Models of Translation

Criticism

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Structure

1. Different Approaches to Assessing Translation Quality

2. A Functional-Pragmatic Model of Translation Quality Assessment

3. Linguistic Description vs. Social Evaluation in Translation Quality Assessment
1. Different Approaches to Assessing Translation Quality

- **Mentalist Views:**

  Global anecdotal judgements such as “the translation does justice to the original” or “the tone of the original is lost in the translation”. Revived in neo-hermeneutic, subjective interpretations of the worth of a translation.
Response-based Approaches

- **Behavioristic Views**

  - Tests using behavioral criteria (e.g. intelligibility and informativeness) based on the belief that a “good“ translation is one that would lead to “equivalent responses“ taken as yardstick for the quality of a translation
  - The source text is largely ignored
**Functionalistic, "Skopos" - Related Approach**

- The "skopos" of a translation is of overriding importance in evaluating the translation.

- Crucial also: Whether and how target culture norms are heeded in a translation. The translator or more frequently the translation brief decides on the function which the translation should fulfil in its new environment.
Text and Discourse Oriented Approaches

- **Descriptive Translation Studies**
  
  - Translation is evaluated in terms of its forms and functions inside the historically developed systems of the receiving culture and literature
  
  - Original is of subordinate importance
  
  - Main focus on "actual translations" and the textual phenomena that have come to be known in the target culture as characteristic features of translations
Postmodernist and De-constructionist Thinking

- Translation practices are examined from a psycho-philosophical and socio-political stance
- Attempts to unmask unequal power relations which may appear as a certain skewing in the translation and should be exposed as such
Linguistically-oriented Approaches

- Relationship between source and translation text taken seriously
- Differ in their capacity to provide detailed procedures for analysis and evaluation
- Most promising: Approaches that stress the inextricable link between context and text in translation
- Such a view characterises the evaluation model by House (1977; 19979)
2. A Functional-Pragmatic Model of Translation Evaluation

Based on a Theory of Translation as Re-contextualisation

Translation texts are doubly contextually bound: To their originals and to the new recipients’ contextual conditions. This double linkage is the basis of the equivalence relation – the conceptual heart of translation.
Since appropriate use of language in communicative performance is what matters most in translation, it is **functional pragmatic equivalence** which is crucial. This type of equivalence underpins this functional translation model.
The model explicates the way semantic, pragmatic and textual meaning are re-constituted across different contexts.

- Translation is conceived as the replacement of an L1 text by a semantically and pragmatically equivalent L2 text. An adequate translation is then a pragmatically and semantically equivalent one.

- A first requirement for this equivalence is that a translation text have a function equivalent to that of its original.
If we use a concept such as ‘function’ of a text, we must be sure that there are elements in a text which can reveal a text’s function.

Function here is NOT identical with ‘functions of language’ as suggested by philosophers and linguists such as Bühler, Jakobson, Ogden and Richards, Popper and many others.

Different language functions always co-exist in a text, there is no simple equation of language function and textual type.
The function of a text – with its ideational and interpersonal components - is simply the application of a text in a particular context, and there is a systematic relationship between context and the functional organization of language-in-text, which can be revealed by breaking down context into a manageable set of ‘contextual parameters’. To grasp a text’s meaning, it must be referred to the particular ‘context of situation’ which envelops it.

Such a view of function and context-text underlies the analytic framework of the model.
Analytic framework for analysing and comparing originals and translations

- Based on Hallidayan systemic-functional theory, Prague school linguistics, speech act theory, pragmatics, discourse analysis and corpus-based distinctions between spoken and written language (Biber et al 1999)

- Breaking down 'context of situation' into manageable parts, i.e., the categories of Register:

  Field – Tenor – Mode

Genre „in between“ register categories and the textual function
A Scheme for Analysing and Comparing Original and Translation Texts

INDIVIDUAL TEXTUAL FUNCTION

REGISTER

FIELD
Subject matter and social action

TENOR
- Participant relationship
- Author’s provenance and stance
- Social role relationship
- Social attitude

MODE
- Medium
- Participation
- Cohesion and coherence

LANGUAGE/TEXT

GENRE
The analysis of the original results in a text-context profile that reflects the original text’s function.

Crucial in the ensuing comparison of original and translated texts is whether and how this textual function is, or indeed can be, maintained. This critically depends on the type of translation.
Two Types of Translation: Overt and Covert Translation

- Overt and covert translation are outcomes of different types of re-contextualisation. They make qualitatively different demands on translation criticism: overt translation is more straightforward, covert more complex.

- These types resemble Schleiermacher’s famous distinction between “verfremdende und einbürgernde Übersetzungen” (‘alienating’ and ‘integrating’ translations) whose many imitators used different, but essentially similar terms.

- What sets the overt-covert distinction apart, is the fact that it is integrated into a coherent theory of translation, within which these terms are explicated.
Overt translation

- Recipients are quite ‘overtly’ NOT directly addressed
- Not a ‘second original’
- Embedded in a new context but still signaling its “foreign” origin
- Translator’s work is visible, translation a case of ‘language mention’
- Enabling L2 members to observe and judge the original’s impact “from outside”
Overt translation and original are equivalent at levels of Language/Text, Register, Genre

But: only second-level functional equivalence possible: giving new addressees opportunity to appreciate original’s function in new guise

Contextual switch, new speech event

Original’s context however co-activated-psycholinguistically complex
Covert translation

- Enjoys status of an original text in a new context
- Not marked as a translation, case of ‘language use’
- Pragmatically of equal concern for L1 and L2 addressees
- Recreation of an equivalent speech event, reproducing original’s function
- No co-activation of original’s context-psycholingistically simpler
Translator’s task: to „betray“ the original, to hide behind ‘crossing’ and transformation

Goal: true functional equivalence

Manipulation on levels of Language/Text and Register

Translator takes new context into account: via application of a CULTURAL FILTER
The ‘Cultural Filter’

- Construct capturing differences in expectation norms between recipients in L1 and L2 contexts. Important for translation criticism: The nature of cultural filtering helps differentiate between a covert translation and a covert version.

- Cultural filtering ideally in line with results of empirical cross-cultural research which needs to complement native speaker intuition.

- Example: Research on German-English communicative norms to explain changes in re-contextualisation processes in covert translation.
The Cultural Filter (German – English)

Dimensions of Communicative Preferences (German-English)

Explicitness --------------- Implicitness

Orientation towards Content --------- Persons

Directness ----------------- Indirectness
The Cultural Filter: Examples

Sign at Frankfurt Airport at a building site:

Damit die Zukunft schneller kommt!
[Such that the future comes more quickly!]

vs. English translation:

We apologize for any inconvenience work on our building site is causing you!
FILM TITLES
(Original ENGLISH-
Backtranslation (BT) from GERMAN)

- Where are the children?----Limitless Suffering of a Mother
- Jack the Bear----My Dad-a totally incredible father
- The Surrogate ----Murder after Birth
- Whatever happened to Aunt Alice----A widow kills softly
- Silent victim ....Accusation: Abortion
- Backlash.....The secret of the five graves
- Shadow of the Past----The corpse in the boot
- etc.
Michel Bond’s classic book “A Bear called Paddington” in German translation “Paddington unser kleiner Bär”

An example of massive cultural filtering in children’s literature.
(Mr Brown offers Paddington some cakes)
I’m sorry they haven’t any marmalade ones, but these were the best I could get
*BT There is nothing with marmalade*

(Paddington in a shop)
*Mr Gruber took Paddington into his shop and after offering him a seat.*
BT Then he pulled the little bear into the shop: „Sit down!“

(Small Talk)
“Hallo Mrs Bird” said Judy “It’s nice to see you again. How’s the rheumatism?” “Worse than it’s ever been” began Mrs Bird....

(Zero-Realization in the German Translation...*)
Most vaccines activate what is called the humoral arm of the immune system.

Most vaccines activate the so-called humoral arm of the immune system.

(after Latin humor, liquid.)
Treatment may reduce the chance of contracting HIV infection after a risky encounter.

An immediate treatment after contact reduces under certain circumstances the danger that the human immuno-deficiency-virus establishes itself in the body. There is no guarantee for this, moreover new risks arise.
Suppose YOU are a doctor in an emergency room and a patient tells YOU she was raped two hours earlier. She is afraid she may have been exposed to HIV, the virus that causes AIDS but has heard that there is a "morning-after pill" to prevent HIV infection. Can YOU in fact do anything to block the virus from replicating and establishing infection?

In the emergency room of a hospital a patient reports that she had been raped two hours ago and was now worrying that she had been exposed to the AIDS-Virus. She said she had heard that there was an "After-Pill", which might prevent an HIV-infection. Can THE DOCTOR in fact do anything which might prevent potentially existing viruses from replicating and establishing themselves permanently in the body?
Hemoglobin carries oxygen from the lungs to the tissues and helps to transport carbon dioxide back to the lungs. It fulfils this dual role by clicking back and forth between two alternative structures.

Hemoglobin, the substance responsible for the blood’s red color, carries oxygen from the lungs to the tissues and facilitates the backtransport of carbon dioxide to the lungs. The molecule fulfils this double function because it changes between two structures. “Why the grass is green and our blood red, are secrets which nobody will ever know. In this dim state, poor soul, what will you do?” (John Donne “On the soul’s progress”)
David Hounshell, “Two Paths to the Telephone, Scientific American”, June 1981
As Alexander Graham Bell was developing the telephone, Elisha Gray was doing the same. Bell got the patent, but the episode is nonetheless an instructive example of simultaneous invention.

Back Translation from German „The Race for the Telephone Patent“, Spektrum der Wissenschaft, August 1981.
Independent of each other Alexander Graham Bell and Elisha Gray handed in nearly identical construction plans for a telephone in 1976 – but only Bell received the patent and became rich and famous. Gray on the other hand had misjudged the importance of his invention and had moreover been badly advised.
Over and above distinguishing between two translation types, the model also distinguishes between translations and versions

- Versions result from a deliberate turning away from the original
- Re-evaluation, often outright renunciation of the original
- New purposes are superimposed on a translation
Overt version

- A special function is explicitly, overtly added to a translation text (e.g. special editions for children)
- The „translation“ is given a special added purpose (e.g. resumés, abstracts)

Covert version

- Manipulation of original text: Translator has applied cultural filter randomly
3. Linguistic Description vs. Social Evaluation in Translation Quality Assessment

- Crucial difference between (linguistic) analysis and (social) judgment

- The functional-pragmatic approach outlined here focuses on the make-up of texts rather than on vague categories such as intuitions, opinions, beliefs
Evaluative judgments of a translation depend on a multitude of factors. One important factor is that they emanate from the analytic, comparative process of linguistic translation criticism.
Two methodological steps:

1. Linguistic-textual intersubjectively verifiable analysis, description, explanation, and comparison

2. Value judgments, social, personal and ethical questions of socio-political and psychological relevance, ideological stance or individual taste

To judge is easy, to understand less so. To take the second step before the first one is therefore tempting. However, if translation criticism is to be compatible with accepted scientific procedure, 2 had better follow 1....