

NOTES ON TRANSLATION CRITICISM

sources: House 'Quality', House *Model*, Newmark *Textbook*

A criticism of a translation is different from a review of a translation.

Review = comment on new translations, description and evaluation as to whether they are worth reading and buying

Criticism = a broader activity, analysis in detail, evaluating old and new translations, assuming that readers know the translation

Translation criticism should take into account all the factors and elements in the process of translation (translation as a communicative act: intention, function, text type, register, strategies, principles, rules, constraints, audience)

It comprises activities which are part of the process of translation (analysis and interpretation of the ST), but it is different from the forms of criticism involved in this process

Translation criticism should not be a mere identification of errors, an intuitive or highly subjective appraisal judging translations as 'good', 'bad', 'faithful' without qualifying these adjectives.

Similarly, reviews should

- describe the quality of a translation with more than a single adjective and
- refrain from trashing the translator's work on the basis of isolated errors

Criticism of translation quality should be grounded on thorough analysis and description. Some critics prefer to eschew value judgements, prefer not to proclaim one translation better than another (Hatim and Mason 1990b: 1)

More concern with understanding how translated texts work (rather than with traditional concepts of quality) and seek to define the translator's method (Vilikovsky) and purpose (Newmark: 1998: 75)

There is discussion about whether evaluation should take into account the Source Text: Toury notes that comparisons between translations and originals often lead to an enumeration of errors and a reverence for the original (1978: 26)

Most critics carry out a comparative criticism of original and translation

- Newmark (*Textbook*): five-part model
 - analysis of source text
 - comparison of it and the translation
 - comments about the translation's potential role as a translation
- Hatim and Mason (1990b) outline a set of comparative parameters; their principal interest lies in the 'cultural semiotics of language'.
Using the notions of genre, discourse and text, they focus not on individual words but on a 'thread of discourse which is sustained through a communicative transaction' (10)
- de Beaugrande (1978) evaluative criteria should address the 'presuppositions and expectations about texts' shared by readers and writers in each language

Non-comparative models

Lefevere (1981b) focus on the product of translation in the context of the target culture rather than on the translation process (see polysystem theory)

Toury (1978, 1980c) his work with translational norms suggests evaluative centred on the target system alone

Criticism should take into account the presence of ideology in translation.

Critics may also have their own hidden ideology conditioning their criticism

A reviewer's motivation may be political, or of other nature.

For instance, in his study of Matthew Arnold's lecture 'On Translating Homer',

Venuti (1995: 118-45) has shown not only that Arnold's attack on Francis Newman's translation of the *Iliad* served to marginalize Newman's work, but also the extent to which a polemic about acceptable translation strategies can be simultaneously one about cultural politics.

[Cladera on Moratín's translation of *Hamlet*]

Criticism of translations can be found in

translator's prefaces and annotations (many new translations try to improve or rectify previous translations; prefaces and annotations contain evaluative comments)

complimentary poems and essays about the work of other translators (often in metaphorical language -> they must be read in the context of prevailing rhetorical conventions),

scholarly writing about translation theory, and

appraisals embedded in fictional commentary (a simile from *Don Quixote* that likens works in translation to the wrong side of a Flemish tapestry provides Cervantes with the opportunity to pass judgment on his contemporaries -Moner 1990: 519-22)

Criteria for the evaluation of translation

They depend on one's view of or approach to translation, on one's theory of translation.

Communicative approach:

They focus on determining the 'dynamic equivalence' (Nida 1964) between source and translation

'dynamic equivalence' = the manner in which receptors of the translated text respond to it must be equivalent to the manner in which the receptors of the source text respond to the source text

Nida postulated three criteria for an optimal translation

- general efficiency of the communicative process
- comprehension of intent
- equivalence of response

For House ('Quality'), these criteria prove to be as vague and non-verifiable as those by the intuitive-anecdotal approach.

A functional-pragmatic model

A model that attempts to avoid anecdotalism, reductionism, programmatic statements and intuitively implausible one-sided considerations of the ST and TT alone

House ('Quality', *Revisited*): a model based on pragmatic theories of language.

Analysis of linguistic-situational particularities of the source and target texts

A comparison of the two texts

An assessment of their relative match

The basic requirement for equivalence is that the translation

should have a function which is equivalent to that of the original, (function = consists of an ideational and an interpersonal functional component, in Halliday's sense should also employ equivalent pragmatic means for achieving that function

Initial analysis of the original according to a set of situational dimensions, for which linguistic correlates are established

The resulting textual profile of the original characterizes its function

The function is the norm against which the translation is measured

Analogous analysis on the translation

From this analysis derives the textual profile and function of the translation

Comparison of both the original's and the translation's textual profiles and functions.

The degree to which the textual profile and function of the translation match the profile and function of the original is the degree to which the translation is adequate in quality

In this comparison, some mismatches will occur. Two kinds of mismatches

Dimensional mismatches: pragmatic errors that have to do with language users and language use

Non-dimensional mismatches: in the denotative meanings of original and translation elements and breaches of the target language system at various levels

The final qualitative judgment consists of a listing of both types of errors and of a statement of the relative match of the two functional components

Newmark (Textbook chapter 17 "Translation Criticism")

Criteria:

- accuracy, economy, both according to the translator's standards and to the critic's standards,
- without reference to the SL: smoothness, naturalness, easy flow, readability, absence of interference

Plan:

1. analysis of ST stressing its intention and functional aspects
2. analysis of
 - the translator's interpretation of the SL text's purpose,
 - his translation method and
 - the translation's likely readership
3. selective but representative detailed comparison of ST and TT
4. evaluation of the translation (a) in the translator's terms, (b) in the critic's terms
5. where appropriate, an assessment of the likely place of the translation in the TL culture or discipline

1. analysis of ST :

- author's purpose, his attitude toward the topic
- characterisation of the readership
- category and type of text
- quality of the language to determine the translator's degree of licence
 - informative text -> clichés [metaphor that have perhaps temporarily outlived their usefulness, that are used as a substitute for clear thought, often emotively, but without corresponding to the facts of the matter, *set trends, a jewel in the crown,*] are reduced to neutral language
 - authoritative texts -> clichés are retained
- state the topic or themes

(don't discuss author's life, works, general background, *unless* they are referred to in the text)

[underline particular problems posed by ST: title, structure, level of language, metaphors, cultural words, proper names, institutional names, neologism, 'untranslatable words, technical terms, ambiguity, meta-language, puns, sound effects,

2. analysis of

2.1 the translator's purpose: – you should understand (not criticise) why he has used procedures for a specific aim

Is he deliberately antiquating the language? moderating the figurative language? livening up simple sentences with colloquial and idiomatic phrases?

Is he trying to counter the under-translating tendency of all translations by deliberately over-translating?

To what extent has the TT been deculturalised, or transferred to the TL culture?

It is too easy to pounce on a translation's howlers, listing them one after the other:

- false friends, stretched synonyms, stiff or old-fashioned structure, anachronistic colloquialisms, literal translations of stock metaphors

If you do so, you have to provide reasons why

3. comparison

[A translation critic determines the general properties -first of ST, and then of TT- and uses the underlined words (see *Last reading* p. 17) as a basis for a detailed comparison of the two texts

underlined words: neologisms, metaphors, cultural words, and institutional terms peculiar to the SL, proper names, technical terms and 'untranslatable words' (the ones with no ready one-to-one equivalent)]

how the translator has solved the particular problems posed by ST

group problems under general heads:

title, structure, shifts, metaphors, cultural words, translationese, proper names, neologism, 'untranslatable' words, ambiguity, level of language, meta-language, puns, sound-effect

discuss problems and do not prescribe a correct or better translation

4. evaluation of the translation

- assess the referential and pragmatic accuracy of the TT by the translator's standards

Is the TT successful in its own terms)

- assess the referential and pragmatic accuracy of the TT by *your* standards

assess the quality and extent of the semantic deficit in the TT. Was it inevitable, was it because of the translator's deficiencies

- assess the TT as a piece of writing, independently of the ST:

in personal or authoritative text, has the translator captured the ideolect of the original?

5. assessment of the importance of the translation in the TL culture or discipline

was it in fact worth translating?

what kind of influence will it have on the language, literature, the ideas in its new milieu?

Quality in translation

A good translation fulfils its intention

informative texts -> it conveys the facts acceptably

vocative text -> it has its purposed effect

expressive text ->

judged 'adequate' if explains what the text is about (cf. many Penguin Plain Prose translations)

judged 'good' if it is 'distingued, if the translator was exceptionally sensitive

as "form is almost as important as content, there is often a tension between the expressive and the aesthetic functions of language and therefore a merely 'adequate' translation may be useful to explain what the text is about (cf. many Penguin Plain Prose translations), but a good translation has to be 'distingued' and the translator exceptionally sensitive; for me, the exemplar is Andreas Mayor's translation of Proust's *Le Temps retrouvé* - 'Time Regained' (p. 192)

Examples of translation criticism in Part II, Text 10 to Text 13,