



Functional Approaches to Translation Quality Assessment: A Descriptive Analysis of Three Translation Quality Models.

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Abstract

Functionalism pragmatics models are regarded as one of the most groundbreaking approaches in the translation quality assessment field, which emphasize the commutative function of the text and its intended purpose rather than the literal meaning of the text. This descriptive study provided a detailed catalog of the most influential functionalist paradigms in translation quality assessment, namely, Reiss text type theory (1971), Reiss & Vermeer (1984) skopos theory, and House (1977,1997,2015) functional pragmatic framework. These three models have collectively demonstrated the development the translation quality assessment field achieved by moving beyond subjectivism and arbitrariness to multi-layered procedures that evaluate the translation quality across functional, commutative, and cultural contexts.

Keywords: Translation, Quality, Assessment, Functionalist, House, Reiss, Vermeer.

المناهج الوظيفية لتقييم جودة الترجمة: تحليل وصفي لثلاثة نماذج جودة ترجمة

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المستخلص:

تعتبر نماذج البراغمتية الوظيفية واحدة من أكثر المناهج تطورا في مجال تقييم جودة الترجمة، التي تركز على الوظيفة التبادلية للنص وهدفه المقصود بدلا من المعنى الحرفي للنص. قدمت هذه الدراسة الوصفية دليل مفصل عن أكثر النماذج الوظيفية تأثيرا في تقييم جودة الترجمة، وهن نظرية نمط النص لريس (1971)، ونظرية الغرض (السكوبوس) لريس وفيرمير (1984)، والإطار التداولي الوظيفي لهاوس (1977، 1997، 2015). وقد أظهرت هذه النماذج الثلاثة مجتمعة التطور الذي حققه مجال تقييم جودة الترجمة من خلال تجاوز الذاتية والعشوائية إلى إجراءات متعددة الطبقات تُقيم جودة الترجمة ضمن سياقاتها الوظيفية، والتواصلية، والثقافية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الترجمة، الجودة، التقييم، الوظيفية، هوس، ريس، فيرمير.

Introduction

Translation quality assessment is a domain that gains growing recognition in the translation studies field by contributing to shifting the assessment procedures from random and subjective judgment towards objective, systematic, and theory-driven assessment. One of the most famous approaches in the translation quality assessment field is known as functionalist pragmatics, which emphasizes the commutative function of the text and its intended purpose, rather than the literal meaning of the text. As Delibas (2023) notes, a paradigm shift was created in translation studies by the functional approach in which they place emphasis on the intended purpose of the text, instead of the actual wording of the text. Pioneering functional and pragmatics approaches in the translation quality assessment field are Reiss Text Type Theory (1971), Reiss & Vermeer (1984) Skopos Theory, and House (1977,1997,2015) Functional pragmatic framework. The primary aim of this

study is to conduct a descriptive analysis of these three grounded theories of translation quality assessment in order to examine their theoretical foundation and guidance for application.

Reiss Text Type Theory

Reiss (1971\2014) built her text typology model based on the theory of language function. More specifically, influenced by the German linguist Bühler's (1934/1965) three main functions of language, in which he views language as mean to serve a function, it can represent, express, and appeal, Wang (2022). In accordance with these language functions, Reiss (1971\2014) classified text into three core types: informative, expressive, and operative, and added a fourth type: audio-medial text type. Reiss (1971\2014) clarified that these language functions rarely exist in a clear distant text; in real-life context, the linguistic elements tend to overlap with one another. These texts can be classified first by examining the dominant linguistic elements, and if each element is equally represented in the text, it can be easily classified as a multifunctional text. Chen and Zhang (2020).

In her book Reiss (1971\2014) outlines prerequisites that must be included in the process of translation assessment; it should be based upon objective and relative criteria rather than arbitrary and subjective ones. Furthermore, the assessment should not be based only on the analysis of the translation product, but rather it must be based on a comparison between the source text and the target text, Abdi (2021). Reiss (1971\2014), argues that translation assessment should not be focused on some components and neglect the other; rather it should focus on the whole unity of the text. According to Delibas (2023), Reiss focuses on classifying text types in a holistic way rather than at the word or sentence level, arguing the text should be examined in a unity in order to convey the communicative function. This is clearly reflected in her statement, "the evaluation of a translation should not focus on some particular aspect or section of it, as is so often done, but it should begin rather with a definition of its text type". Reiss (1971\2014,p,47). Reiss (1971\2014) proposed three categories that a critic must follow in the process of translation quality assessment. First, establishing the text type based on its function. Second, analyzing the linguistic components. Third, accounting for the extra linguistic determinants.

1: Establishing text type: Reiss's (1971\2014) fourfold functional text typology includes *the content-focused text type /Informative*, whose main function is to represent information. *The form-focus text type/ expressive*, this type mainly focused on how the author used the language to express themselves. 3 *The appeal-focus text type/ persuasive*, this is a triggering reaction type of text. *The audio medial texts (Multimedia)*, they are texts that require a nonlinguistic medium to be communicated. Accordingly, each of these text types requires examining specific criteria in the assessment procedures. The translation of a content-focused text type is regarded as good quality when the facts and information of the source are represented accurately in the translation. The examination of a form-focused text type goes beyond the representation of facts and information. The critic must examine if the translation paid special attention to rhetorical structure and stylistic features to recreate the aesthetic and artistic form of the source text. The translation of the appeal-focus text is regarded as good quality when it achieves the purpose intended by the original. Finally, in translating audio-medial text, the assessment is based on examining the success of the use of a nonlinguistic medium in rendering the meaning.

2. Analyzing linguistic categories: The analysis of the linguistic categories is the next step on the Reiss (1971\2014) translation assessment process. This analysis includes semantic category, centers on equivalence, and meaning transfer. Lexical category, which focuses on accuracy of word choices and terminologies. Grammatical category, which examines the sentence structure, word order, and morphine syntax. Stylistic category, focusing on register, tone, and rhetorical devices.

3. Accounting for extra-linguistic determinants: The third category in Reiss (1971\2014) translation assessment process takes into consideration the extra -linguistic determiner; a critic must take into consideration all the external context in which language was used, including the time, the setting, the culture, and the authors' perspectives and readers' expectations. Reiss (1971\2014p, 114) sums up her view towards assessing translation by stating, "Translation criticism is proper if a translation (in the strict sense of the term) demanding a text-oriented translation method (accommodated to its text type) is examined by standards which are proper to its text type, i.e., when these criteria derive from the categories of the text type, the linguistic elements of the text, and the non-linguistic determinants that affect the text".

Skopos Theory Reiss & Vermeer (1984)

Thirteen years after establishing her text typology theory, Reiss (1984), co-authored a book with Vermeer (1984). In which the latter developed a functional framework known as skopos theory, accompanied by the former's text typology theory (1971). The word "skopos" is derived from the Greek word "σκοπός", which means aim or purpose, Houston(2023). According to Reiss and Vermeer (1984-2014), each text carries with it an intended functional purpose and this purpose is what will be based upon the translation action procedures. Stating that "the highest rule of a theory of translational action is the 'skopos rule': any action is determined by its purpose, i.e., it is a function of its purpose or skopos." Reiss and Vermeer (1984-2014, p.90)

The major role played by skopos theory was highlighted by El-Farahaty (2025), asserting that the translation procedures were redefined by skopos by moving the translation procedure away from word-for-word translation into a translation governed by its purpose. In addition to the skopos, Reiss and Vermeer (1984-2014) assert that coherence is a crucial element in their theory, arguing that the translation producers require intratextual coherence, in which the message implemented by the source text producer is coherent to the source text language. Intertextual coherence, in which the message interpreted by the translator as a source text receiver and the message encoded by the translator in the target language for its receiver must all be coherent with one another, Aryani, Kardiasa, and Udayana (2023).

This framework has significant implication for their view towards translation quality assessment, in which Reiss and Vermeer (1984-2014) argue that there is no ultimate correct translation for each text; instead, the translation varies in accordance with its purpose and the targeted audience. And that translation quality assessment should not be based on the abstract notion of correct as opposed to not correct, rather, the assessment must be placed upon examining the levels to which the translation has achieved its skopos for the target text audience. Koglin, Moura, Matos, and Silveira (2023) claim that Reiss and Vermeer (1984-2014) view towards translation assessment Have led contemporary translation quality assessment models to move beyond rigid word-for-word assessment, to a more holistic view that includes achieving the purpose of the text and meeting the expectations of the target text audience.

Reiss and Vermeer (1984-2014) core assessment criteria are built on two notions: adequacy and equivalence. First, adequacy is a process-oriented translation quality assessment criteria; it is specifically concerned with the translator's choices during the translating procedure. The main aim of this notion is to examine all the translator choices and strive for achieving the intended purpose. Second, equivalence is a product-oriented translation quality assessment criterion. The term equivalence is used when both source text and target text have achieved exactly the same communicative function. The main aim is to examine if the translated product recreated the same communicative function to the language audience that was created in the source text.

For the cases in which skopos requires functional equivalence, Reiss (1984-2014) integrates her text typology (1971) as a specific theory within the general framework of skopos. As mentioned in the previous section, Reiss (1984-2014) centered her translation criticism criteria based on her text typology; in informative text type, the quality assessment is based on the content accuracy. In expressive text type, the quality assessment is based on the esthetic value, with a special focus on the form and the target language. In the operative text type, quality is assessed based on achieving the persuasive impact. Finally, for the multimedia text type, the translation quality assessment is based on how well the verbal signs are combined with nonverbal signs in the translated product. Thus, translation quality assessment according to Skopos theory shifts in accordance with its function, Nugraha, Permanik, and Rohmana (2025).

Functional-Pragmatic Model Juliane House (1977), (1997), (2015).

House's original translation quality assessment model was presented in her doctoral thesis in 1976 and then published as a book in 1977. House (1977) TQA model was constructed on the basis of multiple linguistic theories. House (1977) adopted concepts from Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) speech act theory to map a distinction between semantic meaning, "propositional content" focusing on the connection between signs and designation, and its pragmatic meaning, "illocutionary force" the specific use of an expression in a particular context. Kazmi, Kashif, and Rasheed (2023) highlight that the distinction between the literal meaning i.e., propositional content, and the intended communicative functional meaning i.e., illocutionary force, outline the notion of functional equivalence in House's (1977) TQA model.

House (1977) also adopted concepts from Halliday's (1961) systematic functional linguistics to demonstrate how text creates meaning in their social context. According to House (1977), the use of a text in a particular context of situation is what determines the function of the text. As affirmed by Youssef (2023), House (1977) was heavily influenced by Halliday's (1961) SFL, classifying texts into two functions: the Ideational function, concentrated in rendering logical, factual reality, and the interpersonal function, related to the establishment of social relationships between all parties involved in the text.

In order to provide a systematic analysis of parameters for the contextual analysis, House (1977) eclectically modifies Crystal and Davys' (1969) situational concentration, into eight situational dimensions. As explained by Dong and Zhu (2023), these dimensions are divided into: Dimensions for language user, include geographical origin, social class, and temporal factor. And dimensions for language use, including *medium*, which differentiates between simple language channels as opposed to complex channels. *Participants*, distinguish between simple or complex monologues or dialogue. *Social role relationship*, focuses on the analysis of the interpersonal relationship between the addresser and the addressee. *Social attitudes*, describe the influence caused by the closeness or distance in the formal or informal languages. *Province*, this is a text producer-oriented, includes the text producers' occupational and professional information, and the circumstances in which the text was produced. Huyen and Huong (2025).

Valizadeh and Vazifekhan (2022) mention that these eight situational dimensions go through a source text analysis and a target text analysis to build a textual profile and identify its communicative function. In the source text analysis, the analytical procedure undergoes three linguistic levels: *syntactic*, examining the sentence structure. *Lexical*, focusing on the terminology and vocabulary used. *Textual*, focusing on the flow of the information. The target text analysis replicates the procedures that occurred in the source text analysis. Hakami (2024), notes that this stage in House (1977) TQA model is vital since it helps in elaborating mistakes in these levels.

In the lights of the outlined points above, House (1977) TQA model operates through a four-stage procedure: First, the ST is analyzed across the eight situational dimensions in terms of language user and language use dimensions at three linguistic levels: syntactic, lexical, and textual. Results based on this phase will create a source text textual profile and distinguish its communicative function in order to build what House (1977) refers to as the normative baseline for the assessment. The second stage will be mirroring all procedures at the first stage, but this time it will be on the target text in order to derive the target texts' textual profile. After establishing the first and second stages, the third stage begins, in which a comparative analysis will help place between the source text profile and the target text profile for the identification of any mismatches on both situational dimensions and linguistic levels. Mismatches between the source text and target text profiles are categorized into two types of errors: covertly errors, occur when a mismatch is on a dimensional level leading to a disruption between the ideational and interpersonal functions of the text. Overtly errors can be either denotative mismatches relating to semantic errors or target language preachers in which the translation is written in incorrect grammar. At the fourth and final stage, a statement of quality is established by creating a list that includes statements regarding all covert and overt errors with a clear declaration of their impact on the match or mismatches between the ideational and interpersonal functions of the text. kazmi, Kashif, and Rasheed (2023), Abalkheel and Abdulhamid (2023).

In 1997 House revisited her 1977 TQA model; some core concepts remained intact, including the ideational and interpersonal functions dichotomy. Nevertheless, House (1997) replaced the eight situational dimensions with Halliday's (1961) systematic functional register trinity: Field, tenor, and mode. Field, refers to the subject matter in the text, i.e., political, economic, and social action. Tenor, refers to the level of formality and the interpersonal relations between the participants in discourse and also includes specific details such as level of education and specialty. The third level is mode of discourse, which is the channel of communication, spoken or written. Another new category added in the (1997) TQA model, which is genre, House (1997), claims that genre in her model works as a bridge between the text and context to evaluate if the text meets cultural and social conventions in the target culture. Abdulmoghni and Al-Sowaidi (2023).

The evaluation procedures in House (1997) model start with a source text analysis, which is divided into three primary levels. First register analysis, focusing on the micro-context, including: field, to identify text type based on the content and topic. Tenor, to determine the social role and attitudes among the text participants. Mode, to establish the mode of communication, spoken or written. Second is genre analysis, macro- context, this is the linking level between micro and macro context, to examine the text through the social and cultural lens and evaluate the text based on its generic purpose. After establishing these analytical procedures source text's textual profile is set, and a statement of function is declared. The two analytical stages that follow are similar to those in the (1977) TQA model, textual target text analysis, and comparison between ST and TT textual profiles in order to determine the type of mismatches. The evaluation also examines the appropriateness of the translation procedures chosen by the translator. And finally, a statement of quality is disclosed, listing judgments based on the type of errors that occurred.

In (2015) House integrates corpus linguistics into her TQA model in order to make it more reliable by incorporating a large empirical database that includes a variety of translations. House (2015) states that "Corpora can lift the results of the analyses of individual texts to a more general level. In short, they can make results more intersubjectively reliable and valid". House (2015, p.107). In AL-Aizari (2023) opinion House(1977,1997,2015) main purpose is to grant the TQA field scientific recognition within the translation studies field. The use of corpora in House (2015) model

extends more benefits than providing large data, it can also add a dimension of quantitative analysis with the textual qualitative analysis. Corpus is placed between the micro-analysis based on Halliday's systematic functional register trinity and the macro-context analysis of genre. Wang and Xin (2024). This enables the evaluators to contrast translation choices against a large linguistics model, that contains unlimited language in-use patterns.

Final Remark

This descriptive study provided a detailed catalog of the most influential functionalist paradigms in translation quality assessment, which have contributed in one way or another to the modern perspectives towards translation assessment. Reiss (1971) text type theory established grounding rules; including the translation assessment must be holistic, based on theories of language function, and analyze both linguistic and extra linguistic features. Skopos theory by Reiss & Vermeer (1984), has raised the bar by incorporating the intended purpose and a target text expectation at the of the assessment. Finally, House (1977), (1997), (2015) functional pragmatic model linked functionalist theory and formal linguistic analysis by offering systematic, reliable analytical procedures through register and genre analysis, error taxonomy, and corpus integration. These three frameworks have collectively demonstrated the development of the translation quality assessment field achieved by moving beyond subjectivism and arbitrariness to multi-layered procedures that evaluate the translation quality across functional, commutative, and cultural contexts.

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