Translation quality and grammatical proficiency: indirect speech translation from English to Persian

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ABSTRACT

By adopting a language-oriented, problem-solving perspective, the present paper investigated the effect of grammatical proficiency on translation quality when translating English indirect speeches into Persian and the methods Iranian translators use to translate such a structure. A null hypothesis was formulated and 30 MA translation studies students were randomly chosen to take part in two tests: advanced grammar and translation test. A correlation test was used to determine the degree of go-togetherness between the two sets of scores. The result ($r_{XY}=0.824$) rejected the null hypothesis, indicating a strong positive relationship between the two variables. Also, by analyzing translations, translated indirect speeches were categorized into five classes: Censorship, Lexical Translation, Free Translation, Direct Translation and Correct Translation. Finally, a simple model for translating English indirect speeches was proposed. The result indicates a gap in participants' English knowledge which requires further studies to investigate the reason behind this shortcoming in Iranian context. The proposed model can be used in forming problem-solving curriculums for translation courses and further research is needed to cover other aspects in this respect.

Introduction

Franklin P. Jones once said, "It's a strange world of language in which skating on thin ice can get you into hot water." Maybe this complexity of language is the reason that has inspired many researchers to investigate different aspects of this phenomenon in the history of mankind. The scope has broadened over the past century and even caused the emergence of new disciplines related to language phenomenon. Among these disciplines and perhaps the youngest one is Language Translation.

Over the past few years, researchers have investigated different aspects of translation from translator training to translation models to translation assessment to machine translation and etc. The issue of translation quality has been touched upon numerously during recent years, and the question what the qualities and characteristics of a good translation are has inspired many scholars to conduct a research and find an answer for it (Foster, 1958; Nida, 1964; Catford, 1965; Nida & Taber, 1969; House, 1977; Reiss & Vermeer, 1984; Newmark, 1988; Toury, 1995; Venuti, 1995; House, 1997; House, 2001).

By reviewing the related literature, it will become clear that a large amount of research is dedicated to proposing a comprehensive model to assess the quality of translation. Yet, there seems to be a lack of study, investigating the influence of specific differences that exist between languages on the quality of translated works. Languages are semantically, structurally, and culturally different. In fact, these differences define a language and give it a sense of identity saned make it distinct. The kind of effect these language distinctions can have on the quality of the product of translation is a topic that has received little, if say no, attention in the literature.

As is mentioned above, languages are distinct in various ways. The one that grasped the attention of the present study is grammatical distinctions. Compared with Persian, there are grammatical ways in English that help the speaker to communicate extra semantic features. These grammatical channels do not exist in Persian and semantic features must be directly used to transfer the meaning. There are also some grammatical structures that if they are translated semantically into Persian, miscommunication will happen, as in the case of translating indirect speech. In English indirect speech there is a tense shift that does not exist in Persian. If the structure is translated semantically, the time of actions will be communicated wrongly. The present study is devoted to investigate the effect of above mentioned difference on the quality of translation. Also, the study investigates different strategies exercised by Persian translators in translating complex indirect speeches.

Significance of the Study

At first look, the present study may seem to be too specific to have the desired effect on the development of the field. It must be clarified that the at hand study does not aim to introduce a general model for assessing translation quality. The philosophy behind it, however, is to address specific language-oriented problems and to use the result in forming a comprehensive model. From this point of view, the present study is significant and its results can be used in all related fields, from forming language-oriented translation models to developing problem-solving translation courses to improving the quality of translator-training courses to developing standardized translation Elion tests.

Another point that should be mentioned in this respect is the way the present study look at translation quality. The notion of

investigating specific language-oriented distinctions opens new windows towards a different view of translation quality assessment. This study hopes to mark the beginning of other researches to be conducted on the above mentioned topic and motivate interested scholars to investigate one-aspect-assessment translation quality which is problem-solving oriented.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

In accordance with the quality-assessment objectives of the study the following research question has been formulated:

"Is there any relationship between grammatical proficiency and the quality of translation when translating indirect speech from English to Persian?"

Subsequently, a null hypothesis was formulated to be tested and analyzed in further sections:

"There is no relationship between grammatical proficiency and the quality of translation when translating indirect speech from English to Persian."

In line with the problem-solving aims of the present research, the below research question has also been formulated to be investigated:

"What moves do Iranian translators take to translate English indirect speeches and to what extend are these strategies successful?"

Definition of Terms

In order to have a better understanding of the nature of the present study, there are some key terms that are required to be explained and defined. Below is a brief explanation of each key concept.

Translation. Roberts (1998) defines translation in four different ways. First, it is the action of reproducing a "closest natural equivalent" of the original "message". Second, it refers to the product of translation. Third, translation is also defined as a profession. Finally, it refers to a discipline and an area of study. In the present study, by translation, the researcher means the translated text, the product of translation.

Translation Quality. The notion of translation quality will be discussed in the review of the related literature. However, in line with the aims of the present study, the researcher has to define translation quality differently. In this particular research translation quality is referred to as the correct translation of the tenses of indirect speeches given to the participants, regardless of any other factors contributing to the quality of a good translation.

Grammatical Proficiency. It consists of the sounds and sound patterns, the basic units of meaning, and the rules to combine all of these to form sentences with the desired meaning. It is, therefore, what we know about the language and represents our linguistic competence. (Fromkin, 2003)

Indirect Speech. It refers to using a noun clause to report what someone has said. No quotation marks are used. (Azar, 1998)

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The notion of translation quality imposes a great limitation on every study in the field of translation studies and has always been a hot topic to investigate. In order to deal with this problem and reduce the subjective nature of translation quality, as already defined, the researcher is going to analyses the indirect speeches in a given text, regardless of any other factors that may contribute to a better quality of translation. The analysis is based on the correct translation of the tenses of these indirect speeches. For each correct translation one mark will be assigned.

To measure participants' command on English indirect speech structure objectively, an advanced grammar multiple choice test has been devised. In order not to make participants so sensitive about indirect speech, the test contains 10 items examining participants' awareness of grammatical errors and the rest of the items examine their command on the structure directly.

Review of Literature

How one can assess a translation and what the qualities of a good translation are have always been tricky, difficult, and very subjective questions to answer. Many studies have recently been conducted to propose a general model for this purpose. Below, some seminal studies on this topic are reviewed chronologically.

In 1958, Foster described a good translation as the one that has the same purpose in the target language as the original text has in the source language. But the question how we can understand that translated text has the same purpose as the original remained unanswered and the definition was quite subjective.

Influenced by American structuralism and behaviorism, in 1964, Nida proposed that a good translation was one leading to equivalence of response. By equivalence of response, it is meant that the way target language readers respond to the translation should be the same as the original readers' response to the original work. To assess translation quality, Nida suggested global behavioral criteria such as intelligibility or informativeness. But Nida failed to propose an objective model to measure equivalent response and the idea of global behavioral criteria was too abstract to be possible to be exercised in real contexts.

Based on the Hallidayan linguistic model, Linguistic Theory of translation was proposed (Catford, 1965). Catford distinguished between formal correspondence and textual equivalence and proposed the idea of shifts which are, according to him, departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the source language to the target language. The main criticism of Catford's work is that almost all his examples were invented and they were not genuine and taken from real translations. Also, he did not consider the text as a whole and never went above the sentence level (Munday, 2012).

Nida and Taber (1969) suggested three criteria to assess the quality of translation. These criteria were (i) the correctness in a way that target readers grasp the message of the original text, (ii) the ease of understanding, and (iii) target language reader involvement experience as the result of the adequacy of translation form.

In 1977, House suggested a model for assessing the quality of translation based on the pragmatic theories of language use. According to the model, all equivalence in the target language should have two functional components, namely ideational and interpersonal. Therefore, the model was based on a comparison between the original text and the translated text.

According to Reiss and Vermeer (1984) the crux of the issue when it comes to translation quality is the function the translated text has in the target literature or according to their terminology its "skopos". They stated that a translated work should be assessed according to target language cultural norms and to what extend the translated text follow or flout them. House (2001) argues that the idea of function was never made "explicit" or "operationalized" in an adequate way by Reiss and Vermeer.

Newmark (1988) does not completely agree with the objective approach towards translation quality assessment. He argues that because of the artistic aspects of translated work, the quality of translation should be evaluated by "experts" through "informed discussion" and experts have to trust their "intuition and taste" when assessing the quality of translation; as subjective as a translator that chooses one equivalence out of many ones. But they have to be able to justify their choices when they are asked for.

In his seminal Descriptive Translation Studies – And Beyond (1995), Toury argues that the evaluation of the translated work is foremost dependent on its position and the place it occupies in the literary systems of the target language and culture. According to Munday (2001), Toury was actually continuing and building on the Poly-system Theory proposed by Even-Zohar (1978/2012) and his own early works. His methodology consists of three stages: (i) situate translation in its culture and look for its importance and acceptability, (ii) compare the source text and translation for shifts, (iii) make generalizations (Munday, 2012).

Venuti believes in the invisibility of the translator (1995). He proposed that a translation is regarded as acceptable by target scholars, reviewers, and readers when it is read fluently and target recipients do not feel any peculiarities. Venuti suggests that this can be achieved when the presence of the translator is not obvious and the text is not in fact a translated one, but is like the original. Therefore, in Venuti's view, the most important factor is the ability to be a writer and translation and translation techniques come second.

House developed on her early works and in 1997 she proposed a model for translation quality assessment. Her model which is based on Hollidayan Systematic Functional Theory is also influenced by Speech Act Theory and discourse analysis. The model involves comparison between the original text and translated text on three different levels that includes text, register, and genre. She also proposed the notion of overt and covert translation.

House (2001) argues that due to linguistic-textual nature of translation, it should be assess as such. Although, she admits that extra-linguistic factors like politics, society, culture, and ideology are often more influential than linguistic features when it comes to translation, she emphasizes that translation, a serious scientific discipline, should not be confused with notions like politics and must be regarded as what it is naturally and viewed in its own rights, i.e. a linguistic-textual procedure.

As the above review of literature shows, quite a few of studies investigated the qualities of a good translation and tried to form a general model for this purpose, but the lack of language-oriented and specific problem-problem solving studies is quite obvious, especially in Iranian context. Conducting these kinds of researches will lead to form a database that can later be used in forming language-oriented quality assessment models.

By adapting such a perspective, the present study tries to investigate whether grammatical proficiency of Iranian translators can help them to achieve a better quality of translation in translating English indirect speeches. Furthermore, it investigates the methods Iranian translators use to translate aforementioned structure and to what extend these strategies are successful.

Method

Participants

30 MA students of Translation Studies, studying at Kharazmi University of Tehran, regardless of their gender and political orientations, will randomly be chosen to participate in this study. All participants will be within the age range of 20 to 35. They will be asked to take an advanced English grammar test and later translate a short English passage to Persian.

Instrumentations

Advanced English Grammar Test. This test is a multiple choice one that aims to measure participants' command on English grammar and particularly the indirect speech structure. The test consists of 20 items. 10 items directly examine participants in indirect speech structure and the rest of the items focus on finding a problem (capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar) in given sentences. Participants will be allowed to spend 15 minutes to answer the questions. The scale of measurement is interval and one mark will be assigned for each item; therefore, the test will be out of 20.

Translation Test. A contemporary short English passage, including 174 words, which consists of 13 indirect speeches, will be given to participants to be translated into Persian. It is a short story about a boy and a girl who run into each other in a park and later find out that they know each other. The tone of the text is semi-formal and it does not require any extra-linguistic knowledge to be comprehended. Also, the text does not have any political or cultural elements in it.

Subjects can spend 30 minutes to translate the text. They will be allowed to use English to English and English to Persian dictionaries to translate the text. Later, each indirect speech will be examined separately and for each correct translation of the tenses one mark will be assigned. Therefore, the scale on which the quality of the translated text will be assessed is interval and out of 13.

Procedure

The present study consists of two parts. In the first part of the study, the researcher tries to investigate the effect of translators' command on indirect speech structure on the quality of translation. To achieve this goal, 30 subjects will be given an advanced grammar test and later they will be asked to translate an English text into Persian. The results of these two tests will be used to run a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Test between the two sets of scores. The result then will be compared to the r-critical value at 0.05 level of significance to determine the null hypothesis to be supported or rejected.

In the second part, by adapting a descriptive perspective, the researcher will analyze the strategies participants used to translate the indirect structure and pinpoint the advantages and disadvantages of these methods. The ultimate goal of this section of the study is to propose a model to translate English indirect speeches to Persian.

Design

The research is an ex post facto descriptive study.

Results

The Results Obtained by the Two Sets of Scores

The data that was used to test the hypothesis was the result of an administered advanced grammar test and a given English passage to be translated into Persian. Statistical procedures were employed to measure the descriptive statistics of these two sets of scores which are reported below.

Furthermore, inferential statistics were used to validate the hypothesis. To achieve this goal, a Pearson Product-Moment

Correlation Test was used to measure the degree of go-togetherness between the two sets of scores obtained by participants on the translation of the English passage and the advanced English grammar test. The obtained result ($r_{XY}=0.824$) compared to the r-critical value at 0.05 level of significance and the $df=29$ which is $r_{critical}=0.367$, enabled the researcher to reject the null hypothesis.

Advanced Grammar Test (mean)	Advanced Grammar Test (standard deviation)	Translated Text (mean)	Translated Text (standard deviation)
14.267	4.096	9.1	2.917

The Results Obtained by the Analysis of the Translations

The translations were closely analyzed and the result helped the researcher to categorize the translated indirect speeches into five groups, namely: Censorship, Lexical Translation, Free Translation, Direct Translation and Correct Translation. These categories reflect the strategies translators had used to translate the sentences. It is necessary to mention that the names of the categories were given by the researcher and their meaning will be discussed in vivid details in the following section. The percentage of indirect speech occurrence in each category is represented in the following bar graph.
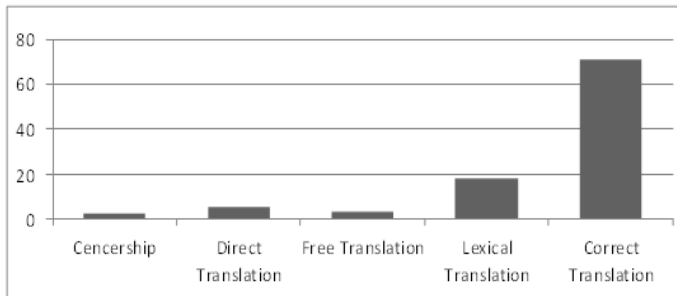
Discussion

The present study was conducted to investigate the effect of grammatical knowledge on the quality of translation when translating English indirect speeches into Persian, and later it was hypothesized that there was no relationship between the aforementioned variables. The reason behind investigating the above question was that the notion of proposing a general model for translation quality assessment had been touched upon numerously in the past (Catford, 1965; House, 1977; Nida & Taber, 1982; House, 1997), but the lack of studies that view upon translation quality in a language-oriented, problem-solving way and try to propose specific models to solve those problems was quite obvious in the related literature and marked the conduction of this research.

Discussion on the First and Second Section of the Study

In the first section of the study, the obtained result was $r_{XY}=0.824$. This indicates a strong positive correlation between the independent variable (grammatical proficiency) and the dependent variable (translation quality). It shows that those who performed better in the Advanced Grammar Test had a better appreciation of English indirect speeches and therefore were able to translate these sentences with more accuracy than those participants who gained lower scores in the grammar test. Hence, it can be concluded that there is a strong positive relationship between the grammatical proficiency and the translation quality when translating indirect speeches from English into Persian, and the increase in English grammatical proficiency can contribute to a better quality of translation. The

effect of independent variable on dependent variable is completely positive and constructive.

In the second part of the research, through close analysis of the translations, the indirect speeches were categorized into five groups which are Censorship, Direct Translation, Free Translation, Lexical Translation and Correct Translation. The discussion of each group in turn along with their merits and weak points and real examples taken from translations is as follows.

As the name itself explains, Censorship group includes those indirect speeches that were censored due to their complexity or the extra meanings their reporting verbs carry. Although, the analysis revealed that only 2.3% of indirect speeches occurred in this group, it should be pointed out that due to the loss of meaning, this strategy cannot be acceptable and should be avoided. Take the following sentence and its translations from the translation test, for instance:

Still laughing, Tim suggested why they didn't have a cup of coffee and donut, to which Sheila replied that she had thought he had wanted to continue his diet.

١. همچنان که می خندید، تیم پیشنهاد داد تا قهوه و کیکی بخورند و شیلا هم قبول کرد.

٢. تیم با خنده پیشنهاد یک قهوه به شیلا داد و شیلا گفت که او دیگر نمی خواهد رژیمش را ادامه دهد.

In both above-mentioned translations, the correct tense of the first indirect speech which is simple present was wrongly translated and simple past was used. As it is obvious, in the first translation, what Sheila replied was totally censored and the notion of acceptance was conveyed. In the second translation, the meaning of the original was distorted and it is not clear who does not want to continue their diet.

With the frequency of 5.3%, in Direct Translation category, translators attempted to translate indirect speeches directly. It should be highlighted that due to the existence of the indirect speech structure in Persian, it is not acceptable to translate indirect speeches in a direct form. Therefore, these translations are considered wrong in this study. The following example is the instance of such a case:

She also said that nothing was broken and she hadn't been watching her steps either.

او همچنین گفت: چیزی نشکسته، من هم حواسم به راه رفتنم نبود.

The third group with a relatively low frequency (3.5%) is Free Translation. In this class, translations are usually free, and most of the times they overlap semantically and structurally. It means that they do not stick to the original meaning or structure; however, they sound totally natural to the target recipients. Take the below translation, for instance:

Still laughing, Tim suggested why they didn't have a cup of coffee and donut, to which Sheila replied that she had thought he had wanted to continue his diet. They both were still laughing by the time they reached the Swimming Donut café.

تیم با لبخندی معنی دار پیشنهاد یک چای و کیک به او داد و شیلا هم تیکه ای به او انداخت و گفت مگه نمی خواستی رژیمت را ادامه بدی و بعدش هر دو مسیر را تا چای خانه "کیک شناور" با خنده پیمودند.

Apart from a great deal of distortion from the original structure, there are some semantic components that exist in Persian and they are not required to be naturalized. The notion of coffee and donut sound totally natural in Persian and the change is unnecessary. Also, in the above-mentioned example, the idea of "Sheila had thought" is not conveyed. The tenses are not translated correctly, either.

In Lexical Translation class, translators tried to translate sentences indirectly, but they failed to convey the correct time of the structures and most translations are lexical. The frequency in this category is 17.9%. The following translations are good examples for this case.

Tim wandered along the path thinking aloud, saying if he continued his diet he should lose twenty pounds by the end of... when BOOM!
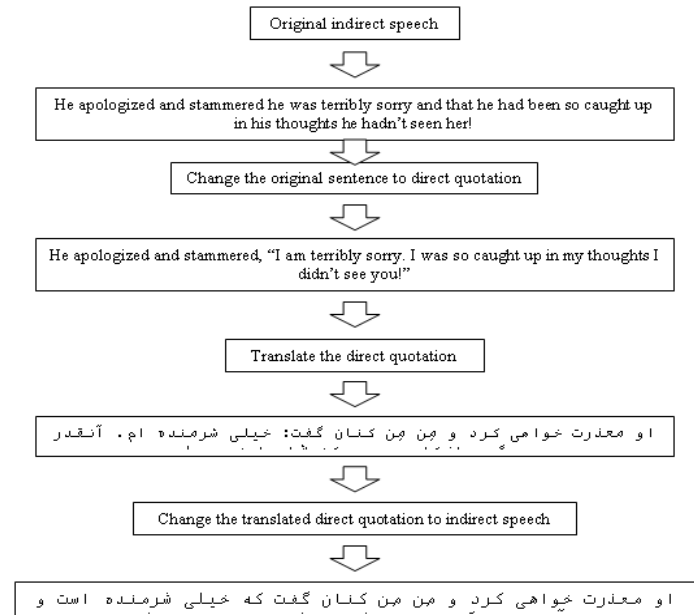
۱. تیم در راه پرسه می زد و با خودش فکر می کرد و می گفت اگر به رژیم غذاییش ادامه می داد باید بیست کیلو کم می کرد تا آخر ... تا اینکه بوم!

۲. تیم همچنان که در امتداد مسیر پرسه می زد آشکارا به این موضوع می اندیشید که اگر رژیم غذایی اش را ادامه می داد می بایست کاهش بیست پوندی را تا آخر ... بوم!

The last group with the frequency of 71% is Correct Translation. As the name stands, this class encompasses all the sentences that were translated indirectly and with the correct time structure. The following examples are taken from this class.

He apologized and stammered he was terribly sorry and that he had been so caught up in his thoughts he hadn't seen her! Smiling, Sheila told him it was OK. She also said that nothing was broken and she hadn't been watching her step either.

۱. او معذرت خواهی کرد و من من کنان گفت که شرمنده است و آنقدر غرق افکارش بود که آن خانم را ندید! شیلا لبخند زنان گفت اشکالی ندارد. او گفت که هیچ اتفاقی نیافتاده است و او هم حواسش نبود.

۲. تیم عذر خواهی کرد و با تته پته گفت که خیلی متاسف است و اونقدر درگیر افکار خودش بود که که او نو ندید. شیلا همانطور که می خندید گفت اشکالی نداره، چیزی نشده و اینکه اونم حواسش به راه رفتنش نبود.

The best way to avoid miscommunication when translating indirect speeches, as the above examples illustrate, is to first make the original sentences direct quotations, and later translate them into Persian indirectly. The procedure is as follows:

```
Original indirect speech
        ↓
He apologized and stammered he was terribly sorry and that he had been so caught up
in his thoughts he hadn't seen her!
        ↓
Change the original sentence to direct quotation
        ↓
He apologized and stammered, "I am terribly sorry. I was so caught up in my thoughts I
didn't see you!"
        ↓
Translate the direct quotation
        ↓
او معذرت خواهی کرد و من من کنان گفت: خیلی شرمنده ام. آنقدر
        ↓
Change the translated direct quotation to indirect speech
        ↓
او معذرت خواهی کرد و من من کنان گفت که خیلی شرمنده است و
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Implications, Applications and Suggestions for Further Research

The result of the present study reflects a serious concern in Iranian context. The conclusion the research drew previously, the more the translators know about source language, the better the translation quality will be, should not be neglected in translator training courses. The fact that the participants in this study are all MA translation studies students, studying at Tarbiyat Moallen University, one of the top five universities in translation studies in Iran, imposes great expectations on both administered tests in terms of the results. Some of the results,

however, proved this wrong, and some low performances in the advanced grammar test indicated some gaps that exist in the knowledge of students even at this level. These gaps in the knowledge of the source language resulted in a poor quality of translation. The question whether these gaps are as the result of the failure of Iranian educational system can be a topic for further studies.

The model that was proposed to translate English indirect speeches may seem to be very specific, but its application in translation courses should not be underestimated. Factors like aesthetic appreciation and creativity do play a role in producing a quality translation, and as Venuti (1995) puts, being a writer is the first step towards being a good translator. However, one should not fail to view upon translation as a systematic phenomenon that has its own linguistic-textual procedures (House, 2001). Providing translation students with language-oriented models in translation courses will help them to understand this linguistic-textual nature of translation and lead to producing quality translation. In fact, such models can help translation academies to develop problem-solving curriculums for translation courses. Further studies are needed to address the problems that cause by language differences when it comes to translation. Regarding English and Persian, there are many topics for investigation, such as translation of future perfect and future perfect progressive, translation of modals and naturalizing cultural elements, to mention but a few.

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