ALIGNING QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES IN PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATION QUALITY ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

Translation Quality Assessment in professional translation is a long-debated issue that is still unsettled today, partly, due to the wide range of possible approaches. Given the elusive nature of the quality concept, first, it must be defined from a multifaceted and all-embracing viewpoint. Simultaneously and from a textual perspective, the quality notion must be defined as a notion of relative (and not absolute) adequacy with respect to a framework previously agreed by parties at stake (petitioner and translator). The backbone of this structure is formed by revision parameters. Hence, in former studies, the two mainstream quality assessment models in professional translation were analysed. On the one hand, there are those based on a "bottom-up" approach, which rely on microlinguistic point-deduction error schemes and, on the other hand, the "top-down" approaches, whose assessment provides a macrolinguistic valuation of the target text using assessment rubrics. Both perspectives stand at the ends of the quality continuum, providing essential cues for a holistic analysis of the translated text and, at the same time, reciprocally make up for the deficiencies inherent to the other model. Consequently, and with a view to design a global and comprehensive assessment model for professional translation, it is necessary to set a sound framework of reference based on a limited number of clearly and objectively revision parameters. As a result, in line with what has been explained above, a preliminary alignment between the recurrent and essential revision parameters of those long-lived and reputed models and the dimensions which define a quality construct that brings together the strengths of both mainstream models is put forward.

Key words: Quality Assessment, quantitative, qualitative, alignment, parameters.

Resumen

La evaluación de la calidad en el mundo de la traducción profesional es tema largamente debatido para el que, aún en nuestros días, no contamos con una visión unificada debido a la gran cantidad de enfoques existentes. Dada la elusiva naturaleza del concepto de calidad, en primer lugar, es necesario definirlo, lo que requiere de la adopción de una visión polifacética e integradora. Asimismo, y desde una perspectiva textual, la noción de calidad por la que se aboga debe establecerse en términos de adecuación relativa, y no absoluta, respecto de un marco de referencia previamente consensuado entre las partes involucradas (peticionario y traductor). Los criterios que constituyen la espina dorsal de este marco de referencia son los parámetros de revisión. Por ello, se ha analizado en estudios previos las dos principales corrientes de modelos de evaluación de la calidad de la traducción. Por una parte, están los fundamentados en un enfoque del tipo "bottom-up", basados en esquemas de categorización y penalización del error lingüístico a nivel microtextual, y, por otra, los que consideran las estrategias "top-down", cuya valoración ofrece una visión macrolingüística del texto analizado mediante el uso de rúbricas de evaluación. Ambas perspectivas, situadas en lo que serían los extremos dentro de un continuo de la calidad, aportan elementos de análisis fundamentales para la valoración holística de texto traducido y, simultáneamente, suplen recíprocamente las carencias inherentes de cada modelo. Por ello, y de cara a diseñar un modelo que permita valorar globalmente una traducción, es necesario asentar un marco de referencia sólido, basado en unos criterios de revisión limitados en número, claros y objetivables. Como consecuencia, y en base al estudio anterior, se propone una alineación preliminar de los parámetros de revisión de los modelos que cuentan con mayor reconocimiento y trayectoria histórica con unas dimensiones que definen un constructo de calidad que recoge la visión de ambas corrientes mayoritarias.

Palabras clave: evaluación de calidad, modelos cuantitativos, cualitativos, alineación, parámetros.

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"Despite extensive debate on various fronts, little agreement exists as to how translations should be evaluated. This lack of agreement can be understood as the result of a multiplicity of factors: amongst them are the elusive and relative nature of quality, often dependent on social and culturally-based values and priorities, and, more generally, a multiplicity of views about translation".

(Colina 2011: 43)

1. Introduction

Both from a theoretical and a practical viewpoint, Translation Quality Assessment (hereinafter, TQA) is probably one of the most heated debate topics nowadays in translation arena. Nonetheless, widely recognized agreements are still to be made on several crucial issues. To this date, research into TQA is a daily need and reality. Aware as we are of the impossibility of reaching total objectivity in TQA (Gerzymisch-Arbogast, 2001: 238), at best, it is aspired to lessen the partiality of assessment as much as possible by counting on well-defined assessment criteria and a transparent methodology.

Lately, Translation Quality Assessment studies have exponentially evolved so that they have turned into a complex maze of methodological possibilities, which can make use of different tools to assess quality and have a wide variety of objects on which to study quality. Consequently, the first step is to trace the path that will be followed as far as the object of study, the purpose, the time, the methodology, and the long list of possible choices are concerned. In order to achieve that goal, this paper is divided into the following parts. Firstly, the thorny issue of defining quality is addressed in order to take the necessary multidimensional outlook. Secondly, we delve into Translation Quality Assessment and we limit the object of study within its ample field of research. Finally, we put forward a preliminary alignment of the quality criteria (on which *bottom-up* or quantitative approaches are based) and the dimensions (on which the *top-down* or qualitative approaches rely).

Traditionally, TQA has been characterized by depending on simple value judgments issued by an expert (assessor), based more on his/her intuition and experience than on empirically-justifiable data (Rothe-Neves, 2002: 118). Therefore, the need to establish a solid assessment model leads us to consider the following steps:

Figure 1: The three steps to assess quality

Despite the diversity of views on assessing translation quality available nowadays, most of them share some basic ideas about what are the keys towards setting a sound model. For that, we posit that the three above mentioned steps have to be followed: Defining quality, specifying the methodology to be employed

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and, finally, carrying out the actual assessment according to the quality definition and methodologies specified beforehand.

2. Defining Quality

The degree of vagueness revolving around the definition of quality in professional translation calls for its settlement before initiating further actions. House (1997) regards the definition of translation quality, at least, as a problematic issue, since it involves many varied factors such as ideals, expectations and previous quality conceptions of people at stake in the assessment (petitioner, translator, reviewer and target audience, basically). Therefore, in order to be able to assess quality, all the parties involved must reach a consensus on what they understand by a quality translation.

Nowadays quality in translation cannot be addressed from just a single perspective, leaving aside all the various factors that play a part in the fulfillment of that particular professional service. What is more, that assessment must not be implemented until the setting, the actors, the method, the timing and a long series of different possible choices for establishing the assessment framework have been made. As Stjeskal (2006: 13) summarizes in his '3P' categorization, quality is liable to be assess in the Producer (translator), the Process and in the Product. These three objects bring together different cues which contribute to shape the final translated text, such as expectation fulfillment (Byrne, 2002: 43; Nobs, 2003: 26; O'Brien, 2012: 56) or user requirements. Besides, from a professional viewpoint, other restrictions such as those of time (De Rooze, 2003: 113) and budget (Muzii, 2006; O'Brien, 2012: 56) are not to be missed. Hence, it is not surprising that a literature review reveals that many current quality definitions are mostly identified with fitness for purpose according to client specifications (Muzzi; 2006: 15), either implicitly hinted (Kingscott, 1999: 199) or explicitly stated (through the translation assignment) as the ruling criteria to determine and, consequently, to assess quality.

More specifically, a revision of the technical literature relative to translation quality specifications in the industrial sector shows that most definitions confine themselves to client-specified parameters (Jiménez-Crespo, 2009: 64). On the other hand, searching for more general quality definitions, not purposely devised for translation, many emphasize the adequacy of the translation for a given purpose and the fulfillment of needs amongst the key quality criteria. Considering quality definitions in the technical field, two stances are commonly adopted: the first defines quality as fulfilling certain requirements and the second equates quality with an error-free product or service (Conde, 2008: 50).

From the first type (requirement-fulfilling), there exists a broad assortment of norms published by International Organizations whose aim is to secure the quality of the translation service by specifying a set of criteria that has to be met. A number of organizations provide these stipulations. For instance, the European CEN (*Comité de Normalización Europeo*), the German DIN (*Deustches Institut für Normung*)*,* the American ASTM F 2575, the Austrian ONÖRM D1200 or the Chinese and GB/T 19363.1.

The lesson that can easily be derived from a review of current quality definitions is that it is such a complex issue that its definition demands a many-sided outlook. As quality may be considered from various angles and is liable to be assessed on different stages and subjects, a multi-layered consideration of the concept is needed. Translation assignments are condition-abiding agreements so their relative success will be dependent upon the requirement-fulfillment of the particular task at hand. That is why

many scholarly views hold the view that quality definition is a commonly agreed construct build up amongst the participants in the transaction.

With hindsight, the quality concept in translation is automatically linked to values such as accuracy, correctness and fidelity to source text (Nord, 2009: 248-249). Updated approaches to the quality concept have gradually evolved to cater for the multifaceted nature of the notion in which all the knitted fabrics will call for different attainment and, accordingly, different assessment processes. From the perspective of localization studies, Garvin (LISA, 2004: 31) establishes that the quality concept comprises five categories involving various criteria and measuring rods: first, what he calls the 'perceived' is something that 'you know it when you see it'. This approach has a cognitive nature since it is based on the world knowledge of the recipient and it thus a highly subjective appreciation. It implies value judgments and it is not to be objectified. Contrarily, the second category is product-based and adopts a textual approach. It allows measurement by comparing the translated text and the source text against preset linguistic criteria. This *tertio comparationis* allows rendering more reasonable assessments. The next category places the notion of adequacy as the ruling criterion for use and evaluation. The fourth one takes on a norm or operation-based approach arguing that if process specifications are followed, this will lead to a quality resulting product. So it relies in conformance to specifications aspiring to get an error-free final product. Final category regards value for money as an essential ingredient in the successful translation recipe.

All these categories bestow pivotal cues to shape the general picture of quality in translation. What can be drawn from the above stated is that quality notion is not an absolute value, but it comprises several dimensions. As a result, it is obvious that a comprehensive approach to TQA has to be settled. In this paper we will consider the quality of translation from a textual viewpoint as a final outcome. Consequently, due to the lack of absolute standards that could cope with the full notion of quality and, to the unavoidable inherent subjectivity of the evaluator, a human-being (House, 1997: 47), TQA needs an explicit set of criteria on which to ground the decision making. Thus, the evaluator could be guided by them as a benchmark for assessment and so, increase the reliability of his evaluation.

Nonetheless, it is admitted that a defective translation process may have major negative consequences on the final translation (Colina, 2008: 99). This is the reason why several proposals have ended up drafting international standards[1], which specify the criteria to needed to achieve a quality translation. Nonetheless, these standards lie beyond the scope of this paper.

Currently, Translation Quality Assessment based on standards primarily concerns the process and not on the product (Martínez & Hurtado, 2001: 274). Yet, the dominant trend in professional TQA is to analyse the microlinguistic features of translated texts to identify errors, therefor adopting a restrictive and one sided approach (Martinez Mateo, 2014).

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[1] For more information about standards see Stejskal (2006) who lists the existing standards and their applications in translation and interpreting. He compiles the state of the art of standards in a table. However, he warns (2006: 15) about their limited applicability to regional or national territories and that no internationally accepted standard for translation is available.

3. Narrowing down the scope

TQA being such an ample field of research as it is, it is essential to narrow down the scope of analysis. For that Martínez & Hurtado's (2001) three basic questions contribute to attain that aim: What is assessing? What is going to be assessed? and What for?

As for the context in which translation assessment may take place, Martínez & Hurtado (2001) aptly differentiate amongst professional translation evaluation, teaching practice evaluation and translated literature evaluation. Our interest lies in professional translation regarded as those translated texts by a freelancer or a translation agency that are subsequently delivered to a customer for a payment. Yet professional TQA may be splitted into intuitive and analytic processing (Muñoz, 2007). Primarily, the former is based on personal judgments whereas the latter takes on a systematic approach to TQA.

Regarding the object of study, as has already been said, our focus is not the producer[2], nor the process, but the final textual product. As for the Product, Stejskal (2006) clearly establishes two evaluation methods to determine the quality of a translation. On the one hand, there are metrics (qualitative or *bottom-up* approach) that rely on error counting (i.e. SAE J2450, LISA QA model 3.1 and ASTM standard). On the other hand, there are the holistic assessment (qualitative or *top-down* approach) methods based on evaluation rubrics. Whichever method is employed, it has to unmistakably identify what features it is going to assess, assess them and use a pre-established set of criteria. In the case at hand, the aim is to evaluate the translation product as a textual instantiation. Independently of the methodology chosen, the mode will be revision. Concretely, bilingual (and not uni-/monolingual) revision owing to the fact that it has been proved to be the mode that renders best results in quality terms (Brunette 2005). Brunette defined revision as a function of professional translation whose aim is to identify the unacceptable features of a translation to improve and correct them. More precisely, the revision of the text is partial, since a randomly chosen sample is used to comparatively analyse the microlinguistic features of target and source texts. This is implemented while the text is not a finished product yet and it cannot be a '*self-revision*', when it is the translator himself who carries it out. It must be '*other-revision*' Mossop (2007), conducted by a third person. Nowadays, revision has become a key stage in every translation model (Parra, 2005; Tardágula, 2009).

In any case, amongst the type of functions that the evaluation may fulfil, namely; diagnostic, summative and formative (Melis & Hurtado, 2001: 277) here it will be summative. This evaluation type consists in checking whether the foretold aims have been attained, usually through a test and within academic settings. It generally takes place on the last stage of the process and its aim is to give a Pass or a Fail final decision. Summative function can also be norm-based, when the subjects under study are compared, or criteria-based, when comparison is made against a pre-established set of criteria (Martínez & Hurtado, 2001).

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[2] The most commonly used method to establish the competence of a translator (Producer) is certification exams, that occur in three possible scenarios: i) certifications by professional associations (ATA, FIT, etc.); ii) certification by some government ('Interprete Jurado' by the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation) iii) and certifications by academic institutions.

4. Methodologies

As we reviewed in previous papers (2006b and 2014), we have found out that terminological variation is also rather frequent in this field. It is not to be forgotten that current methodologies under the scope of this paper are centered on a textual product, the translated text. Yet many authors find common ground in setting up a dichotomy in TQA methods. On the one hand, we have those methods, which analyse the microlinguistic features at sentence level. They are grounded in the notion of error and aim at pinpointing errors by comparison against a preset typology. Errors included in the typologies have an allotted number of discount points according to their relevance that will be deducted from the initial bonus points from which every translation departs. Williams (1989) refers to these as Quantitative methods; Waddington (2000) calls them Analytic and Colina (2008, 2009) refers to them as Anecdotal or experimental. Generally speaking, these types of methods include the SICAL, SAE, LISA, amongst others[3].

On the other hand, we have those methods, which also analyse the textual outcome of a translation but from a more general perspective, from a *top-down* approach. Williams (2001) calls these methods Qualitative or Argumentation-centered; Waddington (2000) refers to them as Holistic and finally Colina (2008, 2009) names them as Theoretical. As an example of this type, we draw on the analysis made in Martínez Mateo (2016a) of Colina's framework (Colina, 2008, 2009), and the ATA (*American Translators Association)* rubric for grading[4] (v. 2011), as they both take on a textual and functional approach to TQA, considering as well the pragmatic features of a translated text as the criteria to determine quality. They are based on a double entry table that links dimensions (assessment criteria in that match up the smaller units in which the quality construct in translation is broken down), command levels and, at the intersection, level descriptors (in the form of affirmative statements). This tool's success depends on the correct choice and accurate definition of the dimensions, command levels and level descriptors (Martínez-Mateo 2016a).

5. Criteria

However, the above mentioned methods rely on revision as a method for determining the linguistic quality of a translation that, on its turn, will only be valid and acceptable if is not grounded in intuitive or subjective judgments (Tardágula, 2009). As a result, the initial step in every assessment process consists in setting up a reference framework to be the basis for source-target texts comparison. Hence, the reviewer will be able to resort to this framework and ground his decisions on it, therefore reducing as much as possible the inescapable biased settlement of human actions task (Martínez-Mateo, 2016a, 2016b). For that, a thorough study in chronological order of the most renowned revision parameters for translation quality assessment based on Horguelin (1878), Hostington & Horguelin (1980), Horguelin & Brunette (1998), Mossop (2001) and Parra (2005) was made in previous works (Martínez-Mateo, 2014, 2016b). The main findings of that comparative study of the authors' proposal were the following:

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[3] For further information on these methods, see Martínez-Mateo (2014).
[4] For more information, visit the website: http://www.atanet.org/certification/aboutexams_rubic.pdf

1. The number of parameters kept constant along the time and in most of the proposals (accuracy, correct use of target language and adaptation to target audience) the different authors.

2. The number of revision parameters was limited to five in most of the proposals in order to provide the reviewer with an easily manageable set of parameters.

3. The complexity implied in the revision of translations quality may lead to claim that a breakdown of the object of study into smaller constituents[5] will make its analysis easier.

Likewise, in another paper (Martínez-Mateo 2014, 2016a), more attention was paid to the so-called qualitative models concluding the following:

1. They are not point-deduction schemes to assess quality but they describe their assets and qualities.

2. They are based on assessment rubrics.

3. They offer a macrolinguistic perspective of the object under study.

Hence it is argued that if translation revision is about checking the smaller components of a whole, the quality of a translation will be derived from the addition of its dimensions. This reasoning is in line with preceding theoretical-experimental research undergone by the PACTE research group (Hurtado, 2004). Considering the above reasoning, it is not unwise to claim that the revision parameters may well stand for the constituent blocks of the construct of quality if they are turned into quality criteria. Simultaneously and from a *top-down* viewpoint, these constituent blocks may become the dimensions of the qualitative-based criteria for a quality assessment model and from a *bottom-up* approach; they could constitute an error typology in an error-counting assessment model.

In view of that, these two perspectives (*top-down* or qualitative and *bottom-up* or quantitative) could correspond to the ends of a continuum of quality and not the options of a dilemma (Waddington 2000: 234). So their combined point of view is necessary and complementary in order to provide the full picture of translation quality. Its axis, around which the whole quality revolves, is formed by the right alignment of the dimensions of the *top-down* approaches and the parameters of the *bottom-up* ones. Should the parameters and dimensions of both approaches be rightly chosen, specified and defined and their alignment be carried out on a sound basis, this will constitute the spine of a solid quality construct.

In this sense, this is the proposal taken from Martínez-Mateo (2016b):

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[5] In line the research done in Applied Linguistics, where the works of Hymes to define the term communicative competence allow him to fully grasp the complexity of the definition at hand and led later researchs to divive the concept into its constituent parts in order to ease its description and analysis (Hymes, 1972; Canale and Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983; Celce-Murcia, 2000).

Horguelin (1978)	Hostington & Horguelin (1980)	Horguelin & Brunette (1998)	Mossop (2001)	Colina (2008, 2009)	ATA Rubric for grading (v.2011)	Dimensions
Accuracy	Accuracy	Accuracy	Transference			
Correctness	Correct use of target language	Correctness	Language	Target language	Target mechanics	Target language
Readability	Transparency	Readability		Non-specialized content	Idiomatic writing	Idiomatic correctness
Tone	Tone					
Adaptation to target audience	Adaptation to target audience	Functional adaptation		Textual and functional adequacy	Usefulness and transfer	Functional and textual adequacy
			Content	Specialized content and terminology	Terminology and style	Specialized content and terminology
			Layout			
		Profitability				

Table 1. An alignment of parameters and dimensions for TQA.

Nonetheless, the preliminary alignment remains to be empirically tested. A bilingual corpus formed by source and target texts made by professional translators in actual circumstances would be the ideal scenario for this test.

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