Translation Criticism
A Model for Assessing the Translation of Narrative Fictional Texts

A Thesis
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Abstract

The earlier treatment of translation criticism has been characterized by the prevalence of contradictory statements on translation assessment. Various attempts, both theoretical and empirical, have been made to base translation assessment on reliable criteria. The field has witnessed the crystallization of two distinct approaches, viz., the response-based and the source text (henceforth ST)-based. Attempts of the proponents of these approaches have been thoroughly discussed in Chapter Two. Proponents of the former approach have failed to guarantee the validity of the criteria and the practical tests they have suggested. They tend to judge the quality of a translated text (henceforth TT) in terms of its readers' reactions only and with a total lack of reference to the ST. Proponents of the latter approach present a more rigorous view of translation criticism. Most of them build models which feature criteria for the analysis of the ST and for the assessment of its TT. Some of them also believe that translation should be reader-oriented. But unlike the former approach, the decision is left to the translator who has access to both texts, i.e., the ST and its TT, and to the critic to judge the appropriateness of the translator’s decisions. Yet, their models have not been free from shortcomings. These shortcomings are mostly related to some of the criteria devised throughout the various phases involved in the models suggested. More often than not, such criteria are controversial, inconsistent, incoherent or discrepant. The solution to this problem is to work out a model which avoids these shortcomings.

In this thesis, the ST-based approach is followed and a model which features reliable, consistent, and coherent criteria is proposed in Chapter Three and applied in Chapter Four. It is based on Hatim and Mason’s (1990) comprehensive model of context which comprises the
communicative, pragmatic and semiotic dimensions. Though these dimensions are adopted, the communicative and pragmatic ones in particular have been largely adapted to cope with modern theoretical views and the demands of narrative fictional texts. The figurative aspect has been added to the proposed model and assigned a separate existence. The scope of the model is restricted to the assessment of the translations of English narrative fictional texts into Arabic. This does not mean that the model cannot be applied to other text types or that the direction of translation cannot be reversed. Yet, it should be noted that certain adjustments may prove to be necessary if another text type is chosen or if the direction of translation is reversed. It is worth noting that Chapter One offers a general perspective to text typologies and deals with the criteria which distinguish narrative fictional texts.

The model consists of two phases, viz., analysis of the ST and comparison of the TT with the ST for assessment. Analysis of the ST involves contextual description in terms of the communicative, pragmatic and semiotic dimensions of context in order to arrive at the writer's intention(s) and text-type focus. It also involves identification of figures of speech in the ST to see how they contribute to textual vividness, writer's intention(s) and text-type focus. The second phase involves comparison of the TT with the ST for assessment. It aims at seeing how the contextual description and figurative language of the ST are realized in the TT. Within comparison for assessment, other elements are also included, viz., losses through translation, errors of the translator, usage anomalies, misuse and/or misplacement of punctuation marks, spelling and/or printing mistakes, and statement of quality. In this phase, two kinds of equivalence have been recognized: functional and non-functional. Functional equivalence aims at preserving as closely as possible the
original's communicative, pragmatic, semiotic and figurative properties within the syntactic constraints of the target language; and, should the circumstances so require, with the aid of certain compensatory methods such as paraphrasing and footnoting. Functional equivalence thus attempts to preserve the cultural specificity of the ST and at the same time keeps the reader of the TT properly informed. Non-functional equivalence arises when one or a combination of the original's properties is not preserved and/or distorted through translation, either wholly or partially. The reasons which can give rise to non-functional equivalence are the linguistic and cultural dissimilarities between both languages, the inherent limitations of the compensatory methods to overcome such dissimilarities, and/or the translator's incompetence and/or carelessness. It is to be noted that translation is more likely to be a combination of both kinds of equivalence. An accurate and adequate translation, however, heads more towards functional rather than non-functional equivalence. Applying the model to the assessment of the translations of some English narrative fictional texts into Arabic, it has been found that the proposed criteria within the model have proved to be reliable, consistent and coherent.