Waddington’s model of translation quality assessment: a critical inquiry

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ABSTRACT
To assess a translated work, just like marking a translation, is a highly subjective task. There is not any objective index according to which, reviewers can assess or mark a translation. So, many reviewers employ a holistic approach to translation quality assessment. Although, there are some models like Waddington’s (2001), which are less subjective, and translation is assessed according to some pre-set criteria. In this paper, Waddington’s model (2001) was applied on the Persian translation of George Orwell’s 1984, by Baluch. Twenty paragraphs were chosen randomly and compared and contrasted precisely with their parallel translations to assess the quality of translation. By close investigation of the model, Waddington’s model turned to be incomplete, regarding translation shifts and additions. Besides, the holistic method proved not to be sufficient as it should be and the model is more of academic contexts, rather than appropriate for general use for Translation Quality Assessment.

Introduction

“What is a good translation?” should be "one of the most important questions to be asked in connection with translation" (House, 1981, p. 127), "it is notoriously difficult to say why or even whether, something is a good translation" (Halliday, 2001, p. 14). From the beginning of practice of translation, there have been always some evaluators, to assess (or even mark) the translations. All of these evaluators (or scholars) employed a holistic approach, to Translation Quality Assessment (TQA), until recent years, some scholars of translation raised the notion of ‘equivalence’ in translation. As Halliday (2001, p. 15) states, this is “the central organizing concept” of translation. But this concept is a controversial one, as Kenny (1998, p. 77) asserts “In the English-language scholarship criteria of translation, the concept of (translational) equivalence is ‘central’ but ‘controversial’.”

But what is equivalence and how important it is? According to Koller (1995, p.197), it "merely means a special relationship—which can be designated as the translation relationship—is apparent between two texts, a source (primary) one and a resultant one." Or as Nord (1997, p.36) defines it "a static, result-oriented concept describing a relationship of ‘equal communicative value’ between two texts or, on lower rank, between words, phrases, sentences, syntactic structures and so on (In this context, ‘value’ refers to meaning, stylistic connotations or communicative effect)."

The controversial nature of ‘equivalence’ is obviously highlighted in the following quotation from Kenny:

Some theorists define translation in terms of equivalence relations (Catford, 1965; Nida and Taber, 1969; Toury, 1980; Pym, 1992, 1995; Koller, 1995) while others reject the theoretical notion of equivalence, claiming it is either irrelevant (Snell-Hornby, 1988) or damaging (Gentzler, 1993) to translation studies. Yet other theorists steer a middle course: Baker [(1992:5-6)] uses the notion of equivalence “for the sake of convenience—because most translators are used to it rather than it has any theoretical status.” (Kenny, 1998, p.77)

In recent years, more and more TQA models have employed the notion of ‘equivalence’ and thus, have reduced the high subjectivity of the task of translation quality assessment. The scholars have tried to set some criteria for evaluating the translation of an original work. They deal, more or less, with equivalence at ‘word-level’. One of these models is the Waddington’s model (2001).

According to Waddington (1995) most of the works in the field of translation quality assessment, were theoretical and descriptive. Some scholars like Darbelnet (1977) and Newmark (1991) sought to set the criteria for a good translation. Some other scholars like House (1981), Nord (1993) and Gouadec (1981) wanted to define the nature of translation errors. Again, House (1981) was for building a bridge between quality assessment and text linguistic analysis. Larose (1989) shared similar views to those of her. Scholars like Dancette (1989) and Larose (1989) put their emphasis on textual levels and were seeking to relate these hierarchical levels to the mistakes made during translation. The Psycholinguistic theory of ‘scenes and frames’ was introduced into the field of translation, by Dancette (1992) and Snell-Hornby (1995), which was a theory, related to translation quality assessment.

As you see, all of these models and theories were so abstract that one may face some problems, applying them in the real world. They all, described the states of translation, regarding TQA, which to date, had become a controversial notion in translation studies. But none of them had proposed some applicable and feasible solutions to the problem of translation assessment.

In 90’s, some scholars like Campbell (1991) and Stanfield (1992), conducted some empirical studies on TQA, in a field which was starving for that. Campbell (1991), emphasized on
In each of the categories a distinction is made between the main function or secondary functions of the source text. He concluded that there are three kinds of competence: a) lexical coding of meaning, b) global target language competence, and c) lexical transfer competence. His work drew on works of Seguinot (1989) who observed translation processes in translation quality assessment of a translated work and examined mistakes. Campbell examined other aspects as well, but again his work was on the linguistic level and he too, ignored above-linguistic levels.

Stanfield (1992) defined variables that constitute translation ability. One was 'accuracy' which was the degree to which, the translator transfers the content of ST accurately. The other one was 'expression', which was the quality of expression of that content. Waddington’s (2001) work was different in that, his work is summative.

In order for Waddington’s model to be analyzed, it should be applied to some text, in real conditions, so as to test the reliability and validity of his model, and to see what weak-points and merits it has, regarding TQA. Before doing that, let us have a close look at waddington’s model (2001). Here, a brief description of this model and some keywords are provided for the attention of those who are not familiar with the model.

**Method A**

Method A is the work of Hurtado Albir (1995); she draws up a list of possible errors which are divided into three categories:

1. Inappropriate renderings which affect the understanding of the source text; these are divided into eight categories: contresens, faux sens, nonsens, addition, omission, unresolved extralinguistic references, loss of meaning, and inappropriate linguistic variation (register, style, dialect, etc.).

2. Inappropriate renderings which affect expression in the target language; these are divided into five categories: spelling, grammar, lexical items, text, and style.

3. Inadequate renderings which affect the transmission of either the main function or secondary functions of the source text.

In each of the categories a distinction is made between serious errors (-2 points) and minor errors (-1 point). There is a fourth category which describes the plus points to be awarded for good (+1 point) or exceptionally good solutions (+2 points) for translation problems. In the case of the translation exam where this method was used, the sum of the negative points was subtracted from a total of 110 and then divided by 11 to reach a mark from 0 to 10 (which is the normal Spanish system) (Waddington, 2001, p. 3).

For example, if a student gets a total of –66 points, his result would be calculated as follows: 
\[(110 - 66)/11 = 4\] (which fails to pass; the lowest pass mark is 5).

**Method B**

Method B is also based on error analysis and was designed to take into account the negative effect of errors on the overall quality of the translations (Cf. Kussmaul, 1995, p.129, and Waddington, 1997). The corrector first has to determine whether each mistake is a translation mistake or just a language mistake; this is done by deciding whether or not the mistake affects the transfer of meaning from the source to the target text: if it does not, it is a language error (and is penalised with –1 point); if it does, it is a translation error (and is penalised with –2 points). However, in the case of translation errors, the corrector has to judge the importance of the negative effect that each one of these errors has on the translation, taking into consideration the objective and the target reader specified in the instructions to the candidates in the exam paper. The final mark for each translation is calculated in the same way as for Method A: that is to say, the examiner fixes a total number of positive points (in the case of method B, this was 85), then subtracts the total number of negative points from this figure, and finally divides the result by 8.5. For example, if a student is given 30 minus points, his total mark would be 6.5 (pass): 85 - 30 = 55/8.5 = 6.5.

**Method C**

Method C is a holistic method of assessment. Although, in the survey mentioned above, the teachers who answered were requested to send a brief description of the method of assessment they applied, I only received three descriptions of holistic methods. In addition to this, all three methods based their scales on the requirements of professional translation and were consequently of little use for judging the quality of translation into the foreign language. As a result, I had to design the following holistic method myself. The scale is unitary and treats the translation competence as a whole, but requires the corrector to consider three different aspects of the student’s performance, as shown in the table below. For each of the five levels there are two possible marks, so as to comply with the Spanish marking system of 0 – 10; this allows the corrector freedom to award the higher mark to the candidate who fully meets the requirements of a particular level and the lower mark to the candidate who falls between two levels but is closer to the upper one.

**Method D**

Method D consists of combining error analysis Method B and holistic Method C in a proportion of 70/30; that is to say, Method B accounts for 70% of the total result and Method C for the remaining 30%.

**Method**

In this paper, the researcher will use a comparative approach to evaluating translation quality of George Orwell’s much famous novel, 1984, by H.R Baluch. In fact, the errors, according to categorization of Waddington, were analyzed. Twenty paragraphs were chosen randomly alongside with their parallel translations. Both original texts and their translations were analyzed carefully and precisely for errors. The results are given in some tables, in data analysis section.

The frequency of each error category was provided for getting to the results and these results were discussed.

**Data analysis**

In order to analyze, first the original text and its translation is presented, then, the above mentioned 3 categories of errors are investigated for each paragraph separately. Regarding the problem of space, all the paragraphs will not be presented, but 20 percent of the collected data would be presented in the appendix. Finally, the researcher demonstrates the results, obtained from all paragraphs in a single table.

To clarify the above mentioned points, the following paragraph and its translation seem to be in order.

**Paragraph no.1**

The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats. At one end of it a coloured poster, too large for indoor display, had been tacked to the wall. It depicted simply an enormous face, more than a meter wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features. Winston made for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the economy drive in preparation for Hate Week. The flat was...
seven flights up, and Winston, who was thirty-nine and had a
varicose ulcer above his right ankle, went slowly, resting several
times on the way. On each landing, opposite the lift-shaft, the
poster with the enormous face glared at him. It was one of those
pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you
about when you move. My BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU,
the caption beneath it ran.

As it was mentioned before, this study sought to investigate
the reliability and validity of Waddington’s model, through
applying it to a translated work. Four critiques could be
mentioned about this model. First of all, this model is highly
academic-bound and cannot be applied to real cases of
translation evaluation, outside the academic context. As you see,
most of the times, Waddington talks about numerical values,
calculations, and marking, while most of the times, an evaluator
is not to mark a translation. So, this model is more useful
in academic contexts and cannot be easily distributed to general
translation evaluation. Another critique upon this model is its
ignorance toward translation shifts. As Catford (1965) notes,
languages operate at different levels and ranks. When it comes to
textual equivalence and particular ST-TT pairs, sometimes
there occurs a divergence between the pair of languages. When
the two concepts diverge, a translation shift occurs, and this can
be either a level shift (1965, p. 73) or a category shift (1965, p.
75-82). As Catford himself defines it, translation shifts are
“departures from formal correspondence in the process of going
from the SL to the TL” (Catford, 1965, p. 73). So, translation
shifts are inevitable as the structures of the languages differ,
regarding their levels and ranks. So it is important to take into
account this very important and controversial notion of
translation. Because mostly, the structures of Persian and
English languages are not the same, the Persian translation has
to go through many translation shifts, in order to transfer the
intended meaning. Most of the times, this shift is inevitable, and
the Persian reader or better say, evaluator, considers it an
appropriate strategy. But, Waddington has not paid any attention
to this important and inseparable part of translation, not placing
translation shifts, neither in error categories, nor in positive
actions, taken by the translator. In this case study, the translator
has widely used translation shifts, but the evaluator, is not
certain if mark them as error or competence.

The third criticism against his model is related to holistic
method C. Waddington’s description of this method is so
general, and leaves the evaluator in a vague situation. Although
Waddington tries to propose an objective model for translation
evaluation, this method seems to spoil his labor for objectifying
the task. This holistic method shows high characteristics of
subjectivity, since the evaluation is left alone to the evaluator,
and judgment is different from evaluator to evaluator. Besides,
one cannot go through a whole without passing through the
details. In fact, if there are no details, there is not a whole. It is
about the deduction/induction dichotomy. To get the result, one
has to utilize either deductive or inductive approach. Both of
these approaches deal with the details. The first one seeks to
proceed from generalization to particular facts, while the other
moves from particular facts to generalizations (Richards, 2002).
So, when an evaluator states a translation as holistically good, he
should have gone through some detailed features of translation
strategies and competence, based on some details, and thus, the
holistic method is somehow spoiled.
The last critique upon Waddington’s model is that of addition, in Method A. The notion of explicitation in translation was first raised by Klaudy (1996). He believes that sometimes it is necessary (and not optional) to add some information to the concepts, or even grammatical structures, in order to make them more explicit and familiar to the eyes of the target reader. So, not only is it addition an error, but also it is a good means of conveying the desired meaning. It seems that Waddington is in favor of word-for-word translation, because he emphasizes that addition is an error, while in sense-for-sense approach, the transference of meaning is of prime importance. Addition adds some extra information to the meaning and as long as this information is not wrong, and it is in cohesive level, one could not deem it as an error. In fact, addition is a good aid for the translator to transfer the meaning, wherever it is not adequate. Of course, omission is an error in both approaches, where some parts of the meaning are deliberately omitted, though some scholars like Baker (1992), considers that as a strategy for translation, and places it as the seventh strategy among her eight strategies for translation in word level. But the author of this paper agrees that omission in any ways, is an error and should be avoided. Persian translators widely use addition, like the one in this study, that according to Waddington’s model, this category constituted about 41% of errors. But not only were not some additions errors, but also they were some good strategies for transferring meaning and thus, should not be deemed as errors.

References

Appendix
Paragraph No.1
The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats. At one end of it a coloured poster, too large for indoor display, had been tacked to the wall. It depicted simply an enormous face, more than a metre wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features. Winston made for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom working, and at present the electric current was cut off during daylight hours. It was part of the economy drive in preparation for Hate Week. The flat was seven flights up, and Winston, who was thirty-nine and had a varicose ulcer above his right ankle, went slowly, resting several times on the way. On each landing, opposite the lift-shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. Big brother is watching you, the caption beneath it ran.
Paragraph No.3

Winston could not definitely remember a time when his country had not been at war, but it was evident that there had been a fairly long interval of peace during his childhood, because of his early memories was of an air raid which appeared to take everyone by surprise. Perhaps it was the time when the atomic bomb had fallen on Colchester. He did not remember the raid itself, but he did remember his father’s hand clutching his own as they hurried down, down, down into some place deep in the earth, round and round a spiral staircase which rang under his feet and which finally so wearied his legs that he began whimpering and they had to stop and rest. His mother, in her slow, dreamy way, was following a long way behind them. She was carrying his baby sister—or perhaps it was only a bundle of blankets that she was carrying: he was not certain whether his sister had been born then. Finally they had emerged into a noisy, crowded place which he had realized to be a Tube station.

Some Eurasian prisoners, guilty of war crimes, were to be hanged in the Park that evening. Winston remembered. This happened about once a month, and was a popular spectacle. Children always clamoured to be taken to see it. He took his leave of Mrs Parsons and made for the door. But he had not gone six steps down the passage when something hit the back of his neck an agonizingly painful blow. It was as though a red-hot wire had been jabbed into him. He spun round in just to see Mrs Parsons dragging her son back into the doorway while the boy pocketed a catapult.

Paragraph No.4

Winston read through the offending article. Big Brother’s Order for the Day, it seemed, had been chiefly devoted to praising the work of an organization known as FFCC, which supplied cigarettes and other comforts to the sailors in the Floating Fortresses. A certain Comrade Withers, a prominent member of the Inner Party, had been singled out for special mention and awarded a decoration, the Order of Conceivable Merit, Second Class.
Table 1: Scale For Holistic Method C (Waddington, 2001, p. 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Accuracy of transfer ST content</th>
<th>Quality of expression in TL</th>
<th>Degree of task completion</th>
<th>Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>Complete transfer of ST information; only minor revision needed to reach professional standard.</td>
<td>Almost all the translation reads like a piece originally written in English. There may be minor lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.</td>
<td>Successful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Almost complete transfer; there may be one or two insignificant inaccuracies; requires certain amount of revision to reach professional standard.</td>
<td>Large sections read like a piece originally written in English. There are a number of lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.</td>
<td>Almost completely successful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Transfer of the general idea(s) but with a number of lapses in accuracy; needs considerable revision to reach professional standard.</td>
<td>Certain parts read like a piece originally written in English, but others read like a translation. There are a considerable number of lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.</td>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Transfer undermined by serious inaccuracies; thorough revision required to reach professional standard.</td>
<td>Almost the entire text reads like a translation; there are continual lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.</td>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Totally inadequate transfer of ST content; the translation is not worth revising.</td>
<td>The candidate reveals a total lack of ability to express himself adequately in English</td>
<td>Totally inadequate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: The Frequency of Errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error</th>
<th>No. of Occurrence</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addition</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faux sens</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omission</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of meaning</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical items</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contresens</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate linguistic variation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unresolved linguistic reference</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsense</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Style</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>100</td>
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