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## **Translation Quality Assessment in Various Communicative Situations: the Problem of Assessor**

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*The article highlights the principal difference between the traditional text-oriented approach to translation and the functionalist approach. According to the functionalist approach, an act of translation must be viewed as a means to enable ST author, TT recipient and the initiator of the translation to perform their activities. Each of them can be an assessor of translation in various communicative situations, while the distribution of assessors among communicative situations shows that a TT recipient is the key evaluator of translation. In an assessor's perspective, a translation is adequate if it fits the given communicative situation, corresponds to the translation goal and can be used successfully by the TT recipient and/or translation initiator.*

*Keywords: translation quality assessment, communicative situation, assessor, adequacy, equivalence.*

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At a recent translation conference I asked a question: "Who evaluate the translation quality?" An immediate answer by the workshop chairperson, a representative of a highly esteemed academic institution, was: "We do!" My efforts to explain that in a real life situation "we" do not participate in any communication across languages and cultures, and for that simple reason do not perceive any message whatsoever, turned out to be futile...

This example illustrates the stereotyped approach according to which translation is viewed as an activity per se, as an act performed by a translator without any definite purpose. It seems that the action is triggered by the mere existence

of the source text (ST) and is terminated with the production of the target text (TT). According to this text-oriented approach, the translation quality assessment (TQA) is based on the comparison of the TT with the ST, and the result is described in terms of translation equivalence and adequacy. The terms are treated as synonyms by some scholars and as different words by other. Usually the term "equivalence" is used to describe some relationship between the ST and the TT or, in other concepts, some kind of semantic and structural resemblance of the two texts. The meaning of "adequacy" is more vague: usually it refers to a "good translation" that meets some requirements which may be unspecified. Maybe

this is the reason why “adequacy” as a term is used rarely in Western translology; suffice it to say that “Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies” does not contain it.

It is obvious that according to the text-oriented approach, translation as an activity is cut from the real life, and that is why the approach is limited. Translation is presented as a game that I would term “Translate Me”: the source text tells the translator “Translate me”, the translator plays the game, i.e. performs some actions, and the target text emerges. Game over.

I insist that translation is not a game. It is a purposeful activity, as Christiane Nord would call it, performed in a certain situation of an even wider activity. Practically, translation serves as a means of performing some other activity by representatives of different language communities. Translation is made within a certain communicative event which unites the ST author, the translator, the TT receiver and the translation initiator. The presence of the ST receivers is not obligatory; at least, they do not participate in some communicative situations (for example, in the situation of business or political talks the ST author addresses his/her counterpart directly through the mediation of the interpreter who is the only true receiver of the ST).

The approach I insist on may be called communicative-functional, though in Western translology the term “functionalist” is also widespread. According to this approach, TQA can be made only in some real life situations, with reference to a certain communicative situation in which translation/interpretation is performed. A question arises then: who assesses the translation quality? Theoretically, any participant in the communicative event can perform the role of the translation quality assessor.

Before I proceed with the discussion of TQA, some basic notions must be defined. The first one is the notion of translation itself. I define

it as the translator’s speech activity the result of which must serve as a tool of performing any activity of the ST sender, TT receiver and/or the translation initiator. Translation as the speech activity of the translator/interpreter is oriented to the ST and is based on it. The key criterion of TQA is adequacy that is defined as such quality of the TT that allows to use the TT for the purpose of some activity of the ST sender, TT receivers and/or translation initiator in a certain communicative situation. Translation is adequate when it is made in accordance with the expectations of the communicative situation participants. I realize, though, that the communicative situation participants, assessing the translation quality, rarely or even never use the term “adequate”. They may think in terms of “good”, “excellent”, “acceptable” or, otherwise, “bad”, “poor”, “unacceptable”, but theoretically their evaluations may be described in terms of “adequate” and “inadequate”.

It might seem that I ignore completely the relations between the ST and the TT, which is certainly not true. As I have already mentioned, translation is made with orientation to the ST and is based on it. For this reason, the TT resembles the ST semantically and structurally to a certain degree that can vary in different situations. I shall use the traditional term “equivalence” while referring to this resemblance. But it should be borne in mind that neither ST sender nor TT receiver can assess the translation quality in terms of equivalence since they cannot compare the two texts. Thus, the notion of translation equivalence is valuable only in theoretical investigations made by translation scholars, and is useless in practical assessment of the translation quality in a real life situation.

Earlier I have divided all the communicative situations with the use of translation/interpretation (CST) into two types: 1) CSTs in which translation is initially planned; 2) CSTs in which translation

was not initially planned (Sdobnikov 2011). In a CST-1 translation is used as a means of establishing communication between the ST sender and the audience of the TT. CSTs of the first types are mostly situations of oral communication. CST-2 is a communicative situation in which a text is initially addressed by the Sender to the source language audience (Receiver). Translation is made *after* the communication between the two has been established, i.e. after the initial communicative event.

CSTs of the second type are further subdivided into four subtypes depending on who initiates the translation activity. It may be initiated by 1) the ST sender, 2) the TT receiver, 3) the client who actually “buys” the translation service and 4) the translator. Thus, I postulate the existence of four CST-2 subtypes: 1) CST-2<sub>author</sub>, 2) CST-2<sub>recipient</sub>, 3) CST-2<sub>buyer</sub>, 4) CST-2<sub>trans</sub>.

In CST-1 situations the ST sender, the TT receiver and the translation initiator perform the role of TQ assessors. The TT receiver is the key assessor. (S)he is the end evaluator of the “worth” of the translation, and assesses it as meeting his/her requirements and expectations. From the recipient’s perspective, the following set of criteria must be met:

- the information contained in the TT must be consistent with the communicative situation and the message must contain the expected meaning;
- the TT must be logically composed;
- stylistic peculiarities of the TT must be consistent with the genre norms of the TL and socio-cultural factors;
- delivery of the TT must conform to the communicative situation parameters.

It is argued that the importance of the criteria is not the same: the first two are the most essential ones. The TT receiver would nobly forgive the interpreter’s grammar and lexical mistakes as well as slips of the tongue. But illogical composition

of the text as well as the information that does not fit the recipient’s vision of the subject matter would arise suspicion on the part of the recipient who would think that the interpreter has omitted some pieces of information or distorted it.

The text-oriented approach to translation ignores such criterion of TQA as delivery. But it is treated as an essential one when the communicative-functional approach is applied. Its importance is due to the integrity of two aspects of a message – the content and the form. Each of them can affect the other, strengthening it or making it weaker. It is known that even an inaccurate interpretation can be positively perceived by the audience when it is delivered with confidence. Anne Schjoldager argues that “an interpreting performance should be comprehensible, pleasant to listen to, linguistically and terminologically acceptable, as well as coherent and plausible. AIIC... even warns its members to pay particular attention to voice and delivery, because: “Less able, less accurate colleagues have been preferred because of a pleasant voice and reassuring delivery” (Schjoldager 1995:190).

The ST sender also performs the role of the TQ assessor. This statement can be disputable because the TT is not addressed to the ST sender who is not able to evaluate the translation quality unless he knows the target language. But I am driven by the conviction that both the ST sender and the TT receiver are bound by their interaction in the framework of their common activity. The success of their activity depends largely on the interpretation quality. The quality is assessed by both of them. The ST sender’s conclusions about the translation quality do not result from the TT analysis because (s)he is not able to analyze it. They result from his/her analysis of the TT audience’s reactions to the text. Thus, in the situation of contract supervision the correctness of the operations that have been described in the ST and that are performed by the workers after

the interpretation has been made is an indicator of the high quality of interpretation, of its adequacy. During a guided tour the acceptable quality of interpretation is proved by the relevance of the tourists' questions. From the ST sender's perspective, the translation is adequate when the audience reacts to the TT in the way that has been anticipated by the ST sender. Linguistic criteria are not applicable in the situation.

The translation initiator is the third TQ assessor in CST-1. The translation can be initiated by representatives of departments of linguistic services (e.g., of Foreign Ministry), divisions of Protocol, heads of companies and organizations, tourist companies, mass media, etc., who organize various events of cross-cultural communication. From the initiator's perspective, the translation/interpretation is adequate when comments of the immediate participants of the communication (delegates, reporters, interviewees, etc.) are positive. It is not incidental at all that nowadays many organizers of international conferences and forums conduct questionnaire surveys to be sure that the delegates are satisfied with the interpretation quality. If they are not, decision is made not to hire the interpreter in question any more.

It is noteworthy that in CST-1 translation quality assessments made by different evaluators are assessments of different levels. The translation initiator assesses the interpretation as worthy and useful for conducting the event. The ST sender assesses it from the point of view of his/her communicative intention and worthiness for his/her personal activity. Assessment of these levels is made by the TT receiver who also evaluates both the text quality and its delivery.

In CST-2<sub>author</sub> situation both literary texts and non-literary texts (e.g., scientific articles) can be translated at the initiative of the author. Thus, we should differentiate between two situations. It is much easier to specify the TQ assessor when

a non-literary text is translated. Apparently, it is a representative of the editorial board who is responsible for the quality of publications in a certain journal. Readers of the TT, i.e. the end users of the text, play a secondary role: they can express their discontent with the TT, if any, but in reality such situations are rare since the text has already been corrected by the editorial board representative, probably, in cooperation with the author.

When a literary text is translated in CST-2<sub>author</sub> situation, the role of the literary critic is most essential. The critic is not an immediate participant in the communicative situation. But it is (s)he who ultimately evaluates the success of the interaction between the ST sender and the TT receiver, the degree to which the communicative intention of the ST sender has been implemented in the TT, and states the reasons why it has not been implemented in full, if it is the case. Yet, we should not undervalue the role of the readers who also make their judgments concerning the TT. But it should be borne in mind that in the readers' total assessment aspects related to the text as a piece of art prevail over the aspects related to the translation of the text. The latter become meaningful and significant when the reader explains his/her feeling of discomfort not by the peculiarities of the given piece of art (the author's position, ideas, images, etc.) but by the drawbacks in the translation (alogisms, violations of the TL norms, poor style). Thus, in this situation the role of the TT receiver is not that insignificant as in the case with a scientific article translation.

In CST-2<sub>recipient</sub> situation the TT receiver performs the role of the translation initiator and its assessor simultaneously. The TT (e.g., an operating manual, therapeutic drug management) is used by the receiver while performing a certain personal activity. In the recipient's discourse, his/her assessment of the translation comes down to "I understand/I do not understand" or

even “I like it/ I dislike it”. Taking into account the translation goal, the translator is free to transform the text, thus lessening the degree of equivalence as compared with a translation that would be made for specialists. The translator can abridge the text, providing the recipient with the “bare bones” information only, replace terms by plain, simple, common words, alter the style of narration making it more colloquial and less technical. Both translation and interpretation (at sight translation) can be made in the situation. The TT is equivalent to the ST in the degree that fits the parameters of the communicative situation and is in line with the translation goal, in line with the recipient’s expectations. This kind of equivalence is established to ensure the adequacy of translation, i.e. the possibility to use the TT in accordance with the receiver’s needs.

In CST-2<sub>buyer</sub> situation (where a client performs the role of the translation initiator) the problem of the TQ assessor seems to be more complicated. The fact is that in this translation “constellation” any of its constituents can become the TT assessor, depending on the text type and the translation goal.

Both literary and non-literary texts can be objects of translation in the situation. The translation of a literary text can be initiated by a publishing house or a film-distributing agency. The translation quality is assessed, first, by a critic and, second, by the readership/audience.

Placing an order for translation of a non-literary text, the client plans to use the TT as a tool of his/her business activity, though it is not necessary that (s)he will make any personal use of the text. We can consider the situation when technical documentation required for installation and operation of equipment is translated from one language to another. Specialists – the end users of the translated documents – perform the role of the TQ assessors. The role of the client as a TQ assessor is a secondary one: (s)he plays it only

when his/her subordinates complain that they have problems in using the documents due to the poor translation.

A situation can occur in which neither the client nor his/her representatives are not going to use the translation of a non-literary, special text. Examples of such texts may include powers of attorney or proxies required for purchase and sales transactions in other countries, diplomas or certificates of education that must be submitted for receiving education abroad. It is obvious that the client (buyer of the translation) has no personal interest in the translation of the papers, but it is essential for him to submit it to the appropriate body or authority for his activity (purchase/sale of property, receipt of education) to be effected with an expected result. The final and primary assessor of the translation quality is the end user of the document, i.e. its recipient. When (s)he is not satisfied with the TQ, (s)he informs the client about it, and the client makes his/her own judgments concerning the translation (and the translator), thus performing the role of a secondary TQ assessor.

In CST-2<sub>trans</sub> situation, the translation event is initiated by the translator who thinks it to be necessary and important to translate a literary text or a text of journalistic genre that, as (s)he believes, possesses some exceptional aesthetic value (it should be noted in passing that “Gettysburg Address” of Abraham Lincoln has been translated into Russian at least six times, and in four cases translation was initiated by translators themselves).

When a literary text is translated, the distribution of roles between the participants in the communicative situation is typical of literary translation: critics assume the role of the key assessors of the translation quality while readers perform the role of secondary assessors.

When a speech or presentation of a special value is translated, the role of the principal

assessor of the translation quality is performed by the recipient. But it is noteworthy that the recipient gets interested in the TQ only when the quality is not up to his expectations, in other words, when the recipient is not comfortable with the TT due to the poor translation. In other instances the recipient is not aware of the problem, since the problem does not exist.

In the same situation essential is the fact that the translator can strive to solve an additional task that does not result from the author's communicative intention. The task may be to highlight specific stylistic features of the ST or to present the text as an outstanding example of eloquence. Obviously, the translator uses the strategy of tertiary translation (see Sdobnikov 2011) in this case, and does not attempt to cause the same response from the TT audience as has been got from the ST recipients. It means

that the translator's role as the TQ assessor becomes more significant: while analyzing the TT (auto-assessment), the translator is eager to understand whether (s)he has managed to achieve his/her goal, i.e. to solve the additional task. From the translator's perspective, if (s)he has managed to achieve his/her goal, to satisfy his/her needs, the translation is adequate. Thus, in this situation adequacy of translation is based on the translator's vision of the TT as consistent with his/her own expectations. When the TT does not meet the translator's expectations, (s) he would rather refrain from submitting it for publication.

The distribution of TQ assessors among the communicative situations may be presented as follows:

Table 1 shows that TT recipient is one of the TQ assessors in all types of communicative

Table 1

CST	Initiator	Text Type	Assessor
CST-1 <sub>formal</sub>	Client	Special (Non-Literary)	TT recipient ST author Client
CST-1 <sub>informal</sub>	Client	Colloquial	TT recipient ST author Client
CST-2 <sub>author</sub>	ST author	Special (Non-Literary)	Editor (client) TT recipient
		Literary	Critic TT recipient
CST-2 <sub>recipient</sub>	TT recipient	Special (Non-Literary)	TT recipient
CST-2 <sub>buyer</sub>	Client (Buyer)	Literary	Critic TT recipient Client
		Special (Non-Literary)	TT recipient Client
CST-2 <sub>trans</sub>	Translator	Literary	Critic TT recipient Translator
		Journalistic*	TT recipient Translator

\*The term "journalistic" refers here to texts of oral presentations usually made by politicians and other public figures.

situations; in most cases, (s)he is the key assessor. The fact proves that his/her role is of utmost importance in shaping the general attitude towards the quality of a specific translation. What follows from this observation is the requirement to take into account the expectations of the prospective TT recipient while translating and evaluating the TT. This provision is completely

in line with the communicative-functional approach to translation according to which translation is an activity that is performed in the interests of other persons who act with a certain purpose in view. The goal of translation, thus, is production of a text that can be used as a tool of performing an activity by the TT users and/or translation initiators.

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## **Оценка качества перевода в различных коммуникативных ситуациях: проблема субъекта оценки**

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*В статье рассматриваются основные различия между текстоцентрическим подходом к переводу и коммуникативно-функциональным. Согласно коммуникативно-функциональному подходу перевод – это средство обеспечения собственной предметной деятельности автора исходного текста, получателя перевода и инициатора перевода. В различных коммуникативных ситуациях каждый из них может выступать в качестве субъекта оценки качества перевода. Распределение субъектов оценки качества перевода между разными коммуникативными ситуациями свидетельствует о том, что именно получатель перевода является основным субъектом оценки. С точки зрения субъекта оценки качества перевода перевод адекватен, если он соответствует условиям данной коммуникативной ситуации и цели перевода и может успешно использоваться получателем перевода и инициатором перевода в рамках их предметной деятельности.*

*Ключевые слова: оценка качества перевода, коммуникативная ситуация, субъект оценки, адекватность, эквивалентность.*

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