reliability.

5.2.2 Postmodernist and deconstructionist views

These approaches tended to test translations from a philosophical socio-cultural point of view, which is why they are called "philosophical, socio-cultural, socio-political approaches" (House,2015,p. 13). This means that these views base their assessment of translation on certain forces that attempt to reach certain goals via translation. One of the best-known scholars who adopted this idea (Venuti, 1995), who revived the notions of domestication and foreignization in translation, which influenced his views on assessment. House praised these approaches as they "throw into question basic concepts in translation such as meaning, and other basic notions involving language, communication that have so far been taken tacitly for granted" (House, pp. 13-14). Also, these texts clarify "internal contradictions". However, the issue with these methods is focusing on a single aspect, that is, the socio-cultural power relations angle, and neglecting the linguistic dimension, which is the essence of

translations. Besides, these approaches didn't provide a set of concrete procedures to apply to translations. Theoretically, they had a new stance to focus on, but it lacked further elaboration on practical procedures, which might have guaranteed a more objective consideration regarding these approaches.

5.2.3 Linguistic- oriented approaches

They are based on linguistic theory and support the notion that translation is first and foremost a linguistic process. A lot of scholars and researchers supported this stance, mainly, (Catford, 1965; Nida, 1964; Hatim & Mason, 1990, 1997; Davidson 2002) and House (1977/1981) who also advocates this movement towards linguistic dimension in translation assessment, as she considered translation: "linguistic-textual phenomenon and can be legitimately described, analysed and assessed as such" (House,1997, pp. 118 -119). The main idea surrounding linguistic approaches is giving importance to "the relationship between source and translated text". For House, a lot of scholars like Hatim and Mason(1990/1997), Doherty(1993), Hickey(1998), and others made valuable contributions to enrich the assessment theoretical scope, although they didn't, like many other scholars, provide procedures of assessment, which made it unclear whether such stance is more objective in assessment compared to others. However, House stood out with her detailed work, a linguistic pragmatic method of translation assessment, which is probably the most refined method of assessment.

From the above methods and views of translation quality, we notice that researchers and scholars in the field of translation limited their opinions or studies to theory and talked vaguely about the concept of translation assessment, and did not opt for a set of procedures applicable to translation to test their theory. The table below clarifies that further.

Table1: explaining the lack of practical application of the above views and theories on translation quality assessment.

Method of translation assessment	Theory or method of assessment	Practice
Mentalist school	Merely feelings and impressions	Absence of practice
Behavioristic stance	Observation and testing	Difficult to apply in real life
Functionalist school	Skopos theory as the evaluation tool	Didn't provide any practical use of method
Postmodernist and deconstructionist views	Based on the soci-cultural power relation angle	Lack of any set of assessment procedures
Linguistic approaches	Based on linguistic theory	Merely theoritical

6. Juliane House's model of translation quality assessment

Juliane's House model of translation quality assessment is probably the most talked about method of assessment in the academic field of translation. The reason for that is her commitment to include various angles in her approach. House adopted an analytical, comparative, and descriptive method. Moreover, her model of assessment underwent several revisions, in 1977, 1997, and 2000, to improve its outcome and reliability. Furthermore, House made a step forward by putting her method into practice, using different types of texts to test its credibility. House's model of quality assessment can be divided into four procedures: textual analysis, comparison, description of the type of translation, and application of a cultural filter.

6.1 Textual Analysis

Textual analysis of both source and target text is the first thing to do when assessing a translation. This analysis is composed of genre which is the generic purpose and register which include field, which captures the content of the text or its subject matter (House, p. 64). Tenor is the kind of relationship that exists between the addressor and the addresses, that is, whether it's a close one or a distant one and whether they are socially distinct in terms of power. Mode, says House:

> refers to both, the channel-spoken or written, which can be simple, e.g., written to be read or complex e.g. to be spoken as if not written, and the degree to which potential or real participation is allowed between writer and reader. (House, 2015, p. 64)

6. 2 Comparison

The comparison phase comes after analysing both texts, source and target, textually. Through this analysis we search for "a textual profile that characterizes the individual textual function" (House, 2015, p. 65), such profile allows us to perform the second step, which is to compare and search for mismatches, first in general and then in field, tenor and mode. Specifically, we search for textual mismatches, syntactic mismatches, and lexical mismatches. Figure 1 clarifies the processes of both analysis and comparison.

Figure 1: A scheme for analysing and comparing original and translations texts
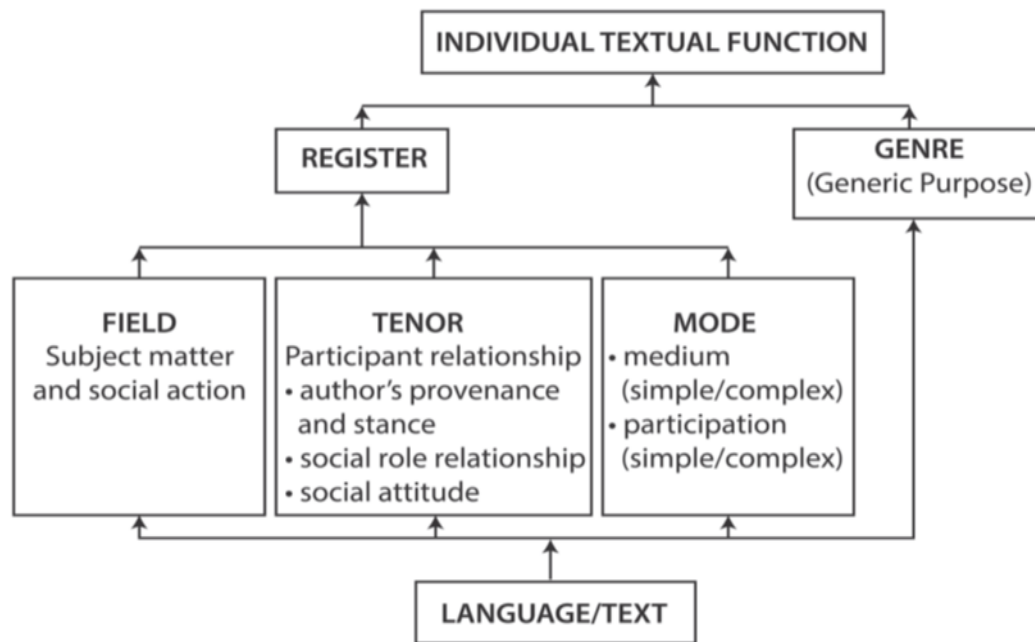
Sourcze: (House, 2015, p65)

6.3 Describing the types of translation

House divided translation into two types. A translator chooses one of them, generally, depending on the type of text he is dealing with; some texts require overt translations whereas others require covert translations:

An overt translation which is described by House as "overtly a translation", not "a second original" (House, 2015, p. 65), is rooted in the source culture. The original text, in such a case, addresses the source readers specifically, which means, the nature of the text calls for this type of translation, used mostly with historical texts for instance.

A covert translation on the other hand is a translation that enjoys "the status of the original" (House,2015, p. 66), which means that the translator is not tied to the source text culture, and the target text readers can feel that they are being addressed by the original author.

 In her method of assessment, House devised these two types of translations to decide whether the translator chose the right translation for the right text or language. Consequently, In the case of overt translation, a source and target text have to be equal at the level of language/ text and register as well as register and genre, however in terms of achieving functional equivalence, due to the nature of the text, a translator's best work is to allow access to the original function in the source text. In covert translation, however, an equal function needs to be achieved. In the statement of quality, a brief statement on the use of overt or covert translations is required. Translators might use a covert translation with a text that is best translated overtly, for the reasons we mentioned earlier about the type of text and its translation.

6. 4 Cultural filter

House did not disregard the socio-cultural dimension in her model; hence, she came up with the term "cultural filter" defined by House as "a means of capturing socio-cultural differences in expectations norms and stylistic conventions between the source and target linguistic-cultural communities" (House, 2015, p68). Essentially, a cultural filter is applied when a translator feels the need to adapt or omit certain elements in the translation to conform to the target text's socio-cultural realm. In translation assessment, we comment on the use of covert and overt translations as well as cultural filter and on whether it was properly applied or conveniently resorted to.

7. House's model and objectivity in assessment

For House, most of the approaches used in translation quality assessment were subjective due to one of three reasons:

- They were based on intuition and instincts.
- They disregarded source text.
- They didn't put their views into practice.

Unlike other methods, however, House provided testing of her method of assessment, which is very important to prove that a particular method of assessment is applicable in practice. House also included the source text in her assessment of translation, which is indispensable since we are dealing with a translation, not an original text. Moreover, she used analysis, comparison, and description in her approach, which renders her work more scientific and less subjective. She also included the cultural dimension in her assessment which is indispensable when dealing with literary translations specifically. Thus, House succeeded in minimising the scope of subjectivity in translation quality assessment and provided a new referential source for future models of translation assessment.

8. Conclusion

Subjectivity ruled the field of translation quality assessment for a long time, first through the mentalist and the behaviouristic approaches, which had a limited view and opted for purely subjective procedures, and then through methods that were only theoretical and which neglected the practical side. Nevertheless, many efforts were made in trying to reduce the subjectivity in translation assessment. One of the most prominent methods in translation quality assessment is House's method which is a detailed system of translation evaluation, that takes into account the linguistic, functional, and the socio-cultural dimension, through multiple procedures that attempt to analyse and compare both source and target texts first, and then, classify translations to covert and overt, to finally conclude this assessment with a statement of quality that points to the errors and deviations and to correct choices made by a translator. Hence, House's translation quality assessment offered a less subjective approach built on objective pillars, which revolutionized the field of translation quality assessment and opened the door for further studies.

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