Tabaran Institute of Higher Education
International Journal of Language Testing
Vol. 8, No. 2, October 2018

ISSN 2476-5880

Classroom Translation Assessment Techniques: How Can We Tell What/How Our Students Are Translating?

Marzieh Sharififar[1], Seyed Reza Beh-Afarin[2], Hossein Younesi[3]

Abstract

Translation assessment has usually been problematic for theoreticians, curriculum developers and university lecturers. In this study, we propose methods for translation assessment. The authors search to elaborate assessment aspects of translation to reduce rater subjectivity in scoring and define what factors should be taken into account in assessing translated texts by developing a new model for the evaluation and scoring of translations. Accordingly, the existing methods for the assessment and evaluation of translations were reviewed and subsequently, two questionnaires were administered to a total of number of 10 translation lecturers inquiring about their methods for assessing students' translations and about 45 translation students about the way their instructors assess their translation tasks. Based on the results obtained from both questionnaires and also the existing scales of assessment, the study shows a significant difference between the views of the two groups under investigation.

Key Words: Assessment, Individual translation, advanced translation

1. Introduction

Translation is a challenging task and its output has always been assessed by its addressees, its translator, other translators, and so on. There are difficulties which may appear during the translation process. To clarify, students of translation have always complained about the way translation is being translated and scored, so, this has led the researchers to come to the idea that there may have been no agreement among lecturers on certain translation assessment criteria. This has inspired the researchers to extract a potential problem and attempt to investigate it.

Translation is usually defined as changing one form into another. When people speak of the form of a language, they refer to the actual words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs among others. There is an extended variety of elements which form can put emphasis on. A form provides a model for assessing translation quality, sequencing the texts designed for the practice of translation. In general, there are two approaches towards assessing an exam; norm-referenced assessment and criteria-referenced assessment. With respect to norm-referenced assessment, the raters assess the translation test/task based on the rest of the examinees. This type of assessment

1 *Islamic Azad University, North Tehran Branch, Faculty of Foreign Languages, English Translation Department*

2 Corresponding author, parpinchy@gmail.com
Islamic Azad University, North Tehran Branch, Faculty of Foreign Languages, English Translation Department

3 *Islamic Azad University, North Tehran Branch, Faculty of Foreign Languages, English Translation Department*

 ISSN 2476-5880

would be usually favored when there is a competition between the examinees. Majority of entrance exams are supposed to be following the principles of norm-referenced assessment. On the other hand, criteria-referenced assessment focuses on the fact that whether the students are able to perform a certain task or not. Translation courses usually make use of this type of assessment. However, it seems that these courses may have lack of criteria in details. Translation courses are being taught at universities, but no precise study has been done on the type of tests and the criteria for assessing students' translation or how translation lecturers prepare translation tests.

Farahzad (2003) provided a framework for determining the text difficulty at lexical and syntactic levels. Text difficulty is of two types: one concerning comprehension of the SL text and the other concerning translation difficulties. According to Farahzad (2003), applying the appropriate text difficulty helps teachers of translation in sequencing their classroom material on the basis of difficulty, for which the sources of difficulty have to be known. Through a study, she has identified the sources of difficulty for Iranian undergraduate students majoring in English-Persian translation. She underscored two types of difficulties as follows: comprehension of ST (type A) and translation (type B). It needs to be taken into consideration that they consist of 3 levels that are interrelated: the lexical level, the syntactic level and the concept level. She discussed the practical thinking to assess Iranian students at exams. To carry out the study, Farahzad (2003) used an objective approach consisting standards for assessment.

According to Ghonsoli (2016), any attempt to design a translation test depends on explaining its theoretical foundations. He has made every effort to present a method so that the grades seem more reliable and fair. Since the feedbacks given to the students are more reliable, it motivates them to present a piece of translation with a higher quality. The field of translation assessment is problematic, and it is often difficult to tell the difference between; e.g., "translation evaluation", "translation criticism", "translation assessment", and "translation quality assessment." Nevertheless, some scholars are concerned with developing models that satisfy the needs of practitioners, thus an empting to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Others attempt to draw up "objective" translation assessment criteria by means of incorporating conventional frameworks of educational measurement, such as reliability, validity, and objectivity, into their overall structures.

According to Ghonsoli (2016), it can be said that whenever the issue of translation education is involved, translation evaluation has also been discussed alongside it. Today there is not much information about the teaching of translation in the past, and this lack of information is much more felt about the assessment of translation and its related theories. However, it is clear that the scientists at that time did not pursue the subject of the assessment of translation, because in that case, references to its significance should be found in the history of the translation of the ancient times.

Even today, despite the interest and attention paid to teaching translation all over the world (Lee, 2006), the subject of translation evaluation is theoretical, not so much attentive and often simplistic. This neglect of the subject, on the one hand, is due to its distance with the mainstream of the field of assessment and theories and actions related to educational evaluation, and on the other hand due to its complex and complex nature (Mayer, 2000, Schaffner 2000).

 ISSN 2476-5880

Initial theories appear to have many common features. One of these is the abstract theoretical diction, or even the multiple categories of translation, which is a kind of traditional dual translation of the free translation (the relative attachment to the characteristics of the source text) and the literal translation (the great emphasis on features of the source text). For example, Toury (1995) presents a dual approach to translation and acceptance. A translation is highly bounded with the norms of the source culture, is sufficient and a translation that follows the norms of the target culture is acceptable. Here again, an implicit reference to the issue of translation evaluation has taken place. Aside from these implicit references in some of the translation theories to the subject of translation evaluation, new approaches in the field of translational studies have taken a serious look at the issue of evaluation.

One of the prevailing approaches in translation analysis and its quality is the approach of functionality. House (1997) explored the issue of evaluating translation quality precisely and with a systematic approach called the functional-functional model of translation evaluation. Based on the theory of functional system and eclectic judgment of the Prague school, the theory of speech action, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and the distinction between the structure of speech and writing, it provides an analytical model based on the comparison of the translation and the original text in The three levels are: context (context, mode, and context), genre, and language/text. He also distinguished between the hidden and obvious translation, which is still based on the concept of equilibrium, and for this reason, there is little difference between the traditional dual and literal translation, although in its definition more complex terms are used. He described the explicit translation as an example of the language of the term, which, in terms of genre, language, and text, is a limitation of the original text. Contrary to the obvious translation, the hidden translation, using cultural elements and changing them, obtains the position of the original text in the target culture (Munday, 2009). The hidden translation, which is an example of the use of language, is the same as the original text at the level of the role and genre of independent texts.

Ghonsoli (2016) said that a brief review of studies on translation evaluation theories suggests that this field has been filled with theoretical abstract concepts, which has created many challenges for the evaluation question. In spite of being valuable, these ideas have raised ambiguities for evaluation experts, especially translators in translation environments. The following are more ambiguities: How can authoritative and reliable ways of measuring basic translation concepts (such as modifications Reader response, norms, fitness, acceptance, role, hidden / obvious translation and cultural elements). In other words, the presentation of the theory in this field is much easier than the practical appraisal of these concepts (Rezvani, 2010).

Translation error seems to be due to the lack of clarity of the concept of the structure. The quality of the destination text does not relate to the source text, and is the result of the translator's ability to evaluate the performance, norms, and the presentation of the translation. In other words, the assessment of translation, especially in educational settings, should focus on the interpretation and application of translation structures or the ability to translate. In the meantime, the important point is that the quality of the translation of the product is the ability of the translator, not the equalization of the role of the destination text with the source text (Rezvani, 2010).

Translation error in this context, i.e., examining the features of the translation quality assessment approaches, can illustrate the progress made in solving issues related to this area and identify the areas that still need further investigation. William and Chesterman (2002) have identified three general approaches to assessing translation quality. The first approach is based on the language of origin, in which the instrumentation tools are used to define the equilibrium and then to classify the types of deviations from this equilibrium state (House, 1997, and Schaffner, 2000). The second approach (Toury, 1995, and Lewin, 1990) is based on the target language, in which the main focus is on the assessment of translation. The third approach evaluates the impact of the translation on its audience (Vermeer, 1996; Mayer, 1998).

In the meantime, two main issues in the translation assessment are the recognition of the issue and how it is evaluated. In the current models and approaches to the evaluation of translation, regardless of their applicability or theories, the focus has been on these two aspects. In addition, these approaches can be categorized according to a common feature: error classification forms the core of each approach (Williams 2004). Of course, the main concept of this categorization is different in view of the quantitative or qualitative nature of this categorization due to the quantitative or qualitative criteria of the measurement. Accordingly, in translation studies, translation modeling models can be divided into two general categories: small-scale models versus models with qualitative aspects. The purpose behind this research, however, was to look for differences between the perceptions of English translation undergraduates and university lecturers about translation assessment.

2. Method

After the administration of the questionnaires to the participants and receiving their responses to 42 translation assessment items, to elicit as accurate and object responses as possible from the participants, the following points were taken into consideration: 1) both the significance and the purpose of the study were explained to them, and 2) the participants answered the questionnaire items, so they felt in answering the questions objectively. The lecturers participated in this phase of the study and answered the first questionnaire, the students completed the second questionnaire and checked their perceptions of the way translation was assessed at university. Having collected the data from the questionnaires, the researcher applied two types of statistical operations in this study; descriptive and inferential analyses. In descriptive statistics, the results were displayed numerically and graphically; and inferential statistics, the researcher has applied parametric tests to check the null hypotheses. Ultimately, to determine whether individual and advanced translations were different of lecturers and students' perceptions of the way translation was assessed at university.

3. Data Analysis and Results

The demographic specifications of the participants based on their groups, age, gender, grade, course and GPA scores are presented below. As Table 4.1 shows, the participants were divided into two groups; that is, one group as translation undergraduates and the other as university lecturers. There were 45 (81.8 %) in the translation undergraduates group and 10 (18.2 %) in the lecturers group.

Table 4.1 *Frequency Distribution of Participants*

Groups	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

 ISSN 2476-5880

Translation Undergraduates	45	81.8	81.8	81.8
University Lecturers	10	18.2	18.2	100
Total	55	100	100	

As Table 4.2 shows, there were 55 participants in the present study, from whom 46 (83.6 %) were female participants and 9 (16.4 %) were male ones. The researcher attempted to collect data from male and female learners proportionately.

Table 4.2 *Frequency Distribution for Participants' Gender*

Groups	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	46	83.6	83.6	83.6
Male	9	16.4	16.4	100
Total	55	100	100	

The participants were divided into four groups in terms of their age. Some of them were older than 25 years old. There were 6 participants, who were below 20; eight of them within the age range of 21-25, and 25 were within the age of 26-35, and 16 were older than 35.

Table 4.3 *Frequency Distribution for Participants' Age*

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
below 20	6	10.9	10.9	10.9
21-25	8	14.5	14.5	14.5
26-35	25	45.5	45.5	45.5
more	16	29.1	29.1	29.1
Total	55	100	100	100

As Table 4.4 shows, the participants were in different grades at the university. Most of them were junior and senior translation students.

Table 4. 4 *Frequency Distribution for Participants' Grade*

Grade	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Freshman	6	10.9	13.3	13.3
Sophomore	1	1.8	2.2	15.6
Junior	21	38.2	46.7	62.2
Senior	17	30.9	37.8	100

ISSN 2476-5880

Total	45	81.8	100
Lecturers	10	18.2	
Total	55	100	

As Table 4.5 shows, the courses under the study were divided into three courses; that is, Translation Project (*Enferadi* translation), Advanced Translation, and one other related course.

Table 4. 5 *Frequency Distribution for Participants' Course*

Course	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Translation project	16	29.1	35.6	35.6
Advanced translation	16	29.1	35.6	71.1
Other	13	23.6	28.9	100
Total	45	81.8	100	
Lecturers	10	18.2		
Total	55	100		

The participants' grade point average is shown in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6 *Frequency Distribution for Participants' GPA*

GPA	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
14-15	12	21.8	26.7	26.7
16-17	26	47.3	57.8	84.4
Above 18	7	12.7	15.6	100
Total	45	81.8	100	

A questionnaire was used to assess the participants' evaluation of translation assessment. The questionnaire was in two sections: the first part, which included some questions to elicit factual information; and the second part, which included 42 items in 5-point Likert scale. The reliability index for the questionnaire was computed through using Cronbach alpha, which proved to be reasonable for the study (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7 *Reliability Statistics for the Questionnaire*

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.783	42
16-17	26

 ISSN 2476-5880

Having checked the descriptive statistics for the sample data, the researcher went through the next stage; that is, inferential statistics. The first analysis was done with the data of the questionnaire, which was administered to the participants in the study.

Table 4.8 *Descriptive Statistics - Participants' Scores in the Questionnaire*

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
total	Translation Undergraduates	45	140.42	11.86	1.76

The descriptive statistics of the two groups are shown in Table 4.8. The mean and standard deviation of the translation undergraduates Group (M=140.42, SD=11.86) are not much different from those of the university lecturers Group (M= 133.90, SD=16.77). In order to compare the mean scores of these two groups, an independent samples t-test was used.

Table 4.9 Independent *Samples Test results for Participants' scores in the Questionnaire*

	Equality of variances		T-test for equality of means			
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. 2-tailed	Mean Diff.
Equal v assumed	.941	.336	1.45	53	.152	6.52
Equal v not assumed			1.16	11.08	.268	6.52

In order to detect the difference between the two groups in terms of their performance in the self-reporting questionnaire, an independent samples t-test was run. As it is shown in Table 4.9, there was statistically no significant difference between the two groups with regard to their scores, t (53) =1.47, p=0.152. The difference between the two groups was not statistically significant. Accordingly, the null hypothesis restated as "there is no significant difference between the assessment of translation done by translation raters and that of academic experts" was supported.

4. Discussion

This study contains some insights into the translation process viewed from a particular angle. Its main defect is that its author approaches the subject via a discussion of general linguistic theory and consequently translation is studied not as a discipline in its own right but as a way of exemplifying aspects of applied linguistic. According to Williams (2004), some translation researchers and theorists believe that assessment of translation is a subjective task but most of the participants of this study advocated the possibility of objective assessment of students' translations. This opinion held by Iranian lecturers may be attributed to the fact that they suggest typical equivalents and translations for words and texts in the class and they expect students to

 ISSN 2476-5880

emulate the same translations at the time of exam. This might be what leads them to believe that students' translations can be assessed objectively.

As Jacobson (2009) stated, the discussion on translation assessment has been done in the field of translation (and interpreting) and it is still obscured by the tension between theory and practice. Practitioners believe that expertise in testing is obtained by practical experience. Since they may not be aware of the consequences of not developing a test based on testing principles, or of not examining a test for its validity, reliability, authenticity or practicality, they continue testing candidates according to a status quo. In so doing, they are measuring other candidates' performances to the best of their abilities. This, however, may not be enough of a justification.

To illustrate the importance of discourse management in interpreted interaction, consider the possible impact of violating turn taking rules or norms. There are at least three conditions that can lead to the mismanagement of discourse by the interpreter, and thus to miscommunication. These conditions were derived from data collected by Jacobson (2007), who conducted qualitative research with student interpreters in medical clinics in a large metropolitan area in the U.S. One condition is related to memory problems, or the inability to retain longer chunks of information at a time in memory, rather than short words and phrases. The second condition pertains to lack of familiarity with lexicon and content (thus supporting the much acclaimed need for sufficient study in terminology and topics related to healthcare). The third condition is related to lack of turn-taking competence in the interpreter's L2. When any or all of these conditions exist, the interpreter is likely to short-circuit interlocutors' turns, such as during the question- answer sequence in a medical interview. This might happen when the interpreter lets out a gasp, or produces a sharp intake of breath (due to panic or tension) when falling behind in an interpreted rendering, or when struggling with unfamiliar content. Another common pitfall might be the overuse of the upheld open hand, facing palm out toward the interlocutor, to cut off the discourse (commonly used in both signed and spoken language interpreting). Jacobson (2007) observed that frequent interruptions of this type by student interpreters in the normal turn-taking sequence is extremely problematic in a healthcare context, for example, when a physician is attempting to process information provided by the patient to arrive at a diagnosis, or when a patient is receiving treatment instructions.

5. Conclusion

Losher (2000) defined the evaluation plan as (1) creating a profile of the source text along with the operating parameters that must be used to evaluate the destination text, (2) determining the role of the source text, (3) comparing the source text with the target text, (4) commenting on the quality Translation (in which, in addition to errors, compliance or non-compliance with the parameters related to the style and context and considerations related to the translation manager is expressed). According to Losher (2000), a good translation is a translation that considers recognized cultural differences in verbal strategies, while at the same time trying to accurately recreate the features of the source text. This issue itself creates ambiguities about the meaning of the term "precise". In practice, many destination texts are not proper translations because they focus only on the culture and language of the destination (p. 155). He avoided judging the totality of the text, and maintained: "the final judgment about the quality of translation is very difficult according to objective criteria" (quoted in House 1997). House (1997) saw the model as a descriptive model against value judgments based on psychology and sociology. Contrary to scientific (linguistic) analysis, value judgment is more than a kind of scientific evaluation of a social, political, ethical, spiritual or personal status (House 1997). She put more emphasis on this: "judging the quality of translation depends on many factors that must be considered in any social assessment. In the assessment of translation, the important point is that such a judgment deriving from an analytical process is a comparative critique of translation, that is, a linguistic analysis that provides grounds for value judgments "(House, 2001). In other words, in assessing the quality of the translation, one should not judge the conformity of translations with the standard and specific quality.

Majority of the lecturers in this study agreed that they should inform their students of the intended evaluation/assessment criteria. They believed in explaining the criteria to their students before exams since it is one of the factors strengthening tests and helping students' answers to be directed to the required points. There was an agreement among translation lecturers about those criteria which are mostly ranked as primarily important for assessing the translations. Although some of the lecturers were not familiar with translation theories, they intuitively applied the theories to assess students' translations. Thus, it can be claimed that the criteria considered to assess students' translations are teacher-made because most of the lecturers chose them based on their experience in this field and not based on their knowledge.

References

Chesterman, A. (2002). Towards consilience, New Tendencies in Translation Studies. Goteborg University, 19-28.

Farahzad, F. (2003). Translation Criticism. A Tree-dimensional (model based on CDA), 30-35.

Ghonsoli, A. (2016). Assessment of translation in the teaching environment (Vol. 123). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

House, J. (1997). Translation Quality Assessment: A model Revisited. Tubingen: Narrator.

House, J. (2001). Translation Quality Assessment. Linguistic description versus social evaluation, 243-257.

Jacobson, H. E. (2009). testing and assessment in translation and interpreting studies. A call for dialogue between research and practice. John Benjamins Publishing.

Jacobson, Y. (2007). Patent Application. No. 10/582,932.

Lee, H. L. (2006). Challenges and Strategies of instrument translation. Western Journal of Nursing Research, 28(3), 310-321.

Lewin, E. a. (1990). Translation Assessment. Washington, DC.: Patent and Trademark Office.

Losher, S. (2000). Translation Quality Assessment. Where can theory and practice meet? 6(2), 149-168.

Mayer, R. (1998). Supporting visual and verbal learning preferences. a second language multimedia learning environment.

Mayer, R. (2000). Intelligence and Education.

Munday, J. (2009). Translation Text in Context, The Comparison to Translation studies. London: Routledge.

Rezvani, R. (2010). Modeling test-taking strategies and their relationship to translation test performance. Shiraz University: A structural equation modeling (SEM) approach (Unpublished doctoral dissertation).

Schaffner, C. A. (2000). Developing Translation Competence. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

ISSN 2476-5880

Toury, G. (1995). The Notion of 'Assumed Translation' An Invitation to a New Discussion.

Vermeer, A. (1996). Exploring the Second Language Learner Lexicon. The Construct of language proficiency: Applications of psychological models to language assessment, 147.

Williams, (2004). Translation quality assessment. An argumentation- centered approach.